

# BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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*the children's book magazine*

Joan of Arc  
Maria



Joan of Arc  
Supermarket Children's Books  
Ted Hughes

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## CoverStory

This issue's cover is from Michael Morpurgo and Michael Foreman's *Joan of Arc* (see page 3). Thanks to Pavilion for their help in producing this January cover.

# EDITORIAL

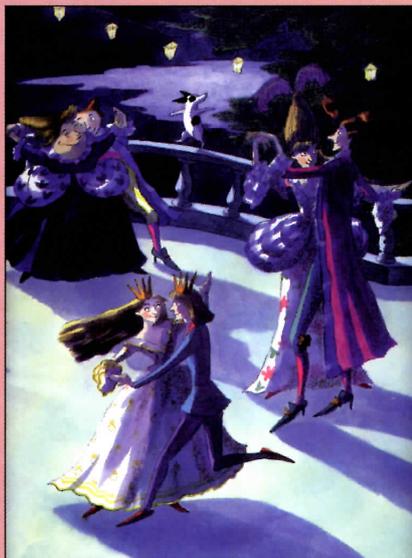
**A**s children's publishing becomes more and more dominated by character publishing, television tie-ins, branded series and by the need to constantly subscribe new titles to the trade, the decimation of publishers' backlists and over-publication of frontlists inevitably continue to the detriment of the industry and of young readers.

The consequences of this situation are particularly bizarre for quality fiction and picture books for which a long and profitable shelf life might have been predicted – indeed must have been predicted when the inhouse prepublication costings were done.

For publishers it makes little economic sense, after all, not to recoup their investment in a particular author or book. Yet the building of a reputation (which takes time and a steady publishing nerve) is nowadays a rare event. Many titles do not make it to reprint let alone paperback publication if originally published in hardback.

For authors and illustrators, this is devastating – by the time their book has been reviewed (and it can take several months for a couple of measly column inches to appear – if they are lucky) it is often out of print. The author/illustrator has no recourse since the publisher can then cite poor sales performance as justification. (Some publishers even have to rush to reprint out of print titles which turn up on the shortlists of the Carnegie and Greenaway Medals.)

Is there a correlation between the general lack of knowledge about children's books/authors and illustrators amongst book buyers – and I mean



'So Marco and the princess were crowned King and Queen and there was dancing and feasting for nine days and nine nights.' From *The Frog Princess* (see Editor's Choice on page 20).

Harry Potter titles is proof of that.

Advice about children's books has many elements to take into account – age range and reading ability, for example, quite apart from particular passions of the moment and developmental interests. Writers and illustrators also deserve informed critical feedback about their work if they are to continue to develop and grow creatively. At *Books for Keeps* (which reviews over a 1,000 new books every year) we know that each issue of the magazine is used by many of our readers as a buying guide. We see the magazine's role in furthering the critical debate about children's books and building a shared body of opinion as equally important.

## Books for Keeps increases its circulation

We are pleased to announce that for the second year in a row *Books for Keeps* has increased its circulation. In 1996/97 we managed a modest increase of just over 1% – nothing extraordinary but nonetheless heading in the right direction.

In 1997/98 (measured as the difference between the September and July issues in any one year), we saw an increase of 5.5%, the biggest circulation improvement since the very early days of the magazine when numbers had nowhere else to go but up and were in double percentage figures for the first three to four years.

But the most astonishing increase has come this autumn as we have seen individual UK subscriptions rise by almost 8%. For the first time ever we actually ran out of an issue – BfK 112, the September 1998 issue – and had to delay starting up new subscriptions until the arrival of the November issue.

## BOOKS FOR KEEPS

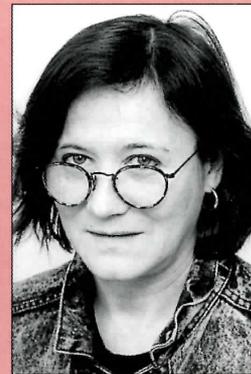
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Rosemary Stones

trade buyers as much as parents, teachers (many of them) and some librarians? When books are so often not reviewed and not discussed, there is no possibility for a shared body of opinion to form – a critical consensus about excellent writing and illustration that may ensure that more titles make it to the backlist and more and new authors and illustrators establish reputations. It can be done – the astonishing success of J.K. Rowling's

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MORPURGO

# A Creative Collaboration

Writer **Michael Morpurgo** and  
illustrator **Michael Foreman** describe  
how they worked together on their  
latest book **Joan of Arc**.



FOREMAN

## Michael Morpurgo

Michael and I have worked together on many books now, and they just get better and better. I think this is because we are both involved in the collaborative process from the outset, from the concept even, but then leave each other entirely alone to get on with our respective roles. *Joan of Arc*, like *Arthur*, *Robin* and *Farm Boy*, was not my idea, so the blame or the credit for instigating these books goes to Michael and Pavilion, the publishers. Michael seems to know unerringly what it is that I do best, and suggests it.

He then reads my text and responds almost intuitively it seems to the spirit of the story. It is one of the signs of a great illustrator that he gives himself up to the text, soaks himself in it, and then comes up with his vision of it. Michael's vision always surpasses my expectations.

I went about writing *Joan* in the same way I did *Arthur* and *Robin*. I researched avidly, seeking all the while to discover the girl behind the saint and the legend. To me there has been no life and no death more moving, and in a way more uplifting than that of Joan of Arc. I came to know her and love her as well as anyone can do across the chasm of the centuries. Together with Michael I hope we have brought her to life for thousands of people so many years after her terrible death in Rouen.

## Michael Foreman

*Joan of Arc* is the fourth Michael Morpurgo book I have illustrated. After *Arthur*, *High King of Britain* and *Robin of Sherwood* we thought of various other characters for future books. There were several possibilities, but as soon as 'Joan' was mentioned we knew she was the one.

At the time we were already working on *Farm Boy*, a very different book, set in Michael Morpurgo's home village in Devon. The book follows the lives of a family and a remarkable horse from the First World War to the present day.

While drawing the Devon landscape, I was also stockpiling information and pictorial reference for *Joan of Arc*. Eventually Michael sent me the first chapter of *Joan*. It was handwritten in spidery writing on his usual thin, faded paper. I

think Michael bought a ton of it from Army Surplus years ago. The chapter sets the scene in the present day and opens the door to History.

Before we really get down to work Michael and I like to go on a little trip. For *Arthur* we went to the wonderful Isles of Scilly, and for *Robin* we went, of course, to Sherwood.

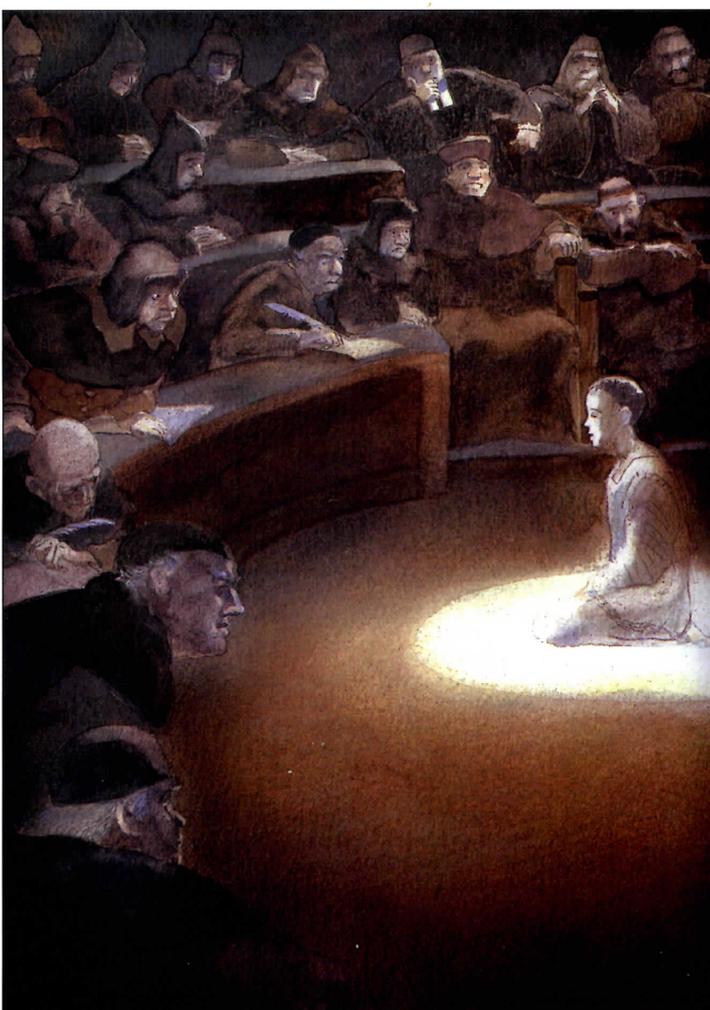
For *Joan* we went to France, and journeyed to Orléans – the scene of some of Joan's epic adventures – and where there is a Joan of Arc Archive and a Museum. The Museum, in addition to armour, artifacts, banners and

weapons, has detailed panoramic models of the great battles – the Siege of Paris, and the battles of Orléans, Jargeau, Beaugency etc. The details were invaluable to me – the kind of boats used to carry hundreds of war horses across the wide river, and how did they transport cannon and cannon balls and scaling ladders? What kind of helmets did the various sections of the opposing armies wear? Often helmets would be relics of earlier battles, the dents beaten out and handed on, down the generations.

We walked the banks of the Loire, wide and dotted with small islands with scrub which would have provided cover, and also mudflats which caused treacherous currents. So many little details which make the big picture.

Late one evening we were sitting outside the Bar Shakespeare in a narrow, cobbled street lined with tall, thin medieval houses. It was dark, with no traffic, just a few drinkers and cats slinking around in the shadows. It was the very street along which Joan had led her triumphant army to raise the siege of Orléans.

I know nothing of all the events which must have happened here during the past 500 years. To me, it felt like Joan had only recently passed by at the head of her army. Past these same houses, clattering over these same cobbles, armour glinting in the torch light, and cats slinking in the shadows. It was no longer 'long ago and far away'. It felt close, personal, and very bloody. ■



*Joan of Arc* by Michael Morpurgo and Michael Foreman is published by Pavilion (1 86205 131 3) at £14.99 hbk, and available from all good bookshops or call 01403 710851.

# TROLLEY POWER?



## Children's Books in Supermarkets

Access to books and ownership of books are determining factors in helping children to become readers but for many families bookshops appear to be intimidating or inconvenient places. Supermarkets on the other hand are full of parents and children shopping together. Can they provide the books children need? Julia Eccleshare investigates.

Over 60% of children's books are currently sold through book clubs, school bookfairs and the rest, so debate about other outlets, such as supermarkets, might be thought of as an irrelevance.

### Children owning books

But, not so. Breaking down barriers between parents and the books their children read, and enabling children to become self-purchasers are hugely important. Access to books and specifically ownership of books are determining factors in helping children to become readers. The difficulty is, where should children's books be most usefully sold?

### Supermarkets the solution?

The obvious answer is supermarkets where many adults shop around once a week and where parents and children often shop together. However, the last ten or more years have shown

that selling children's books in supermarkets is not as straightforward as it sounds.

On the plus side, there are clear benefits for the retailers, the suppliers and the buyers. These markets open vital new opportunities. For the supermarkets, they provide the chance to add a new area of business which does not compete directly with any of the other goods on sale in their shops; for the publishers they provide a brand new market which does not compete with the bookshop market and is, instead, incremental business which has to be a bonus. For the shoppers, many of whom have no available bookshop or are intimidated by the ones they could reach, they provide a one-off opportunity to browse and buy at what is already a shopping moment. And yet, for all three groups, there are also substantial downsides that reduce the importance and impact of the whole enterprise.

### An idiosyncratic 'product'

Much of the problem lies in the very idiosyncratic nature of children's books which makes them difficult to sell in a supermarket context. They do not have the same kinds of profile as most other commodities. They have few 'market leaders', they are not usually 'impulse buys' and they do not get bought as repeats. This makes it hard for supermarkets selling them because they have to be treated as special cases in an otherwise highly streamlined business. It also makes it hard for the publishers supplying the supermarkets because the difference between the needs of the supermarkets and the major or trade outlets that are their standard business is so great. And, it raises questions about the fulfilment of book buying opportunities that supermarkets can realistically provide for their customers. Because of this, the winds around children's books in supermarkets blow hot and cold.

The truth is that, specialist children's bookshops aside, it is notoriously hard to make a profitable business out of children's books. The problems of very low unit prices and therefore a tiny profit margin on each individual title makes them far from cost effective. This could be outweighed if the 'pile them high, sell them cheap' philosophy that operates throughout supermarkets could be applied but two things make this hard to put into practice. Firstly, the space-consuming face out display that Sainsbury's opted for with its launch into children's books in the 1980s and which has been widely copied elsewhere, is far more enticing than the rather mingy spine displays in most bookshops. Secondly, the evidence is that parents and children like a range of titles from which to choose and will buy more if the range is bigger.

### Which children's books to stock?

The range is, of course, a crucial issue. While it makes sense for supermarkets to stock children's books, the problem of stock selection is enormous and fundamental. Policy on what kinds of books are stocked varies from one chain to another and, according to the sales directors of the supplying publishers, depends very much on the personal commitment of each company's book buyer. Inevitably, all supermarkets will go for the children's books that sell cheaply and in large volume. Their shoppers visit a store about once a week and expect to see fresh stock pretty frequently. The books are of course open access and unsupervised which means that they are liable to be much fingered even after only a relatively short display time – and nothing is more off-putting than tired and bedraggled stock. Tesco change about 20% of their children's books every six weeks, pulling out the underperforming titles. A six-week turn around of at least a proportion of stock makes absolute sense to a supermarket but this is not the kind of stock holding pattern that publishers are accustomed to.

The need to sell a lot of copies quickly and cheaply governs the kind of children's books supermarkets stock. As Fiona Kennedy, book buyer for Tesco, says, 'We don't sell a lot of titles but we sell them in depth.' The books that sell quickly are the ones that the customers know about without any advice. Books associated with mass market merchandising such as Thomas the Tank Engine and The Teletubbies are



sure-fire successes. Home learning titles, tying in with the current national obsession with passing tests, are hugely in demand. Well known series fiction such as Goosebumps and Animal Ark also go well. All are easy purchases with the shopper already knowing the kind of book that they are getting. There is very little room indeed on the supermarket shelves for new authors, literary fiction or high quality picture books.

### Own brand or trade?

The history of children's book selection has been chequered as supermarkets have moved in and out of a belief in own branding. Sainsbury's pulled out of its twelve-year-old 'own brand' deal with Walker Books last year partly so that they could cherry pick from all publishers' lists and partly on the grounds that they could make more money from the shelf space with food products. Almost coincidentally, Tesco then embarked on a partnership with Brilliant Books aiming to create an own brand range of children's titles.

Fiona Kennedy at Tesco is clear that having own brand books is just one strand of their book supply. 'We developed our own brand so that we can provide our customers with exactly what they want, based on our extensive customer research. With our own books we have more control over content and price. But own brand and trade titles can happily co-exist so we also follow the market closely by watching Book Track and choosing the most successful titles. Goosebumps, Horrible Histories and the Mr Men all do well for us. We wouldn't be serving our customers fully if we didn't stock that kind of title as well as our own.'

Last year, as part of a commitment to raise the sales of paperback fiction and children's books by 50%, Asda moved from dealing with Parragon as its book merchandiser to

dealing direct with major publishers such as Transworld, HarperCollins, Random House and Scholastic. To keep up a range, they also buy through the wholesaler, Gardners. They do not have their own brand believing that they can offer their customers good books by taking selected titles from individual publishers. Like Tesco, but unlike Sainsbury's, Asda are bullish about the non-food market in general and see children's books as just one of the wide range of goods and services that they provide.

### Price points important

Price points are critical at Asda because, as book buyer Julian Graham-Rack says, 'The whole Asda philosophy is about selling products to customers at a good price.' Keeping to the four price points from 99p to a top price of £4.99 is the guiding principle behind the range of children's books stocked but, beyond that, there lies a real belief in serving children well. 'We cut back on the pre-school area, specifically on colouring books, in order to stock authors like Dick King-Smith and Jacqueline Wilson,' says Graham-Rack who is confident that the sales of children's books in supermarkets will grow. 'We've seen growth of over 20% in the last year and we know both from the sales figures and from the customer research we do that books are very popular with our customers.'

Safeways, the other major supermarket, has a more limited commitment to children's books. They have no own brand but rely instead on top selling trade titles such as the Mr Men and Roald Dahl. Waitrose also has no own brand list but carries a considerable range for the pre-school market. For older children the emphasis is on home learning titles. Most usefully, they issue a monthly list of the titles in stock.

A belief in the value or otherwise of own branding currently divides the major supermarkets. Very large, firm sales of own

brand titles make them highly attractive as they can be sold so cheaply. However, it is less flexible, which is a critical factor when book space may suddenly become shampoo space. It also carries all the associated risks of publishing. In particular, as those setting up own brand deals have discovered, named writers are unwilling to work for the kind of flat fee that supermarkets want to offer. This makes quality own brand expensive and therefore less competitive with buying in published books.

### Changing policies

Each supermarket chain, then, sources its children's books in a different way and may suddenly change its buying policy in the search for a good enough profit margin. Although publishers are pleased by the incremental sales in non-traditional markets such as supermarkets they are often frustrated by the lack of a firm or coherent policy. 'All supermarkets are aware that they ought to be selling children's books, but they don't always know what to sell,' says Penny Morris of Penguin Children's Books. 'They are not adventurous, but will take series fiction if it is well-enough established.'

Gavin Lang, sales director of Scholastic agrees. 'Fiona Kennedy at Tesco is very knowledgeable about books and so they took Philip Pullman's **Northern Lights** as well as Goosebumps and Horrible Histories. We also do a lot of business with Asda. If you are lucky enough to sell direct to the buyer you are likely to sell a wider range but, in general, the great strength of supermarkets is that they can sell a huge volume of some carefully picked titles.'

### Can supermarkets call the tune?

The view among publishers is that while supermarket sales are an important and interesting part of their business they cannot be allowed to influence the kind of children's books that are published. The general verdict, expressed anonymously, is 'Supermarkets could call the tune and can do so on a selected title or range, but publishers don't dance to this tune.' The bottom line is that children's book business in supermarkets is not big enough to wag the dog.

In the absence of the long life, slow build principle which suits children's books best, supermarkets must dip and weave, plunging in to the market to pull out the financial plums. As a service to its customers this is only partially satisfactory. Yes, families shopping in supermarkets can buy children's books. Specifically they can buy any amount of Letterland, Lett's and the rest and the most popular of the series fiction as well as own brand imitations. But, for all the supermarkets, price is a prime factor in defining the choice of stock so many areas of publishing output for children will never make it to their shelves. Picture books are most notably under-represented as are the major quality non-fiction titles.

