

# BOOKS FOR KEEPS

March 1999 No.115

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Biblical Books  
Jacqueline Wilson  
Computer Art

*the children's*  
**book magazine**

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## CoverStory



This issue's cover is from *The Lion Treasury of Children's Prayers* compiled by Susan Cuthbert and illustrated by Alison Jay (see p13). Thanks to Lion Publishing for their help in producing this cover.

# EDITORIAL



Rosemary Stones

**B**loomsbury Children's Books kindly helped me with some research into the reviewing of children's illustrated books for this editorial. They sent me five reviews received of one of their recent picture books, *What!* by Kate Lum, illustrated by Adrian Johnson. (Five reviews, by the way, is not bad going these days. Some books don't get any.) Most of these five, however, turned out to be little more than summaries of the plot with a few or no words at all about the illustration. 'Funky artwork' wrote one 'critic'; 'great use of colour' wrote another; 'Adrian Johnson's pictures repay the most detailed inspection' wrote a third. This sort of 'criticism' is hardly illuminating for the reader quite apart from being deeply disappointing for the illustrator. Why is the situation so bad?

Quite simply, too many people who write about illustrated children's books (or are involved in judging them for prizes) are not visually literate. Trained as words people, they rarely have an understanding of illustrative techniques or the processes whereby an illustrated book is created. Publishers know, for example, that while a designer cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, a good design department can often make a respectable looking picture book out of some pretty mediocre illustration.

The result of all this is reviews like those inflicted on *What!* In addition the level of comment from librarians at last year's Kate Greenaway Medal discussions was described by one illustrator at a recent Children's Book Circle meeting as 'terrible'. Prizes are increasingly tending to go to cosy and less challenging illustration by people who do commercially successful books but sometimes cannot actually draw.

It is thus the case that illustration is simply not criticised enough. There are illustrators who write superbly about illustrated children's books but many of them are diffident about commenting on colleagues' work. The proliferation of courses on children's literature has resulted in some long pieces on illustrated books from academics full of desperate jargon. Rarely does one find comment on how difficult it is to do certain kinds of illustration for there is little appreciation of the challenges involved.

There is a need for a language to express the visual that can become a common currency. Knowing about techniques can help of course, but there is a great deal more to writing about illustration than that. Reviewers need to be able to understand and convey what is communicated to the reader by the illustration - in what way and how successfully.

The next issue of *BfK* will include articles on Spring picture books looked at from an illustrative point of view. There will also be the first of a new series of short pieces in which illustrators explain the techniques and the approach behind their work.

*Rosemary*



Illustration by Lesley Harker from the cover of *Hansel and Gretel*, one of Scholastic's 'Magic Bean' series which collectively is this month's Editor's Choice on page 21.

## BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine

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# BIBLICAL BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

One of the objectives of Religious Education is to provide 'Religious Literacy' – that is to give children a knowledge of religions and religion so that they can read about it, write about it and talk about it with understanding and intelligence. How does the current crop of books on the Bible and related topics measure up? **Ralph Gower** investigates from a Christian perspective.

My initial reaction on opening the large parcel of books on the Bible and related topics sent by **Books for Keeps** for this article was – 'What on earth are publishers doing, publishing so many titles, so similar to what has been around for my sixty or so years – rag books excepted!' But what should publishers be looking for when publishing books relating the Bible to children?

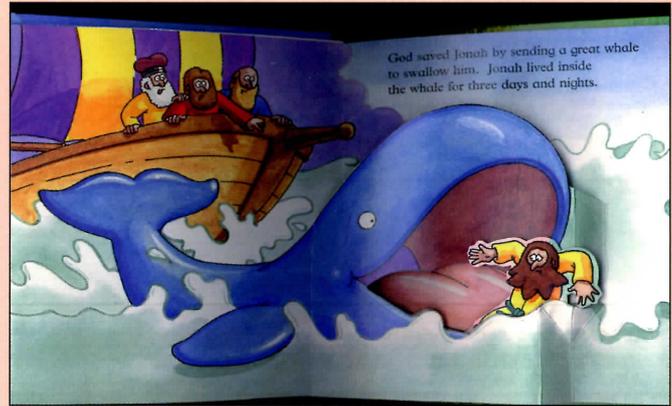
## Religious Literacy

From a schools perspective, such books need to fit in with the objectives of Religious Education. One such objective is to provide 'Religious Literacy' – that is to give children a knowledge of religions and religion so that they can read about it, write about it and talk about it with understanding and intelligence. With a strong foundational knowledge of Christianity, they will go on to obtain a good knowledge of those other world religions such as Judaism and Islam which have links to Christianity, and will extend this knowledge to other faiths which are important internationally and locally.

## Key Stages and Objectives

As children move through the 'Key Stages' of education they will move from a knowledge of stories and activities in Christianity at Infant level (roughly Key Stage 1; but key stages refer to stages of development and not to chronological age groups, although for the 'average' child, key stages will roughly correspond to infant, junior, lower secondary and secondary examination level) to a deeper and broader knowledge of Christianity and other faiths through Junior level (roughly Key Stage 2) and Lower Secondary Level (roughly Key Stage 3). At Key Stage 4, they will normally be preparing for GCSE examinations. The question for the publisher (and the reviewer!) is, 'in view of the level of the book as determined by illustration, language and concept, does it fit into a progressive understanding of Christianity?'

The other key objective in Religious Education is linked to Personal and Social Education, and is referred to as 'Spiritual Development'. It would help if R.E. specialists



Pop-up Jonah's escape into the whale, from 'The Beginners Bible' series.

could all agree on exactly what this means because there are two different ways of understanding/emphasising it. To some specialists, spiritual development simply means the growth of those faculties which go beyond the materialistic; the maturing of a person's inner nature. To others, it is the development of a relationship between a person and what that person perceives to be God. Most R.E. specialists probably feel more at home with the first, and would feel happier that the churches dealt with the second in their church education programmes.

## The Relevance of Bible Stories?

Which brings us to the church side of things; and here there is a problem. It is clear from the large volume of research summarised by Francis and Kay in **Drift from the Churches** (University of Wales Press), that whatever the starting point for the child such as age, region, sex or denomination, there is a gradual loss of interest in religion (Christianity) and in religious education from Key Stage 2 onwards. This is also reflected in recent surveys conducted by the Bible Society and by the Scripture Union which showed that while 60% of adults said they owned a Bible, most said that they never read it; 60% admitted that they had not looked at it once in the past year. It is therefore clear that children's books need to engage and stimulate young readers so that their interest in religious education is maintained.

In what ways, then, are Bible stories relevant to children and young people? What is their purpose? And where do those areas of the Bible which are not stories and are therefore neglected (like law, poetry, wisdom literature, prophecy and pastoral letters) fit in? If people do not see in the Bible a revelation of the nature of God which is basic to their understanding of God, the rationale for the means of living a moral life to Christian standards, and a means of being able to cope with life's hardest questions, then how is it to be deemed relevant? How far do children's books on Christianity and the Bible begin to tackle these areas, going beyond the basic historical stories to what is being said through them, supported by law, poetry, wisdom, prophecy and pastoral letter? These are the questions I asked myself as I assessed the 30" high pile of children's books before me. These are also the questions that the creators of such books need to ask themselves!

For discussion purposes I have divided the books in categories.

## OLD TESTAMENT STORIES

The famous stories of the Old Testament are often retold, usually with reasonable accuracy. They include Noah's ark (although the ark did not look like an ancient version of a tourist liner as so many of the illustrators of these books depict it); Joseph's coat (except that it should have been of many *pieces* and not many colours); Moses in the bullrushes; David and Goliath and so on.

Just as he felt he was about to die,



God sent along a gigantic whale.

Jonah and the whale, illustration by Marcia Williams from Walker Books' 'Bible Stories' picture book series.

Amongst the examples before me for the very young, Mission Publishing has produced 'The Beginners Bible' series, four cheerful, small format pop-up books with cartoon style illustrations. From Walker Books the 'Bible Stories' picture book series illustrated with agreeable strip cartoons by Marcia Williams also has great appeal. Moonlight Publishing's 'Best Bible Stories' is a paperback series different by virtue of the excellent illustrations done in silhouette while Usborne's 'Usborne Bible Tales' is a series written and illustrated for children who are just beginning to read. It is a matter of personal choice which of these retellings are used by parents or by teachers for the infant class (Key Stage 1) library.

### The meaning of the stories?

But do such retellings tend to equate Bible stories with other favourite tales from Little Red Riding Hood to Noddy and Big Ears, so that their significance is lost and reduced to folk lore to be discarded along with Santa Claus? While it may be argued that children have first to know the story, and later come to understand its significance, I still look for the writer/illustrator who has the courage to incorporate the meaning behind the story into their version! What was God saying to the Jewish people through the story of Joseph? Why did the Jews of their time need to be told the story of Jonah? Who exactly needed the encouragement which came from the story of Daniel in the lions' den?

John Ryan's splendid picture book, **The Very Hungry Lions**, gets much nearer to conveying the meaning and significance of the Daniel story than other retellings here and it is better detailed. In so many other picture book versions of Bible stories, the inaccurate and distorted text is simply a vehicle for contemporary artwork. We are told by Pippa Goodhart in **Noah Makes a Boat**, for example, that Noah got his plans by observing nature – in fact God gave Noah the plans. We are told by Isaac Bashevis Singer in **Why Noah Chose the Dove** that all the animals except for the dove presented their case for being allowed on board when in fact, God gave clear instructions for admittance. We are told by Geoffrey Patterson in **Jonah and the Whale** that Jonah was a lazy man told to stop the people of Nineveh fighting; in fact Jonah was sent to bring the people



Daniel survives the lions' den in **The Very Hungry Lions** by John Ryan.

of Nineveh to repentance so that God would not destroy them even though they were enemies of the Jews. Such distortions need to be avoided. Jewish, Christian and Muslim believers cannot approve such licence being taken with the stories of their holy books and such versions therefore have no place in the classroom.

We do better at Key Stage 3/4 level (10 years and above): Geraldine McCaughrean retells 32 stories well in the anthology, **God's People**, illustrated with good pictures of contemporary life and Michael Coleman's paperback, **Top Ten Bible Stories**, is full of humour and insight accompanied by hilarious line illustrations.

## CHRISTMAS • STORIES •

The problems discussed above to do with the retelling of Old Testament stories also apply to New Testament stories. These can be divided into two groups – Christmas stories, and others!

Heather Amery's cheerful board book, **Christmas Story**, and Georgie Adams' picture book, **The First Christmas**, are both written and illustrated in the traditional mode. Other picture books have added material (way beyond poetic licence!) in their adaptations of the story. Marcus Pfister's **The Christmas Star** bases the story on shiny silver stars throughout the book – but it was the angels' instructions the shepherds followed, not a 'single magnificent star'. Pennie Kidd's **Sleepy Jesus** tells us that on Christmas Eve, 'God mixed the colours of the sunset and shaded the sun' but, in fact, Mary didn't 'wrap him in a cloth' and we have no record of her calling the baby 'Sleepy Jesus'. In **Gabriel's Feather**, Elizabeth Laird tells the story of the Nativity straight, but makes the mistake of saying that Mary and Joseph were married at the time of the birth announcement, and that the baby was wrapped in a blanket at the time of the birth. The feather is an artistic motif; a little brown bird picks up a feather from Gabriel's wing in the picture accompanying the annunciation; and still has it for presentation in the manger scene! Personally I would not touch any of these titles with a shepherd's crook!

When will writers/illustrators dare to incorporate the fact that Christmas is an 'official birthday', that shepherds were to be found in the fields of Bethlehem only at Passover time; that the inn where there was no room was a 'Kataluma' – a

grubby marquee for crowds erected by the Romans, so that Jesus was born not in a stable but in a shepherd's cave which anyone who goes to Bethlehem can see for themselves; that the Magi arrived so long after the event that a careful Herod put babies of two and under to the sword; and that this could not have happened in Bethlehem because a few days after the birth, the family returned home to Nazareth!

Nick Butterworth's **The Nativity Play** (first published in 1985) is set in a primary school and now comes packaged with an audio tape which includes the story and a couple of carols sung by children. With the children caricatured in both drawing and in text, this picture book will appeal to the adult who has many hilarious memories of such school plays, rather than to children themselves.

## OTHER STORIES • OF JESUS •

'Other' stories from the life of Jesus in my pile varied from the sublime to the ridiculous.

Mary Joslin's **Miracle Maker** is a handsomely illustrated anthology of quotations from the Gospels. For Key Stage 3 and 4 readers, Rachel Billington's **The Life of Jesus** is the best book here as it accurately harmonises the key stories from the four Gospels in an enjoyable way. Indeed, many adults unfamiliar with the Bible will also appreciate this paperback.

And the ridiculous? Nicholas Allan's **Jesus' Day Off** is a jolly, small format picture book with cartoon style illustrations. It has a lovely lesson in it, that when people take a rest (as Jesus does in the author's imagination – eg turning cartwheels in the desert and playing catch with his halo) it does them good. But do we want to read about an imagined Jesus or a real one?

## WHOLE BIBLE • ANTHOLOGIES •

Anthologies representing the whole Bible are probably a better buy. These books would have to be 'read to' rather than 'read by' Key Stage 1 children. Margaret Mayo's **First Bible Stories** is well printed and illustrated for group story times but has the disadvantage of being confined to the Old Testament. Sally Grindley's **Bible Stories for the Very Young** has smaller print and less realistic illustrations, but it does cover stories about Jesus as well. **The Usborne Children's Bible** is the most comprehensive at this younger level with lots of words on colourful backgrounds.

The anthology which stands out for Level 3 is a hefty tome, **The Lion Graphic Bible**, composed of high quality comic-strip graphics which retell the story of the Bible to a

generation familiar with cartoon-style TV imagery. There are always problems of interpretation when moving from words to pictures, but these have been competently dealt with for the most part while holding to a generally conservative viewpoint. The one disappointment is that while its language and the concepts identify this as a Key Stage 3 book, there is little about the non-story element of the Bible (law, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, pastoral letters), which is important at this stage of development; it is not so much a Graphic Bible then, as graphically portrayed Bible stories.

Interestingly, non-story elements have been included in Lois Rock's anthology **Words of Gold** which consists of extracts from all parts of the Bible, sensitively illustrated. Many people may see this as a gift book for adults, but it is a good way for Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils to explore passages from the Bible.

## STORIES BEYOND • THE BIBLE •

The content of the Bible is of very great importance in any area of Religious Education whether as a means of coming to know what Christianity is about, or whether it is one of the ways of drawing a person nearer to the God who is revealed in the Bible. It is of such great importance that there have always been those who assume that Christianity starts and stops with the Bible, and that if it is necessary for children to learn about Judaism, they should get to know it through the Old Testament. David Self's **Stories from the Christian World** and Sybil Sheridan's **Stories from the Jewish World** render us a great service by taking us to stories beyond the Bible which children in the upper junior school will enjoy for their content and their illustration, and on which further brief 'background notes' are provided. The Christian source book is tied to biographical material – the familiar Francis of Assisi and Mother Theresa, but also Richeldis of Walsingham, Joan of Arc, Adjai Crowther (the first black African bishop) and Father Borrelli of Naples. The Jewish source book goes beyond it and invaluablely introduces us to Midrash (how evil came to the world after the Flood), the Apocrypha (the Maccabean revolt), Jewish humour and recent historical experience in the Holocaust. I look forward to more titles in this excellent series!

