In her 33 year production of the excellent magazine about children's books, Signal, Nancy Chambers was eclectic and honest, demanding of her contributors and impatient of critical jargon. Those qualities permeate this collection of seven essays about the six novels which comprise her husband's Dance Sequence, published at intervals between 1978 and 2005. The articles are drawn from the United States, Canada, Sweden and Germany - appropriately enough, since Aidan Chambers has perhaps been even more honoured abroad than in his own country.

Nancy Chambers' honesty is disarmingly evident in her introduction. She may have been busily editing Signal in the next room while Aidan was writing the Sequence but, she says, 'I don't recall trying to see what the everyday work added up to, year by year, and what it was becoming.' It took the perspective of a 2008 essay by Mary Harris Russell on ?The Spiritual Geography of Domestic and Narrative Spaces? in the Sequence for her to sense the 'exceptional arc of fictions' which her husband had created. That paper prompted the compilation of the present volume.

This is not an introduction to the novels - you need to have read them attentively first. The discussions differ in focus, but share a freedom from the tedious reference to other authorities which reduces too much current academic writing to nervous anonymity. These essayists employ their own confident, even familiar voices - some clearly know Aidan personally; Anthea Church, in fact, is the dedicatee of the massive This is All which closes the Sequence. Two of them, like Aidan Chambers, have spent periods as members of religious orders, and this valuably informs their reading.

The contributors are four university teachers and two writers whose work has chiefly been in schools. Among the academic discussions we find 24 pages of excerpts from Swedish bloggers, rattling on enthusiastically, sometimes about themselves rather than the books, as bloggers do. By contrast, the other pieces offer close readings which turn us back to the texts themselves. Together, they enable us to track the journeys towards adulthood which Aidan Chambers has retraced in each book from his own shifting perspective as he has grown older. For him, as Church says writing of Now I Know, 'life is not linear, nor cyclical exactly but, at the very least, has to be lived over several times, first in the flesh and then several hundred times in the mind; at different times, on each occasion meaning something else.? The pain, disillusion and melancholy which sometimes mark the intellectual, sexual and spiritual aspects of the journeys are offset by insight and joy. These essays offer a highly readable exploration of the work of this reflective, sometimes troubled, always self-aware and unafraid author.