### Reaching the new buyers that other outlets can't reach?

But some cake is better than no cake and there is no doubt that supermarkets are selling children's books to new buyers who would not have bought children's books from another source. The high standard of books that Sainsbury's offered when they launched their own brand list with Walker set a bench mark of quality that all supermarkets have, to some extent, emulated. It changed the image of non-traditional book outlets stocking only Ladybird titles and showed that given the opportunity people would buy books for children. Of course, supermarkets are not bookshops and will never begin to come near the specialist children's bookshops in the broad support that they can offer the publishers or they can offer children as readers. But their commitment to offering a range of children's books for everyone to add to their weekly shopping plays an important part in getting children and books together. ■

Julia Eccleshare is the children's book editor of *The Guardian*.



4-year-old Cody examines the range at Sainsbury's, Lee Green.

Thanks to Susie and Cody Parker (customers), Jason Knox (Manager) and Rachel Gunstone (Cashier) at Sainsbury's, Lee Green, London.

Photographs by Richard Mewton.



# THE CENTRE FOR THE CHILDREN'S BOOK



Setting out to establish a new institution is a challenging, some might say a foolhardy, undertaking. But the power of a vision should not be underestimated – particularly when that vision focuses on an undisputed need in Britain for a national Centre for the Children's Book.

Elizabeth Hammill explains.

While British children's books may be celebrated worldwide, they are undervalued at home. Countries abroad have national Centres dedicated to children's literature but ironically no such centre exists here. There is no institution in this country where original work by the creators of children's books from first notes, early drafts, preparatory drawings to finished artwork and manuscripts is collected and preserved to be shared with the nation through exhibitions, artistic and educational programmes, and used for research and as an international resource.

## Exciting Possibilities

The creation of a unique showcase for children's literature in Newcastle upon Tyne which will provide a safe haven for the work of British illustrators and authors and stop the loss of this rich seam of Britain's literary heritage to overseas institutions is motivation enough to pursue the vision for a Centre. Enlarge this vision of a collection which will focus on work produced in post-World War II Britain with a library, galleries, a studio theatre where narrative in other forms can be explored, workshop space, a 'model' children's bookshop and a cafe serving book-inspired food and you have an institution replete with exciting possibilities for connecting all of us with children's books. Its potential to place children's literature at the heart of our national literary culture, by transforming attitudes to it and thus creating a new climate in which the artistic importance of such work is recognised and a broader, more enthusiastic audience for it emerges, is enormous.

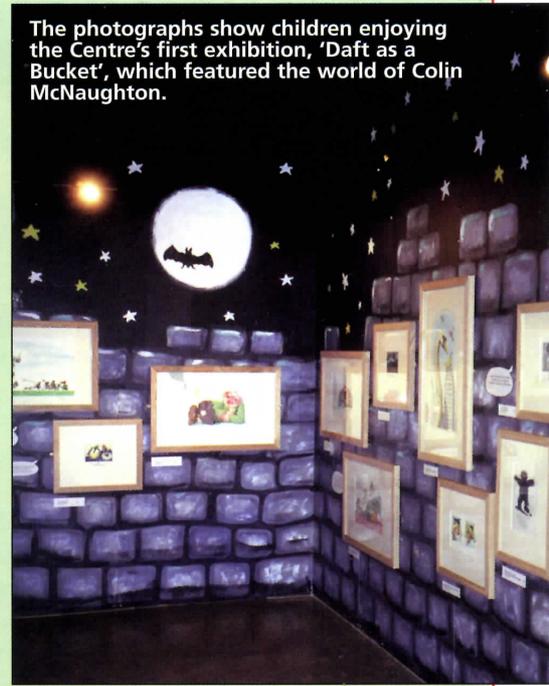
Creating a vision takes time but is relatively straightforward. Realising a vision is another matter altogether. Politics, in all its senses, is the operative word. Hard graft too. It took five years of consulting authors, illustrators, publishers, educators, librarians and the general public before an initial proposal was composed. Plunging into the world of public subsidy, private sponsorship, grants and lottery funding was an act of faith – one that meant putting everything that I believed in about children and books on the line. If buildings could be assembled on goodwill alone, the proposed Centre would be in business already.

## A Lottery Award

But more than goodwill has been forthcoming. In 1995, by happy chance, I encountered a former colleague who had worked with me and others to establish the Northern Children's Book Festival in 1984. Now, as Principal Planning and Development Officer in Newcastle City Council's Education Department, Mary Briggs was in an ideal position to help move the project forward with the Council. We have worked as a team since; initially forming a Steering Committee representing local and national political, literary, educational and museum interests, then translating that Committee into a Board of Trustees when we received charitable status, and receiving a lottery award of £27,000 in August, 1996 to carry out feasibility work into the establishment of a Centre. An Arts Council grant enabled an Acquisitions Committee to develop an Acquisitions Policy and approach a representative group of authors and illustrators to establish their support for the Centre and their willingness to pledge work to it – a feasibility exercise resulting in over 100 offers of original work from writers and illustrators including Joan Aiken, Quentin Blake, Anne Fine, Shirley Hughes, Philippa Pearce, and Philip Pullman as well as the entire literary estate of the late Robert Westall. Grants helped us to acquire the Kaye Webb and Faith Jaques Archives, the latter saved from the rubbish tip by an astute house clearer. Ted Hughes offered us a 20 foot Iron Man, created for a Young Vic production of his classic tale.

Initial feasibility work was completed just as the lottery changed its guidelines in late 1997 and introduced a three-stage application process (with

The photographs show children enjoying the Centre's first exhibition, 'Daft as a Bucket', which featured the world of Colin McNaughton.



a project like this, the goalposts always move). Further feasibility work was required but because the Arts Lottery had only £55,000,000 to spend on capital projects until 2000, a hold was put on all such initiatives, the Centre included, while a National Capital Strategy was produced. Northern Arts, however, has put together a funding package to enable us to complete feasibility work – convinced, like us, that the project will succeed.

In the meantime Newcastle City Council has become the Centre's local development partner (vital for any project), making available a site in a growing cultural quarter of the city worth £1 million. Tyne and Wear Museums Service has become a formal associate and the Centre has received seedcorn funding from a range of publishers, in particular Walker Books who gave us our first £1,000 as an 'act of faith' and has recently pledged £100,000 to match a donation of £100,000 from the Walker Books' Employee Trust Fund towards a gallery to commemorate Sebastian Walker. Hodder has pledged a 5 year sponsorship and Scholastic, Macmillan and Penguin have pledged 4 years of charitable giving. The Robert Westall Charitable Trust has also pledged £100,000 towards the £10 million project. Mary and I have spent the past 18 months working full-time for the Centre, Waterstone's having given me a sabbatical and provided our first major sponsorship.

Where to now? Completion of feasibility work, the challenge of finding plural funding given the anticipated changes in the Art Lottery's Capital Strategy, a Stage II Design and Development Lottery Application this year, and a steadfast belief in the value and viability of our vision. An opening date? 2002–2003. Just cross your fingers. ■

Elizabeth Hammill is Project Director, The Centre for the Children's Book



# What is

To find out about the book business from the literary agent's point of view, I spent some time talking to one of the best, Rosemary Sandberg, who became an agent eight years ago after a distinguished publishing career in children's books.

## Publishing background

After eighteen years running the children's paperback lists at HarperCollins, with five years before that starting the Puffin Club with Kaye Webb, I wondered how Rosemary enjoyed life as an agent. 'When I was made redundant from HarperCollins in 1991 it took me six months to think about what I might want to do next. I was ready to start something new when I had a call from Ed Victor (a famous trans Atlantic literary agent) asking if I would like to become a children's book agent in association with him. I spent the first two years working from home, but when Ed moved his office to Bloomsbury he asked if I'd like to join him, and I felt then that I was ready to have an office that was separate from my home.'

Rosemary operates on her own, with no staff and she also calls upon the skills of an experienced senior editor, Jane Fior, to help out on the creative work with authors and illustrators. She occasionally draws on Ed's long experience: 'The piece of advice Ed gave me when I started was not to take on everyone I came across straightaway. He stressed the importance of the close relationship between agent and author/illustrator, where mutual trust has to build, and I realised early on that there was a limit to the number of people I could take on, because of the time needed to devote to each client.'

How did she start finding clients? 'Babette Cole, whom I had worked with before and who had never had an agent, was the first one to call. I was also lucky at the beginning that many publishers recommended me to their authors and illustrators, so I gradually built up a client list of established and new writers and artists, with a very wide range of skills.'

## Why have an agent?

Why do authors and illustrators need agents, particularly if they already have a publisher? 'Many authors and illustrators have a strong relationship with their editors and are quite thrown when their editor changes publisher, so they may then turn to an agent who can provide the stability they want. They can't always move with their editor because they have all their backlist titles with their original publishers, and they obviously don't want to jeopardise their continuing sale. Authors and illustrators can feel very isolated, working on their own at home, and I can act as an extra contact, often explaining what's going on and sometimes even defending publishers when they are accused of not promoting a book, for example, when in fact the illustrator just hasn't been kept up to date with the work that has happened on the book's behalf.'

Rosemary is clear that the author/agent relationship can only work if the author has decided that they really want to work with an agent, and wants someone to take on that role in their career. 'Many also realise that publishers' editors are under such pressure that they don't have time for the kind of ongoing one-to-one relationships with authors that they used to have time for.'



Rosemary currently has around 45 clients – roughly two thirds of whom are illustrators, and one third authors – of which seven or eight might be in need of particular attention at any one time. This number also includes a few adult writers of popular non-fiction, such as Jocasta Innes, that Rosemary represents, but for the most part she concentrates on children's books. Her client list includes illustrators such as Patrick Benson, Jane Ray, Selina Young and Ian Andrew, and writers such as Elizabeth Laird and Pat Moon. She is unusual in that she also represents many American authors and illustrators – such figures as Rosemary Wells, Susan Jeffers, Steven Kellogg. 'This means that I spend one week every other month in the US, and it gives me a chance to find out what American editors are looking for, what's hot with booksellers and publishers there, so I can feed that information back to my UK clients in a productive way.'

Her various clients need her skills in a variety of different ways. 'With several major authors I act a bit like their manager, sorting out a myriad of requests from all over the world – will they visit? Will they change this or that on the cover in Japan? Can they provide an updated biographical note? Who publishes their work in other countries? One of my main tasks with creators new to publishing is to explain what goes on in the industry, and explaining all the clauses in a contract can be a good starting point for all the information and background that's needed for them to understand the complexities of the business.'

## Relationships with publishers

As well as close relationships with her clients, Rosemary has to have close relationships with a number of editors across the publishing houses, both large and small, on both sides of the Atlantic. 'Publishing depends enormously on good relationships, and my job is often about finding the right illustrator to go with the right author and then find them the right editor in the right publishing

# a Literary Agent?

If a literary agent ever gets a mention in the press, it is usually to report a huge sum of money extracted from a publisher as part of a glitzy deal for a high-profile author. Sometimes we read an agent's name in the author's acknowledgements at the start of a book, and occasionally we read of an agent involved in a feud over a dead author's estate. Publishers have to deal with agents all the time. But what do they do? Do authors and illustrators need them? Liz Attenborough investigates.

house.' Before entering publishing, Rosemary had worked for an advertising agency and worked briefly as a journalist. 'The advertising experience has proved immensely useful, knowing how to target and sell, and be focused on what is really achievable.' A publisher always appreciates an agent who has done some homework, only sending along projects that really might suit their particular list. 'Getting to know editors well means I get a feel for what they might like, what they think their publishing house can sell. I have to keep in touch with the whole range of what's going on everywhere, and what's doing well or what's now had its day.'

With the complexities of co-edition publishing on picture books, UK agents sell world rights to the publisher in the text and the illustrations, leaving the publishers' rights departments to make all the overseas sales necessary to secure big print runs for the books and make them viable. So once a project has found a publisher, Rosemary may not have much to do with it until she gets a copy of the finished book. 'My work has often happened a very long time before, particularly in working on a project to get it ready to present to publishers, so it's very exciting to see the book in its finished form.'

## Suggesting other avenues

Some of Rosemary's illustrators are new, but many are already established with close relationships with their publishers. 'I can suggest to them other avenues they haven't thought of, perhaps doing black and white work for other publishers, or maybe some board books for another, that won't interfere with their colour picture book work for their main publisher. One publisher may not be able to cope with all the things that an illustrator wants to do – and needs to do to get the money to pay the rent. The thing I most want for my clients is a good working relationship with their editor, so that they can work together on the creative side. I busy myself with the administrative side, the contracts and money, and don't get involved

with a book in progress unless something is going wrong. Then I can act as the intermediary, reassuring where necessary. Some of my authors need a sunshine call each week, but others prefer to be left alone to get on with their work.' I was surprised to hear that Rosemary telephones Rosemary Wells in America at least twice each week. 'She's got so much going on at the moment – her *Mother Goose* has sold over half a million copies – and she's a tremendously hard worker.'

I asked Rosemary whether good interpersonal skills is the key to being a good agent. She agrees, but would rate a wide knowledge of how publishing works as an equal number one priority. Next is organisational and administrative skills, and Rosemary's neat office would attest to her adherence to that. 'You have to be meticulous when you're dealing with other people's money, and it's important to be on top of things. I have to do an enormous amount of chasing publishers, both in the UK and the US, sometimes just asking them to let the illustrator know what's happening.' Rosemary would put career planning and management high on the list of important tasks for an agent, too. 'It's sometimes a question of taking dreams and trying to make them a reality, even if it's going to take many years.'

## A cruel business

Rosemary believes it is important for her to be totally realistic with her clients, for instance only leading them to expect an advance from the publisher that is entirely related to the number of copies the publisher can sell. 'Publishers don't have treasure chests of money to give away, and are under great pressure themselves to justify everything they spend. Negotiating skills also need to be on the list of any agent, particularly when it comes to film and merchandise contracts. They are a nightmare, but don't happen very often.'

Rosemary is not taking on new clients at the moment, but offers this advice to any new authors. 'It's important to be incredibly self critical – to stand a chance you have got to produce something better than most of what is already published. The standard is so very high, and only the very best will be published.'

So how would Rosemary sum up life as a literary agent? I want to be able to make the creation of a book a thoroughly happy experience for the writer or illustrator. So besides taking care of the business end of things, I spend much time, together with Jane Fior, in shaping manuscripts, working out concepts, making constructive suggestions – I spend much more time on that side of things than many people realise. I want anything I submit to be something that I would have been happy to see when I was a publisher. In this way, we give every submission the best chance of being taken on, and we try not to waste people's time. But publishing can be a cruel business, with wonderful books just not making the grade, just not finding the right publisher.'

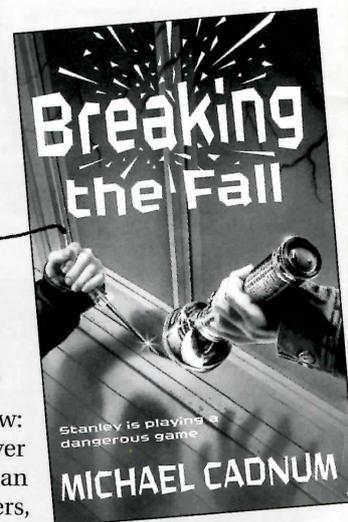
Rosemary ends on a more cheerful note. 'If the process has been as enjoyable and creative as possible, then everyone can gain experience and move onwards. It is this partnership with authors and illustrators that I value most. And of course nothing beats the sheer joy of receiving the finished copy of a beautiful book, knowing the hard work, inspiration and commitment that has gone into it.' ■

Liz Attenborough is Project Director, The National Year of Reading. She was formerly the Publisher, Penguin Children's Books.

# Authorgraph No.114

Michael Cadnum

Michael Cadnum interviewed by Val Randall



I met Michael Cadnum in the London office of Penguin, publishers of the three Cadnum novels available in Britain: **Calling Home**, **Breaking the Fall** and **Taking It**. Cadnum is a soberly dressed, unassuming man, far away from the sunshine of his Californian home: quietly spoken, weighing each word with care as we talked. He explored and developed each answer with a studied deliberation until he was satisfied with its honesty and accuracy.

Yet Cadnum's characters thrive on danger: it is their oxygen. What they have *not* learned is how to avoid being destroyed. His books contain an ultimate morality: he vividly portrays the excitement of misadventure but shows where it can lead – the price which must be paid – rehabilitation, painful self-realisation, even death.

Cadnum's protagonists are dysfunctional characters, obsessively acting out their behavioural maladies, trapped in their own distorted image of the world.

In **Calling Home** Peter is a teenage alcoholic so dependent on drink that when Mead, his closest friend, tries to curb his excesses he kills him accidentally with a single angry, drunken blow. He repeatedly rings Mead's parents, assuming his identity to assure them that all is well and to deny the crime by giving Mead 'life'.

Jared in **Breaking the Fall** burgles houses to challenge society, to experience danger, drawing his friend Stanley into the excitement until Jared's suicide shocks Stanley back into a saner but duller reality.

**Taking It** chronicles Anna's obsessive shoplifting, her battle to restore her life to balance, to escape the trap which she has set herself.

Cadnum's books for young adults explore fractured families and their problems. This preoccupation was stimulated by some of the many jobs he has had. His work for the Suicide Prevention phoneline taught him 'a good portion of the human landscape. The callers were people not well enough to get up and go outside. I wanted to speak up for people who couldn't speak for themselves, to be on their side. This kind of character impresses and draws me.

'I am not portraying young people as wretched and incomplete but people we can understand, even when they *are* so incomplete. I am their friend – I offer them an alternative.'

His time in teaching was something Michael took very seriously. He admired children, felt they were his equals and treated them with respect. He feels that writers who are teachers draw on the same energy for both activities: teachers, he says, are artists.

The worst thing about finishing an enjoyable book is untangling yourself from the lives of

the characters you have come to know: saying goodbye to a friend you may never see again. Michael Cadnum enjoys an even greater intimacy with his characters, since he regards the writing process as sharing their lives, being guided by them to a better understanding of their desires, their motivations, their needs.

His characters' voices replace his own and he is the instrument through which they communicate with the reader. The excitement of being inside a character's skin is part of his love of the writing process and parallels the thrills enjoyed by his protagonists as they play their dangerous – and, ultimately, destructive – games.

'What Peter does with Mead in **Calling Home** is what I do in becoming a character. Peter invents a character and becomes it, for many reasons. Also, he becomes an artist and he acts out what a writer does in creating a character.