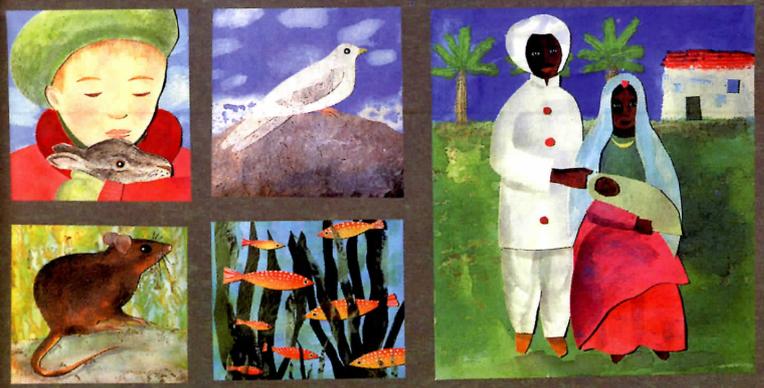
## • ART BOOKS •

Some of the books in my pile are really 'art books' in which the text is almost secondary to the artwork. **The Life of Jesus in Masterpieces of Art** by Mary Pope Osborne speaks for itself; the 41 pictures chosen are from such artists as Botticelli and Fra Angelico. Alison Wisenfeld has illustrated the life of St. Francis in a style reminiscent of illuminated manuscripts in Mary Joslin's picture book, **The Good Man of Assisi**, while St. Francis's 'Canticle of the Sun' has been vividly interpreted in a decorative modern style by Cathie Felstead in her striking picture book, **The Circle of Days**. **The Dog who walked with God** is a beautifully illustrated picture book version of the story of Creation as told by the now extinct Kato Indians of California. Books of this kind do not fit into artificial Key Stages – the words, not always clear in themselves, are given life through the art in which they are set and they speak to all ages.

## BOOKS OF • PRAYERS •

In the preface to **Best-Loved Prayers**, the compiler writes, 'Prayer is spending time with God: talking, listening, learning, loving, laughing and crying together. But how can anyone pray if they don't know God? One way to start is to use prayers written by people who know God as a friend...' Sound advice! All of these books of prayers can be used in this way. **The Lion Book of First Prayers** is

For sister, brother, parent, child.



From **The Circle of Days** illustrated by Cathie Felstead.



From **Best-Loved Prayers** illustrated by Alison Wisenfeld.

written and illustrated with pre-school children in mind ('Dear God, I just feel good knowing that you are everywhere. That's all!'); parents and nursery teachers will be delighted!

For older children, **Best-Loved Prayers**, **Glimpses of Heaven** and **A Child's Book of Celtic Prayers** with their evocative artwork, typescripts and setting are difficult to place in the school of prayer. After all, 'A little child shall lead them'. But in this difficult area of teaching (how Christians pray, what they pray about, what picture of God they have in mind as they pray and how they believe that it 'works'), these books provide a useful school resource at Level 3 or above for insight and for reflection brought out by personal assignment, with the possibility that some prayers might then subsequently be used in an assembly.

### • THEOLOGY •

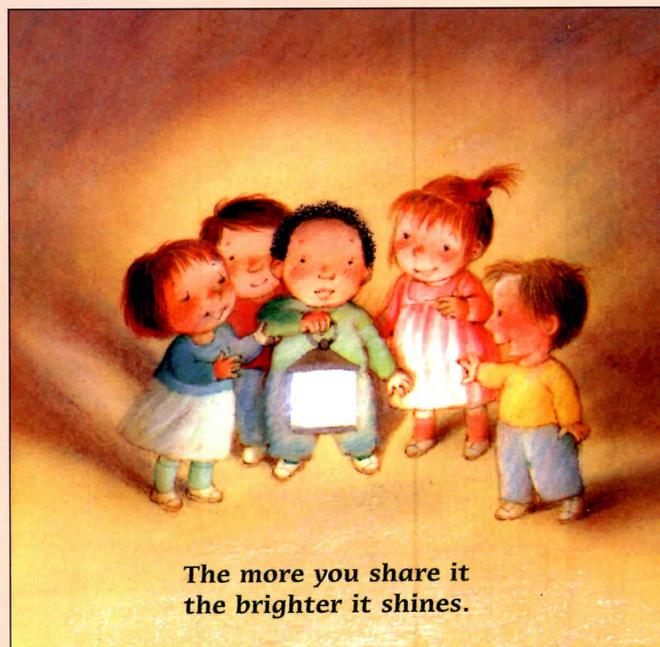
Three very different books in my pile might be classed as 'Theology'.

**Whose God Is It, Anyway?** written by a Jewish Rabbi and a Roman Catholic Priest with a preface by the Dalai Lama introduces the Key Stage 4 reader at around the level of a non-tabloid newspaper to world religions (in 224 pages!). But this title covers much more than is usual, introducing the reader to aspects of the different branches of Buddhism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Taoism, Tribal religions and the religions of Native Americans. The book will be a godsend to a teacher unfamiliar with world religions in general and looking for an overview. But it does have its problems. Not many people would define a religion as 'a collection of big answers to the really big questions' (they might define philosophy that way) or agree that 'religions are the same because all answer the same questions' – each religion has its own absolute truth claims. There are occasional and perhaps inevitable inaccuracies in view of the scope of the book and the tone is occasionally patronising. Perhaps when this title is reprinted, the publisher could arrange for references to Sikhism to be included, repeat their italicised 'technical' words in an end of book glossary and include a book-list for further reading.

Russell Stannard's, **The Curious History of God** is in reality a popularised, Key Stage 4 account (very well illustrated with excellent cartoons!) of the progressive revelation of God as he reveals more and more about himself to a developing people, as recorded in the Hebrew Bible. Unfortunately, the expected supreme revelation of the person of God in the person of Jesus, and the supreme

act of God's love in becoming a sacrifice for the world's sin is not absolutely clear.

Marie-Agnès Gaudrat's **What is God Like?** is a small format picture book intended to 'help parents to answer questions that many young children find difficult to articulate, and to explain basic Christian concepts'. Dealing with the Love of God, Faith in God, Presence of God and the Word of God, this book approaches the truth through sentimental statements and pictures of children – 'The love of God is like a cuddle that brings you out of a sulk' ... 'The word of God is like a fantastic present – the more you open it up, the more it gives.' – and many more. Intended for parents to use with Key Stage 1 and pre-school children, this book will delight many Christians way above the Key Stages!



**The more you share it the brighter it shines.**

'The Word of God' from **What is God Like?** illustrated by Ulises Wensell.

### • MISCELLANEOUS •

Some religious books do not fit easily into any category. Two outstanding books at Level 3 go way beyond their titles. Stephen Motyer's **Who's Who in the Bible** tells the story of the Bible through its most important characters, introduced in their historical sequence and background, aptly and carefully illustrated. Andrea Dué's **The Atlas of Bible Lands** tells the story of the Bible through its social geography, profusely illustrated not only with maps but with contemporary pictures showing life as it was lived at the time. It then goes beyond the Bible, tracing the story of the land of Israel from New Testament times through the ages of Islam and the Crusades to modern times (1995). It is one of the best books of its kind I have seen.

**Measurements of length**  
 cubit = 44.5 cm  
 span = 23 cm  
 palm = 7.6 cm  
 finger = 19 mm

**Weights**  
 1 gerah = about 0.5 g  
 10 gerahs = 1 bekah (about 6 g)  
 2 bekahs = 1 siclo (about 11 g)  
 50 shekels = 1 mina (about 500 g)  
 60 minas = 1 talent (about 30 kg)

**1 bath = 22 litres**  
**10 baths = 1 homer**

**1 homer was the equivalent of a 'donkey load'.**

**Measures for liquids (oil, wine) and dry substances (cereals) were different. However, they were both named for the containers they could fill.**

**Shekels are Hebrew stone weights dating from Old Testament times.**

Measuring from **The Atlas of Bible Lands**.

Christina Goodings's large format full colour guide, **Celebrating Christmas** will prove a good resource for

parents and especially for teachers, with children at Primary School age. It is full of readings, poems and 'How to do it' features from making shortbread to the nativity play.

In conclusion, I have to say that my initial, hasty judgement was unjustified. There are good books here, with splendid artwork, beautiful design and inspiration as well as learning for the reader. And there are more to come. Look out for Ann Pilling's forthcoming story collection, **Who Laid the Cornerstone of the World?** and Bob Hartman's picture book, **The Easter Angels**, and appreciate the books on the Bible for children, which are being produced by so many publishers for us! ■

**Ralph Gower** is a Baptist minister, a former Local Authority and OFSTED inspector of Religious Education and someone who loves and collects books.

## Details of books discussed

**Daniel and the Lions**, 0 85953 812 5, **David and Goliath**, 0 85953 810 9, **Jonah and the Whale**, 0 85953 813 3, **Noah and the Ark**, 0 85953 811 7

James R Leininger, Mission Publishing, Child's Play (International) 'The Beginners Bible', £2.99 each hbk novelty

**The Amazing Story of Noah's Ark**, 0 7445 6058 6, **The First Christmas**, 0 7445 6317 8, **Jonah and the Whale**, 0 7445 6059 4, **Joseph and His Magnificent Coat of Many Colours**, 0 7445 6060 8

Marcia Williams, Walker Books 'Bible Stories', £4.99 each pbk

**Story of Joseph**, 1 85103 268 1, **Story of Moses**, 1 85103 269 X, **Story of Noah**, 1 85103 267 3

Moonlight Publishing 'Best Bible Stories', £3.99 each pbk

**The Easter Story**, **The Prodigal Son**, **Moses in the Bulrushes**, **Noah's Ark**, **Jonah and the Whale**, **The Christmas Story**, **Daniel and the Lions**, **David and Goliath**, **The Good Samaritan**, **Joseph and his Amazing Coat**, **Loaves and Fishes**

Usborne 'Bible Tales', £4.99 each hbk, £2.99 each pbk

**The Very Hungry Lions**, John Ryan, Lion, 0 7459 3601 6, £6.99 hbk

**Noah Makes a Boat**, Pippa Goodhart, ill. Bernard Lodge, Heinemann, 0 434 97480 3, £9.99 hbk, Mammoth, 0 7497 3422 1, £4.99 pbk

**Why Noah Chose the Dove**, Isaac Bashevis Singer, trans. Elizabeth Shub, ill. Eric Carle, Macmillan, 0 333 73255 3, £4.99 pbk

**Jonah and the Whale**, Geoffrey Patterson, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1246 5, £4.99 pbk

**God's People**, Geraldine McCaughrean, ill. Anna C Leplar, Orion, 1 85881 163 5, £12.99 hbk, Dolphin, 1 85881 620 3, £7.99 pbk

**Top Ten Bible Stories**, Michael Coleman, Scholastic, 0 590 19257 4, £3.99 pbk

**Christmas Story**, Heather Amery, ill. Norman Young, Usborne, 0 7460 3507 1, £3.99 board

**The First Christmas**, Georgie Adams, ill. Anna C Leplar, Dolphin, 1 85881 188 0, £3.99 pbk

**The Christmas Star**, Marcus Pfister, North-South Books, 1 55858 203 7, £12.95 hbk

**Sleepy Jesus**, Pennie Kidd, ill. Susie Poole, Lion, 0 7459 3764 0, £8.99 hbk

**Gabriel's Feather**, Elizabeth Laird, ill. Bettina Paterson, Scholastic, 0 590 54314 8, £11.99 hbk

**The Nativity Play**, Nick Butterworth and Mick Inkpen, Hodder, 1 85998 776 1, £7.99 pbk book and tape

**Miracle Maker**, Mary Joslin, ill. Francesca Pelizzoli, Lion, 0 7459 3629 6, £9.99 hbk

**The Life of Jesus**, Rachel Billington, ill. Lee Stinson, Hodder, 0 340 69357 6, £4.99 pbk

**Jesus' Day Off**, Nicholas Allan, Hutchinson, 0 09 176749 0, £6.99 hbk

**First Bible Stories**, Margaret Mayo, ill. Nicola Smee, Orchard, 1 86039 147 8, £9.99 hbk

**Bible Stories for the Very Young**, Sally Grindley, ill. Jan Barger, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 3552 3, £12.95

**The Usborne Children's Bible**, Heather Amery, Usborne, 0 7460 3043 6, £12.99 hbk

**The Lion Graphic Bible**, Mike Maddox, ill. Jeff Anderson, Lion, 0 7459 2708 4, £20.00 hbk

**Words of Gold**, Lois Rock, ill. Sarah Young, Lion, 0 7459 3630 X, £9.99 hbk

**Stories from the Christian World**, David Self, Macdonald Young Books, 0 7500 2553 0, £8.99 hbk, 0 7500 2554 9, £4.99 pbk

**Stories from the Jewish World**, Sybil Sheridan, Macdonald Young Books, 0 7500 2555 7, £8.99 hbk, 0 7500 2556 5, £4.99 pbk

**The Life of Jesus in Masterpieces of Art**, Mary Pope Osborne, Viking, 0 670 88198 8, £12.99 hbk

**The Good Man of Assisi**, Mary Joslin, ill. Alison Wisenfeld, Lion, 0 7459 3633 4, £8.99 hbk

**The Circle of Days**, Reeve Lindbergh, ill. Cathie Felstead, Walker Books, 0 7445 4047 X, £9.99 hbk

**The Dog who walked with God**, Michael J. Rosen, ill. Stan Fellows, Walker Books, 0 7445 5616 3, £9.99 hbk

**Best-Loved Prayers**, Lois Rock, ill. Alison Wisenfeld, Lion, 0 7459 3343 2, £8.99 hbk

**The Lion Book of First Prayers**, Su Box, ill. Leon Baxter, Lion, 0 7459 3441 2, £7.99 hbk

**Glimpses of Heaven**, Lois Rock, Lion, 0 7459 3632 6, £7.99 hbk

**A Child's Book of Celtic Prayers**, Joyce Denham, ill. Helen Cann, Lion, 0 7459 3774 8, £6.99 hbk

**Whose God Is It, Anyway?** Rabbi Marc Gellman and Monsignor Thomas Hartman, The Bodley Head, 0 370 32432 3, £10.99 pbk

**The Curious History of God**, Russell Stannard, ill. Taffy Davies, Lion, 0 7459 3964 3, £9.99 hbk, 0 7459 3992 9, £3.50 pbk (pbk April 1999)

**What is God Like?** Marie-Agnès Gaudrat, ill. Ulises Wensell, Lutterworth, 0 7188 2973 5, £4.99 hbk

**Who's Who in the Bible**, Stephen Motyer, ill. Peter Dennis, Dorling Kindersley, 0 7513 5778 2, £9.99 hbk

**The Atlas of Bible Lands**, Andrea Dué, Macdonald Young Books, 0 7500 2633 2, £10.99 hbk

**Celebrating Christmas**, Christina Goodings, Lion, 0 7459 3955 4, £14.99 hbk

**Who Laid the Cornerstone of the World?** Ann Pilling, ill. Helen Cann, Lion, 0 7459 3634 2, £10.99 hbk

**The Easter Angels**, Bob Hartman, ill. Tim Jonke, Lion, 0 7459 3877 9, £8.99 hbk

'Here is a Herod in glasses  
Who whispers, so nobody hears.'

From **Celebrating Christmas**.



# Is Computer Art Creative?

Some think that using a computer must necessarily be antithetical to producing 'real' illustration. But as computer technology develops, has it anything to offer?

Illustrator *ShookRayne* explains how he sets about making his computer work for him.

The last twelve years or so have been very frustrating as I have instinctively known what digital is capable of but did not have the resources to play with it. I wanted to produce CD-ROMs but came to find it an unsatisfying medium. I use the animation and programming skills that I learned to keep up my website which is far more interactive (and I get feedback from the viewers). Then in 1997 I upgraded my computer yet again and this time the machine, an Apple PowerPC, had the power and the software to really do the job.

## ● Books on disc

Around the same time I had the idea for 'The Rex Files', a spooky, spooey animal detective series. I told Hodder, my publishers, that I wanted to deliver the book on disk ready for the printer. They did not bat an eyelid. After a few teething troubles it seems to be working out better than I had hoped.

I have been producing my own typesetting and delivering camera ready artwork for a few years now. 'The Rex Files', I decided, were going to be completely laid out on screen. I wrote to the electronic page, live, using all the different typefaces and sizes as I went. The physical look of the books grew as I wrote the text around the spaces that were my illustrations in my imagination.

