

Basel in SPRING

LONA GERICKE

Bellville Public Library

After months of preparation and reading through the work of 27 nominees for the Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration, the time finally came to meet in the charming city of Basel (legal seat and secretariat for IBBY and cultural heart of Switzerland) for the final judging during April 2004.

I was welcomed at the airport by Liz Page, IBBY executive assistant who generously provided me with accommodation for the week.

That first night all jury members were invited to a dinner at her home and I finally met the other jurors from the Netherlands, Iran, Italy and Spain. Truusje Vrooland-Lob from the Netherlands was enchanted by the fact that I could understand her Dutch and we communicated in Afrikaans and Dutch!

The next morning our group was taken on a tour of the old part of the city by Leena Maissen, the previous IBBY executive director. She guided us through narrow streets and lanes, past the oldest university in Switzerland; the market square; the beautiful cathedral, the former craftsmen's district on a wet and cold morning; with myself dragging behind in an attempt to take photographs on the way!

A visit to one of the excellent children's bookstores set the scene for the next morning: a day of intensive deliberation about the candidates for the award.

We were sworn to absolute secrecy regarding the names of the winners which would only be announced at the press conference in Bologna the next Wednesday. Jury president Jeff Garrett (USA) chaired the meetings.

Martin Waddell (Ireland) was chosen as

the winning author and Max Velthuis (The Netherlands) for his illustrations.

'In choosing Martin Waddell as the winner of the author award, the jury had paid tribute to the remarkable perception, compassion and warmth of this prolific writer. Waddell writes for young people of all ages with simplicity, empathy and respect: he recognises and articulates the complexities of ordinary lives and illustrates the need of those lives to be protected and understood.'

Max Velthuis is a brilliant storyteller and artist whose lifetime dedication to children's literature has been recognised by the jury. 'Velthuis has proven many times over that he understands children, their doubts, fears and exhilarations. His books are little jewels of image and text that come together to comfort children and reassure them as they venture out into the world around them.'



Above: Lona Gericke and Jeffrey Garrett toast the winners of the Hans Christian Andersen Award 2004 after the announcement in Bologna, Italy

Right: An enthusiastic Lona promoting the upcoming International IBBY Conference in South Africa at the IBBY stand, Bologna



At a special function in one of Basel's largest bookstores, the jury members were welcomed, allowed to introduce themselves to the audience and each received a certificate which read as follows:

This certificate conveys the gratitude of the IBBY for service on the Jury of 2004. The undersigned acknowledge, not only the high professional honour, but also the hard work, careful preparation and the dedication to children's literature that participation in the jury represents.

For me this was an experience I will treasure as I gained in knowledge and understanding of this challenging and demanding children's literature but also as confirmation that IBBY does important work as an international network of people from all over the world who are committed to bringing children and books together.



(Ltr): Lona Gericke, Kimete Basha (executive director, IBBY), Valerie Coghlan (new editor of *Bookbird*), Jeffrey Garrett (president of the Andersen jury), Peter Schneck (IBBY president) at the press conference in Bologna, Italy, during which the winners were announced

Hans Christian Andersen Award Criteria

JEFFREY GARRETT

President, Hans Christian Andersen Jury

'To merit consideration for the Andersen, I believe that a candidate's work must speak honestly and eloquently of his or her own culture, and it should consist primarily of creations for the children of that culture. The quality of being both rooted in a culture but also transcending it is to my mind what makes a writer or illustrator truly and magically international, not some kind of internationalist outlook this writer or illustrator may start out with.'

It is also important that we recognise what a writer or illustrator has contributed to enhance how children's literature is regarded, both in his or her own country and abroad. In other words, I think we should be recognising our champions, those who have helped make children's literature important in their countries or world regions. In a way, we are honouring writers and illustrators with an aura.

Thirdly, we need to keep in mind that by giving this award to an individual writer or illustrator we are sending certain messages to the world about what we see as

great writing and great illustrative art for children, and only secondarily for ourselves. We must overcome the temptation to regard children's writing and illustration as just another genre of literature for adults. How we assess the quality of writing and illustration for children is up to us, but we must have the child as reader in mind. We are not awarding the Andersen in an aesthetic vacuum nor for how someone's work measures up to adult criteria.

Fourthly, for both writing and illustration, we need to avoid being fooled by bad translations (or even just 'good' translations of superlative writing) and bad production. We are judging the original, even if we cannot see it directly.

Finally, as for the political statement we are making when giving this award, I think that the 'politics' we must be aware of have to do with our perceptions of the social conscience of the author and the sense and depth of social and political responsibility this writer imparts to young readers, not the politics represented by a writer's government.