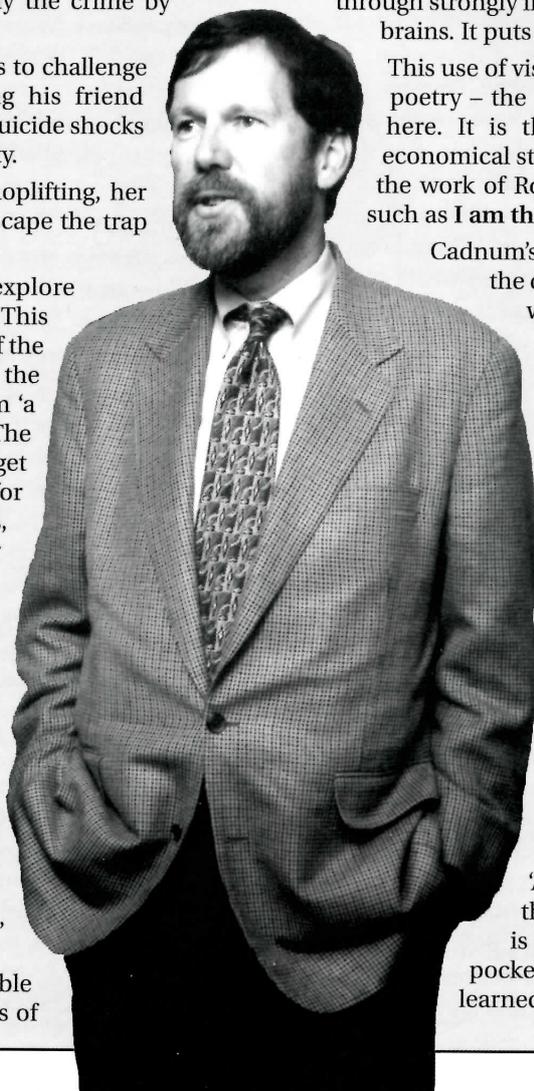
'In fiction, you get the character's tone of voice and the way they look at the world affects their voice. I describe what the character sees and feels – for example, Anna's humour (**Taking It**) comes through strongly in the visual image that cold spaghetti is like brains. It puts us there with the character.'

This use of visual imagery is cross-fertilised by Michael's poetry – the literary quality of his writing has its roots here. It is this richness of imagery, this powerful, economical style which has prompted comparisons with the work of Robert Cormier – particularly earlier novels such as **I am the Cheese**.

Cadnum's subjects share similarities with Cormier's: the disconnected young adults adrift in a world which fractures their attempts to survive. Where Cadnum differs is in the belief in a wise or compassionate friend, someone who knows how hard and serious life is but can help the character to move forward. Cadnum sees this as another indication to readers of how they can achieve maturity – he describes the process as 'choosing new parents' – perhaps a wise friend outside the family, a book, a church, a teacher – and he feels young adults are nourished and sustained by this support.

Indeed, he considers the real reason that books exist is to give us the teachers we will never meet, to provide us with a window through which we can look outside our immediate surroundings and use what we see to help us to grow.

'A young character will not know some things because he is not old enough. There is a vivid compression of experience with pockets of things which the character has not yet learned. This creates a delicious challenge: to





create someone like that is a thrill. Conversely, adult characters can actually know more than the author.

Cadnum maintains that a book can outstrip its author – in **Calling Home** there are things which he does not consciously understand; a clear example of the character leading the author in the way he wants him to go.

Implicit in this conviction is Michael's belief in the power of language.

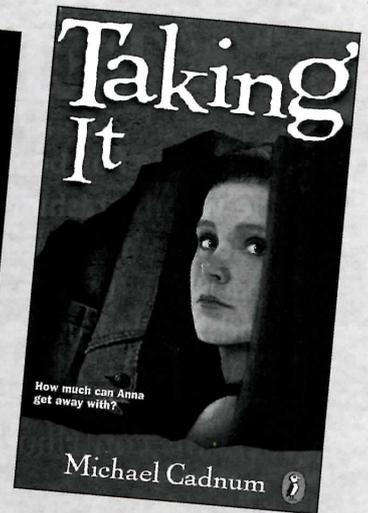
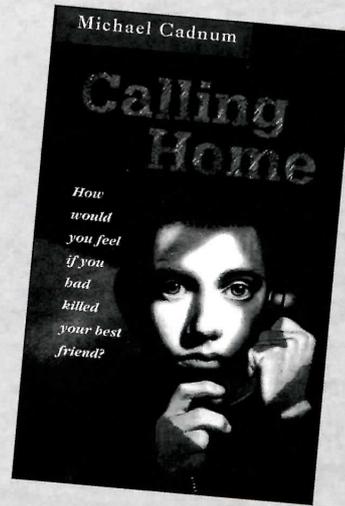
'I have a faith in language: it can convey life, what it's like to be someone else – all this out of mere words. They do something which no other art form can. I enjoy writers who relish language and enjoy writing.'

He is one of this number, feeling that writing is vividly connected to life, so that his commitment to it is continually renewed. He began his involvement with writing early.

'The first word I ever read was "We". The big W really impressed me and I was really relieved that the word was so short. One problem with being a child who writes is that it's difficult – it takes so long and this depressed me.

'When I was about twelve years old I wrote a novel about dinosaurs – it was five pages long! You never get far from this – I'm still shocked at how little I've written at the end of a session. But we must be careful – writers tend to embrace their own suffering with too much enthusiasm. Writing is work, but not the worst work in the world!

'Before I could read I loved looking at pictures and drawings. As I grew up I drew story pictures. I still feel that my books have a strong visual sense – for example, when Anna (**Taking It**) is driving through the desert I see it clearly and try to describe it to the reader through Anna's eyes. One of the wonderful things



about writing is that you can see, hear and smell things with the character and be inside the character's skin. No other art form can so fulfillingly portray what it's like to be someone else, to learn patience, to learn how hard we have to work to achieve maturity, to take an interest in things outside ourselves.'

It was not solely his admiration for young people which led him to write fiction for young adults. When **Calling Home** was written he was unaware of this market but wrote it because he was intrigued by the real crime on which it was based. It was his publisher's decision to slot it into the young adult market, but this did not trouble him.

'**Calling Home** was written years ago and not published for over ten years – then I was very pleased with it being given wings. I am happy when my books come out because the characters finally have a life beyond me.'

His books explore a shadowy world where conventional rules are cast aside, where failure is experienced by those who do not have the inner resources to cope with it.

It is this dark side of things to which we, as readers, are drawn. Michael explains:

'I picture someone standing at a window, looking out at a storm. The rain lashes the trees, the trees swoon in the gale, but inside, where our Someone is safe, a warm fire crackles in the hearth. We feel a frisson of pleasure as our own sense of security meets the random hail and gusts of the storm, protected by the brittle membrane of glass.

'I suspect our interest in misfortune springs not merely from a pleasure in reading about damage and destruction. I believe our curiosity about mayhem makes us feel joined to a larger community, alive to the trials of others in a way which is both reassuring and healthy. It makes us feel a part of life, which we know in our hearts is not the step-by-step routine we try to enforce.'

So many of Cadnum's characters are out of step: he is drawn to Peter (**Calling Home**) because of his creativity and imagination: most people would not dream of getting away with the game he was playing.

Breathtaking creativity, imaginative engagement, risk-taking – there is definitely much more of Michael Cadnum in his characters than he might recognise – and long may he continue to play his own most individual game. ■

## The Books

**Breaking the Fall**, Puffin, 0 14 038172 4, £4.99 pbk

**Calling Home**, Viking, 0 670 83566 8, £10.99 hbk

**Taking It**, Puffin, 0 14 037570 8, £4.99 pbk

Photographs by Richard Mewton.

**Val Randall** teaches English at Mansfield High School, North East Lancashire.

# • TED HUGHES 1930–1998 •

This house has been far out at sea all night,  
The woods crashing through darkness, the booming hills,  
Winds stampeding the fields...

(from 'Wind', *The Hawk in the Rain*, 1957)

The wind howled like a Greek chorus and rain splattered the landscape on the night Ted Hughes died (29 October 1998), as if the very elements were mourning his loss. **Morag Styles** considers his contribution to children's literature.

The enormous sense of loss felt by so many for this extraordinary writer has been apparent all over Britain. Born in Mytholmroyd, Yorkshire in 1930, Hughes won an exhibition to read English (he later switched to Archeology & Anthropology) at Pembroke College, Cambridge, where he met his first wife, Sylvia Plath. Her suicide in 1963, while they were separated, left Hughes with more than a family tragedy to contend with; he endured lifelong vilification from those who misguidedly blamed him for Plath's death.

*The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) established Hughes' reputation as one of the most original poets writing in Britain. The prolific output of poetry, essays, edited volumes and writing for children since then confirmed his place in the annals of English literature. Hughes went through an uneven patch in the middle of his life and some were disappointed in the ceremonial poems he wrote after becoming Poet Laureate in 1984. But in what tragically turned out to be the last year of his life, he was crowned with honours – he was awarded the Order of Merit, the Forward Prize for *Birthday Letters* (1998), the Whitbread for *Tales from Ovid* (1997) and accolades for his translation of Racine's *Phèdre*, currently running to packed houses in the West End.

## Commitment to Young Readers

Hughes had a life-long commitment to young readers and apprentice writers. He was largely responsible for setting up the Arvon Foundation which provides subsidised writing courses in rural settings such as Totleigh Barton, situated near his Devon home. Fame did not stop him from putting in time as a judge for children's writing competitions and he encouraged talented teachers like Jill Pirrie to publish their ideas, writing the foreword to her inspirational guide to teaching poetry, *On Common Ground* (1987/1994). His last initiative was to help establish the Children's Laureate (see **BfK 113**) on which he worked tirelessly with Michael Morpurgo.

Hughes began to write for the young when his two children were small: *Meet My Folks* (1961), *How the Whale Became* (1963) and *The Iron Man* (1968) were taken up enthusiastically by both children and teachers. *The Iron Man* has been variously described as a modern fairy tale, an allegory, a myth; this dramatic story, which I have observed just independent readers consume voraciously, could probably only have been written by a poet, the language is so spare and

rich. Hughes went on to write many distinguished books of poems and stories for children. Faber reissued all his animal poems in four volumes in 1995, including *The Iron Wolf* which is his most accessible collection for younger readers. A new illustrated edition of his nature poetry is forthcoming.

## Using Poetry with Young People

Hughes endeared himself to the teaching profession (he taught in a Cambridge comprehensive school for a short time, so he knew what he was talking about) by publishing *Poetry in the Making* (1967) based on a sequence of Schools Radio Programmes. It is still the best book available on reading and writing poetry with young people. In the recent *By Heart: 101 Poems to Remember* (1997), he made a strong case for knowing poetry by heart, while deprecating rote learning. He viewed the latter as joyless and counter productive for many pupils, whereas memorising 'strongly visualised imagery' could be done as a game, if linked with free choice, pleasure and the ancient magic of words. *The Rattle Bag*, co-edited with Seamus Heaney (1982), is a veritable treasure trove of a poetry anthology, packed with surprises and treats, but always nourishing.

## Hughes and Nature

Nature poetry came of age with Hughes' uncompromising poetic vision full of savagery and beauty. He views animals without sentimentality, often locating them in a mystical landscape; the most outstanding example of this is *What is the Truth?* (1984/1995) which won the Signal Award. The only reason I did not try to swat the single winter fly droning irritatingly round the kitchen yesterday was that Hughes taught me to feel differently about flies (and sheep and crows and salmon and badgers). His fly is **A freshly barbered sultan, royally armoured In dusky rainbow metals.**

**A knight on a black horse.**

(from 'The Fly', *What is the Truth?*, 1984)

A powerful voice has been lost – but not, of course, silenced: Hughes will live on through his poetry and fiction in the hearts of present and future readers. ■

**Morag Styles** is Language Coordinator at Homerton College, Cambridge.

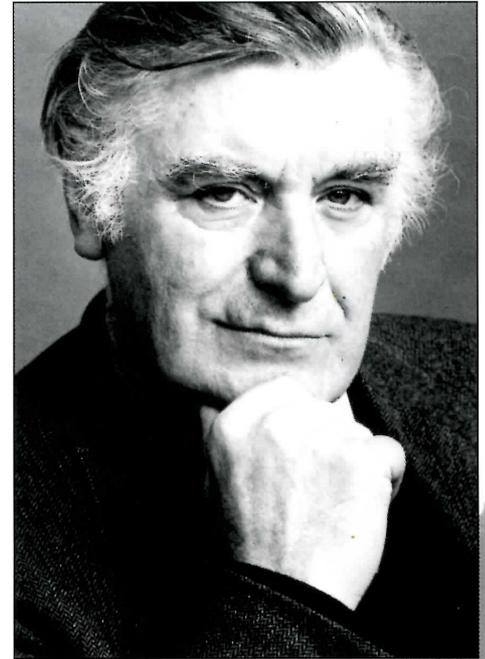


Photo courtesy of Caroline Forbes

Thought to be the last poem he wrote before his death, *Gulls* is Hughes' legacy to children. It will be published shortly by Faber & Faber in an anthology of Hughes' poems about the sea and its creatures, *The Mermaid's Purse*.

## Gulls

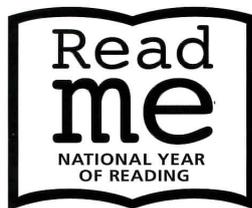
**Gulls are glanced from the lift  
Of cliffing air  
And left  
Loitering in the descending drift,  
Or tilt gradient and go  
Down steep invisible clefts in the  
grain  
Of air, blading against the blow,**

**Back-flip, wisp  
Over the foam-galled green  
Building seas, and they scissor  
Tossed spray, shave sheen,  
Wing-waltzing their shadows  
Over the green hollows,**

**Or rise again in the wind's landward  
rush  
And, hurdling the thundering bush  
With the stone wall flung in their  
faces,  
Repeat their graces.**

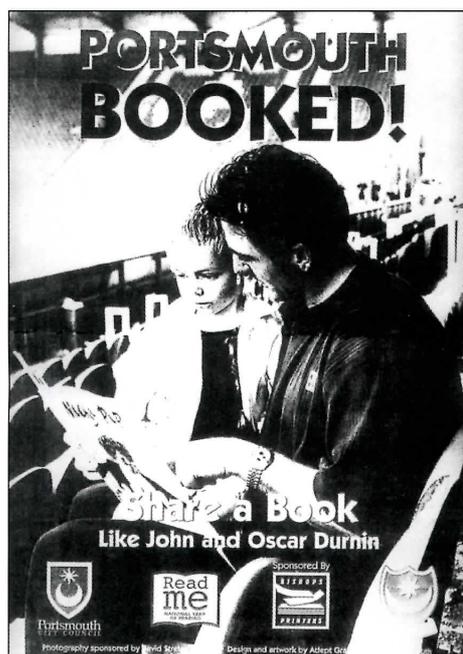
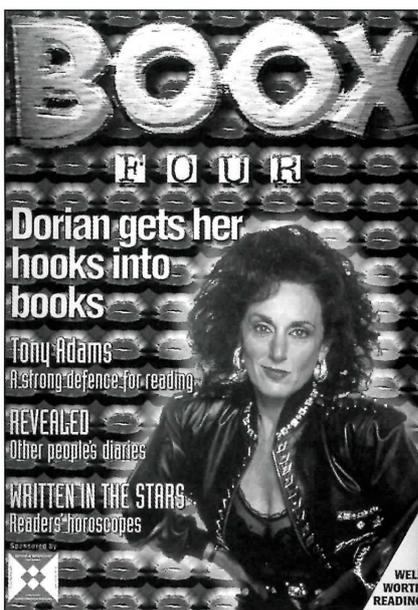
## NEWS

## NATIONAL YEAR OF READING



Sainsbury's are sponsoring a national £6 million Bookstart campaign, giving away at least a million books over two years from January 1999. By the year 2000, every nine-month-old baby will receive a free book. Further information from Alex Strick, Book Trust (0181 516 2983).

Well Worth Reading (WWR) has announced details of three reading promotions with accompanying materials aimed at teenagers and adults designed to introduce readers in libraries and elsewhere to new writers and ways of looking at books. **Made in Britain** looks at fiction and poetry from Black and Asian British writers; **Boox 4** is the latest edition of the magazine aimed at 13 to 16 year olds and **Shaken and Stirred** is a thematic look at contemporary adult fiction. Punchy and accessible, these promotions are well worth checking out. Details from Miranda McKearney (fax: 01962 853747; email: miranda@quarryroad.demon.co.uk).



Portsmouth School Library Service is backing a **Portsmouth Booked!** Campaign featuring posters to get people reading starring World Cup hero Alan Ball and footballers Alan Knight, Adrian Whitbread, Andy Awford and John Durnin. Further details available from Liz Stevenson, Norrish Central Library, Guildhall Square, Portsmouth PO1 2DX (01705 819311/7).

Year of Reading events are too numerous and frequent to cover fully in BfK. National Year of Reading updates are

available from The National Year of Reading Team, National Literacy Trust, Swire House, 59 Buckingham House, London SW1E 6AJ (0171 828 2435).

Useful Organisations  
No.4: THE  
FEDERATION OF  
CHILDREN'S  
BOOK GROUPS

c/o The Secretary (FCBG), 9 Westroyd, Pudsey, West Yorkshire LS28 8HZ (tel: 0113 2579950; e-mail: fcbg@cwcom.net; website: www.fcbg.mcmill.com). For further details please write enclosing an sae.

A national charity run by volunteers to promote the reading habit among young people. There are c. 40 groups made up of children's book enthusiasts (including parents, authors and storytellers) who work with crèches, playgroups, schools and libraries to organise events such as storytelling, author visits, visiting speakers etc. There is individual membership for those not able to join a group.

The Federation organises three major events a year for which it has obtained sponsorship. They are The Children's Book Award, a national award based entirely on the votes of young readers; National Tell a Story Week for which each group chooses a theme and produces booklists, stickers, posters and balloons; and an annual weekend conference each Spring. The Federation also publishes a Newsletter, booklists and information leaflets and provides support and practical help to its groups.

The Children's  
Laureate 1998

Twenty writers and illustrators have been nominated for this prestigious new venture (see BfK 113) which had the backing of Poet Laureate Ted Hughes until his death. They are: Allan Ahlberg, Quentin Blake, Raymond Briggs, Anthony Browne, John Burningham, Charles Causley, Peter Dickinson, Anne Fine, Michael Foreman, Alan Garner, Shirley Hughes, Pat Hutchins, Dick King-Smith, Joan Lingard, Jan Mark, William Mayne, Michael Morpurgo, Philippa Pearce, Philip Pullman, Brian Wildsmith. The winner, who will be announced in May will receive £10,000 to celebrate a lifetime's achievement in the field of children's literature and to provide a platform to highlight the importance of children's books.

Creative Writing  
Competition 1999

Open to students studying for first or second year of 'A' levels, GNVQs, BTEC or access courses in any London borough, this competition is linked to The Word: The London Festival of Literature which will take place in March 1999. Novelist Margaret Atwood and poet Simon Armitage have agreed to be judges. Entries may be a short story, three to

six poems, or a short script up to 10 minutes in length. Further information from Julie McGrath (tel: 0171 753 5074; fax: 0171 753 5075; email: j.mcgrath@unl.ac.uk). The closing date is 14th February.

Storytelling  
Workshops

Professional storyteller Bob Hartman will be running practical workshops in February for teachers, parents, librarians and other carers who want to develop their storytelling skills. The venues are Oxford, Huddersfield, Manchester, Birmingham, Wimbourne and London. Details from Becca Wyatt (tel: 0171 603 1776 or 0976 365082).

## Junk

Melvin Burgess's controversial teenage novel (winner of the Carnegie Medal and the Guardian Fiction Award) has been adapted for television and will be transmitted from Friday, January 15th on BBC2.

## Ladybird Job Losses

Following its decision to close Ladybird's Loughborough printing and publishing operation and relocate to London, Penguin is to make 210 redundancies. 40 jobs will be created in London.