My first on screen drawings were made using the four cursor keys, then I got used to using a mouse for drawing. Now I have a drawing tablet that lets me draw straight into a painting program on the computer. As the old saying goes, it is a bit like sucking toffees with the wrapper on. These programs have clever sound effects to make you think you are dragging pencil across paper, but it still feels like a shiny, plastic pen on a shiny, plastic pad.

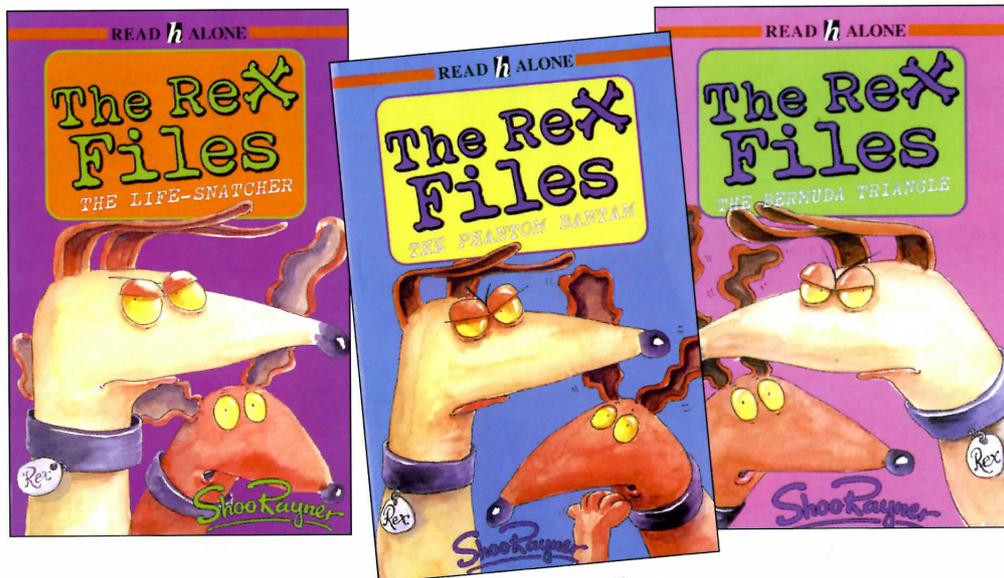
## ● The computer: servant or master?

My major problem with art programs is that it takes several hours to produce a bad imitation of what I can do on paper in minutes! The computer is supposed to be my servant, not my master.

When drawing into paint programs you are forced to use the programmer's idea of what your chosen medium is all about. This is why so much computer artwork has a sameyness about it. Most designers use programs like Photoshop or Corel Paint. Within these programs, photographs or drawings can be manipulated to the nth degree.

## ● Spot the filter

There is a game that designers play called 'Spot the Filter'. Filters are the basic building block of image manipulation. When an image is digitised, it is turned into



Rex and Franky in sharp focus, mysterious goings-on blurred.

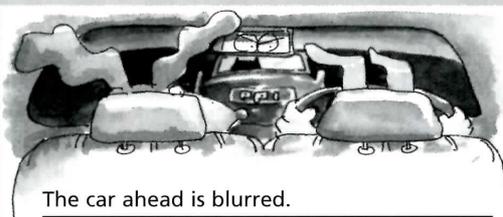
thousands of dots. Each dot is represented by a number. The number represents the colour, hue, shade, brightness, size etc of that dot. By changing that number you can change what the dot represents. A filter applies a mathematical formula to all the numbers that make up the image, thereby altering the whole image.

One person revolutionised the filter business. His name is Kai Krause. Every time I see artwork that has been passed through one of his filters, I can tell. You see his work all over the place. He is responsible for adding a uniform look to television, magazines, advertising etc. In no time at all, using his filters, you can make your work look slick and indistinguishable from any other designer's work. Idiosyncrasy is hard to come by in computer graphics.

## ● Less is more

With 'The Rex Files' I decided to paint the pictures onto paper using grey washes. The books are printed in black and white, so I could use my own scanner to bring the pictures into the Photoshop program. After a lot of playing about I realised that less is more. It is so easy to get carried away with what is possible at the expense of what is best.

One of the simplest filters is called Blur. Look at most photographs and you will see that the background is out of focus. I naturally draw everything in focus. This is because my eye shifts focus all the time to take in the scene. (And I am not very good at painting out of focus!) By selecting the



The car ahead is blurred.

background area of a picture and blurring it, real depth can be achieved. I use it in night scenes to add a sense of mystery and also to differentiate between the main and incidental parts of the story.

The very first illustration in 'The Rex Files' is of Franky, Rex's sidekick, being yanked off the page by his collar. I used the 'Clone Brush' in Photoshop, which paints a copy of another part of the picture. By painting at 40% transparency, the repetitions fade, since each repetition is a faded clone of the previous one. This is how I produced the whooshing effect. I have used it elsewhere to give frightened characters the jitters.

With real paint, I am never satisfied with highlights. Adding white paint on top of a picture never quite does it for me. Using electronic white paint is quite different. For a start, mistakes can be redrawn. I use it for 'motion marks'. These look even better when painted over blurred areas. They seem to hang in space.

### ● Drawing more freely

Photoshop is brilliant for tidying things up. I have often drawn a dodgy or extraneous line and thought 'never mind, I'll sort it out on screen.' Once an image is digitised and saved, you can keep working at it and go back if you make a mistake. A lot of the original paintings have mistakes in them that would normally make me start again.

Illustrators commonly get precious with finished artwork and lose some of the life that is in their roughs. Knowing that I can make mistakes actually allows me to draw more freely.

Being a spooky series, I needed to draw the ghostly Phantom Bantam. I drew the Phantom on one piece of paper and the background on another. Photoshop allows you to build up artwork in layers. I scanned the Phantom into the top layer and increased the layer's transparency and the Phantom became a ghostly image superimposed on the background.

Hereford Libraries asked me if I would put on an exhibition of my artwork, for the Year of Reading, as illustrators' work is so rarely seen. I decided that 'The Rex Files' should be the one to show as not even the publishers are getting to see the original artwork. I will be backing up the exhibition with a virtual exhibition on my web site ... so do pay a visit.

[www.shoo-rayner.co.uk/rexibition.html](http://www.shoo-rayner.co.uk/rexibition.html) ■



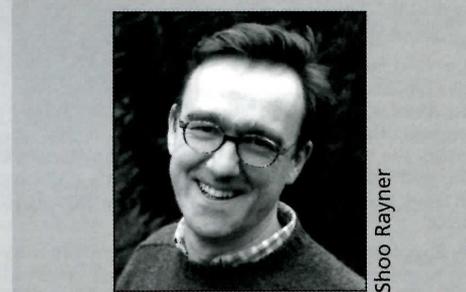
The Phantom's ghostly image superimposed on the background.



Above, Franky being yanked. Below, lighting and 'twinkles' for effect put in on computer rather than using white paint.



Phantom Bantam

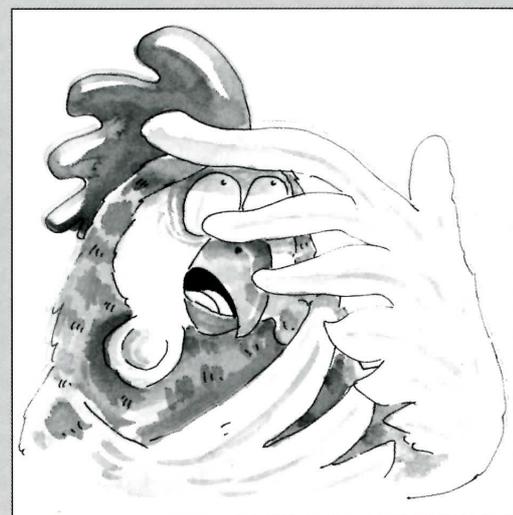


Shoo Rayner

Books written and illustrated by Shoo Rayner include six 'Ginger Ninja' titles from Hodder, four 'Jets' titles from A & C Black/Collins (plus seven titles written by Michael Morpurgo) and sixteen 'Animal Crackers' written by Rose Impey from Orchard, of which the most recent, **A Medal for Poppy** and **Stella's Staying Put**, are soon to appear in paperback.



As I write this I am about to start work on the fourth book. I imagine that I will find new ways of treating my artwork. I think I have got past the 'Gee Whizz!' stage and I am now using my computer as another tool on my desk. Yes, the computer can make your work look slick but to produce individual, idiosyncratic work requires the years of experience, personal insight and sheer hard graft that has always been required.



Lucy with the jitters.

# Authorgraph No.115

Jacqueline Wilson

Jacqueline Wilson interviewed by Julia Eccleshare



ell any child of nine and upwards that you are going to interview Jacqueline Wilson and your credibility rating goes sky high. Through her books she has touched the lives of hundreds and thousands of children who know her characters and something of her through her tireless round of school visits. 'Look out for her books,' my niece who had recently met her at a school visit advised me. 'She has so many that

she has to Hoover round them.' I thought I knew about piles of books but promised to take note of Jackie's anyway. And they are quite something. They take up literally half the living room floor space and include hard and paperback copies of the same title. 'I just can't resist books,' she says. 'Even if I've got the hardback I'll buy the paperback to read on the train.'

Since she also writes on trains it is hard to see how Jackie will ever get through the books she buys but it fits with her total absorption in books and writing. Though delighted by her success and happy to enjoy the ego trips of author tours and to buy more rings and books – her two indulgences – she has never written for that purpose. 'Even if I didn't get published, I'd still write. My writing matters to me more than anything, except my daughter. I'm doing what I want to do and, of course, it's lovely now to see my name on the bestseller lists.'

Knowing Ruby, Garnet, Tracy Beaker and most recently Lottie so well, I could not help thinking that one of them would open the door when I rang Jackie's bell. And there is something about Jackie that is very like her 'girls'. It is partly physical because she is small and neat and vigorous, rather like a child, and it is partly because she talks with the same humorous and sharply direct voice as they do.

Not that Jackie only writes about girls or is only enjoyed by girls. In fact, she has even had a marriage proposal from an 11-year-old boy reader but, as she says, 95% of those queuing at signing sessions are girls, even though she has not thought of them as the specific readers. 'When I write, I'm not thinking about the child reading the book but I think of the child in the book, and that's mostly a girl. While I'm writing about them I become their character even though they're usually 10-year-olds.'

Perhaps that is not so surprising since the very first story that Jackie remembers writing was when she was about nine. 'It was very much based on Eve Garnett's *The Family from One End Street* which I had just been reading. It had a girl of 10 who wanted to be an actress and a brainy girl with glasses. Even then I had the types of children that I have now.'

And the 10-year-old girl was, of course, Jackie herself. 'I was an only child from a not very happy home. My parents didn't get on particularly well. My father was a civil servant and my mother went out to work so I was left by myself a great deal – which I loved. I read a lot, I wrote and I played imaginary games. I made paper dolls to talk to and to do things with. Of course, I didn't tell the other children I played with any of that.'

Jackie has exceptional recall of her childhood. She talks about the big emotions as well as the tiny details as if they were recent and certainly as if they are important. 'I wasn't unhappy but I was certainly lonely. I wanted someone to talk to about books and writing but, though I had nice friends, no one was interested in that kind of thing. It's perhaps because I didn't have special friends that I think friendship is so important and that I want to write about it.'

While her own life offered little scope for friendship she found her ideal companion outside home. 'The biggest influence on my life was a child actress called Mandy Miller. I had a complete crush on her. She was always the child of divorced parents or she had a weird father. She became a sort of imaginary friend. When I was about 10 I was taken to an event in Battersea Park that she was appearing in and I had my picture taken with her. I was struck dumb, but I've got the photo of her with her arm around my shoulder.' She uses that memory now as roles are reversed and children asked to be photographed with her and she tries to make them feel more at ease than she did.

Despite the crush on Mandy Miller and a love of going to the cinema, Jackie always wanted to be a writer and was an eager reader. 'I liked all the obvious books like the Noel Streatfeild's, the Katy books, *Little*



*Women, The Secret Garden* and *The Little Princess*. I then moved on to adult books about children through authors like Catherine Cookson. I remember reading *Lolita* and being astonished by the writing and by *Lolita* who seemed a totally convincing girl. Of course, I knew my parents would have had a fit if they'd known that I was reading *Lolita* so I put the Catherine Cookson cover on it. Really, it should have been the other way around. They should have minded me reading Catherine Cookson.'

Education was not something Jackie cared about much at the time and at 16 she left school and did a shorthand and typing course. She was looking for a junior secretary job when she saw a D.C. Thomson advertisement for a teenage writer. 'Well, I was a teenager and I wanted to write, so I wrote off to them and got offered a job in Dundee. I thought I was gaining my freedom from home but in fact I was put to live in a Church of Scotland hostel so there was no freedom at all!'

But, the journalistic experience was a tremendous training and discipline and Jackie stayed for two years until she got married at 19 and she and her husband came back south. Her daughter Emma was born when she was 21 and Jackie kept her writing going by writing jokey articles about being a mother and 'tacky anonymous stories'. She wrote her first children's book which she sent to J.M. Dent. 'They turned it down with a lovely letter but, at the time, I didn't realise that it was an encouraging letter so I just stopped writing for children. It had three very realistic children in it, quite like the children I write about now, but

they went on a fantasy adventure and that was probably the mistake.' Instead, Jackie turned her hand to crime novels – still writing about children. 'In the first, two children were kidnapped. Because I was married to a police officer people thought that I knew about that world. Actually, I don't like crime novels.'

Not liking crime novels was quite enough to make Jackie not want to go on writing them. But not to stop writing. She has always written and writes all the time. She writes straight into a little notebook which she has with her at all times so that on trains, in queues or wherever she is she can get on with the writing. The first draft is full of crossings out – mostly of names which do not sound right – and it is that that becomes the final book, though there is some tidying up and rewriting at the typing up stage.

Abandoning crime novels, Jackie turned to what she really *did* like which was children's books. Throughout Emma's childhood, Jackie had read what was around to her, 'so I was always very on the button about them. Emma was into fairy stories and Victorian novels. But I loved the socially real stuff – Honor Arundel, Mary Kaye Harris and the teenage novels from Sweden like *Mia* which were imported at that time. All the girls in them seemed so real.'

It was these and the burgeoning US market for the teenage novel with authors such as Judy Blume, Paul Zindel, Betsy Byars and M.E. Kerr writing directly and often in the first person, that inspired Jackie to write for children. 'I felt that it was the kind of thing that I could do so I sat down to write my first teenage book. It's called *Nobody's Perfect* and it's about a girl who wants to be a writer. It took eighteen months to get it published because it was turned down several times. It was very hard but I just kept hoping that something would happen. At last the Oxford University Press said yes. It was wonderful. I was thrilled to bits and from that moment I felt that I belonged.'

Seven or eight teenage novels for OUP followed, all of which were well received but it was when David Fickling suggested that Jackie try a book for 10-year-olds that she began to find the style and voice for which she is now so well known.

Not that she hit the nail on the head straightaway. Her first, *How to Survive Summer Camp*, sunk without trace but then *Glubbslyme* was brought by Transworld in paperback. Jackie persuaded them that her next book should be a heavily illustrated book because at that age she had loved books like *Ballet Shoes* and *The Family from One End Street* which were as memorable for the illustrations as the story. She wanted to do a book about a child in a home who wanted to be adopted and so Tracy Beaker was born. In fact, the story line was easy but Jackie had great difficulty thinking of a name. 'I'd got Tracy but I couldn't think of a surname. It was in the bath washing my hair and rinsing the shampoo off with a beaker when suddenly, it came to me. Beaker. That was the name.' There is even a discreet picture by Nick Sharratt of Jackie in the bath at the moment of inspiration.

For it is Nick Sharratt who was found to illustrate *The Story of Tracy Beaker* and whose illustrations have become the perfect partner for Jackie's words. Both have an apparent simplicity which is instantly attractive to readers of all abilities. Jackie realised early on that her readers were not the kind of girls who would be reading *Lolita*, as she had, and she wanted to grab their attention and hold it. 'I saw that it would be possible to put over a book that was satisfying for me in terms of its depth and which could still have lots of word play but, it could also use a first person narrative and be colloquial and so attract a wide range of readers.'

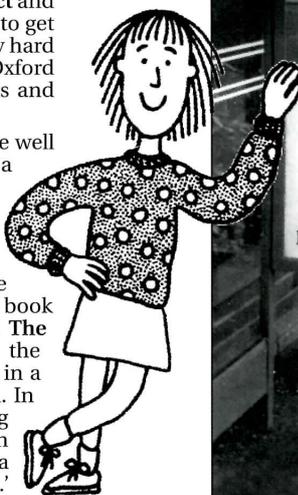
The style of *Tracy Beaker* has certainly attracted a lot of readers. Jackie's sales figures are staggering. Over 1 million copies of her books have been sold, putting her well up with the best of the adult bestsellers. She is always on the bestseller list and has won all the awards which are chosen by children. She is in constant demand in schools and is mobbed at signing sessions with queues of children whose lives have been touched by her books. '*Tracy Beaker* was the first of my books that I found in W.H. Smith and it marked the beginning of my visits to schools. It is rather wonderful to feel the pleasure that I've given to children and it's a delight to read the letters they send. Mostly they're from chirpy kids but sometimes I get a letter from a child in a terrible situation and I feel that I've helped. That's a privilege.'

Not that Jackie sits down to write with a mission to fulfil. 'For the most part I want to write a good book. However you define that. Good for me and good for the readers, is what I think. Occasionally it's what happens to children that fuels what I write. I'm not good about charity but sometimes I think my writing can help.'

*The Suitcase Kid* came out of that kind of thinking. 'I got annoyed that people were talking about divorce saying that the kids didn't mind. But I knew kids who were finding it difficult to cope. So I thought, OK let's try to write this from a child's point of view so that it seems like the end of the world. It is, but you come through it. I definitely didn't give it a happy ending.' Jackie gets heated talking about children being expected to cope. She feels that the burden being put on them is often too great and too little understood.

Her own understanding of children is both accurate and sympathetic. 'When I go into schools and talk about the teasing in *Bad Girls* and how good girls are at it, I get the children's attention immediately. They know exactly what I'm talking about. Similarly, when I talk about Mandy and Tanya and the shoplifting, it's perfectly plain that most of the kids are entirely familiar with the situation. But I also wanted to show what happens when you get caught. It's horrible.'

Jackie never preaches nor does she have falsely happy endings. Her readers trust her for her honest portrayal of their lives – with a bit of imagination thrown in. Her characters live on the page for her readers and, for Jackie, they live with her. 'I'm writing a sequel to *Tracy Beaker* at the moment. She's never really gone away. She's easy to write about because, although this sounds fey, she has such a strong personality she



almost takes over.' Jackie has a particularly soft spot, too, for Ruby and Garnet of *Double Act* which is the book she gets the most letters about.

Fortunately for her readers, Jackie cannot stop writing so there is no likelihood of drying up. She starts her day with a 7am swim and then settles down to a morning's writing, usually at the kitchen table where she feels most comfortable. She writes fast, producing around 1,000 words an hour but, even so, it takes about six months for her to finish a novel. School visits, replying to children's letters, browsing in Waterstone's (just in case there is a bit of living room floor that needs covering!) and her line dancing class fit in around her greatest pleasure – filling her notebook. 'Nothing is more pleasurable to me than seeing a child's eyes shining when they have enjoyed one of my books. It's just lovely.' ■

Photographs courtesy of Transworld Children's Books.

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

## The Books

The majority of Jacqueline Wilson's many books are published by Transworld with illustrations by Nick Sharratt, but she is also published by A & C Black, Collins, Egmont, Kingfisher, Longman, Oxford, Piccadilly, Puffin, and Scholastic. Listed below are titles referred to in the article as well as those shortly to be published.

*Double Act*, Yearling, 0 440 86334 1, £3.99 pbk

*The Story of Tracy Beaker*, Yearling, 0 440 86279 5, £3.99 pbk

*The Lottie Project*, Yearling, 0 440 86366 X, £3.99 pbk

*Glubbslyme*, Yearling, 0 440 86231 0, £3.99 pbk

*The Suitcase Kid*, Yearling, 0 440 86311 2, £3.99 pbk

*Bad Girls*, Yearling, 0 440 86356 2, £3.99 pbk

*Monster Eyeballs*, Egmont 'Blue Banana', 0 7497 2814 0, £3.99 pbk (April 1999)

*The Illustrated Mum*, Doubleday, 0 385 40888 9, £10.99 hbk (May 1999)

*How to Survive Summer Camp*, ill. Sue Heap, Oxford, 0 19 275019 4, £3.99 pbk (June 1999)

# A Lasting Impact:

## Jacqueline Wilson in School

An author visit is always an exciting experience but the circumstances surrounding Jacqueline Wilson and Nick Sharratt's visit to Burscough County Primary made it extra special. **Andrew Kidd**, Headteacher of Burscough CP School, Lancashire, explains.

When Year 6 at Burscough County Primary won the Smarties Young Judges Competition it meant the whole school being given the responsibility for choosing the overall winner of the Smarties Book Prize. Weeks of deliberation and consultation culminated in the children spending a whole day being filmed for **Blue Peter** discussing the shortlisted books, prior to travelling to London for the award ceremony. There, as VIP guests, they announced that Jacqueline Wilson was the winner for **Double Act**. One of our rewards was a visit to our school by both Jackie and the illustrator of her books, Nick Sharratt – the first time they had visited a school together.



### A double act

So we had our very own 'Double Act' to enjoy. The children were already familiar with Jackie and Nick's books. There was, however, a heightened enthusiasm for them in the months leading up to their visit. Sequels to **Double Act** flowed from the pens of would-be authors and Sharratt-esque illustrations appeared in jotters throughout the junior department.

Author visits are often punctuated by Workshop sessions, but Jackie and Nick simply talked about their work to a very well informed and spellbound audience. Knowing everything there is to know about Ruby and Garnet, Tracy Beaker and **The Suitcase Kid**, what our pupils



Jacqueline Wilson drawn by Nick Sharratt as part of a demonstration for Year 6.

found fascinating was learning that Jackie does not use a computer but writes all her stories in ink before typing the whole thing out again on an old typewriter. With the whole process taking five months it was subsequently easier to encourage our children to redraft work!

### Engaging eccentricity

As well as creating characters that instantly appeal to children, there is an engaging eccentricity about Jacqueline Wilson which children love. She is also very much a child at heart. Strange anecdotes about a typical day intrigued the children. In times when inspiration is absent, Jackie told the children how she attempts self-hypnosis at her writing desk, using 'Radish' a bungee jumping bunny. Radish, who appears in **The Suitcase Kid**, is also allowed to type out the first few words after a successful 'hypnosis'. The children were fascinated by Jackie's very early attempt at writing a book entitled 'The Maggotts', featuring the first of her ubiquitous twins.

Nick Sharratt, a refreshingly unassuming man, brought the illustrations he had shown at a school assembly at the age of nine. The positive reaction to that particular piece of artwork was the defining moment in his desire to be an illustrator.

### Long-term influence?

Who can say now what long-term influence a one-day visit can have? There was quite a lot of individual correspondence between Y6 and Jackie after her visit which was fantastic for the children. There is also a lasting reminder of our association with Jackie and Nick in the dedication to Burscough County Primary in **The Lottie Project**.

Most significantly, when past pupils come back to visit us they still talk of the time Jacqueline Wilson and Nick Sharratt came to Burscough CP. ■

# Books Away!

Reading enthusiasts once used to dream about a world where children's books received imaginative, energetic help from all quarters. In 1999 this dream seems to be coming true, with ground breaking schemes for bringing books and children together announced on an almost daily basis. **Nicholas Tucker** investigates.

## LaunchPad

### Promoting the value of libraries for children

**Launchpad**, a library development agency, has just launched 'Reaching Parents', a £500,000 ground breaking partnership programme with three companies from the commercial sector designed to support families in developing children's reading. There are three very different, exciting projects.

#### Lads and Dads

On May 29, a week after the Cup Final, football clubs and leisure centres will be invaded by librarians promoting two teams of eleven books each, one aimed at dads, the other at their lads. Leaflets, posters and counter-packs will shower on twelve pilot areas from Barnsley to Windsor, urging both sides to make reading part of their lives. Dads will be told about the role they can play in encouraging their sons to read. The lads' books, all published by Random House who are backing the project, start young with Shirley Hughes' **Alfie's Alphabet** and contain only one football title, Tim Barnett's **Fantastic Football Phenomena**. Dads get John King's **Football Factory**; other titles include **Catch 22** and **Silence of the Lambs**. Some older lads may want to try these too.

#### The Big Read

Two days later on May 31 and for a week afterwards, ASDA's 223 stores are hosting **The Big Read**, aimed at parents as they shop. Special events will be held in every store, with local librarians running performance and story-telling events as well as advising on the book displays to be drawn from ASDA's current stock of titles. Story-telling sessions will also be led by ASDA staff, fresh from training sessions in one of twelve regional workshops run by the library service. The aim is to reach all of ASDA's six million weekly shoppers. If the scheme works, it might not only persist in itself but also encourage other supermarkets to come forward with their own initiatives.

#### Ford's Working Parents

**Launchpad's** third scheme is to bring librarians into industry, in this case the Ford Dagenham Body Plant. Over six months, during staggered meal breaks, workers will be able to borrow books from a special area of the shop floor. Backed by The Library Association, The Society of Chief Librarians, and the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians, there will be no shortage of expertise on any of these ventures. A grant from The National Year of Reading covers the extra costs.

Will it all work? Could an over-promotion of reading, both here and in government-inspired propaganda elsewhere, prove as great a turn-off as the previous years of public indifference about children's books? Only the most dedicated Jeremiah would want to start crying woe at this stage, but even so there are some areas of concern. Might there be a tendency to push children's books mostly covering the younger end of the age-range, so avoiding controversial titles such as Melvin Burgess's **Junk**? What about the delicate situation, still hardly admitted in many reading circles, of older children who often seem to prefer outspoken adult works by authors from Irving Welsh to J.G. Ballard? At a time when the very existence of childhood itself is being questioned, in terms of whether many modern children are still happy to live in a cultural ghetto marked out for them by adults, the very concept of a children's book is no longer as simple as it once might have appeared. For younger children, however, **Launchpad** can only be good news. Other regular shoppers at ASDA could surely benefit too from this jolly break in routine, whether they have any children or not. ■

For further information about **Launchpad**, contact Becca Wyatt on 0171 603 1776 or 0976 365028.

**Nicholas Tucker** is a lecturer in Psychology at Sussex University.

# BETWEEN GOD AND MAMMON?

Founded in 1971, Lion Publishing is a Christian book publisher with a strong children's list of titles for all ages. What is different about publishing religious titles? Rosemary Stones investigates.

At the younger end of the Lion children's list, *You Are Very Special*, is a novelty book for the very young. It has a mirror at the back of the book in which the young reader may see her/himself. 'God made you just as you are, and he made you just right', the text tells us, reinforcing the message that whoever looks in the mirror is unique and special. In the middle are books of prayers, stories from the bible published as picture books and as part of anthologies, Christmas titles and picture books with a spiritual theme. At the older end are novels for teenagers with Christian themes woven into contemporary settings. One of Lion's most recent ventures is *The Lion Graphic Bible* (discussed p5), a tome the size of a small car battery, illustrated in full colour throughout by Jeff Anderson, a former Judge Dredd artist; it will appeal to everyone from eight upwards who likes comics.

## The market place

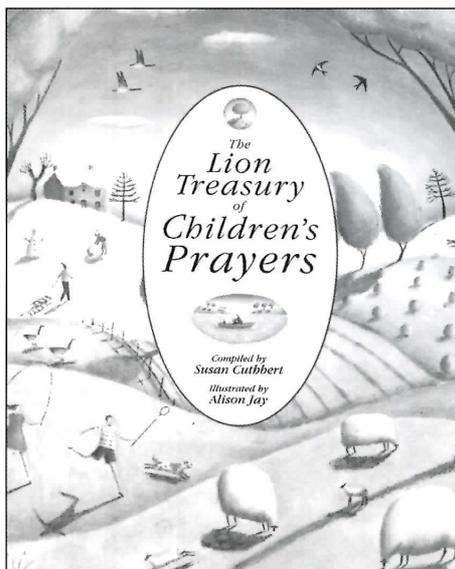
Once relegated to specialist religious bookshops and bought by people who were perhaps more interested in Christian content than they were in beautiful books, the attitude of the market place to children's books with an overtly Christian or spiritual message appears to be changing.

With the decline in the number of people who are Christians over the last ten to fifteen years, Christian bookshops are struggling. Meanwhile, the general book trade, which usually always carried at least a children's bible, is finding there is more demand from the general public for titles with a Christian or spiritual approach.

This trend appears to coincide with an increasing interest in religious and spiritual matters in general. It is quite a coincidence that a bible story, Moses, should have been chosen by Spielberg's film company, Dream Works, for adaptation to the big screen as *The Prince of Egypt*. The Policy Studies Institute's survey, *Cultural Trends*, reports a 75% increase in the number of mind, body and spirit titles published in the last five years in the UK and an 83% increase in religious title output.

## Changes in Christian publishing

An important change in Lion children's publishing, according to Managing Director Lois Rock, is the need to 'reflect people's starting points'. The readership is now seen as book lovers who may be Christian or may have a general interest in spiritual matters, rather than Christians who are not necessarily book lovers. Thus,



## The Lion Treasury of Children's Prayers

This handsome anthology of over 200 prayers is thematically arranged around the seasons, festivals, the wide world, creatures, at home and so forth. It contains prayers in the form of poems from such poets as e. e. cummings, Robert Browning, Eleanor Farjeon, Coleridge, Christina Rossetti and Dorothy Wordsworth alongside passages from the bible, particularly from the psalms. There is St Francis's *Canticle of Brother Sun* which contrasts with Trevor Huddleston's rather terse prayer for Africa. Of particular interest are prayers from different parts of the world, eg 'Prayer from Mexico', 'Prayer from India' and 'Prayer from Philippines' – whose language is place specific yet full of meaning. Take 'Prayer of an African Girl', for example:

O Great Chief  
light a candle within my heart  
that I may see what is therein  
and sweep the rubbish from  
your dwelling place.

Alison Jay's stylised illustrations have great appeal on the page either as full page artworks or decorative vignettes. Her elongated, rather triangular figures stride up cliff paths in the heat of the sun, plant the fields, enjoy the sea – she is equally at home in the modern world as in the world of the bible or other lands. The soft browns, blues, greens and yellows of her palette are full of reflective depth with shadows, symmetries or depths of tone echoing the mood of the prayers.

A beautiful book that will be enjoyed by children of all faiths or none.

*The Lion Treasury of Children's Prayers* compiled by Susan Cuthbert, illustrated by Alison Jay, is published in hardback by Lion (224pp, 0 7459 3961 9, £20).

Lion picture book publishing includes, alongside adaptations of bible stories, stories like *The Heavenly Tree* or *The Minstrel's Tale* which contain references which could be taken as Christian or as referring to archetypes. Young readers are then free to explore ideas in their own way.

In terms of illustrative and production quality, Lion's children's titles now compete with titles from other publishing houses. Their artists, in particular, include some with styles that are able to convey emotional and spiritual feelings in a more sophisticated way than heretofore. Bible figures in Christian children's books are no longer necessarily jolly men in unlikely pajamas.