# BfKREVIEWS

Reviews (of both hardback and paperback fiction and non-fiction) are grouped for convenience into both age categories and under teaching range. Within each section, you will find reviews for younger children at the beginning. Books and children being varied and adaptable, we suggest that you look either side of your area. More detailed recommendations for use can often be found within the review.

## RATING

Unmissable ★★★★★  
 Very Good ★★★★★  
 Good ★★★★★  
 Fair ★★★★★  
 Sad ★★★★★

## REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

**Khalida Alvi** was formerly a primary and advisory teacher in Ealing.

**Gwynneth Bailey** is Language Coordinator at Aldborough County Primary School, Norwich.

**Clive Barnes** is Principal Children's Librarian, Southampton City.

**David Bennett** is Senior Teacher and Head of the English Faculty at George Spencer School, Nottinghamshire.

**Jill Bennett** is the author of *Learning to Read with Picture Books*. She is Early Years Coordinator and teacher at Chatsworth Infant School in Hounslow, Middlesex.

**Roy Blatchford** is UK Director of Reading is Fundamental and Series Editor of Longman Literature.

**Valerie Coghlan** is Librarian at the Church of Ireland College of Education, Dublin.

**Robert Dunbar** lectures in English and children's literature at the Church of Ireland College of Education, Dublin.

**Nikki Gamble** is Head of English at the School of Education, Anglia Polytechnic University.

**Annabel Gibb** works as a supply teacher in primary schools in Leeds.

**George Hunt** is a lecturer in Language in Education at the University of Reading.

**Adrian Jackson** is General Adviser – English, West Sussex.

**Andrew Kidd** is Headteacher at Burscough County Primary School in Lancashire.

**Margaret Mallett** is Visiting Tutor in Primary English, Goldsmiths' College.

**Ted Percy**, until he retired, was Divisional Children's Librarian with Buckinghamshire County Library.

**Val Randall** teaches English at Mansfield High School, North East Lancashire.

**Steve Rosson** is Head of Library Resources at Moseley School, Birmingham.

**Elizabeth Schlenker** is the Librarian at Penglais School, Aberystwyth, and the compiler of *Reading Therapy for Children – books for hospital and home*.

**Judith Sharman** is Head of Hoole All Saints Infants School, Cheshire.

**Rosemary Stones** is Editor of *Books for Keeps*.

**Helen Taylor** works in Community Arts organising arts events and poetry projects in Cambridgeshire.

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Hunting Gumnor	★★★ 25	Under the Cat's Eye	★★★★ 25
Hutchinson Treasury of Children's Poetry, The	★★★ 25	Victorian House, A	★★★★ 26
I Love You, Blue Kangaroo!	★★★★★ 18	Victorians	★★ 26
I Slept with My Best Friend's Boyfriend	★★★ 27	Vulca, the Etruscan	★ 22
India under the Mughal Empire	★★★★ 26	W is for World	★★★★★ 21
Journey's End	★★★ 24	Wake Up/Sleep Tight	★★★ 17
Just Grandpa and Me	★★★★ 19	Walk with Granny, A	★★★★ 19
Katie and the Mona Lisa	★★★★★ 19	War	★★★★★ 24
Lion and the Unicorn, The	★★★★★ 22	Wedding Days	★★★ 24
Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, The	★★★ 20	What!	★★★★ 18
Living with Asthma	★★★★ 24	What Do We Think About Death?	★★★ 21
Living with Diabetes	★★★★ 24	White Wolf	★★★★ 24
Lost Property Box	★★ 23	Witchy	★★★★★ 27
Michael Rosen's Book of Nonsense	★★★★★ 20	With a Friend Like You	★★ 26
Mind & Body	★★★ 27	World of Islam, The	★★★★ 26
Mockingbird	★★★ 18	Zoo in the Sky	★★★★ 21

## Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant

### Wake Up/Sleep Tight

★★★

Ken Wilson-Max, Bloomsbury, 16pp, 0 7475 3547 7, £6.99 board

This flipover board book with an inset clock face explores the things that happen at certain times during the day and – flip the book over – in

the evening. A very simple idea and in some ways not as immediately appealing as other titles from this author/illustrator. However, our Nursery age children loved it and were particularly fascinated by the clock with its moveable hands. There was some confusion initially as some of the children felt that the characters depicted at different times of the day should be the same throughout the

book. The rhyming text is rather twee but easy to remember and soon had the children chanting. The illustrations are in Wilson-Max's inimitable style. This book will no doubt drive a parent mad with re-readings but will probably be a real favourite and it is tough enough to cope with meal times, journeys, and bedtimes. JS



Daisy teaches Morris how to open the post.



Baby learns too.

**Daisy Knows Best**

★★★★★

Lisa Kopper, Hamish Hamilton, 32pp, 0 241 13776 4, £10.99 hbk

Daisy is the proud mother of three cuddly pups. She teaches them all kinds of useful tricks, which the very young instantly recognise as terribly naughty! For there is a toddler in this family too, so whenever Daisy instructs her own pups, Baby joins in! There is immediate rapport between story toddler and young reader, and the very clear text and repetition encourage the youngest child to join in. Kopper's illustrations are full of fun, down to the Mother's despair on discovering the havoc wreaked by Daisy, pups and Baby. A book to be enjoyed in every Nursery and Reception classroom. GB

**Mockingbird**

★★★

Allan Ahlberg, ill. Paul Howard, Walker, 24pp, 0 7445 5574 4. £9.99 hbk

*Hush little baby, don't say a word, Mama's gonna buy you a Mockingbird.*

In a paraphrased version of the old song, Ahlberg's and Howard's baby is king in a family which keeps him entertained by buying him gifts of increasing extravagance: a mockingbird, a garden swing, a pedal truck, a dog named Rover. All of these come to grief of one kind or another, and it is Papa's homebaked birthday cake which eventually brings baby to a sleepy state of contentment.

Many of the conventions of good picture book making are in evidence here, for example, balance on the pages between words and illustration, and pictures contained in a frame while others bleed to the edge, encouraging the reader to experience an involvement with baby's comfortably well off family at the turn-of-the-century. It is perhaps because of this rather studied effect that the parts do not add up to the whole which might be anticipated from the pairing of the seemingly dream-team of Ahlberg and Howard. **Mockingbird** will undoubtedly appeal to a market for nostalgia with its almost familiar words and the careful details of Howard's pictures, evoking a nursery era when all was, at least superficially, right with the world. But it is the real bird pictured outside the window on the title page and on the closing page which hint that baby, and possibly young readers too, will venture beyond the confines of such a cosy world. VC

**The Selfish Crocodile**

★★★★★

Faustin Charles and Michael Terry, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 3857 3, £9.99 hbk



The selfish crocodile allows no other animal near HIS river – until, that is, the day toothache changes his life. Mouse tiptoes through his mouth, removes the offending fang, and peace breaks out in the local animal kingdom. The tale has a quite wonderful simplicity and a pace and rhythm characteristic of the oral tradition at its best. On the page or in performance, Charles is a master at making every word count for young audiences: this picture book is super storytelling.

Terry's illustrations are an equal delight: from the leering, gluttonous, self-satisfied crocodile to the alternatively bemused and frightened fellow jungle creatures. The double-spread image of wee mouse climbing through croc's mouth is a classic of its kind and caused more than a few gasps from a group of Reception children.

Highly recommended for group story-sharing. This title would make a wonderful Big Book! RB

**The Great Ball Play**

★★★

Joanna Troughton, Happy Cat, 32pp, 1 899248 32 3, £3.99 pbk

This adaptation of a Native American folktale has parallels in the more recent stories of the Ugly Duckling and Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer. In the early days of the world the animals and the birds challenged each other to a game of proto-lacrosse. The bat, sidelined as a substitute, does not seem to fit into either team, and he has to watch as the arrogant birds use their power of flight to trounce the animals. Then after a foul he is given the opportunity which enables him to

earn his membership of the animal club. Taxonomic purists might look askance at the team names in this simple and light-hearted picture book, but children should enjoy the unusual twist given to the perennial theme of the outsider's triumphant integration. GH

**Scaredy Cat**

★★★

Joan Rankin, Red Fox, 32pp, 0 09 965841 0, £4.99 pbk

An amusing and well written picture book that was much in demand according to one parent who tried it for me with her sensitive four-year-old. Scaredy Cat is a little kitten for whom the world is a terrifying place peopled with Giants (Auntie B), Crocodiles (shoes), Screaming Sucking Monsters (the vacuum cleaner) and many other terrifying creatures. How s/he (very useful this lack of specificity) learns to overcome his/her fears is a good yarn and it is one of those books from which

children will take what they need. The confident child will enjoy the story and the visual tricks and can gain important empathy; less confident children will return to it again and again gaining vital strength and reassurance. Teachers could use this story to get children to write their own versions, from the perspective of Mama Meow, Auntie B or

even the Dark Hairy Forest – it works a treat! JS

**What!**

★★★★

Kate Lum, ill. Adrian Johnson, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 3054 8, £9.99 hbk



Patrick is a child out to delay bedtime in a *serious* way. In turn he causes his Granny to construct a bed, pillow, blanket and teddy before he will even contemplate bedtime – and by that time it is morning!

Granny's increasing exasperation is brilliantly captured by Johnson's zany, vibrantly coloured illustrations which have an off-beat eye for detail that appealed to the four-year-olds with whom I shared this picture book. Young Patrick himself is a character beginning readers can identify with, his few well-chosen

words guaranteed to wind up even the most patient grandparent! RB

**I Love You, Blue Kangaroo!**

★★★★★

Emma Chichester Clark, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 831 9, £9.99 hbk



The next day, Lily looked everywhere for Blue Kangaroo. "Goo goo, boo gangaroo!" cooed the baby.

Every night Lily says 'I love you, Blue Kangaroo!' to her stuffed toy, and Blue Kangaroo feels wanted. But new toys start to arrive one by one, and Lily loves them too. Blue Kangaroo is sad and cannot sleep; one night he is even pushed out of bed. His solution to the problem helps Lily discover whom she really loves best. The illustrations are as warm and cuddly as the story; they glow with bright colour and yet are simple and accessible to the very young. This could become a classic. ES

**The Puffin Book of Five-minute Stories**

★★★★★

Illustrated by Steve Cox, Puffin, 128pp, 0 670 87680 1, £12.99 hbk

The nineteen stories in this collection chosen for their read-aloud qualities range from the well-loved 'Three Billy Goats Gruff' and 'Red Riding-Hood' to Margaret Mahy's 'The Horrendous Hullabaloo' and Allan Ahlberg's 'Miss Dose the Doctors' Daughter', and includes the neoclassic 'The Little Wooden Horse'. Several of the tales are traditional in origin presented through such voices as Michael Rosen ('Clever Cakes') and Pat Thomson ('Ticky Picky Boom Boom' – an Ananse story). The mood, reflected in Cox's friendly illustrations, is essentially light-hearted though each of the stories embodies depths of meaning to extend the imagination beyond the five-minute telling time and with the potential to open many new doors. JB

**My Ladybird Treasury of Stories & Rhymes**

★★★

Chosen by Ronne Randall, ill. Peter Stevenson, Ladybird, 192pp, 0 7214 9750 0, £14.99 hbk

Reuse again! Ladybird's previously published **Teddy Bear Tales** and **Nursery Rhymes** have been bunged together to make this large format Treasury in which, of the nineteen teddy bear stories and rhymes in the first half of this bumper book, only

five are not written by Joan Stimson. While it is then, less of the bargain it first appears to be, it adds up to a useful basic collection of nursery rhymes with some rather mundane ursine tales and acceptable verse storytelling. **JB**

### Ragged Bear

★★★

Brigitte Weninger, trans.  
Marianne Martens, ill. Alan Marks, North-South, 32pp, 1 55858 960 0, £4.99 pbk

This is a familiar story but it is refreshingly retold, and the text, a translation, is endearing without being sentimental. Tattered old bear is rejected, then lost. Eventually he finds a new family, where his appearance is restored to former glory, and he once more warms to hugs and cuddles. The class of 6-year-olds to whom I read the book immediately wanted to read it for themselves. The text is large, well set out on each page, and the illustrations are memorable. I particularly like the fact that the humans in this story appear only as shadows or retreating back-views. It is ragged bear who holds the reader's attention. **GB**

### Ebb's New Friend

★★★★

Jane Simmons, Orchard, 32pp, 1 86039 525 2, £9.99 hbk

Those of us who fell in love with *Come on, Daisy* will delight in Simmons' new book. Ebb, based on Jane's own dog, is most put out when a goose arrives and steals her favourite spot, her tibbits, and Flo's affection. Lazy hazy days on the river are no longer the same, with this goose 'Beep, beep, beeping' everywhere. Ebb becomes

increasingly grumpy, and wishes Bird would fly away and never come back. When, of course, Bird does just that, Ebb discovers how attached she has become to him, and she spends her days scanning the sky, hoping he will come back. Bird's eventual return brings the reader once more to the opening of the book. 'Things couldn't be better'. A beautifully constructed circular tale about jealousy, and the fun that can be had from sharing. **GB**

### Hmm... A Preston Pig story

★★★★

Colin McNaughton, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 827 0, £8.99 hbk



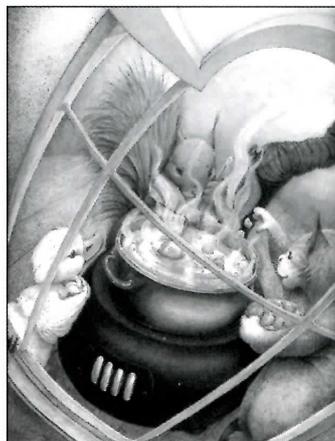
As a 'Careers Manual' for hungry wolves this latest picture book in the Preston Pig series more than lives up to its predecessors. Hungry Mister Wolf is encouraged by Preston Pig to seek gainful employment. Preston's good advice is seen as having totally different outcomes when looked at through Mister Wolf's eyes - with all careers ending with a 'piggy sticky

end' as one young reviewer put it! There is little to add other than to say that the McNaughton formula delivers - yet again! **JS**

### Pumpkin Soup

★★★★★

Helen Cooper, Doubleday, 32pp, 0 385 40794 7, £9.99 hbk



'Deep in the woods there's an old white cabin with pumpkins in the garden' - therein Cat, Squirrel and Duck live a well-ordered life, each with his own tasks and personalised equipment. Every night, pumpkin soup is made, in exactly the same way, until Duck challenges the status quo: 'Today it's *my* turn to stir the soup...'

This picture book's large square format gives plenty of space for Cooper's richly-painted illustrations, ranging from the larger-than-life burgeoning of the pumpkin patch to the tiny, detailed sequence as the Duck carefully 'scoops up a pipkin of

salt, and tips in just enough.' Emotion and atmosphere are evoked well and the illustrations are used cleverly to extend the story. Subtle use is made of symbolic devices (e.g. to show imagined events): while easy for an adult to decode quickly, this may be more difficult for a child. The book thus demands careful reading and looking - indeed the pace of the text encourages an unhurried approach. Highly recommended - an unusually rich experience. **AG**

### The Gotcha Smile

★★

Rita Phillips Mitchell, ill. Alex Ayliffe, Orchard, 32pp, 1 86039 064 1, £9.99 hbk

This book deals with the difficult problem of a child moving school and settling in with new relationships. Clarine is a little black girl whose first day proves a disaster and as things go from bad to worse she decides that she cannot bear to go to school any more. Helpful strategies are offered from all quarters but it takes Grandpa to come up with giving her confidence to flash the 'gotcha smile'. This book might prove helpful for very young children in a similar position but in some cases I wonder if it might make the situation worse. The book is probably most useful for encouraging empathy when used with children receiving a new child and should only be used judiciously when it comes to the tricky situation of a failing introduction to a new school. **JS**

## REVIEWS 5-8 Infant/Junior

### Katie and the Mona Lisa

★★★★

James Mayhew, Orchard, 32pp, 1 86039 705 0, £9.99 hbk

If you have enjoyed Katie's previous gallery trips, when she climbs over frames and into pictures (*Katie's Picture Show* and *Katie Meets the Impressionists*), then this new picture book will also make you smile. Whilst Grandma dozes, Katie visits the Mona Lisa, who explains that smiling has become very hard as she feels so lonely. Katie promptly takes her hand, they step out of her picture frame, and together they meet Raphael's St George and the Dragon from the painting of the same name, Carpaccio's lion from *The Lion of St Mark*, and Flora from Botticelli's *Primavera*. All the characters become entwined in a romp round the gallery until Katie runs off to find Grandma. This richly illustrated book closes with a page of information about Mona Lisa and the Italian Renaissance. An enjoyable introduction to famous paintings for the very young. **GB**

### A Walk with Granny

★★★★

Nigel Gray, ill. Jason Walker, Cambridge University Press, 32pp, 0 521 46928 7, £4.50 pbk

Mike has just moved in with Joe's mum and Joe and he are wary of each other. At Mike's suggestion they take Granny Beth's old, fat dog for a walk. Granny Beth has recently died, and Joe is missing her more than he wants to admit. During the long, hot afternoon, he begins to talk about her to Mike. They become closer almost imperceptibly and Joe is pleased to hear that Mike plans to stay around. This is an unusual, sensitive story, with atmospheric pictures that are soft and fuzzy around the edges. They express the shimmer of heat in the hot day and the growing sense of comradeship between man and boy. **ES**

### Just Grandpa and Me

★★★★

Sally Grindley, ill. Jason Cockcroft, Dorling Kindersley, 32pp, 0 7513 7065 7, £8.99 hbk

This picture book is a real tear jerker - a bit bewildering to children who have not had any brushes with mortality particularly when it overwhelms the adult sharing it with



them. When a little boy goes to stay with his grandfather at the seaside the joyous day is somehow enriched by the memories of his dead Grandma. This book is beautifully crafted in every way. Grindley's poetic text works in sympathy with Cockcroft's evocative artwork to create powerful images that build, layer upon layer, to give a strong message about death as part of the pattern of life. It also conveys well that coping and enjoying life is right and that honouring and valuing the memories

of a dead person can contribute greatly to the quality of life for those left behind. This is a must for all school libraries and a book which will help many families at a very difficult time. **JS**

### From a Distance

★★

Julie Gold, ill. Jane Ray, Orchard, 32pp, 1 86039 637 2, £10.99 hbk

Jane Ray, creator of such visionary books as *The Story of Creation* (Smarties Prize 1992) and *Noah's Ark*, has taken the rather bland words of Julie Gold's song and set them to a haunting sequence of paintings that depict a harmonious and beautiful world gradually infiltrated by images of hatred, violence and death. The opening pages depict richly textured and tranquil landscapes, reminiscent of Ray's earlier work. Then the reader's eye is drawn into the streets and homes of a thriving community. On the next page, one small detail shows a couple arguing, a tank is glimpsed in a back street, and helicopters have joined the doves and stars in the sky above the town. Then the community descends into a barbaric conflict which is followed by a sudden, unexplained redemption. This book was inspired by the war in Bosnia, and was created in order to

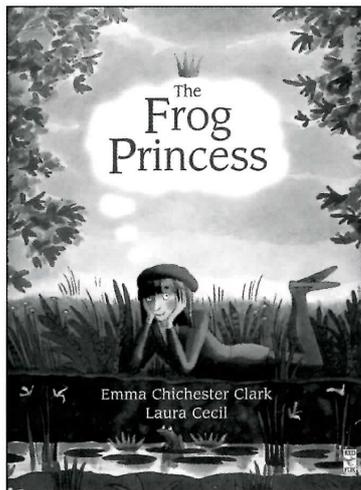
# Editor's Choice

## The Frog Princess

★★★★

Laura Cecil, ill. Emma Chichester Clark, Red Fox, 32pp, 0 09 965091 6, £4.99 pbk

A delightfully told variant of *The Frog Prince*, this witty picture book version has three princes (one very plump who likes his food, one very thin who loves fashionable clothes and the youngest who likes to lie in the grass looking at flowers and insects) who are sent out by their mother to find a wife. The youngest, who has a tender heart, promises to marry the young frog he comes across, thus breaking the enchanter's spell and revealing her to be a beautiful and clever princess. Cecil's well paced narrative with its humorous asides is complemented by the astuteness of Clark's layout



which gives a visual form to both the comic and dramatic moments in the tale. Clark's deft visual characterisations and imaginative, atmospheric scenes range from the damp greenness of the river bank to the formal brightness of the court. A tour de force. RS

promote the work of Connect Humanitarian Agency, a Bosnian charity which is striving to heal the wounds caused by the conflict. This is certainly a vivid and a powerful book, but the slightness of the text and the ambiguity of the picture story imply that some careful teacher intervention might be necessary in order to help younger children to understand what is intended to be an optimistic message. GH

## The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

★★★

Abridged from C S Lewis's text by Amanda Benjamin, ill. Christian Birmingham, Collins, 48pp, 0 00 185701 0, £12.99 hbk

This large format picture-book, lavishly illustrated in rich colours, has been produced to celebrate C S Lewis's centenary and is, in the publisher's words, intended to 'delight younger children'.