## Bible knowledge?

As church attendance continues to decline, there are many parents concerned that their children should at least know enough about Christianity to recognise and understand cultural references to it. 'From the beginning', says Lois, 'Lion Publishing assumed that people now are less knowledgeable. In our books everything is explained, even who Jesus is. Many readers are without cultural clues.'

## The bottom line

But should Christian children's books be free because they are Christian? Where does mammon fit in? There is a perception, says Lois, that bible stories should be cheaper than other children's books. At the same time she believes that being a commercial publishing house is a 'great discipline'. 'If you have to think about what the market will buy and what questions book lovers ask, it sharpens your sense of what readers want. Within Christian publishing you can find the odd legacy or grant which is excellent if used for a special needs project; otherwise that can lure you into publishing something that no one wants.'

Lion's commitment to quality illustration means that sharp negotiations are often needed. Lois believes in having such discussions 'at the right stage'. And Lion children's books are as dependent on international conditions for full colour titles as other children's publishers. *The Lion Graphic Bible* was a huge investment but 'if bibles get established, they will stay around for a long time and will pay back eventually'.

There is also, of course, more competition in this area from other publishers. 'The market area has opened up,' says Lois. 'There are now a number of publishers with bibles – a huge glamorous array.' ■

## NEWS

## Useful Organisations

No.5: **REACH**  
(National Advice Centre  
for Children with  
Reading Difficulties)

REACH

California Country Park, Nine Mile Ride, Finchampstead, Berkshire RG40 4HT (tel: 0118 973 7575; fax: 0118 973 7105; e-mail: reach@reach-reading.demon.co.uk). There is also an information helpline number (0345 973 7020) which is a local-call-cost number for enquiries about the reading needs of children with special educational difficulties.

A national charity that works with children who have difficulty with reading, writing and language. Some of these children also have additional difficulties such as hearing or sight loss, intellectual or physical problems or emotional disturbance. REACH provides information, advice and support to carers, teachers and families. The Centre has a reference collection of over 12,000 items for children (books, tapes, CD-Rom, Braille or signed stories etc). Items are not lent but staff can advise on where they can be bought. Reading lists are available on specific reading needs. REACH also runs in-service training for teachers, librarians and other carers. It has recently published a handbook to help children with reading difficulties, *Everyone is a Reader* (by Beverley Mathias, REACH, 0 948664 20 7, £9.95 inc. p&p).

## PRIZES

The Whitbread  
Children's Book of the  
Year

David Almond has won the Whitbread Children's Book of the Year with his first children's novel, *Skellig* (Signature). The prize is worth £10,000, £11,000 less than the adult Whitbread Book of the Year. To the annoyance of the children's book world, Whitbread and the BBC did not televise Almond's win. It was announced briefly but he was not interviewed; his book was not discussed by the studio panel and he was not seen receiving his prize. As Adèle Geras put it, in a letter to *The Guardian*, '(Almond) is lucky that the BBC and Whitbread let him stay up late and join the grown-ups at the banquet.'

## The Marsh Award

The Marsh Award for Children's Literature in translation has been awarded to Patricia Crampton for her translation of Gudrun Pausewang's *The Final Journey* (Puffin). This powerful novel, about a 12-year-old Jewish girl's experiences in a cattle truck on the way to Auschwitz, also won the 1997 Birmingham Children's Book



Award which is judged entirely by children. It is reviewed in *BfK* 108.

The South Lanarkshire  
Book Award

The South Lanarkshire Book Award is a new award which involves libraries and secondary schools in the area as well as author visits. From a shortlist of four titles chosen by librarians and English teachers, students in six schools will vote for the winning title. The shortlisted books are *Wicked* by Anthony Masters (Orchard), *Asian Triangle* by Sailesh Ramakrishnan (Mantra), *Love On-Line* by Lisa Tuttle (Mammoth) and *Starlight City* by Sue Welford (Oxford). The presentation will be made in April. Details from Margaret Cowan, Central Library, 40 The Olympia, East Kilbride G74 1PG (01355 248581).

NATIONAL YEAR  
OF READING

## Young Book Trust's Parent's Pack

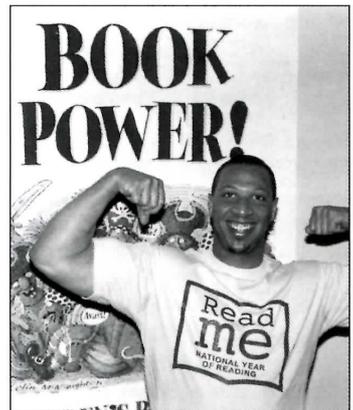
Especially designed for parents and other carers, the pack provides guidance on selecting and sharing books with children. It is available in four age categories: (0-4, 5-7, 8-11 and 12+). Available free. Send an A4 sae to Young Book Trust, Book House, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ.

## World Book Day 1999

Every schoolchild in the UK and Ireland will again receive a free £1 book voucher from the bookselling and publishing industry for World Book Day on 23 April (Shakespeare's birthday). The voucher can be exchanged for a copy of *The Children's Book of Books 1999* (a compilation of stories and poems from well known authors such as Michael Morpurgo, Anne Fine, J.K. Rowling and Narinder Dhani) or it can be redeemed against any book or audiobook worth £2.95 or more.

## Read Me T-Shirt

A National Year of Reading t-shirt with the Read Me logo is available from The Marketing Department, Peters Library Service, 120 Bromsgrove Street, Birmingham B5 6RJ at £6.50 (plus p&p).



Mark Thompson of Peters Library Service models the t-shirt.

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).

## The Children's Laureate

Three top children's writers and illustrators have been shortlisted for the first Children's Laureate. They are the writer/illustrator Quentin Blake and the novelists Peter Dickinson and Anne Fine. They were chosen from a list of twenty nominations by a judging panel comprising a member of the IBBY committee (International Board on Books for Young People), a librarian, a publisher, a critic, a bookseller and an academic specialising in books for children. The panel was chaired by James Naughtie, journalist and presenter of the BBC Radio 4 *Today* and *Bookclub* programmes. The winner will be announced in May.

## Book of the Year

J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Bloomsbury) has won the Children's Book of the Year Award at the 10th annual British Book awards.

## • Obituary •

## Naomi Mitchison

1897-1999

Naomi Mitchison who has died aged 101 was, amongst her many activities of a literary, social and political kind, also a writer of books for children. There were around 25 titles, many set in other cultures or at other times, often at moments of turbulent change. With their vivid and recognizable characters, they enabled young readers to empathise with experiences outside their own. Mitchison was a sort of tribal mother to the Bakgatla people in Botswana and some of her stories have that setting.





# 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

**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.

**Errol Lloyd** is an artist and writer.

**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.

**Andrea Rayner** is a freelance book editor and children's book reviewer.

**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*.

**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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## Books About Children's Books

### The RIF Family Guide to Encouraging Young Readers

★★★★

Reading is Fundamental UK,

Scholastic, 224pp, 0 590 63646 4, £4.99 pbk

A reader-friendly volume aimed at parents and carers packed with ideas for encouraging and promoting reading (and sometimes writing) preceded by some down-to-earth

good sense about making reading and learning to read enjoyable. There are fourteen sections with activities centering on locations such as the kitchen, supermarket and the road, or themes - TV tie-ins, newspapers, seasons - for instance. As someone

THE RIF\* FAMILY  
GUIDE TO  
**Encouraging  
Young Readers**

\*Reading Is Fundamental, UK



"A book that could make a real difference to your child's and your family's enjoyment of reading."  
David Blankett  
(Secretary of State for Education and Employment)

who believes that reading should be intrinsically rewarding I am less happy with the 'signs of progress' section though I have to admit to liking the idea of Dad chopping a chunk off a detested tie each time a book is read aloud (presumably by him!). **JB**

# Now out in Paperback

This section lists three, four and five star hardbacks or trade paperbacks already reviewed in **BfK** and now published as mass market paperbacks.

## 5-8 INFANT/JUNIOR

### Off to School: Poems for the Playground

**POETRY** ★★

Compiled by Tony Bradman, Macdonald, 0 7500 2150 0, £4.99

*Reviewed BfK 111, July 1998:*

'A picture book format poetry collection with a school theme ...almost exclusively new poems with something to appeal to most listeners or readers.'

## 8-10 JUNIOR/MIDDLE

### Giant Jim and the Hurricane

**FICTION** ★★

Jeremy Strong, Puffin, 0 14 038248 8, £3.99

*Reviewed BfK 107, Nov. 1997:*

'A variation on the friendly giant theme ... transformed by Strong's humour, invention and grasp of human nature.'

## 10-12 MIDDLE/SECONDARY

### Hannah Goslar Remembers

**BIOGRAPHY** ★★

Alison Leslie Gold, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 4027 6, £4.99

*Reviewed BfK 114, Jan. 1999:*

'An extension to the Anne Frank diary and simply told and moving in its own right.'

## Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

**FICTION** ★★

J K Rowling, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 3848 4, £4.99

*Reviewed BfK 111, July 1998:*

'Imaginative, complex, inventive yarnning that compels and rewards the reader.'

## 12+ SECONDARY

### Storm

**FICTION** ★★

Suzanne Fisher Staples, Red Fox, 0 09 925292 9, £3.99

*Reviewed BfK 112, Sept. 1998:*

'A brilliant contemporary variation on a Romeo and Juliet theme, executed in a style in which anger and compassion are unforgettably combined.'

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

## My Presents

★★★

Rod Campbell, Campbell Books, 20pp, 0 333 74885 9, £3.99 novelty

This board book with sturdy-looking built-in flaps (first published in 1988) is a characteristic offering from Campbell. Each page shows a parcel which flaps open to reveal its contents. The repetitively structured text leads the eye from left page to right, describing the gift without naming it, while many of the pictures give no clue as to what might be behind the flap. Tags on each present give an early introduction to meaningful print for the very young reader. A very simple idea with no added frills - not much to talk about while sharing, but adequate for its purpose - flap-lifting and a bit of prediction generally being a hit with toddlers. **AG**

## A First Picture Book of Nursery Rhymes

★★★★

Selected and illustrated by Elizabeth Harbour, Puffin, 32pp, 0 14 054973 0, £4.99 pbk

The illustrations, all important in a Nursery Rhyme book, are very stylised here, very cool, very restrained; soft brick pinks, yellow and duck egg blue predominate. The characters are dressed variously in 18th- and 19th-century styles, the stiffness of Harbour's figures echoing the formality of style. Pattern and symmetry abound - Polly and Sukey swoop in from either side of a roundel to attend to the kettle; 'Six little mice' sit down to spin in an exquisitely decorated Victorian dolls' house; the King and Queen of Hearts preside over tea in a stage-set of a palace.

There is much to delight here; the pictures reflect the origins of some of



'Dickery, dickery, dare,  
The pig flew up in the air,  
The man in brown soon  
brought him down,  
Dickery, dickery, dare.'

From **A First Picture Book of Nursery Rhymes**.

our best-known rhymes thus giving a timeless quality to images that might not seem immediately appealing to the contemporary child. **AG**

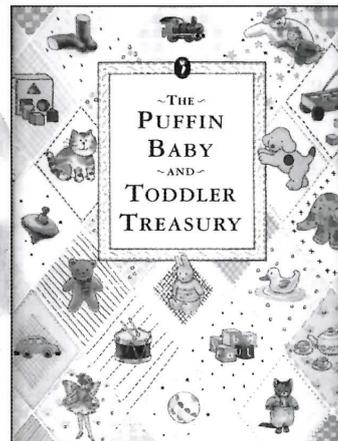
## The Puffin Baby and Toddler Treasury

★★★★

Various illustrators, Puffin, 192pp, 0 670 87832 4, £14.99 hbk

Beautifully produced, from its pretty cover and silver endpapers onwards, this is a well-composed, lively and varied anthology of rhymes and stories for young children.

The mix includes traditional tales such as 'Three Billy Goats Gruff', nursery rhymes, poems by Milne, Blake and Lear, contemporary stories and popular play-group songs, nicely



mingled together. The illustrations are by a wide range of artists, many of them represented several times so that the reader begins to recognise their style on encountering them through the book.

I found the inclusion of 'Spot's First Picnic' and some of Nick Sharratt's brash illustrations rather intrusive in a book that is otherwise quietly harmonious to look at; 'The Snowman', abridged and with a very minimal set of words by Raymond Briggs, also seemed disappointing here, but these are quibbles: this is a good collection otherwise. **AG**

## Tell Me Something Happy Before I Go to Sleep

★★★

Joyce Dunbar, ill. Debi Gliori, Doubleday, 32pp, 0 385 40791 2, £9.99 hbk

A comforting picture book for little ones who just cannot get to sleep. The troubled bunny Willa of this story turns to big brother, who in his wisdom helps her resolve fears of the dark and possible bad dreams.

Together they think of happy things, but after each happy thought Willa remains fiercely awake, and asks, 'What else?' The resolution is lovely, for big brother tells Willa that the morning is sad. Sad because the morning likes to wake her up...so she must get off to sleep. The title page is full of comforting sleeping toys, and the gentle text is matched with splendid illustrations. A book to read again and again. **GB**



From **Tell Me Something Happy Before I Go to Sleep**.

## Cat and Mouse

★★★

Tomek Bogacki, Barefoot 'Beginners', 32pp, 1 901223 56 6, £9.99 hbk

A baby mouse and a kitten set out to learn about the world by experience rather than by listening to their respective mothers. By doing so, the author implies, these traditional enemies find common ground through play and friendship. The text is slight and it is the stylised depictions of mice and cats which dominate each spread. Executed in muted pastels, they convey a sense of

movement and immediacy as the young mice and cats frolic together in the green meadow. VC

**Noisy Nora**

★★★

Rosemary Wells, Doubleday, 32pp, 0 385 40948 6, £9.99 hbk

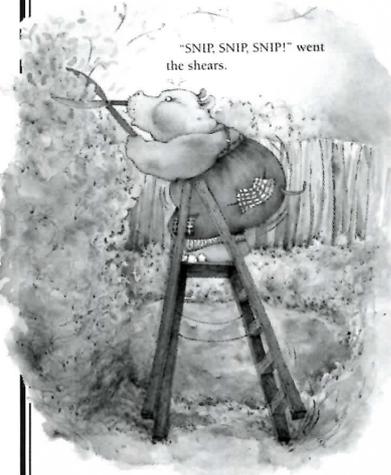
Wells fans will not be disappointed by this new full colour version of an old favourite about the frustrations of being a middle mouse-child. Whenever Nora wants parental attention it seems to be focused upon younger brother Jack or elder sister Kate. Nora's inventive and mischievous attempts to seek attention are warmly captured in both drawing and text: from hiding chess pieces and scattering marbles to flying the kite indoors. Her final disappearing act turns the house suitably upside down!