The illustrations include soft charcoal pencil drawings, atmospheric landscapes and larger-than-life double spreads, in full colour, of the main events and characters, evidently derived from photographs and thus realistic rather than impressionistic, and very much in the modern idiom. Adult reaction to this may be that little is left to the imagination compared with Pauline Baynes's stylised vignettes in the original edition. However, my eight-year-old daughter (who has read the original several times) was enchanted by the realism of this new edition.

The text has been heavily abridged. Using Lewis's words but altering their context by omitting large amounts in between reduces the text to a bare sequence of events – no room here for the emotional or spiritual content which is surely the point of the book, nor for Lewis's avuncular, confiding story-telling style. 'It'd be all right for a six-year-old' was my daughter's dismissive comment – and she had noticed particular omissions that she felt mattered. Of course, that is O.K. – the book is aimed at younger readers,

after all. But is it *really* O.K.?

The spiritual nourishment inherent in Lewis's original resonates particularly with children of nine and over, sophisticated enough to deal with deeper thoughts and less realistic illustration. So why offer it in this watered-down version to younger ones?

One might argue that many children will not read it in full anyway, and might as well meet it at six in this abridged form. I am not so sure. Early and inappropriate exposure may put off as many potential readers as it invites. AG

## Read Me a Story, Please

★★★★

Chosen by Wendy Cooling, ill. Penny Dann, Orion, 256pp, 1 85881 548 7, £20.00

You will need a strong arm for this hefty anthology! It contains fifty bite-sized stories catering for all tastes from twenty-nine authors. Many of its delicious fillings are new, and each one has a distinctive taste and special spark whether it be from Anne Fine's glowing worm, Hetty, the stars on the blue curtains in Adèle Geras's 'Playing Princesses' or Vivian French's 'Before Goldilocks' (which I just loved). Dann's illustrations always make me smile though somehow I can only associate 'The Little Girl and the Tiny Doll' with Edward Ardizzone or Michael Foreman's 'Two Giants' with his original artwork. My only quibble, albeit a very tiny one, is with some of the timings given for the stories which are supposed to take either two, five or ten minutes to read: perhaps the compiler's clock came from wonderland too – best use your own! JB

## A Bed full of Night-time Stories

★★★★

Collected by Pat Thomson, ill. Anthony Lewis, Corgi, 176pp, 0 552 52961 3, £3.99 pbk

Ten well-chosen and varied stories with a night-time theme by well-

known contemporary authors form this anthology for 5-7 year olds.

Many of the stories have a fairy-tale feel about them, and the collection includes three fine re-tellings of traditional tales. Those readers of nervous disposition may benefit from an encounter with Dick King-Smith's friendly headless ghost and Jenny Wagner's kindly werewolf, while Philippa Pearce's contribution ends with a rather neat twist.

An anthology of consistently high standard, suitable for home or school use. It has occasional line drawings. AG

## Funny Stories for Seven Year Olds

Ill. Alan Snow, 256pp, 0 330 34945 7

## Funny Stories for Eight Year Olds

Ill. Alan Snow, 256pp, 0 330 34946 5

★★★

## Animal Stories for Seven Year Olds

Ill. Diz Wallis, 192pp, 0 330 35494 9

## Animal Stories for Eight Year Olds

Ill. Diz Wallis, 240pp, 0 330 35495 7

★★★★



## Scary Stories for Seven Year Olds

Ill. Kerstin Meyer, 192pp, 0 330 34943 0

## Scary Stories for Eight Year Olds

Ill. Kerstin Meyer, 240p, 0 330 34944 9

★★★★

Chosen by Helen Paiba, Macmillan, £3.99 each pbk

Chosen by an experienced children's bookseller, these short story collections are suitable for either newly confident independent readers or for sharing with an adult. They include tales to satisfy a variety of palates though some are tastier than others.

The two *Funny Stories* collections include tales by Dick King-Smith, Anne Fine and Jacqueline Wilson. Roger McGough's story, 'The Stowaways', detailing two youngsters' failed attempt to escape to exotic foreign parts is absolutely hilarious, as the young boys mistakenly end up in a lifeboat shuttling between Liverpool and Birkenhead on the Mersey Ferry! There are also stories from earlier decades including extracts from 'Mary Poppins', 'Paddington Bear', Anthony Buckeridge's 'Jennings', and 'Mr Majeika', which may seem a little dated but no doubt will be enjoyed by some.

The *Animal Stories* contain a more successful mix of the contemporary and traditional and a wider cultural aspect too. With an animal theme there is naturally a substantial contribution from Dick King-Smith. Other extracts are from Michael Rosen ('The Lion and the Hare'), Allan Ahlberg ('Woof!'), together with Philippa Pearce ('A Dog So Small'), and Ted Hughes ('How the Whale Became'). There are snippets from 'Charlotte's Web' and 'Here Comes Tod!' as well as 'The Elephant's Child' from Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*. In addition there are tales from Australia, New Guinea, Africa, South America and a North American Indian story, 'Coyote and the Mice'.

The *Scary Stories* titles contain spooky stories such as Paul Jennings' 'The Ghost of Old Man Chompers', Ruth Ainsworth's ghostly 'A Sprig of Rosemary' mixed well with tales of wild imagination like Bel Mooney's 'I'm Scared!'. Then there is Ian McEwan's menacing tale 'The Dolls' and the more tongue in cheek 'A is for Aaargh!' by Frank Rodgers. Scotland, Swaziland, Trinidad, are all represented by scary tales as is Russia with a retelling of the famous Baba Yaga story.

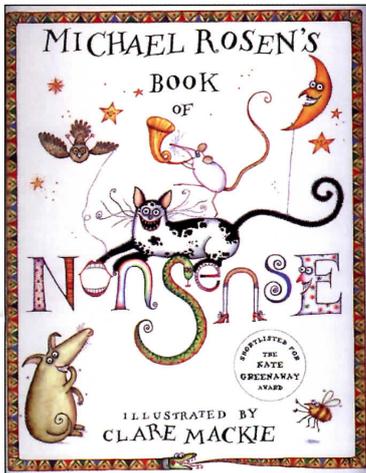
The age guided titles may be of some limited use to an adult storyteller but are rather alienating to readers of eight or nine years old and over. AK

## Michael Rosen's Book of Nonsense

★★★★★

Michael Rosen, ill. Clare Mackie, Macdonald, 48pp, 0 7500 2671 5, £4.99 pbk

The spikiness of Mackie's drawings brilliantly complement Rosen's spiky verse, creating a book of nonsense which deserves to become as well-known as its namesake. It has elements of a post-modern homage to Lear but it is also strikingly original: teasing and challenging the reader with an assault of visual and verbal puns, poems, limericks and awful jokes. Mackie's wittily sophisticated artwork dances off the page in a riot of bold lines and bright colours, but it repays close looking too, for jokes and asides are contained in the fine detailing of her work. The design and layout of the pages is excellently judged, providing a constant sense of exhilaration. A variety of lettering is employed for poem titles and jokes, also enhancing and extending meaning, and a running gag is provided by the 'TV Cats' who interact both inside and outside a television set. VC



friend Andrea take the cat's way home along the dividing walls of the nearby houses to get to safety. This is a thoughtful tale with a deliciously satisfying ending, sensitively punctuated with Howard's line drawings, that will provide lower junior teachers with plenty of Literacy Hour material as well as giving hope to the bullied.

In both titles there is a useful page of information about the author and illustrator whilst the inside back cover offers advice on how to use Big Books – just in case there is still a teacher out there who has not heard of Literacy Hour! **AK**

**What Do We Think About Death?**

**NON-FICTION** ★★★

Karen Bryant-Mole, Wayland 'What Do We Think About' series, 32pp, 0 7502 2208 5, £8.99 hbk

Two pages at the end of this book explain to parents and teachers how children may react to death and how to use the book as part of a coping strategy. Photographs and large print make the main text appealing, and there is a basic explanation of life – what it means – and the ending of it. The book is intentionally secular. Sections on sadness, missing someone (or a pet) who has died, anger, helping a bereaved friend, and remembering the person who has died cover the emotions. My main criticism is that some of the ideas seem too simple and obvious for the 6 to 9 year olds at whom the book appears to be aimed. Other issues books in the same series cover adoption, alcohol, bullying, disability, drugs, family break-up, and our environment. **ES**

**My Amazing Journey**

0 7500 2573 5

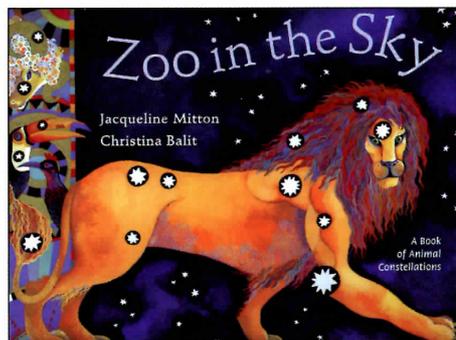
**My Family's Changing**

0 7500 2571 9

**NON-FICTION** ★★★★★

Pat Thomas, ill. Lesley Harker, Macdonald 'M.Y. Bees', 32pp, £8.99 each hbk

This is a welcome new series that shows great promise. *My Amazing Journey* gives the facts of life from conception through birth, giving just the right amount of information. The colour illustrations are accurate and expressive. Little is left to the imagination, but it is all superbly handled, set within a happy family. The family in *My Family's Changing* is not happy. Divorce is imminent, and the feelings and worries of both parents and children are thoroughly aired. There is a good bit of factual information included in the text, and in both books there are occasional questions to be discussed. Each book also includes a helpful page of advice on how to use the book with a child – and the 'with' is rightly emphasised. These books must be shared with a caring adult. Further reading lists are included. Both books have a positive look about them, even when dealing with a difficult subject. More M.Y. Bees, please! **ES**



**Zoo in the Sky**

**NON-FICTION** ★★★★★

Jacqueline Mitton, ill. Christina Balit, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 1186 8, £10.99 hbk

This beautiful information picture book is an exciting introduction to the mysteries of the night sky, stars and galaxies. While intended for under eights, older readers would also appreciate the striking illustrations of the animal constellations. The book provides information about the location of the stars and the history of the constellations and the Milky Way using clear star maps of the Northern and Southern skies. Other books do this but this one invites young readers in through particularly fine illustrations and a lively text. Large dramatic pictures of The Great Bear, The Scorpion, Leo the Lion and other animal named constellations are set against a night sky and enhanced by laminated silver stars that shine out from the page.

Mitton, an astronomer, knows just how to combine information with a touch of humour for young readers. Explaining that the Little Bear swings around behind the Great Bear in the North Pole of the sky, she adds 'You won't see bears quite the same anywhere else – real live bears don't have long tails!' **MM**

education. While showing what is distinctive about each part of the world, the book also celebrates what brings us together – an appreciation of natural phenomena whether trees, desert or rivers, of the necessities of life – clothes, food and homes, and of the families and friends that give our lives point and meaning – grandparents, visitors and workmates.

It would be hard to improve on the format and presentation. Each page has the letter of the alphabet clearly in upper and lower case, a large print explanation of the item or concept and smaller extending writing to link with the illustration.

The book has clear potential for the Literacy Hour but deserves more than use as an alphabet or geography book. It is a warm and human journey helping young readers understand the joys and difficulties of people in different countries and circumstances. **MM**

**Tell Me Why Planes Have Wings**

0 7500 2577 8

**Tell Me Why Rain is Wet**

0 7500 2576 X

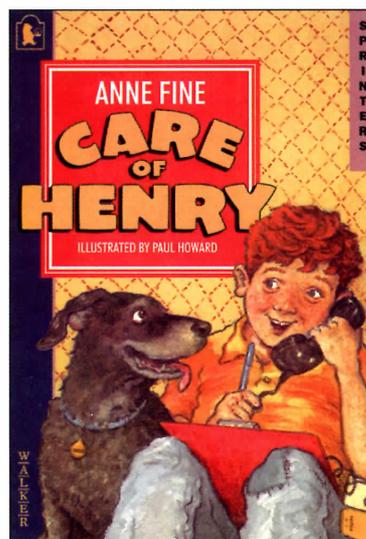
**NON-FICTION** ★★★★★

Shirley Willis, Macdonald Young Books 'Buddies' series, 32pp, £7.99 each hbk

These small square picture books are lively and humorous and they also impart sound information about the topics they consider. Children will like joining the six 'Buddies' children and their dog, Boris, as they endeavour to find answers to their quest-ions on, respectively, flight and water. The books have nice clear contents pages, glossaries and indexes, and in each case the drawings extend the text in an amusing way.

Young readers at Key Stage 1 (5–7 year olds) are also introduced to different types and sizes of font – large bold print for the questions that organise each book, basic information on the sub topics in large print, smaller print for detailed points and the procedural writing explaining how to carry out simple experiments. The children's comments on all the phenomena they are exploring are in yet another kind of typeface which is designed to be integral to the illustration.

The rationale for these books has been thought out by a team who has really considered how to make some inviting information books for young children. Even reluctant young readers, who cause us much concern, might be tempted to try them. I particularly like the diagrams – for example of the plane parts, clearly labelled, on page 26 of *Tell Me Why Planes Have Wings* and of the main types of cloud – cumulus, stratus and cumulonimbus – on page 13 of *Tell Me Why Rain is Wet*. Teachers will find these titles help meet objectives in the National Literacy Strategy's Framework for Teaching. **MM**



**Care of Henry**

Anne Fine, 0 7445 6927 3

**Taking the Cat's Way Home**

Jan Mark, 0 7445 6928 1

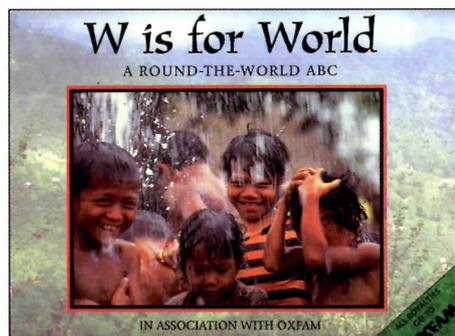
**BIG BOOKS** ★★★★★

Ill. Paul Howard, Walker 'Sprinters', 64pp, £12.99 each pbk

Just published in Big Book format, these two satisfying books for new readers (from authors who have both won the Carnegie Medal twice) are a welcome extension to the range of titles available for Year 3 (7–8 year olds) Literacy Hour.

In *Care of Henry*, Hugo's mother is trying to sell their house but that is not the only potential upheaval in his life. With mum about to go into hospital to have a baby, Hugo is to be allowed to choose with whom he would like to stay. The choice is not easy though the list of 'possibles' is quite short: Granny, Mrs Mariposa next door or Uncle Jack. Hugo devises a checklist covering important aspects such as 'Entertainment', 'Food', 'Strictness' and 'Care of Henry' (his dog). But are ticks the best way to determine his choice? Howard's cosy line drawings ably support the text.

*Taking the Cat's Way Home* also makes an excellent Big Book and is a powerful vehicle for dealing with the issue of bullying and how to overcome it. New boy William takes an instant dislike to Jane, and her cat Furlong, whom he nicknames 'Loo Brush'. When William threatens to 'get' Jane after school, she and her



**W is for World**

**NON-FICTION** ★★★★★

Kathryn Cave, Frances Lincoln with Oxfam, 32pp, 0 7112 1260 0, £9.99 hbk

We think of alphabet books as being for the very young but this one would both delight and inform children up to about eight years. A large number of countries across continents are included and the daily life of different adults and children is brought to life by a clear interesting text and photographs of exceptional quality. The author and publisher acknowledge the expertise of Oxfam which helped inform the book. There is a clear message: with support, people can achieve basic rights to shelter, food, water, healthcare and

**Big Blue Whale****NON-FICTION BIG BOOK**

★★★★★

Nicola Davies, ill. Nick Maland, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 6929 X, £12.99 pbk

Now in Big Book format, **Big Blue Whale** brings feelings about these huge and wonderful creatures into the picture as well as what we need to know. This title translates well in big book form – different levels of print, inspirational illustrations and a well written text. There is an attempt to make the dimensions of this largest creature the earth has ever known – ‘heavier than 25 elephants or 115 giraffes’ – imaginable by young learners. Its eye is ‘as big as a teacup and as dark as the deep sea’. All the senses are appealed to in making the creature real for the children – its skin is ‘springy and smooth as a hard boiled egg’, its breath is ‘stale and fishy’ and when it breathes out ‘you can hear it, too – a great proof!’.

I remember the many questions asked by a class of five-year-olds learning about Sea Creatures, including those about the whale’s young. This book answers these sort of questions, for example it brings to life the maternal behaviour of the creatures as well as details about their structure and the function of the skin, blow-hole and baleen plates. It also creates the sea environment powerfully – in a wealth of blues and greens sweeping across the double spreads. The ethical dimension is addressed at the beginning. In spite of the hunting ban now imposed – after too many whales were killed for their meat and blubber – the number of whales is growing only very slowly. As one of the children in the project mentioned above remarked – ‘You could not kill a whale if you looked at its face’. In Big Book format, **Big Blue Whale** offers an opportunity for children to share and talk about the much more than superficial information this book

provides via its superb pictures and clear, exciting text. For those who wish for Literacy Hour suggestions there is advice on the back cover.MM

**Think of an Eel****NON-FICTION BIG BOOK**

★★★★★

Karen Wallace, ill. Mike Bostock, Walker ‘Read and Wonder’ series, 32pp, 0 7445 6930 3, £12.99 pbk

Already much enjoyed, **Think of an Eel** has adapted well to the Big Book format. The eel’s journey is exhilarating and children respond enthusiastically to the details of the life cycle described through picture and text. The language has a wonderful rhythm for reading out loud: ‘Think of an eel. He swims like a fish. He slides like a snake.’ Images in words are beautifully realised in the illustrations. We hear the eel ‘looks like a willow leaf, clear as crystal’ and see Bostock’s lovely translucent picture. As a Big Book, the contrast between the large picture and the detail showing the tiny real size of the creature is even more dramatic. The two texts – the larger writing is poetic, the smaller more conventionally informational in tone – complement each other perfectly.