However, the Americanisms of the text will not appeal to some readers – 'Jack had gotten filthy', and coupling 'mum' and 'dumb', 'trash' and 'crash' – but the overall rhyme and rhythm of the book make for uncomplicated, fun bedtime reading. RB

**Best of Friends**

★★★★

Shen Roddie, ill. Sally Anne Lambert, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 1226 0, £4.99 pbk



Hippo and Pig are best friends, but when Hippo cuts down the hedge between their houses, they find they can see too much of each other – including all their less-than-desirable habits. The friendship comes to an abrupt halt, but as the hedge grows back, they learn they can be friends again so long as they each respect boundaries and protect their own space. Gleefully amusing pictures add to the fun, and children will enjoy the knockabout humour. ES

**Night Night Sleep Tight**

★★★★

The Bodley Head, 128pp, 0 370 32308 4, £12.99 hbk

A dozen stories on a bedtime theme, mostly previously published as stand-alone picture books from The Bodley Head's list. While the cynical might see such reuse as a contribution to the publisher's bottom line, this selection is an inspired one which includes some of my favourite picture book stories. Shared last thing at night, stories like Mennen and Daly's 'One Round Moon and a Star for Me', John Prater's 'Timid Tim and the Cuggy Thief' or Virginia Mayo's 'The Swan' with their magical words and pictures will surely bestow a sense of awe and bedtime blessings on reader and listener alike. Who could fail to be enchanted by Susie Jenkin-Pearce and Julia Malim's poetic images of 'Rabbit Magic': '...Small boy follows through the gate. Golden time, berry time, crimson leaves in the lake. Footsteps follow, join the chase. Where to? Where next? ...' with for me anyway, echoes of Eliot's 'Burnt Norton'. Truly a book to dream on. JB

**I'm Too Busy**

★★★

Helen Stephens, Dorling Kindersley, 24pp, 0 7513 7184 X, £3.99 pbk

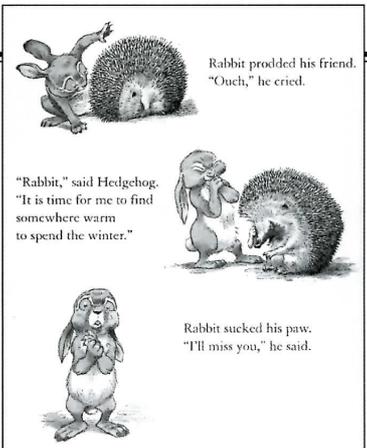
This picture book is one of a new series designed for the very young. It claims to be toddler proof which means that the pages are almost like thin card. Katy has prepared supper, but Charlie the cat is far too busy to stop and eat. He is busy directing traffic, exploring the moon, and dancing at a ball. However, when his tummy rumbles he remembers that it is fish soup, fish cakes and jelly for supper. The text is simple and repetitive, and the vibrant colours in the impressionistic artwork match the story well. The youngest child will soon be reading the picture clues and experiencing a real independent read. GB

**A Little Bit of Winter**

★★★★

Paul Stewart, ill. Chris Riddell, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 814 9, £8.99 hbk

In this endearing tale of friendship between a rabbit and a hedgehog, the author creates a satisfying circular story, the final page ending with the sentiments of the first. It is time for Hedgehog to hibernate, and he sleepily asks Rabbit about the nature of winter. On being told it is hard, white and cold, Hedgehog asks his friend to save him a little bit of it. But Rabbit is 'so full of forget', that writing a reminder on a tree trunk seems a good plan. Vital words from the message are later eaten by the hungry rabbit, but nevertheless, he does

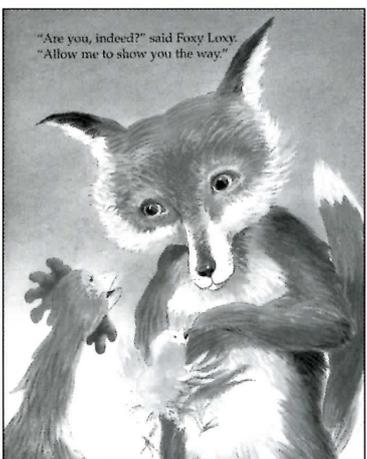


remember to preserve something of winter for his prickly friend. Lots of quality direct speech between the two creatures, and Riddell's expressive line and muted colours add vitality to this humorous tale. GB

**Chicken Licken**

★★★★★

Michael Foreman, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 847 5, £9.99 hbk



This story of silly birds and a wily fox is a well-known traditional tale. Chicken Licken, Henny Penny, Ducky Lucky, Goosey Loosey and Turkey Lurkey race across the pages, anxious to tell the King the sky is falling. The birds frantically run and run, until they meet Foxy Loxy... By studying the pictures, we see that Chicken Licken narrowly escapes the fate of the others, for as he flies off the edge of the final endpaper, there is a tiny 'Phew!' Foreman's vibrant glowing colours are a treat in this new version, and the text flows with energy and delight. GB

**The Macmillan Treasury of Nursery Rhymes and Poems**

POETRY ★★★★★

Edited by Alison Green, ill. Anna Currey, Macmillan, 376pp, 0 333 74165 X, £17.50 hbk

Open any page of this substantial volume and delight sings out: it sings

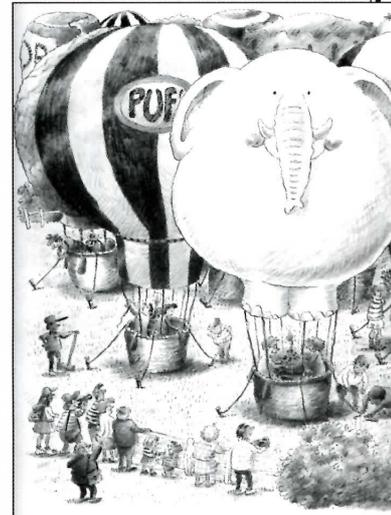
from the circle of small children on the title page and resonates through Roger McGough's introductory words and through every one of the eighteen thematic sections. Despite the book's size it is not dense. Each poem has room to breathe on the page and Currey's watercolour illustrations provide a harmonious accompaniment which never overwhelms the verbal images. The poems selected – from Stevenson to Silverstein – are all highly accessible to a young audience. What is lacking in so substantial a collection, however, is a handful of poems which really challenge, so that young readers can be part of, to borrow Richard Lewis's words, 'the circle in which all ends meet ... no longer ends but beginnings of a whole – no longer beginnings but what is continuous' ie the lifelong joy with which poetry abounds. That said this is still a very desirable collection to own and to share. JB

**Mrs Jolly's Brolly**

★★★★★

Dick King-Smith, ill. Frank Rodgers, Macdonald, 32pp, 0 7500 2568 9, £4.99 pbk

Mrs Jolly is as atypical a witch as you could imagine – plump, constantly smiling, the proud owner of a ginger cat and possessing a brightly coloured golfing umbrella instead of a broomstick. Encouraged by her ginger cat, Mrs Jolly hooks her brolly onto the back of a kitchen chair and, once airborne, follows the competitors in a Hot Air Balloon Race.



Children will love the repetition of Mrs Jolly's poetic magic spell commands and be captivated by the subtle warmth of the soft pencil crayon illustrations in this picture book, as Mrs Jolly's flying skills see her cross the finishing line ahead of all the racers. A jolly good read indeed. AK

**REVIEWS 5-8 Infant/Junior**

**A Baby for Grace**

★★★

Ian Whybrow, ill. Christian Birmingham, Kingfisher, 32pp, 0 7534 0206 8, £10.99 hbk

This is the story of Grace, whose baby sibling's arrival seems to bring a lot of prohibitions – 'No Grace, let me...' – while the new baby's activities provoke an 'Ah, yes!' response. Eventually Grace finds a way to get a 'yes' too.

The text, in large clear print (literacy hour sharing in mind?) uses very simple language structures reminiscent of reading scheme books, irritatingly poorly punctuated in places.

Birmingham's illustrations are larger

than the page, photographically-derived with a pastel-like texture that looks computer-created. Rich colours and hazy outlines give a certain, slightly wishful, attractiveness, and the illustrations reflect the text very literally.

I wonder whether this conscious approach to children facing difficult situations is appropriate to vulnerable young children – a subtler approach might be more effective in the end. This story seems more suited to school-use, perhaps for circle-time discussions. AG

## Mother and Child Treasury

★★★★

Selected by Shirley Hughes, ill. Clara Vulliamy, Collins, 96pp, 0 00 198274 5, £14.99 hbk

Hughes has put together a collection of stories and poems loosely centred on mothers and their children. From Moses to Milly-Molly-Mandy to Anne Fine's contemporary working mother; from traditional rhymes via Milne to Colin McNaughton and Michael Rosen, this is a lively anthology with various aspects of childhood represented.

The illustrations are by Hughes' daughter, Clara Vulliamy, who is at her best illustrating Eleanor Farjeon's 'The Sea-Baby' where beautiful watercolour washes and subtle colours offset the tendency to cuteness found in her round-faced, doe-eyed characters. I found her new illustrations of 'Milly-Molly-Mandy' and Ameliaranne which are derivative of the originals without adding anything new particularly irritating.

A reasonable anthology with lots of potential. AG

## Lucy's Quarrel

★★★★★

Jennifer Northway, Hippo, 32pp, 0 590 11122 1, £4.99 pbk



Alice stuck her tongue out at Lucy, so Lucy stuck her tongue out at Alice.  
"You're not my best friend any more," shouted Lucy.  
"And I don't want you to come to my party, so there!"

When Lucy (a small black girl) gets a bit bossy and big headed about her imminent birthday party, her best friend and cousin Alice (a small white girl) reacts with acerbity. Tongues are pulled and the friendship is left in tatters. As the party approaches, Lucy's realisation that life is not as much fun without Alice intensifies, but with all the bloody minded defiance of a nursery aged child, she steadfastly resists sustained adult attempts to encourage her to mend the rift.

The latest Lucy and Alice story is told through plain prose and lively dialogue, clearly printed against colourful, realistic paintings of the everyday lives of the two children. There are touches of humour and of real sadness as the quarrel persists, and the story is told so well that younger readers and listeners will experience genuine uncertainty as to

whether or not it will all end in tears. Very highly recommended for beginner readers and for reading aloud. GH

## Lost Property

★★★★

Bruce Ingman, Mammoth, 32pp, 0 7497 3531 7, £4.99 pbk

What happens to all those small things that you can never find when you need them: the towel, when you come out of the shower; the ticket for the dry cleaners; the umbrella when it is raining? Ingman invites his readers to discover who is responsible for these mysterious disappearances in one particular family.



This is a book that is as nostalgic as the Ahlbergs' Peepo! The clothes, the furniture, and the family snapshots (in black and white) suggest a world of thirty or forty years ago. And so does the style of the illustrations, using bold blocks of colour, ink line drawing, wax crayon, and occasional collage, so that there are echoes of Bemelmans and early Wildsmith. It is an artistic approach that is unusual nowadays, when picture books are often dominated by graphic design and pictorial narrative. Yet the careful composition of each page fits the episodic nature of the story, the characterisation is simple but deft, and there is a great deal for three- to seven-year-olds to enjoy in the images themselves and in Ingman's use of colour, texture, shape and space. CB

## A Night on the Tiles

★★★★

Bruce Ingman, Methuen, 32pp, 0 416 19416 8, £9.99 hbk

In this follow up to the Mother Goose award winning *When Martha's Away*, Ingman lets us into the details of the secret nocturnal life of Lionel the cat.

And a very full and colourful life it is. The ginger tom spends most of his owner's sleeping hours working on fashion design, scooter maintenance and tree house architecture at a feline night school; he dines in a canteen run by a French chef; he takes his girlfriend to a cafe or a movie or to watch poodles, dachshunds and dalmatians competing at the dog racing. Then he wends his way home by scooter. This big, bright picture book depicts Lionel's surrealistic adventures in a suitably phantasmagoric manner. Broad washes of crepuscular colour are illuminated by Lionel's orange fur and the custardy yellow of night lights. Shadowy characters are half



sketched into the margins. The paintwork is fashionably embellished with startling patches of photomontage. The storyline is very slight, but the overall effect is entertainingly mysterious. Cat lovers should savour this one. GH

## A Dog's Life

★★

Sara Fanelli, Heinemann, 32pp, 0 434 80364 2, £9.99 hbk novelty

This book arrives with its own fold out legs and head, a tail that wags, and a bone on a string. Inside, you will find 26 anarchically adorned pages devoted to scrawly captions and ragamuffin illustrations about dogs: sketches of different species' ears and tails, a bit of canine history, some sayings about dogs, a few jokey pictures of dogs of the world. The graphics present themselves as a deliberately slapdash, slash and patch bricolage, using scraps of mongrel text to assemble schematic pictures of dogs and doggy paraphernalia. I found it as physically unappealing as a slobbering rotti, but perhaps I was missing the point. Dog enthusiasts might be more sympathetic towards this stray mutt of a book. GH

## Bad Habits!

★★★★

Babette Cole, Hamish Hamilton, 32pp, 0 241 13979 1, £10.99 hbk

The central character of this cautionary tale is Lucretzia, an uncivilised little monster. Her disgusting habits include burping, farting and swearing, and she kicks and screams if she cannot get her own way. Her father, a mad scientist, invents a range of anti-Lucretzia devices which work efficiently for a while, but upon their removal, Lucretzia is wilder than ever. A cure is eventually perpetrated with help from a few friends, and the uncivilised little monster becomes a civilized little angel! Cole's exuberant cartoon style illustrations and in your face story will either delight or appal, according to taste. GB

## Arthur's Computer Disaster

★★

Marc Brown, Red Fox, 32pp, 0 09 926577 X, £2.50 pbk

One of many run of the mill TV cartoon tie-in picture books about Arthur and his crazy sister D.W., their family and friends.

Arthur is forbidden to touch his

Mom's computer (note the American spelling). The temptation is, however, too much for the young bear who is addicted to computer games. When mom is called to the office, Arthur and his friend, Buster, begin a quick game of Deep, Dark Sea only for the computer keyboard to be knocked to the floor. Unable to repair the damaged computer, Arthur fears big trouble when his mother returns. However, she 'jiggles' a switch and everything is normal again – except that Arthur is banned from the computer for a week for his disobedience.

The colour spreads and single page illustrations are somewhat dated and dull – rather like the story. AK

## Poems about you and me

POETRY

★★★★

Compiled by Brian Moses, artwork by Michaela Blunden, Wayland, 32pp, 0 7502 2384 7, £4.99 pbk

Twenty-one poems looking at aspects of interpersonal relationships which might be used as starting points for exploration of such issues as loss, name-calling, insiders/outside and co-operation. The quality of the poems, form, length and tone are varied and the illustrations a mixture of photography and airbrush techniques, sometimes both being used effectively in one spread. The picture book format may facilitate small group discussion of particular poems and there is a double page spread suggesting possibilities for shared and individual writing and reading together with a brief outline of a further half dozen related titles. If you are looking to use the book with a whole class then you will need to rely on the verbal images impacting aurally; the print is not big enough to be read from a distance. JB

## The Secret Weapon

★★★★

Nicci Crowther, ill. Tony Blundell, Macdonald, 48pp, 0 7500 2562 X, £4.50 pbk

Leo, Billy, Zoë, Tony and Rani love playing football in the park on Sunday mornings. They are not very good but they have a lot of fun. When they are challenged to a match, the friends decide that they need a secret weapon and Billy suggests his cousin, Jason, who is very good at football. However, Jason shouts at everyone and wants the ball all the time. The day of the match arrives and when Jason is carried off in the second half, the team realize that they can play perfectly well without him.

Young readers who like football will enjoy this lively story which is well integrated with amusing illustrations that are full of character. It will appeal to both sexes because the football team includes both boys and girls. It is also a story about friendship and team spirit, showing how important it is to play as part of a team and not just as an individual. AR

## The Pony Picnic

★★★★

Christine Pullein-Thompson, ill. Gilly Marklew, Macdonald, 48pp, 0 7500 2560 3, £4.50 pbk

Sophy is really excited about the pony picnic. Before the trip she

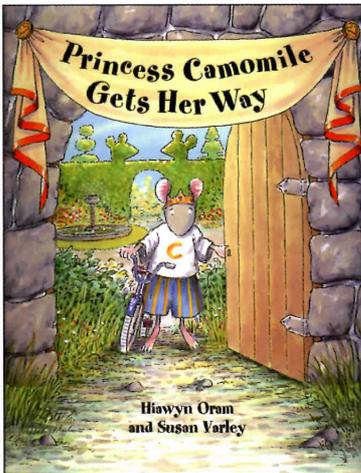
prepares by putting lots of useful things in her rucksack. She hopes to ride her favourite pony, Mousie, but when she arrives at the stables, Mousie is not there. However, on the trip, Sophy's rucksack comes in very handy - she has a carrot to catch Claire's horse, Honey Bee, some antiseptic to put on Sam's arm when she is stung and a map to help find the way home when they get lost.

This rather stilted but agreeable story is full of detail about what goes on at a riding stable and it will certainly appeal to young horse lovers. Through the rivalry between Sophy and Claire, it also looks at friendships. The pencil and full colour illustrations are of varying quality. AR

### Princess Camomile Gets Her Way

★★★★

Hiawyn Oram, ill. Susan Varley, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 836 X, £9.99 hbk



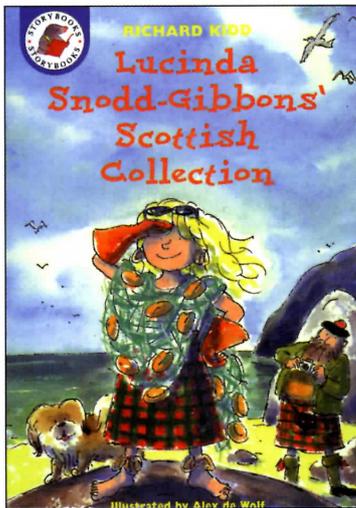
Camomile is fed up with being a Princess and therefore 'Not-Allowed' to do all kinds of things. Giving Nanny the slip one morning, Camomile escapes the castle confines. In Bad Cat's shop, she explains she cannot pay for her sweets as, being a princess, she is not allowed to handle money. The Bad Cat's greasy purr becomes greasier as he bags her, and hatches his plot to send the King a ransom note. The reader then discovers the advantages of being literate because Bad Cat is obliged to dictate his ransom note to Camomile who writes quite a different version. Oram and Varley have worked together on other fine titles (eg *Badger's Bad Mood*) and once again they have created an original story with witty, well paced illustrations. GB

### Lucinda Snodd-Gibbon's Scottish Collection

★★★★

Richard Kidd, ill. Alex de Wolf, Macdonald, 48pp, 0 7500 2499 2, £4.50 pbk

Lucinda Snodd-Gibbon, the daughter of world famous fashion designers, is sent to stay with her Uncle Angus on the Isle of Snodd for the summer whilst her anxious parents try to think up some designs for their new collection. Lucinda is not keen on visiting Uncle Angus, but she has a great time, checking lobster pots, gathering the sheep off the



mountain, beachcombing, and enjoying her uncle's delicious meals. During the summer, Lucinda's parents have been unable to think of any new designs, but when they come to collect her, Lucinda has some ideas to give them.

This humorous story manages to give a very entertaining view of the fashion industry and life on a Scottish island and both text and the witty illustrations subtly convey other changes in the relationship between Lucinda and Uncle Angus. The text is divided into easy to read chapters. Shame about the typographical errors on the jacket. AR

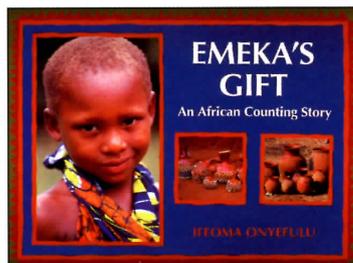
### Khumalo's Blanket

★★★★

Iain Macdonald, ill. Rian Nest James, Macdonald, 48pp, 0 7500 0888 1, £4.50 pbk

Khumalo desperately wants a beautiful new blanket he has seen in the market. Its weaver wants a jar of wild forest honey in exchange. So Khumalo sets out to find it with the honeybird's help but, in his excitement, he forgets to thank the honeybird and give it some honey as a reward. When there is a drought, the people say this is because the water spirit is angry but Khumalo believes it is because he forgot to thank the honeybird. Can he make amends?

This is an unusual story with a simple message about the importance of 'a kind heart'. There are colourful descriptions of different African landscapes and animals augmented by expressive illustrations in colour and black and white. AR



### Emeka's Gift

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Ifeoma Onyefulu, Frances Lincoln, 24pp, 0 7112 1255 4, £4.99 pbk

Now out in paperback, *Emeka's Gift* is a much praised counting book in the

## Editor's Choice

### Hansel and Gretel

Henrietta Branford, ill. Lesley Harker, 48pp, 0 590 54383 0

### The Goose Girl

Gillian Cross, ill. Jason Cockcroft, 64pp, 0 590 54384 9

### Grey Wolf, Prince Jack and the Firebird

Alan Garner, ill. James Mayhew, 48pp, 0 590 54389 X

### The Three Heads in the Well

Susan Gates, ill. Sue Heap, 48pp, 0 590 54387 3

### The Six Swan Brothers

Adèle Geras, ill. Ian Beck, 48pp, 0 590 54388 1

### The Snow Queen

Berlie Doherty, ill. Siân Bailey, 48pp, 0 590 54385 7

### The Seal Hunter

Tony Mitton, ill. Nick Maland, 48pp, 0 590 54390 3

### Cockadoodle-doo, Mr Sultana!

Michael Morpurgo, ill. Michael Foreman, 48pp, 0 590 54391 1

### Mossycoat

Philip Pullman, ill. Peter Bailey, 64pp, 0 590 54392 X

### Rumpelstiltskin

Kit Wright, ill. Ted Dewan, 64pp, 0 590 11364 X

### Rapunzel

Jacqueline Wilson, ill. Nick Sharratt, 64pp, 0 590 11363 1

### The Twelve Dancing Princesses

Anne Fine, ill. Debi Gliori, 64pp, 0 590 54386 5

### Aesop's Fables

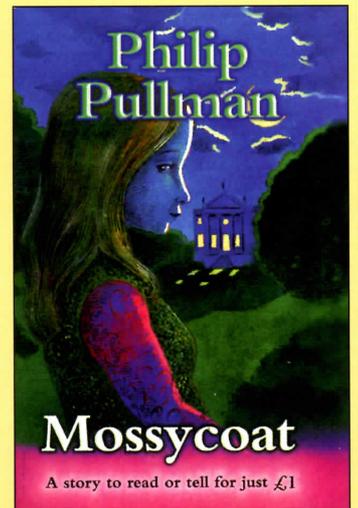
Malorie Blackman, ill. Patrice Aggs, 64pp, 0 590 54382 2

★★★★★

Scholastic 'Magic Bean' series, £1 each pbk

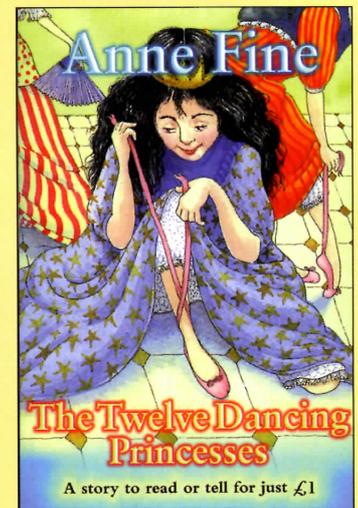
Almost all the distinguished retellers (contemporary writers or poets to a person) do more than justice to their respective story in this new series of traditional tales. Garner's *Grey Wolf*,

form of a delightful story of a child's efforts to take his grandmother a present. It is a book which children up to about eight would enjoy both in and out of school.



Prince Jack and the Firebird, Cross's *The Goose Girl*, Fine's *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* and Doherty's *The Snow Queen* amongst others combine simplicity with taut and gripping narratives that will have young readers or listeners on the edge of their seat.

Wilson's *Rapunzel* fits uneasily into this company with such infelicities as 'the husband and wife steered well clear of their neighbour' and 'by the time she got to eleven it was obvious (*Rapunzel*) was growing into a stunning beauty'. Such clichéd modernity strikes a jarring note. Mitton's selkie story, *The Seal Hunter*, is told in verse and just about carries it off; it will read aloud better than it reads on the page.



One might have hoped for some acknowledgement of Andersen and the other sources for the tales in these books. The spines are blank and while it is difficult to print a title onto the spine of a 48pp paperback, booksellers may find this an irritation. These are, however, cavils. The books are attractively illustrated with decorative borders and vignettes and the typeface is large. Above all, thirteen traditional tales at a £1 each is amazing value given the overall high standard of retelling from authors skilled at their craft. An eminently collectable series and a bold publishing venture. RS

Like Onyefulu's other picture books (eg *A is for Africa*), *Emeka's Gift* provides a window into a particular culture, in this case that of the Igala tribe in rural Nigeria. Grandmothers

are important in African families, often taking a central role in caring for the children. Therefore we are not surprised at the nature of the gift Emeka's grandmother values most.

The presentation of the book is impeccable – the numbers are bold and clear and the annotations to the vivid, sunny photographs are lively and informative. Young readers learn about the games, cooking utensils, necklaces, musical instruments and

food of this part of Africa. But it is the people – the young women cheerfully carrying their goods to market, the young man carving pestles and mortars for grinding up food and the children at the grandmother's house

waiting for Emeka to join their games – who shine out most brightly from the pages. This life enhancing book would make a lovely gift or an attractive and useful addition to the Key Stage 1 collection. **MM**

## REVIEWS 8–10 Junior/Middle

### The Frog Prince (or Iron Henry)

★★★★★

Brothers Grimm, trans. Naomi Lewis, ill. Binette Schroeder, North-South, 32pp, 1 55858 997 X, £5.50 pbk



This picture book version of the well-known classic has startlingly atmospheric illustrations. As the story unfolds the reader's attention is caught by the theatrically arresting pictures, and each spread demands focus on detail. It opens, 'Once, in olden times, when wishes still had power, there lived a king.' The text is cleverly superimposed upon the illustrations. On one particularly dramatic page, the text is in an inverted triangle, seemingly a shaft of sunlight into the 'great dark forest' illustration. Iron Henry, of the alternative title, appears in the final pages, with three iron bands around his heart.

*'Sire, 'tis a ring that bound  
My heart when it was aching.  
But now my lord is freed and back,  
Joy has made the iron crack.'*

This is a book to ponder over, to savour richness in words as well as drama in illustration. **GB**

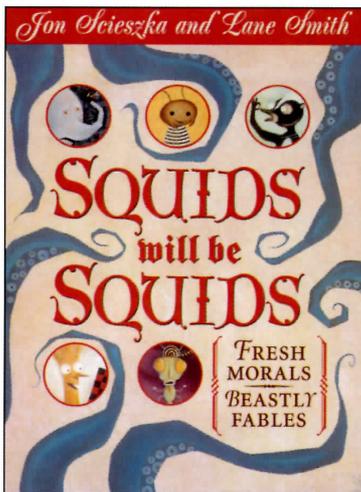
### Squids will be Squids

★★★★

Jon Scieszka, ill. Lane Smith, Viking, 48pp, 0 670 88227 5, £12.99 hbk

The team that brought you *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs!* and *The Stinky Cheese Man* now offer a reworking of Aesop – 'Fresh Morals, Beastly Fables'. The definition of 'beasts' is wide. Aesop would have thought more than twice about including 'Piece of Toast and Froot Loops' and 'Duckbilled Platypus vs. BeefSnakStik'. As in the previous titles, the whole book plays with its theme: in this case, of animals representing the less appealing behaviour of humans. The dust jacket is part of the entertainment, with thumbnail biographies of Eagle Scieszka and Lion Smith. This book is suitable for 'Ages 49-630 (in dog years)' – but probably best for 70-98.

For the most part, the fables draw on the stuff of urban childhood and adolescence, relationships with parents and friends. Every fable ends with a 'moral': although these are more often quips and punch lines.



But do not be misled, although Scieszka is cool and streetwise, this is, in the spirit of Aesop, a tongue in

cheek guide to manners. Three fables about elephants make up a running joke whose underlying message is the need to call home if you are going to be late (or stay out all night). Scieszka's sharp observations are perfectly matched by the weird shapes and colours of Smith's imagination. As in previous titles, text, design (by Molly Leach) and illustration all work together to create a consistently off centre world, where the joke is in how far the idea of the fable can be pulled out of shape and still emerge reasonably intact: see, for instance, why Straw should not play with Matches; or what happened when Rock, Paper and Scissors were partners on an end-of-year Science project. The book is perhaps not as readily accessible as its predecessors. But those who already know Scieszka and Smith will not be disappointed. **CB**

### Journeys through Dreamtime: Stories from the World's Religions

★★★

Anita Ganeri, ill. Jackie Morris, Macdonald, 64pp, 0 7500 2506 9, £12.99 hbk

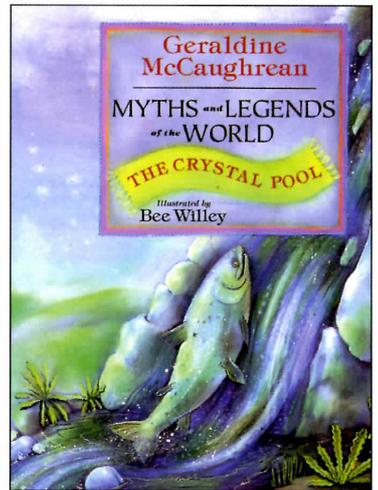
There are twenty-four tales in this collection organized under the headings of 'Gods and Heroes', 'Saints, Angels and Immortals', 'Sacred Places, Sacred Ways', 'Natural Wonders', 'Sacred Days'. The major world faiths are represented, as are African, Aboriginal, Norse and Malaysian religions and mythologies. This results in a mixture which works well on the level of presenting the reader with a range of tales from many cultures and religions and would make it useful in a situation where such an anthology is required to support a multi-faith curriculum. On the other hand, despite very determined efforts to provide an organized presentation with section titles, a glossary and an index, the overall effect is that a great deal of religious and cultural richness has been squashed into too small a space.

The stories are told in straightforward language, and are between one and four pages long. The essence of each story is well-caught in the striking illustrations which are disposed on the pages in a varied and lively way. Visually this is a very attractive book and a considerable amount of thought has gone into its presentation. Perhaps it is carping to suggest that the title appropriates an important aspect of one religion (Aboriginal Dreamtime) and imposes it on others? **VC**

### The Crystal Pool: Myths and Legends of the World

★★★★★

Retold by Geraldine McCaughrean, ill. Bee Willey, Orion, 144pp, 1 85881 180 5, £14.99 hbk



'The sea was not always so big, glazing the globe blue, roaring in the ears of dry land. Believe it or not, the sea was once no more than a single secret saltwater spring where an old woman went to draw water for cooking: it made her vegetables taste good.'

Thus begins the title story of McCaughrean's fourth collection of myths and legends, and as with the earlier collections (*The Golden Hoard*, *The Silver Treasure* and *The Bronze Cauldron*), this harmonious combination of the poetic and the conversational provides a perfect vehicle for tales in which domestic life is constantly suffused with magic and mythology. The story of the Crystal Pool comes from Melanesia, and almost every other region of the world is encompassed by these 28 stories. There are two or three well known tales (*The Flying Dutchman*, *The Pied Piper*, *Isis and Osiris*) and a wealth of material that will provide fresh delights for your readers, and opportunities to draw thematic parallels with more familiar stories. All of the stories are compact and enthralling, and the reteller's skill with a richly embellished vernacular makes them ideal for reading aloud. The book is copiously illustrated with Willey's radiant and eventful paintings. **GH**

### Read Me: A Poem a Day for the National Year of Reading

POETRY

★★★★

Chosen by Gaby Morgan, Macmillan, 512pp, 0 333 75194 9, £12.99 hbk

A good idea, presented in an accessible format for older primary school children. The book has been put together to provide a resource for teachers to use in class as part of the Literacy Hour. It features poems for every season and occasion and there is one poem for every day of the year. The selection of poems is erratic – good in places, but disappointing in range. There are some new delights like Carol Ann Duffy's 'Chocs' and Debjani Chatterjee's 'My Sari' and it is

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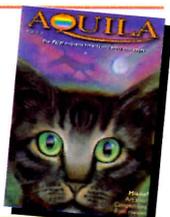


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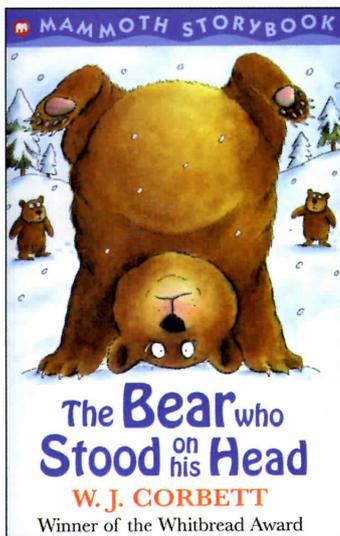


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good to see Sweeney and Stevenson, Farjeon and Fanthorpe in the same anthology but it is difficult to know exactly what the editor intended with the choice of poems. The collection has a solid foundation of traditional rhymes, classic poems and contemporary poetry but it does not build on this to provide the far-reaching selection it claims to be. Caribbean culture is represented but what about Africa, Japan, India, Native American? I could find only three dialect poems and two of these were by Robert Burns. The publicity accompanying the book says 'From Auden to Zephaniah', but I could not find a Benjamin Zephaniah poem in the book. Predictably, Macmillan poets are generously represented but why do most of these poets have four poems when people like Adrian Mitchell and Michael Rosen have only two? Where is Liz Lochhead, Sylvia Plath, William Carlos Williams? I know it is impossible to include everyone but this selection needs a wider range of cultures, forms and approaches to be truly representative of what poetry has to offer to our children and to the Literacy Hour. HT



their mother to let young Ben tag along with them.