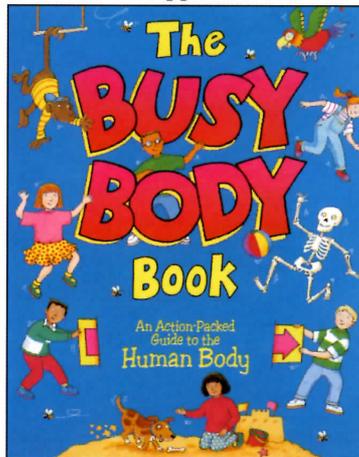
The ‘Read and Wonder’ series encourages children to feel and imagine as well as think. A group of student teachers thought the comment at the very beginning of this book – that no-one has ever seen an eel egg hatch – would capture children’s interest. The thought of a secret intrigues! Children will enjoy responding to the whole text and sharing what they liked most and found most surprising. They can also be helped to attend to the detail and to use syntactic and semantic cues in reading the text for themselves. This book provides a sufficiently rich experience to make it worth returning to. It would certainly be a very good text of the week for the

Literacy Hour for children from about six to eight. MM

**The Busy Body Book****NON-FICTION**

★★★★

Anne Civardi and Ruth Thomson, ill. Steve Cox, Macmillan, 12pp, 0 333 65404 8,



£9.99 hbk novelty

This book has all the ingredients for success – the topic is ‘my body and how it works’, the text is relatively accessible, the illustrations are excellent and since it clearly needs to be shared with an adult for best results, the paper engineering is probably going to survive for longer than most. It is a fascinating read and the paper engineering is not just for novelty effect but actually delivers, making some fairly complex concepts much easier to understand. The range of pop-ups, the ‘touch and feel’ and even a cardboard skeleton all combine to make the topic come alive. The whole range of the year groups in my infant school has been fascinated – the children loved it and were seen even a week later, trying the experiments out in the playground. JS

**Vulca, the Etruscan**

0 7141 2156 8

**Nefertari, Princess of Egypt**

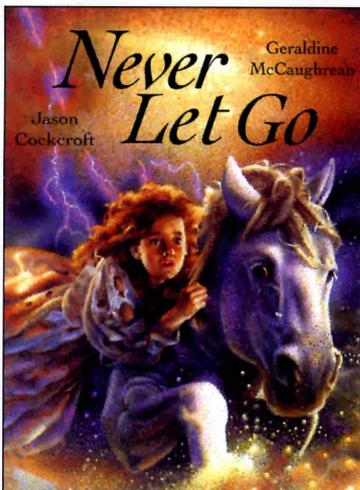
0 7141 2155 X

**NON-FICTION**

★

Roberta Angeletti, British Museum Press ‘A Journey Through Time’, 32pp, £8.99 each hbk

These are picturebook introductions to ancient civilisations that have been translated from Italian. Both use the device, ancient itself, of a modern child taken back in time to meet a historical figure – Vulca or Nefertari – and be given a guided tour of their tombs. The main text is short and aimed at 5-8 year olds, although it is a poor translation which can be twee and patronising. Any child would know that ‘the funny wooden thing’ found by Robbie at the entrance to the Etruscan tomb, was a musical instrument. There are ‘notes’ at the back of the book, suitable for an older child, filling in the background. A lot depends on the illustrations, which are vigorous and colourful, but which, I suspect, are not accurate representations of the original tombs. The idea might have been more successfully used in a CD ROM format, where the reader could move more easily between the story and information content, and actual archaeological evidence could have been seen beside Angeletti’s representations. It is curious to see the British Museum buying in material like this. CB

**REVIEWS 8–10 Junior/Middle****Never Let Go**

★★★★★

Geraldine McCaughrean, ill. Jason Cockcroft, Hodder, 32pp, 0 340 68290 6, £9.99 hbk, 0 340 68291 4, £4.99 pbk

This picture book will bring a shiver to your spine. McCaughrean weaves a

magical spell around the reader as well as the fated hero, Tamlin, who is stolen away to the land of the fairies on the eve of his wedding. No sweet and fanciful land, but one where the ground runs red with blood. His bride, Janet, determines to rescue Tamlin from the enchantment of the Fairy Queen. Despite her Father’s anguished cries, Janet sets off on Hallowe’en night, and is terrified as skeletons dance in the wind, owls babble, sing and weep, and dark shapes speed across the moon. Throughout the long night she endures searing pain, her grasp tight on Tamlin as she is tossed and battered whilst he is turned into all the horrors of Hallowe’en. Janet constantly claims, ‘I will never let go.’ And as All Hallow’s dawns and the Fairy Queen relinquishes her hold on Tamlin, so the story ends with a happy marriage. Older readers will love the tension built up as the night progresses, and Cockcroft’s dramatic illustrations are arrestingly beautiful. GB

**Enchantment in the Garden**

Red Fox, 0 09 964441 X, £5.99 pbk

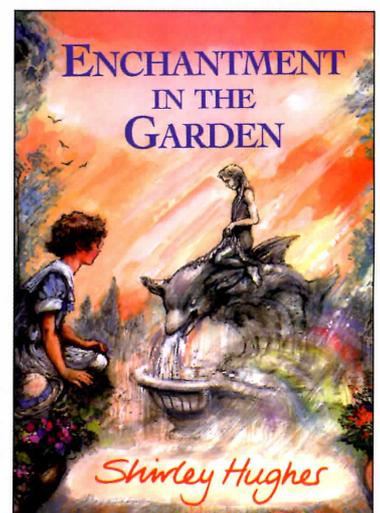
**The Lion and the Unicorn**

Bodley Head, 0 370 32475 7, £12.99 hbk

★★★★★

Shirley Hughes, 64pp each

Both of these books describe the adventures of intensely lonely children whose longings cause statues in secluded gardens to come to life. In the first book, the only child of a wealthy hotel owner falls in love with a statue of a young sea god. Her love brings him to life, but his encounter with the depredations that the 20th century has made on his elemental home leads to an inevitable parting. The second book describes the tribulations of Lenny Levi, another only child, whose father is away fighting in the second world war. When his street is bombed, his mother sends him off as a refugee. He arrives in a country house with a group of jeering children and an



unsympathetic housemaid, whose hostility is barely balanced by the friendship of a serving girl and a crippled war hero, encountered in the overgrown garden behind the house. But also in the garden is the statue of a unicorn, a life sized version of the creature on the little brass lion and unicorn emblem that Lenny’s father has given him as a

keepsake. When Lenny's fear and loneliness transform themselves into a phantom lion that pursues him through the garden, it is the unicorn which restores his courage.

The books share the theme of childhood vulnerability brought to emotional crisis in an encounter with mythology. That they manage to make such encounters engaging and believable is a tribute to the blend of straightforward text and dramatic but realistic illustration. Shirley Hughes' powerful, full page paintings, rich in both narrative sweep and period detail, make an intense visual impact, but they are accompanied by quiet, subtle marginal sketches, and by clear writing. Highly recommended for readers of all ages. GH

**Elephant Dreams**

**POETRY** ★★

Ian McMillan, Paul Cookson and David Harmer, 0 330 35338 1

**Lost Property Box**

**POETRY** ★★

Peter Dixon, Wes Magee and Matt Simpson, 0 330 36967 9

**An Odd Kettle of Fish**

**POETRY** ★★★★★

John Rice, Pie Corbett and Brian Moses, 0 330 36966 0

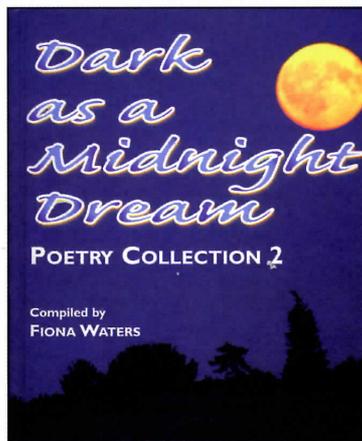
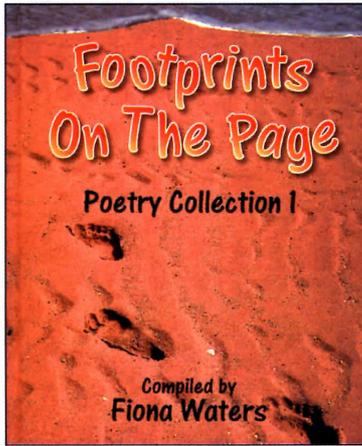
Ill. Lucy Maddison, Macmillan 'Sandwich Poets', 96pp, £3.99 each pbk

Fun, fun, fun, but is it enough? *Elephant Dreams* is the most recent book to be published in the 'Sandwich Poets' series. It is full of jokes, wordplay and the obligatory verses about aliens, but not much substantial poetry. Do Macmillan have a set of rules in this series which the poets have to obey? Because where they are allowed to, Harmer, Cookson and McMillan slip in the odd memorable poem which is then immediately suffocated by the interminable routine of zany subjects and verses.

*Lost Property Box* is a new cover reprint from 1995. The new series cover style is garish and the inside illustrations are crude and cartoonish. Even the drawings of each poet at the beginning of a section do not do them any favours. Neither does the selection of poems in this title. Magee, in particular, can write some stunning poems but this book's theme seems to be the insubstantial, the 'whatever can be consumed quickly'.

Also a reprint, *An Odd Kettle of Fish* was first published in 1995. This is the sort of selection that Macmillan should be aiming at in this series. Yes, there are the crazy poems, the plays on words, the poems about school or parents but the quality is higher, the jokes make you laugh and the word play is fun. There are also the more thought-provoking poems like John Rice's 'Big Fears' where the subject, the language and the rhythm become melded into a memorable poem which resonates long after one has turned the page. This is a collection which is relevant to everyday experience and also fulfils the promise in Pie Corbett's poem 'Poetman': 'The Poetman/ calls at each house/ in the early hours./ When the stars are frosted flowers/

and the night a velvet mole./ The poetman shoulders his bundle -/ At each doorstep/ he sheds a poem or two.' Mmmm... HT



**Footprints on the Page: Poetry Collection 1**

160pp, 0 237 51844 9, £12.99 hbk

**Dark as a Midnight Dream: Poetry Collection 2**

Ill. Zara Slattery, 288pp, 0 237 51845 7, £14.99 hbk

**POETRY** ★★★★★

Compiled by Fiona Waters, Evans

Fiona Waters is a respected, established anthologist. You can tell from her selections that she reads all types of poetry all the time. These two collections are aimed at schools and at the Literacy Hour and come in hardback, well produced with an accessible format.

In *Footprints on the Page* the poems are loosely arranged in themes such as the seasons, food, school, magic, families and the sea. The poems are all on the footprints on the sand background interspersed with photographs relevant to the poems. The overall impression is attractive and reader-friendly. The poems are an excellent mix of classic and contemporary poetry with a good variety of form and subject matter. The collection also bears the mark of the selector who unflinchingly chooses poems that are not only enjoyable but also remain in one's head long after the book is closed.

A companion volume, *Dark as a Midnight Dream* has black and white drawings and not on every page. The selection of poems is more

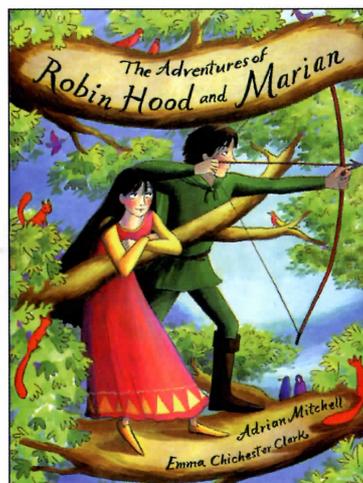
challenging and is aimed at the older primary school child, crossing over into the secondary age group. Themes include War, Inhumanity and Death as well as Animals, Christmas and Love. Again the choice of poems is inspiring; this is the first time I have seen a poem about Aids in a school anthology, it is also rare for adult poets such as Paul Durcan and Sharon Olds to be included in a children's anthology - an excellent preparation and introduction to adult reading. There are some real gems - Nancy Willard's 'Blake Leads a Walk on the Milky Way' manages to keep the spirit of William Blake whilst creating a new story of creation. Norman MacCaig's 'Sleeping Compartment' is just pure joy, an extended metaphor and an extended complaint 'I don't like this, being carried sideways/ through the night. I feel wrong and helpless - like/ a timber broadside in a fast stream.' Read on! HT

**The Adventures of Robin Hood and Marian**

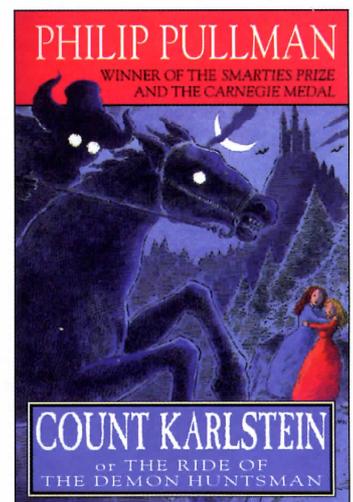
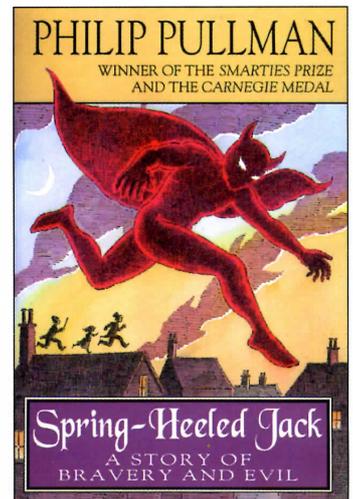
★★★★

Retold by Adrian Mitchell, ill. Emma Chichester Clark, Orchard, 96pp, 1 85213 741 X, £12.99 hbk

This fresh reworking of the famous story of our hero in Lincoln green is a joy to read. It skilfully combines tradition with originality to ensure its popularity with a new generation of readers. Here we have Little John, Will Scarlett, Friar Tuck and the Sheriff of Nottingham together with characters of Mitchell's own creation - the Scuttle twins, for example, 'children of an African soldier killed in the Crusades' who escape from the castle kitchens and are found by Little John hiding in a hollow tree. Mitchell begins the story with the nine-year-old Robert Locksley (Robin) running away from home and chronicles the outlaws' activities through their battles with the authorities, Robin's marriage to Marian and his ultimate death at the hands of an embittered prioress and sister of Sir Ralph Montfalcon, whom Robin had killed in a swamp.



Robin and his merry friends, including the feisty Marian, are vividly brought to life by Mitchell's words and Chichester Clark's wonderfully atmospheric yet decorative illustrations. A book right on target. AK



**Spring-Heeled Jack - A Story of Bravery and Evil**

Ill. David Mostyn, 0 440 86229 9

**Count Karlstein or The Ride of the Demon Huntsman**

Ill. Patrice Aggs, 0 440 86266 3

★★★★

Philip Pullman, Corgi Yearling, 112pp, £3.99 each pbk

These very welcome re-issues make available once again two of the most hilariously clever children's books of the past few years. With plots where the action never flags, where characters are invariably larger than life and where the jokes tumble over one another, these are stories surely guaranteed to appeal to even the most determined non-reader. But they will also have a very considerable charm for the bookish (young or old), especially those tuned into all sorts of mischievous literary and textual allusions, not to mention a wealth of supporting material in the form of mock period advertisements and mock erudite bibliographies. The illustrators' strip-cartoons, far from being mere decorations of the text, are themselves an integral part of it, demanding - sometimes quite challengingly - that they too be 'read' and, for full appreciation, re-read. In short, these books are indispensable additions to the reading experiences of all children - and of all ages. RD

**Living with Asthma**

Peta Bee, 0 7502 2246 8

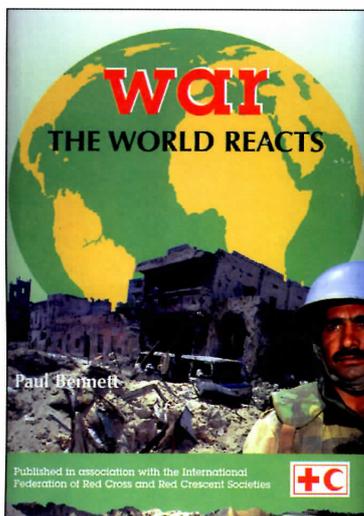
**Living with Diabetes**

Jenny Bryan, 0 7502 2247 6

**NON-FICTION** ★★☆☆

Wayland 'Living With' series, 32pp each, £9.50 each hbk

In these two books we meet children and adults suffering respectively from asthma and diabetes, and we learn what causes the problems and how they can be treated. Colour photographs and diagrams are useful adjuncts, as are organizations and web sites that can provide further information. Upbeat and positive, these books provide a good introduction to two very serious but common health problems both for sufferers and for their friends who want to understand. Other subjects in this new series include blindness, deafness, Down's syndrome and epilepsy. Excellent for schools and hospital children's ward libraries, as well as for individuals needing information and reassurance. ES

**Famine**

1 85561 792 7

**War**

1 85561 793 5

**NON-FICTION** ★★★★★

Paul Bennett, Belitha 'The World Reacts' series, 32pp, £8.99 each hbk

These titles' aim is to show how governments and agencies act to

provide help when famine strikes or war breaks out. Should we need convincing that war and famine are inextricably linked, a glance at the glossaries of these two books will do the job – a quarter of the terms included are common to both. It is reasonable to regard each book as half of a 'human disaster' whole and to read and use them in partnership.

**Famine** starts with nature, causes and immediate effects, progressing to response strategies both immediate and long term ending with moves toward prevention – a self-reinforcing development of the subject which shows pleasingly that the book's been written rather than just assembled. Explanations of such contributory dilemmas as the cash crop trap and the persistent legacy of colonialism are clear, succinct and unbiased.

**War** shows some of its (almost always unreasonable) origins before homing in on aid in action. Common to each volume and highly contributory to their effectiveness is the use of case studies – so the **War** spread on landmines is illustrated in terms of Angola, 1997 and **Famine's** 'Relief Camps' shows the Somalian camp at Liboi, 1992.

In these complementary titles, Bennett has provided accurate, up-to-date and constructively thought-provoking examinations of these two evil but seemingly unavoidable syndromes. His objectivity is commendable – these are published in association with the Red Cross and Crescent so it should be – and the planning and presentation of each is excellent. A thoroughly constructive and contemporary library addition. Further titles in this series, **Earthquake** and **Flood**, are forthcoming. TP

**Robot****NON-FICTION** ★★☆☆

Clive Gifford, Dorling Kindersley 'Inside Guides', 48pp, 0 7513 5807 X, £9.99 hbk

Information books for younger children have improved considerably in format, text and illustration in the last decade. However, as children move towards Years 5 and 6 (9-11 year-olds) it becomes more difficult to find truly inviting books. The main problem is that too much information is squashed into double spreads so that reading the text and interpreting the diagrams are challenging. Dorling Kindersley has addressed some of these problems and **Robot** is well illustrated, with large diagrams giving a three

dimensional effect, and has a lucid text which explains complicated notions clearly. The author communicates a sense of wonder that technology has advanced so swiftly and dramatically – computing technology that 'would have filled a warehouse 30 years ago can now be squeezed onto a chip the size of your thumbnail'. The book is well structured with spreads covering What is a robot, Computer control, Artificial intelligence, Performing surgery, Sheep shearing and Exploring space among other topics. I learnt much – and the book would be a useful addition to a secondary school library – but I think only the ablest Year 6 children would be able to cope with this without support. Nevertheless, it is important that primary central and classroom collections contain books and software to challenge advanced readers. Some of these diagrams deserved to fill a double spread without any other illustration. This would have enabled very good labelling to become larger and clearer. But Dorling Kindersley are more generous than most in allotting space and **Robot** is a strong addition to the Inside Guides series. MM

**New Beginnings: Celebrating Birth**

0 237 51831 7

**Growing Up: From Child to Adult**

0 237 51832 5

**Wedding Days: Celebrations of Marriage**

0 237 51833 3

**Journey's End: Death and Mourning**

0 237 51834 1

**NON-FICTION** ★★☆☆

Anita Ganeri, Evans 'Life Times' series, 32pp, £9.99 each

This new series examines the rites of passage ceremonies and traditions (birth, marriage etc) in the six major world religions. Attractively presented and clearly written they will be of great interest to youngsters who will use the photos to share their own life experiences with you and be led into the text. I do so wish, though, that there had been some attempt to draw parallels between the religions

and stress the commonality of the human condition rather than simply to concentrate on the outward observances which can lead to the reaction 'Aren't they strange. We don't do anything like that.' SR

**Future****NON-FICTION** ★★☆☆

Michael Tambini, Dorling Kindersley 'Eyewitness Guides', 64pp, 0 7513 6128 3, £9.99 hbk

There are two ways of looking at the future and this 100th Eyewitness guide to it shows us both. On the one hand it can convince us that, in the words of C F Kettering 'we should all be concerned about the future because we will have to spend the rest of our lives there.' Apparently Kettering is an American industrialist. On the other hand it is also a total confirmation of Albert Einstein's point of view: 'I never think of the future – it comes soon enough.'

The book does these jobs by showing us close on five dozen pages of the triumphs of human technological achievement. We see nano-robots that can do anything from clean the carpet to destroy tumours, potatoes made frost-resistant by adding fish-genes, self-sorting dustbins and virtual virtually everything. Barbarella come home!

In their puff for their century volume the publishers aver that 'Eyewitness Guides have set the standard for today's information books.' They have a point: in the use of context-free pictures and in the confinement or expansion of any subject to fit a double spread they have proved themselves world leaders. But considering the breadth and quality of most of the other 99 titles in the series, this one is a definite lightweight. Not least because only part of our future – and a minor part at that – is technological, and this will neither destroy us nor provide a golden age. The quality of our future is much more a social thing, but of course that does not make for hundreds of amazing pictures with snappy captions.

So I am happy to go with Einstein on this one and take it as it comes – a day at a time will do for now – which makes this book a handy spotter's guide. But set alongside the observation by Kettering's fellow-American Thomas Waller that 'one never knows, do one?' it is but a wonder-ful irrelevance. Happily the self-awarded gold medal on the dust-jacket is peel-offable. TP

**REVIEWS 10-12 Middle/Secondary****Shakespeare's Stories**

★★★★

Retold by Beverley Birch, ill. James Mayhew, Macdonald Young Books, 128pp, 0 7500 2672 3, £8.99 pbk

In this volume, five plays are retold in modern English. The three tragedies and two comedies are well chosen to appeal to a young audience and the collection is balanced. All are well-known and children are likely to come across most of them in production at some point.

A difficult task this – to convey the spirit and atmosphere of

Shakespeare's texts in a coherent and convincing way to a new audience. Birch's retelling is workmanlike rather than inspiring, setting appropriate quotes into her own sometimes verbose text, adding much dramatic detail but not always achieving clarity. The illustrations framing every page are varied in style – echoing Italian Renaissance paintings in **Romeo and Juliet**, Chagall in **Midsummer Night's Dream**, and Munch in the depiction of **Macbeth's** witches. Characters are not always clearly-enough defined, and the strength of Shakespeare's females in particular is not well-served by overly sweet, pretty images.

A potentially useful collection, well worth considering for 10-13 year olds, though by no means accessible to all in that age range. AG

**White Wolf**

★★★★

Henrietta Branford, Walker, 96pp, 0 7445 4177 8, £9.99 hbk

We first meet the eponymous white wolf as a cub held in captivity by yellow-haired Jesse and his father Jim. He is, however, no ordinary pet, for a white wolf has special powers in the eyes of North American tribespeople, and Jim who is a

trapper and a trader realises that in white wolf he has a valuable commodity and a possible protection against harm from marauding tribes. Despite this Jim is killed by raiders who capture Jesse and his lupine companion. In captivity Jesse's courage saves the white wolf whose sacrificial death is required by the tribe to waken their sleeping dead. Freed, the wolf learns to fend for himself and meets other wolves, but during the years in which he meets his mate and fathers cubs he is tracked by Drums-Louder, a young tribesman, and a sense of danger is always present. The story unfolds from the perspective of the white

wolf, and as far as is humanly possible the reader senses what it might be like to inhabit the form of a creature of the wild. The rhythm of the language matches the rhythms of the seasons and of the natural environment producing an empathy with animals who hunt and who are hunted, and whose sensitivity to the least change in the wind or in the ground underfoot is essential to survival. VC

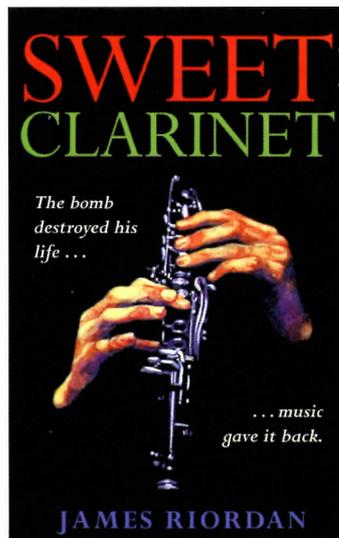
**Fighting Back**

★★★

Catherine MacPhail, Puffin, 128pp, 0 14 038270 4, £3.99 pbk

Culture shock hits big time when Kerry and her mother are forced to move into a tower block flat after the removal of her father from the scene with a new love of his life. It is not long before the local gangland ruling family get the unlucky pair in their sights and matters deteriorate from bad to worse since Mrs Graham insists on upholding the law against the flow of her frightened and crushed neighbours.

The short chapters make it a very fast read but character development seems to be sacrificed for consideration of just how dangerous a jungle some estates can be. DB



**Sweet Clarinet**

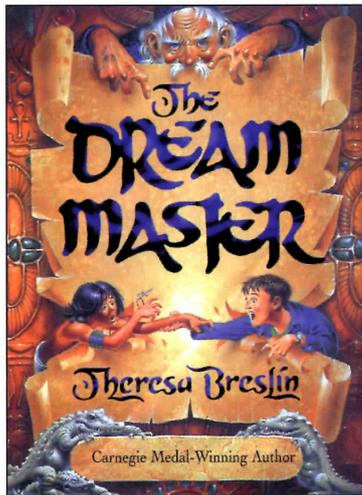
★★★★

James Riordan, Oxford, 144pp, 0 19 271795 2, £5.99 pbk

'Inside my fortress I felt safe, I could rant and rage, simmer and hate.'

William Riley was orphaned and severely, painfully, disfigured when a second world war bomb shattered the shelter to which he had retreated with his family. An uncertain and bitter period of his life began, one in which he was his own tortured and resentful enemy. Fortunately for him he was befriended by a young, similarly maimed girl and then a badly burned soldier, who brought a clarinet and gave Billy a glimmer of faith in what he might become, forgetting the 'Frankenstein's Monster' that he feels himself to be.

Riordan skilfully has Billy tell his own moving story, thereby capturing the reader's empathy and creating a compulsion to keep the pages turning. DB



**The Dream Master**

★★★★

Theresa Breslin, Doubleday, 176pp, 0 385 41029 8, £10.99 hbk

Cy mingles past with present when, with the help of the Dream Master, he brings desert sand and the young Prince Aten back with him from his dreams of Ancient Egypt. Accompanying Cy to school, Aten helps him deal with the class bullies and with his difficulties with school work, and offers us an amusing glimpse of modern life through a stranger's eyes, while gathering his own resolve to return to the past and take on the challenges that await him there.

I found this an exhilarating read with much to ponder over – it plays with images and reversals, shifts in time, dream and reality, and with the elusiveness of these concepts, in an entertaining way, while also expounding the value of trust and friendship. However the book is irritatingly contrived in parts, and details do not always fit together accurately, making it a less intellectually satisfying read than it might have been.

Recommended for thoughtful readers of 10 or so with a sense of adventure – a bit of background on Egypt for KS2 History too. AG

**Under the Cat's Eye**

★★★★

Gillian Rubinstein, Dolphin, 176pp, 1 85881 614 9, £4.50 pbk

While adults will detect many of Rubinstein's oblique references to the classics of children's literature and appreciate how these echoes contribute to the ethos and atmosphere of her richly-textured novel, younger readers will be more likely to respond to its central gripping narrative. Here, the emphasis is on Jai Kala, a new arrival at Nexhoath, a gothic mansion now serving as a boarding school, and the 'unimaginable adventure' on which he is to embark. It is a tale of parallel worlds, shape changers and eerie encounters, not least with the chilling principal, Mr Drake, from which Jai emerges wiser, if heavier of heart. Read this one slowly to enjoy its numerous twists and turns to the full. RD

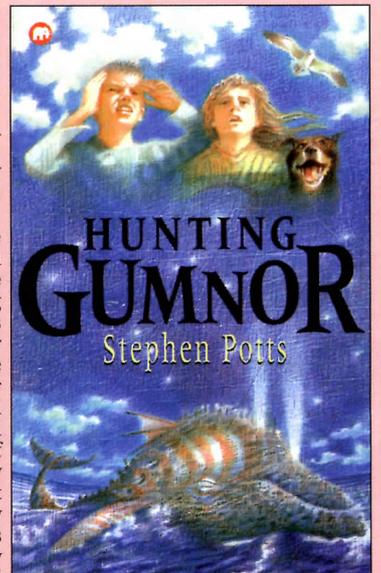
**NEW Talent**

**Hunting Gumnor**

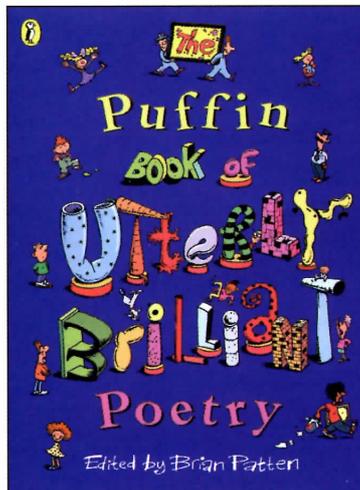
★★★

Stephen Potts, Mammoth, 224pp, 0 7497 3604 6, £4.50 pbk

In this adventure story set on the coast, Rarty and her friend Lionel must find Gumnor, the whale-type creature whose cry acts as a warning to ships on foggy nights. She has escaped from her chains and her disappearance threatens the livelihood of Rarty's father, her keeper. This rather overloaded novel touches on many themes – animal rights, the disappearing way of life of the islands, depression and the newly disabled, neglected children etc but pulls most of it off by being cheerily pacy with many cliff-hanger endings and convenient coincidences. Rarty and Lionel are agreeable central characters whose imaginative play draws on Lionel's love of reading. The adult characters are folksily sketched



in. While this first novel is overly ambitious, Potts writes with warmth and is certainly not short of ideas. RS



**Puffin Book of Utterly Brilliant Poetry**

POETRY ★★★★★

Edited by Brian Patten, Puffin, 144pp, 0 670 87319 5, £12.99 hbk

**Classic Poetry: An Illustrated Collection**

POETRY ★★★★★

Edited by Michael Rosen, ill. Paul Howard, Walker, 160pp, 0 7445 3280 9, £14.99 hbk

**The Hutchinson Treasury of Children's Poetry**

POETRY ★★★

Edited by Alison Sage, Hutchinson, 320pp, 0 09 176748 2, £19.95 hbk

Michael Rosen is one of the ten utterly brilliant poets in the first of these stylish gift books; has compiled the second, and contributed a foreword to the third. These collections all reflect an enthusiasm that has led to a renaissance in poetry written for children in the last 25 years: a renaissance that could be

said to begin with the first of Rosen's own collections in 1974.

Of course, it did not all come out of thin air. If the Puffin Book of Utterly Brilliant Poetry includes some of the best that has appeared since the seventies – Agard, Ahlberg, Kay, McGough, Patten, Zephaniah, Wright – then it is good to see the really old boys, Causley and Milligan, included in the party. Their poetry is characteristic of much that came after, in its child centredness and its use of popular forms, ballad, limerick, spell, nursery rhyme and music hall: all that has connected recent children's poetry closely to the oral tradition and to performance.

This is a party full of old friends, including the Dancing Bear, the Chocolate Cake, Sky in the Pie, Talking Turkeys and Derek Drew. Each poet is introduced by a short chat with Brian Patten (he is interviewed by his cat, Wiz) that says something about the poet and poetry in general; and each collection of poems has its own illustrator. There is the established firm of Ahlberg and Wegner; and there are some exciting new double acts. Rosen is teamed up with Korky Paul, the only artist who might be able to do justice to the poet himself in full flight in front of an audience. This is a celebration of some wonderful poets. Buy it yourself, and for any 7-10 year old you know, and for school, and for the library.

As you might expect, the emphasis in the Puffin collection is on humour: but all of the poets are capable of reflecting more deeply on the human situation. They are able, as Rosen puts it in his introduction to Classic Poetry: An Illustrated Collection, of saying 'important things in a memorable way'. The seriousness of this Walker anthology is never in doubt. It is Rosen's intention to introduce older children, say 10-14 year olds, to the range of outstanding English language poetry, written for adults, since Shakespeare. He provides short biographies of the poets, notes on some of the poems, and descriptions of poetic forms. Many of the poets and poems you would expect are here: Blake's Tyger, Shelley's Ozymandias, and Carroll's Jabberwocky; and there are welcome

inclusions from the U.S.A. (Whitman, among others), and Australia (Banjo Paterson and Judith Wright). There are reinstatements of sometime unfashionable poets: Browning, Longfellow, and Tennyson, reflecting Rosen's interest in drama, storytelling and music in poetry. There are choices, too, that reflect Rosen's political and social preoccupations; poets as diverse as Thomas Hood, Siegfried Sassoon and Carl Sandburg give a voice to the common soldiery and working people. There is brilliant illustration by Paul Howard, which varies from a single ladybird, accompanying a poem by John Clare, to a double-page railway carriage stopped at Adlestrop. Howard captures a variety of moods and demonstrates an awareness of artistic sensibilities in particular periods: so that his pictures both mirror and comment on the poems. His research is impressive: his illustrations to the two Langston Hughes poems suggest that he knows more than a little about the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Altogether, this is a striking production.

Alison Sage's *Treasury of Children's Poetry* suffers by comparison with the first two collections, largely because it attempts too much. Poetry from all periods, for all ages from cradle to teens, and a gallery of illustrators from Greenaway to Burningham, with some illustrations recycled from earlier collections, are packed in. There is an array of talent on display; it is good value, as a gift book, even as the most expensive of the three; and there are occasional winning combinations of poem and illustrator; but it lacks coherence, and space for the poems to catch the imagination.

It is easy to find poets and poems that anthologies do not include. But, with some duplication among the three collections, it is interesting that there is only one poem from Ted Hughes, whose body of poems for children was considerable. CB

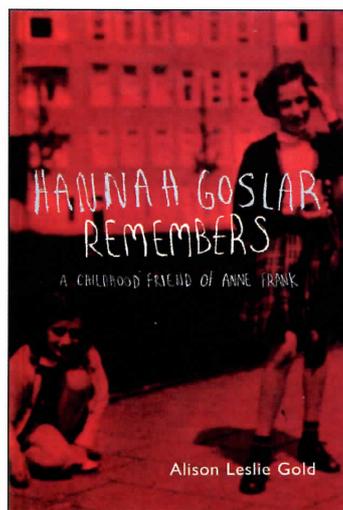
## Hello? Is Anybody There?

★★★

Jostein Gaarder, translated by James Anderson, ill. Sally Gardner, Dolphin, 144pp, 1 85881 623 8, £3.99 pbk

Joe's encounter with Mika, who has fallen out of his spaceship, begins a thoughtful story full of wide-eyed wonder and speculation on life. Joe's Mum is about to have her baby and this acts a backdrop to a wider marvelling at and questioning of origins. *'The good thing about visiting a strange planet is that it makes you understand your own planet a little better,'* says Mika and in his world questions are valued more highly than answers: *'An answer is always the stretch of road that's behind you. Only a question can point the way*

*forward.'* The book has a quaint charm and a simplicity that mellows the didacticism at its heart and allows readers from young juniors up to enter into the fun and possibilities posed by its questions. AJ



## Hannah Goslar Remembers: a childhood friend of Anne Frank

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Alison Leslie Gold, Bloomsbury, 152pp, 0 7475 4026 8, £10.99 hbk

This moving account is by the 'Lies' or 'Hanneli' mentioned in Anne Frank's diary, Anne's best friend from the age of four to 13 when Holland was occupied. Hannah's first memories are of a happy, pre-war childhood with her friend, a sharp contrast to the awfulness of life in the camps – for she too was deported. While the opening stutters, apparently just an extra to the Anne Frank story, the book becomes more than that, showing again the human facts of this history. Hannah believed that Anne's family had escaped to Switzerland. The desperately poignant, awful coincidence of meeting Anne, unseen but heard on the other side of a dividing fence, brings the two stories together again, providing a glimpse of Anne beyond the Diary and taking us on, through Hannah into the aftermath at the war's end. This book is an extension to the Anne Frank diary and a simply told and moving story in its own right. The photographs, with Anne's well-known face in several, tell the story in their own, powerful shorthand. AJ

## Victorians

NON-FICTION ★★

Ann Kramer, Dorling Kindersley, 48pp, 0 7513 5775 8, £9.99 hbk

Is there no subject that DK think

cannot be covered in their oh so familiar house style? Once again we have double page spreads, stark white backgrounds, an introductory para or two in larger print in the top left hand corner and eight or ten illustrations of various sizes (contemporary drawings, photographs, ephemera and artefacts culled from various museums with attendant commentary). While this title is not actually part of the Eyewitness series you can imagine what you are getting – so ground breaking once, so predictable now. The text makes little concession to young readers – on one spread we get such words as 'extensive', 'industrial', 'expansion', 'manufacture', 'intensified', 'stimulated', 'precision', 'mechanization', 'gaunt', 'industrialization' and so on. The pictures say 9-12 year olds; the text says something very different (or very bright 9-12 year olds). The time lines at the bottom of some of the pages are useful as is the Facts and Figures section at the back. The book attempts to cover a wide range of topics but all, necessarily, rather superficially. It is also full of typographical errors – Lewis Carroll spelt incorrectly ('Carrol') and Robert Louis Stevenson as 'Stephenson' on p29 and in the index. Also on p29 we have 'Willkie' Collins and in the index Dr 'Banardo'. I wonder how many more there are I did not notice... SR

## A Victorian House

Richard Wood, 0 7502 2282 2

## A Shakespearean Theatre

Peter Chrisp, 0 7502 2282 4

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Wayland 'Look Inside' series, 32pp, £9.99 each hbk

Upstairs Downstairs life and the rumbustiousness of Elizabethan theatre are captured well in these interesting books. An unconventional contents page leads you into a rather more conventional format. So in *House* the contents page is a labelled picture of the Servants' Hall with Gong, Sewing Machine, Mangle, Piano Music etc. directing us to pages beginning with the item and broadening to develop a theme. Thus 'Potty' (and what kid is not fascinated by bodily functions) starts with the potty and goes on to look at deaths from typhoid, the introduction of piped water and sewers, the flushing toilet and the introduction of factory products for cleaning and personal hygiene. All this is rounded off with the quintessentially Victorian middle class homily 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness' in one of the little pictures of open books that grace each page with an apposite quotation. Other quotes are included on the main pages and I was much entertained in *Theatre* to discover that King James I described smoking as 'a custom

loathsome to the eye, hateful to the nose, harmful to the brain, dangerous to the lungs'. Good sized print and thoughtful sentence construction make these ideal for Years 6-8 (10-13 year olds). SR

## The World of Islam: Before 1700

Hazel Mary Martell, 0 237 51726 4

## India under the Mughal Empire: 1526-1858

Anita Ganeri, 0 237 51838 4

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Evans 'Looking Back' series, 64pp, £14.00 each hbk

The *World of Islam* is a comprehensive history of the world of Islam written clearly with an unbiased approach. In nine chapters it covers the period from the pre-Islamic era to the life of Mohammad. It then goes on to show how the religion spread first in Arabia and later across the world. Various Muslim empires, their caliphs and famous dynasties are also discussed with maps to show the expanse of the Islamic rule throughout history. The book also gives detailed information about the contribution followers of the faith have made to science and the arts. Literary contributions made by Muslims during this period are also detailed and illustrated with both elegant figures and relevant photographs.

*India Under the Mughal Empire* focuses on one of the most splendid periods in the history of India. It is a well researched, successfully condensed and simply written account which starts with the religious and political background of India before the Mughal invasion and discusses in detail how the empire was established. It also gives an interesting account of the lives of the six Mughal emperors as well as the events leading to the rise and eventual fall of the empire ending with the start of the British rule in India.

The book covers not only the political and administrative aspects of the Mughal government but also the day to day life of ordinary people during that period. The contribution to the culture of the region made by the Mughal rulers and their influence on the lifestyle of the indigenous people gives a valuable insight into Indian culture and history. The book is very well illustrated with photographs and maps and contains further useful information by way of the 'Closer look boxes', glossary and timeline. KA

# REVIEWS 12+ Secondary

## With a Friend Like You

★★★

Jo Noble, Piccadilly Press, 176pp, 1 85340 580 9, £5.99 pbk

Kim and Nicky have been pen friends

for years. They are the best of friends although they have never met. Then one summer, Nicky invites Kim to stay with her family in Cornwall.

First impressions confound their expectations. Nicky is smart, well groomed and from a privileged background. Kim is artistic and has been brought up by Bohemian

parents. Do they really have anything in common? After initial uncertainty they come to appreciate each other's qualities and their friendship enables them to find new strengths.

*With a Friend Like You* is a funny book and whilst too predictable to hold my interest has some appeal for girls in their early teens at whom the

book is clearly aimed. The cover gives little indication of the book's main theme but the design will attract readers who enjoy teenage magazines like *Shout*. NG

## The Scavenger's Tale

★★★★

Rachel Anderson, Oxford, 144pp, 0 19 271736 7, £5.99 pbk

Things can only get better? Not if we share the futuristic vision of this novel, set in 2015 in a London where the poor, the dispossessed and the dysfunctional are at the mercy of their Community Health and Welfare Monitors, agents who have a sinister link with the tourists thronging the capital. Focusing on the fight for survival of the various members of the household presided over by the redoubtable Ma Peddle, this novel poses endless questions about our responses to those generally called 'misfits' – and offers little hope that we shall ever comfortably accommodate them. It is a worthwhile, if harrowing, read, in which moments of dark humour lighten the prevailing bleakness. RD

## Heroes

★★★

Robert Cormier, Hamish Hamilton, 112pp, 0 241 13992 9, £10.99 hbk

Once more Cormier presents his readers with characters in crisis and again, things are not quite as they seem.

Francis Cassavant was awarded the Silver Medal for valour, but his apparent act of heroism was a suicide attempt which destroyed his face but not his life. The reason for his suicide attempt was another flawed hero, Larry LaSalle, charismatic youth leader, guilty of the secret rape of Francis' girlfriend, Nicole Renard: hidden darkness in a publicly glittering figure. Francis returns to his home town not only to avenge Nicole but also to punish LaSalle for his own failure to stop the rape.

Cormier repeatedly challenges reader perception of both the book's title and the motivation of its characters: here, he is as successful as ever – even within the restrictions of this slim book. His prose lacks the startling immediacy characteristic of his earlier work, though flashes of former glory are evident. Francis Cassavant does not gain the reader's confidence in the same way as Adam Farmer did in *I Am the Cheese*.

Cormier is always worth reading, but this is not his worthiest book. VR

## My Sister – the Superbitch

Rosie Corrigan, 0 590 11151 5

## I Slept with My Best Friend's Boyfriend

Sue Dando, 0 590 11150 7

## They Think I'm Too Easy

Lorna Read, 0 590 11156 6

## My Boyfriend's Older than My Dad

Jill Eckersley, 0 590 11244 9

★★★★

Scholastic Point 'Confessions' series, 192pp, £3.99 each pbk

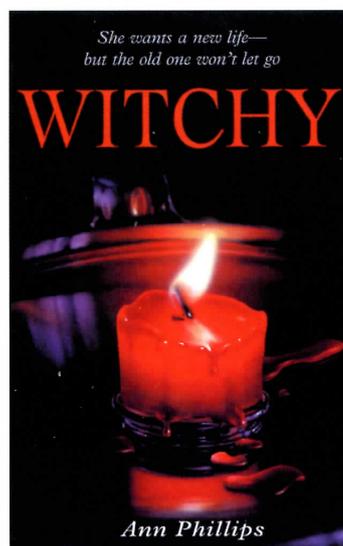
This new mass market paperback series features bright, modern covers with sensationalist titles designed to

intrigue and titillate. Scholastic's 'Point' title certainly targets teenage readers effectively – bold, relevant issues with an easy to read typeface and an attractively low price.

There are recognisable authors here, too – always a sign that some thought has gone into a series. Rosie Corrigan is the most familiar – her entertaining mother/daughter sagas and advice books have always been worthwhile reads.

Plots are formulaic – main character happy, happiness disintegrating under pressure, satisfactory solution with a lesson learned – and all accessible to even reluctant readers. My only reservation about this collection is some of the titles – *I Slept with My Best Friend's Boyfriend* and *They Think I'm Too Easy* may well be excellent moneyspinners but parents, school governors and librarians may be reluctant to purchase such provocatively titled books.

It is the old dilemma – should teenagers read what adults think appropriate or what they really want to read? These titles may bridge this uneasy gap. VR



## Witchy

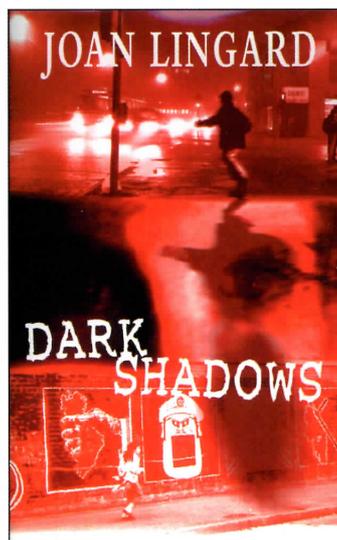
★★★★

Ann Phillips, Oxford University Press, 176pp, 0 19 271794 4, £5.99 pbk

The year is 1890 and twelve-year-old Aggie is thrown out of her home on suspicion of being a witch. Befriended by chapel folk, willing and hard working, she tries to make a new life for herself.

Then, unexpectedly, Aggie is summoned home to nurse her dying mother. Aggie suspects that her brutal father and his mistress are responsible for her mother's death. Determined to start a new life, she leaves home for the second time taking her younger brother and sister. But she finds that the old life won't let go. Aggie's new friends are disturbed by her prophetic visions and stories of witchcraft are whispered in the village once more.

Phillips has created a feisty heroine whose self-doubt is appealing and never over wrought. Her evocation of the inhospitable fen country is perfect for this story of intrigue, superstition and triumph over adversity. NG

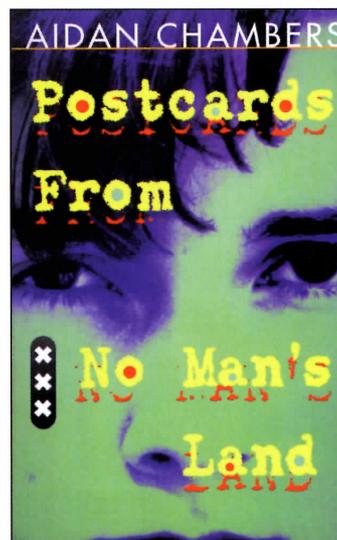


## Dark Shadows

★★★★

Joan Lingard, Hamish Hamilton, 192pp, 0 241 13774 8, £10.99 hbk

Like much of the young adult fiction dealing with the Ulster 'troubles' this novel chooses to focus on a representative from each side of the conflict and, through a series of events, to take them closer to mutual understanding. The novelty here is that the protagonists are girl cousins, long separated by a family feud but now brought together by a chance meeting and a shared involvement in music. Lingard brings her usual assured and sympathetic touch to the presentation of her heroines' experiences and is particularly good in contrasting the entrenched stubbornness of an older generation with the more open tolerance of a younger one. She is, however, wise enough to avoid the euphoria of easy, or imminent, total reconciliation, a stance which – sadly – gives her novel a pleasing credibility. RD



## Postcards from No Man's Land

★★★★

Aidan Chambers, Bodley Head, 336pp, 0 370 32376 9, £10.99 trade paperback

The annual commemoration of the Battle of Arnhem brings Jacob to Holland to visit the grave of the grandfather whose name he bears.

His grandmother's Dutch friends seem inexplicably guarded and unwelcoming until he discovers that Geertrui, terminally ill, is soon to have an assisted death. Before she dies she has a story to tell and the book's parallel narrative, set at the time of Arnhem, reveals love and betrayal of the deepest kind, introducing Jacob to a family he did not know he had.

This is a long, complex book: a challenging read for older teenage readers and adults. Chambers frankly airs the thorny issues of sexuality, euthanasia, the morality of war and the nature of love. His portrayal of the young Geertrui, in love with Jacob's grandfather (by whom she bears a child) and displaced from home and family by the war, is both moving and convincing.

However, there are occasions when the narrative is less successful; wordy passages in need of an editor's pencil and an artificial, staged tone to some of the conversations – particularly those between Jacob and Hille, the Dutch girl he falls in love with during his visit. These reservations aside, this is an ambitious and often contentious book which deserves consideration by an older, accomplished reader. VR

## The Teenage Worrier's Pocket Guide to:

### Romance

0 552 14641 2

### Families

0 552 14642 0

### Mind & Body

0 552 14643 9

### Success

0 552 14644 7

★★★★

Ros Asquith, Corgi, 96pp, £2.99 each pbk

I spect these little books will be V. SUCCESSful, just like Ms Chubb's other bukes about Lurve and Life, with all those nice cartoons. They are cheap and come in four lurly colours and are written in a langwidge that doesn't make too much fuss. She tells you all about these subjects that you can worry about a lot if you are teenage, and while they are V. funny, they are also V. serious. She tells you about things that are often not talked about and they have lots of good advice and lots of factz but they are not boring. They can be V. helpful telling you about the big, worrying world and about the strange things that happen to people's bods and what to do (and what not to do!). AJ

*Picture books reviewed this issue relevant to older readers*

*A Walk with Granny* (see p19)

*Never Let Go* (see p22)

*Enchantment in the Garden* (see p22)

*The Lion and the Unicorn* (see p22)

# CLASSICS IN SHORT No.13

Brian Alderson

*A coughing rose, a crashed plane and space travel. It can only be...*



Written and illustrated by

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Who he?

Born in Lyon, 29 June 1900, St-Ex as he was known, was a hulking 6ft tall aristocratic French *comte* from a traditionally reactionary Catholic background. He was also a pioneering aviator (he learnt to fly when he was twelve) and philanderer whose mistresses were resented by his Salvadorean wife Consuelo. Despite the couple's stormy relationship, St-Ex promised to return to her after the war, saying that if he was killed: 'I will have someone to wait for in eternity'. St-Ex had joined the air force and had been decorated during the fall of France. He took refuge in the US but rejoined his squadron in 1942 although officially too old to fly Lightnings. He died on a reconnaissance mission flying over the littoral of southern France near his childhood chateau on 31 July 1944.

The recent discovery of St-Ex's identity bracelet, 300ft below the surface of the Mediterranean, engraved with Consuelo's name and contact address in New York, implies that she was indeed still close to his heart, something that was refuted after his death by his family. They reviled Consuelo's memory, trying to exclude her from biographies and denying that *The Little Prince* was a metaphor for his relationship with her. One mistress, the aristocratic Hélène de Vogüé, even wrote a biography which reduced Consuelo to one paragraph. St-Ex's mythophile descendants are now opposing a seabed search for his wrecked aircraft.

First published

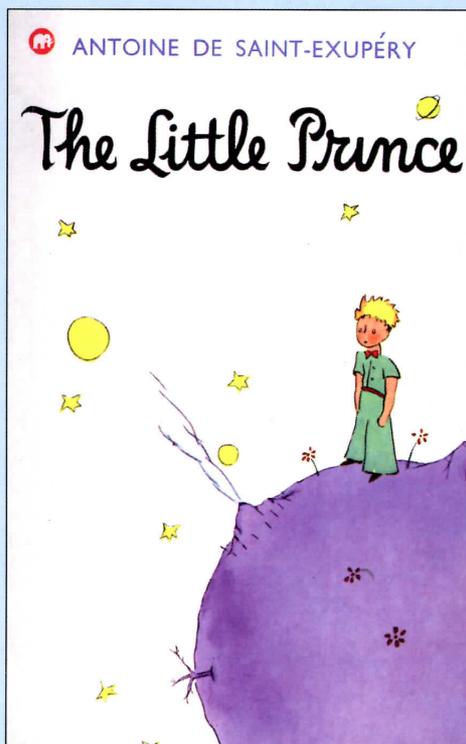
Almost simultaneously in French, and in an English translation by Katherine Woods, both editions from Reynal & Hitchcock, New York, 1943

Dedicated to

Léon Werth, a Jewish Trotskyist art critic ('the best friend I have in the world') but as the dedication statement continues it decides to address rather 'the child from whom this grown-up grew' and amends itself to: 'Léon Werth when he was a little boy'.

What's it about?

An airman is repairing his plane which has crashed in the desert. He is approached by 'un petit bonhomme' who requests that he draw him the picture of a sheep. This little fellow [Woods = 'little man'] is *le petit Prince*, sole inhabitant of Asteroid B-612, who has travelled to Earth (taking advantage perhaps 'of the migration of a flock of wild birds') via several other asteroids inhabited by eccentric personages: a lone king, a conceited man, a boozier, a business-man, a lamplighter, and a geographer. He is fleeing from his association with a flower on his own planet whose behaviour embarrasses him, but a meeting with a philosophical fox persuades him that he must follow the dictates of his heart and



take responsibility for his flower. He helps the airman to find a well in the desert and then, after a pre-arranged and fatal meeting with a yellow snake, he vanishes – presumably returning (with the drawing of the sheep) to his own asteroid.

What's it about? (2)

St-Ex meets his child self in a fable of innocence and experience. It is not hard to make a case for this eccentric story being rooted in his dismay over his difficult marriage with the asteroidal, adenoidal, coughing rose, being the hypochondriac spendthrift Consuelo. Confused adult uncertainties bang against the ruthless assurances of childhood ('One runs the risk of weeping a little if one lets himself be tamed.'). The metaphor becomes an excuse for ruminations on freedom and responsibility. Existential Angst enters children's literature and



you must work out the interpretation for yourself.

The illustrations

The book belongs among those whose text can only at peril be divorced from, or rearranged round, its illustrations. St-Ex's watercolours and monochrome wash drawings (now, with his manuscript, in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York) are closely integrated with the text, which often refers to them. Their naïveté ('I was discouraged [from painting] when I was six years old') chimes with, and hence lends conviction to, what has often been seen as an absurd, not to say perverse, piece of whimsy.

Is that so?

The recent trawling up of St-Ex's silver identity bracelet from the bottom of the Mediterranean has encouraged renewed discussion about the status of this 'children's book for adults'. It could be classed, amongst disparate examples from Rabelais and Swift to *Alice* and *The Water-Babies*, as what the critic Northrop Frye calls 'a Mennipean satire' – which is to say a stylised dialogue playing with and making fun of human activities as distinct from life as it is actually lived. As with Kingsley though the satiric energy can be blunted by an intrusive sentimentality.

But sentimental for whom?

As a writer St-Ex was a master craftsman and his pellucid French mitigates the inherent sopiness of the child's transactions with his flower. That seems to suit the francophones, who have put the little chap on to pre-Euro bank-notes, and it may well suit foreign readers coming at the French text and rejoicing in its accessibility as well as its content (Heinemann used to publish it as a schoolbook). But who knows what the readers of the hundred or so translations make of it? Katherine Woods can be ungainly – and has been called 'ponderous' – but for English readers any successor to her *Little Prince* has been blocked by Europe. The mad decision a year or two ago to 'harmonize' our copyright limitations with those of Germany (ie extending them to 70 years after the author's death) has prevented Pavilion Books from reprinting their new, and more satisfactory, translation by Alan Wakeman, with its highly discussable pastiche illustrations by Michael Foreman. One is moved to reflect that there should be an asteroid reserved somewhere for *les grandes personnes bruxelloises*. ■

*The Little Prince*, with illustrations by the author, is available in both a Heinemann hardback gift edition (0 434 97123 5, £20.00) and a Mammoth colour paperback (0 7497 0723 2, £4.99).

Brian Alderson is Chair of the Children's Books History Society and the chief children's book consultant for *The Times*.