Plenty for pupils to get their paws into. AK

**Loudmouth Louis**

★★★★

Anne Fine, ill. Kate Aldous, 80pp, Puffin, 0 14 130205 4, £3.99 pbk

Louis, who talks all the time, lights on the idea of a sponsored silence as his school fund-raising effort. The book is cleverly constructed so that Louis gradually realises the effect his chattering has had on his schoolmates, how much of interest he has missed through constantly making a noise, and how supportive his friends and teachers are of him.

Fine's customary light touch makes the point well, in short, infectiously funny chapters, complemented by Aldous's conventional, almost old-fashioned illustrations – it is a pity that the cover, by Claire Douglass, is so unattractive.

Highly recommended for 8s to 11s – I'm looking forward to my own resident Loudmouth being old enough to read it! AG

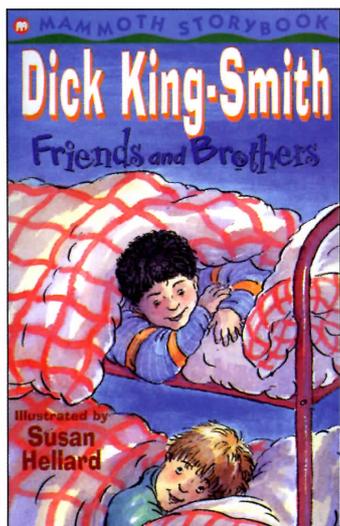
**The Bear who Stood on his Head**

★★★★

W J Corbett, ill. Martin Ursell, Mammoth, 80pp, 0 7497 0032 7, £3.99 pbk

Inside a cave in the Canadian wilderness, live a family of grizzly bears. Each season, Elspeth and Archibald enjoy escaping from their mother to go adventuring. Their roly poly lovable younger brother, Ben, always wants to accompany them but this inevitably leads to disaster. With near drownings, multiple bee stings and a bolt of lightning, Ben attracts trouble wherever he goes. However, if it is suggested that Ben stays at home, he gets upset and when that happens, Ben stands on his head weeping tears into his ears.

The richness of the language for middle juniors makes this book a useful literacy resource. More importantly, it is a very enjoyable book. The dramatic style of Ursell's illustrations brings to life a truly warm and comforting story. Long suffering older brothers and sisters will relate to Elspeth and Archibald, who time and again are persuaded by



This perceptive and pacy story of sibling rivalry and bonding is a refreshingly un sentimental treatment of a familiar topic, with all the right ingredients to engage junior children. Boys and girls instantly empathise with one or other of the central characters, William and his younger brother, Charlie, and are hooked from the opening lines:

*"You say that word just once more," said William to Charlie, "and I'll hit you".*

*Charlie said it.*

*William hit him.'*

The word in question is 'absolutely', which Charlie says all the time, although he does not know what it means. When Charlie has a nasty bicycle accident, however, it is William who comes to his aid.

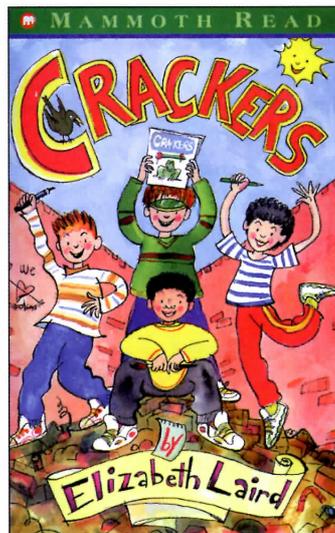
The occasional half page illustrations are competently drawn, but this book is so well written that they are hardly needed. Very entertaining and a real hit with my sample audience. First published in 1987. AK

**Crackers**

★★★★

Elizabeth Laird, ill. Angus McDowall and James Lightfoot, Mammoth, 128pp, 0 7497 0309 1, £3.99 pbk

Crackers is the entertaining story of a classroom circulation war. When Sandy and Rick's favourite comic, 'Champ', becomes temporarily difficult to obtain from the local newsagents, they start producing their own comic, 'Crackers', which proves to be an instant hit with everyone at school – everyone, that is, except Dudley Parker, the school bully, and his cronies. Dudley's gang set up a rival publication entitled 'Wot Larfs'. It is nowhere near as good but through a 'Free gift' promotions technique, its sales outstrip those of 'Crackers'. And so the press barons of Bridgend School battle it out to try to establish their supremacy.



This is a fast moving story which captures and maintains the reader's interest with consummate ease. It has a few cartoon illustrations depicting characters from the comics. I have been inundated by requests to borrow the book from children to whom I had read the first few chapters. Sorry kids, I wanted to finish it first. Definitely worth having in the school library. First published in 1989. AK

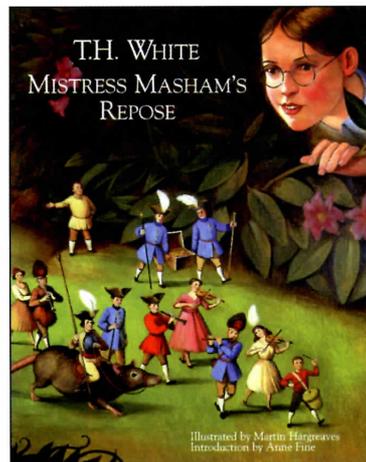
**Fruit and Nutcase**

★★★

Jean Ure, ill. Mick Brownfield, Collins, 160pp, 0 00 185639 1, £9.99 hbk

Fruit and Nutcase is the successor to *Skinny Melon and Me* and *Becky Bananas: This is Your Life*. Mandy Small is a ten-year-old with learning difficulties, whose teacher, Cat, suggests she tells her life story into a tape recorder.

Mandy's story is both funny and sad. With loving but irresponsible parents, Mandy's home life is certainly eventful. Her mum cannot get her act together in the mornings, her dad is a window-cleaning Elvis lookalike, whilst interfering Nan thinks Mandy's parents are not fit to look after her. School life is made miserable by teasing bully Tracey Bigg – a character carefully crafted to cause discomfort to some readers! With its touching storyline, empathetic central characters and occasional line drawings, this is an enjoyable read. AK



**Mistress Masham's Repose**

★★★★

T.H. White, ill. Martin Hargreaves, ACC Children's Classics, 160pp, 1 85149 700 5, £12.99 hbk

First published in 1947, *Mistress Masham's Repose* returns in this handsome edition, with superb colour illustrations. It is the story of ten-year-old Maria and her discovery, within the grounds of the dilapidated mansion where she lives, of Lilliput in Exile – a community of the descendants of the little people visited by Gulliver in Swift's satire. From the friendship developing from this encounter White constructs a narrative in which Maria helps the Lilliputians maintain their independence in the face of threats from her repellent governess and guardian. While many adults will respond to White's orotund style and his width of erudite allusion, fewer children will find the book accessible; a pity, for it has undeniable charm and will never look more attractive than it does here. RD

**What Happens to Your Food?**

**NON-FICTION BIG BOOK**

★★★★★

Alastair Smith, ill. Maria Wheatley, Usborne 'Flip Flaps', 16pp, 0 7460 3490 3, £14.99 pbk novelty

This book does not gloss over the realities of eating and excreting and is therefore not for the squeamish. It offers a thorough and clear explanation of each stage of the digestive process for children from about seven upwards. You could read it to the whole class but I think it might be best read to a group or by children themselves in pairs. Do not read it just before you intend to enjoy a meal!

The bold, often witty illustrations link perfectly with the text. Included are just the sorts of specific information children like. For example, the book shows a large elongated balloon and explains that an adult's stomach, when empty, is about this size. Actually the metaphor of stomach as balloon is most apt as stomachs expand and contract swiftly to receive and dispose of food with the flexibility of a balloon. Two other helpful images are of food being nudged along the food tube from mouth to anus rather like toothpaste being squeezed out of a tube and the large intestine working like a sieve,

'sucking water out of the sloppy food through the sides'. We are told about germs in food that has gone bad and about the different foods we need to stay healthy. This is done with a light touch. I just wonder why the terms carbohydrates, protein and so on were not used. This, though, is a tiny quibble about such an excellent book.

The flaps are powerful. Some show beautifully clear, labelled cross sections – for example of the tongue, windpipe and food tube. No doubt children will giggle a bit at what the very last flap, a bathroom door, reveals. **MM**

### Think About Having a Learning Disability

Margaret and Peter Flynn, 1 85561 807 9



### Think About Being in a Wheelchair

Lois Keith, 1 85561 806 0

### Think About Being Blind

Peter White, 1 85561 796 X

### Think About Being Deaf

Maggie Woolley, 1 85561 797 8

**NON-FICTION** ★★★★★

Belitha Press, 32pp each, £8.99 each hbk

The viewpoint in this series is

important because each of the authors suffers from the disability discussed. Peter Flynn has a learning disability and shares authorship with his sister Margaret; Lois Keith uses a wheelchair; Peter White is blind and Maggie Woolley is deaf. Their involvement with disability gives them insight and understanding not often found in books about these sensitive subjects. The reader is invited to 'think about' what each disability means, the limitations it brings, and how each individual can be helped to fulfil his or her potential. We see how people in the past were treated (or mistreated) and we are shown people today participating in school, in sport, in careers and in leisure activities. Famous people are given as role models. Occasional 'Think About' boxes invite the reader to assess disability at a deeper level – for instance, to design a house for a wheelchair user. This impressive series provides positive information for upper primary/lower secondary children. **ES**



### Space Shuttle

**NON-FICTION** ★★★★★

Mark Bergin, Macdonald 'Fast Forward' series, 32pp, 0 7500 2583 2, £9.99 hbk novelty

This is an excellently straightforward and highly explanatory (and explanatory) look at the White Van of Space. Starting with the reasons for needing reusable space craft and going on to its construction, loading, propulsion and launching, we see the whole thing develop until lift off, then we discover what it does – and what the astronauts do while they are up

there before the hazardously hot business of re-entry.

Bergin has done both words and pictures and they are excellently integrated. Split-page and cutaway diagrams show us inside and outside easily (and economically) and the whole book is a fine example of logical composition – one set of facts leading to the next. This makes it not only a delight for the bright but accessible to the less able and it most definitely fills a gap in my understanding of the subject. **TP**

### Science School

**NON-FICTION** ★★★★★

Mick Manning and Brita Granström, Kingfisher, 48pp, 0 7534 0210 6, £9.99 hbk

Everyone knows what scientists do – they do experiments. These help them find out things they did not know before and so they tell everyone else about it – which is how we know what they do. This last bit,

communication of results, is vital to the scientific method and so it is utterly cheering that the primary requisite for entry onto Granström's science course is a notebook, for 'when (scientists) carry out an experiment they write down what they used, what they did and what happened'. A truly illuminating and entertaining series of experiments (I counted 44) follows in which scientific disciplines are as healthily mixed as in real life. We range from chocolate leaves through filtration, surface tension, air pressure, gravity, levers and gears, friction, optics and colour, music and sound to electricity and magnetism. Instructions are plain and unambiguous throughout and expected results are habitually gratifying and well worth reporting on. Science tips down the outer spread-margins provide amplification.

Safety is well considered – for instance in my favourite Ketchup volcano experiment the bottle from which the lava issues is buried neck-deep in a pile of sand thus rendering the eruption utterly harmless, relatively clean and much more volcanesque – add some custard to the mix and you get a dramatic bursting boil!

And of course the whole thing is brilliantly designed and illustrated, Granström doing the lead characters and the whole knit tightly together by Manning's technical bits, headlines and legends.

The appearance of a new work from these two friendly talents is invariably a joyful thing and here, with *Science School*, the good work is well and truly carried on. This is a fine book for juniors upward on their own (with a grown up within hailing distance) but could be real magic for younger ones and parent-persons to share together. **TP**



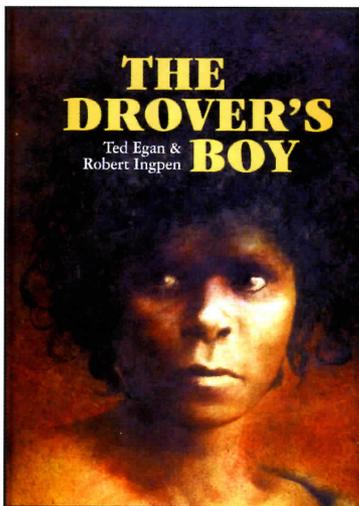
## REVIEWS 10-12 Middle/Secondary

### The Drover's Boy

★★★★★

Ted Egan, ill. Robert Ingpen, Lothian, 32pp, 0 85091 840 5, £9.99 hbk (available via Ragged Bears, tel: 01264 772269)

This powerful and unusual picture book ostensibly presents a song about an Australian drover mourning for the death of an Aboriginal employee killed by a bolting horse. The words of the song are printed against a vivid background of wilderness landscapes, haunting portraits and a patchwork of clipped documents related to the exploitation of Aborigines in the Australian cattle industry of the early 20th century. It is only in the last verses of the song that the real relationship of the drover and his 'boy' is hinted at. A fascinating historical endnote clarifies the story, and takes the reader back to the beginning of the book with renewed interest and sympathy. *The Drover's Boy* provides an excellent integration of history, narrative, illustration and



music (the score for the song is provided at the end). Singer/songwriter Ted Egan, who has worked for Aboriginal rights for many years, has dredged a truly memorable tale

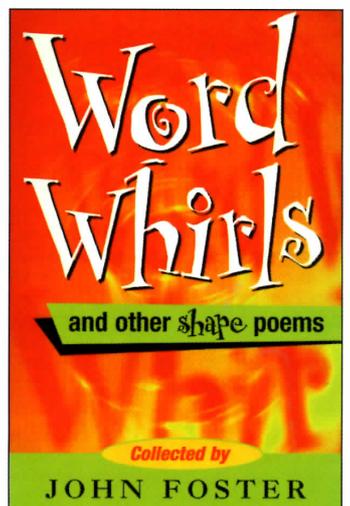
from one of the obliettes of our age, and Ingpen's illustrations provide an appropriately poignant and enigmatic accompaniment. **GH**

### Word Whirls and other shape poems

**POETRY** ★★★★★

Collected by John Foster, ill. Clare Hemstock, Oxford, 96pp, 0 19 276188 9, £4.99 pbk

Shape poems (poems which experiment with layout, the shape reflecting and enhancing the content of the poem) in small doses can be fun and sometimes thought provoking. They are also an excellent stimulus for writing. This lively and attractive anthology would be a welcome addition to any class poetry library or for the individual reader. There are some weak moments where the poems rely too much on typesetting and shape for meaning rather than a combination of words and image and it is a pity to have no poems by May Swenson or Edwin Morgan – two of the great shape



poem writers; but in general, a page-turner which might inspire writing and more poetry reading. **HT**

## A Boy Like That

Tony Langham, ill. Tracy Fennell,  
0 7136 4988 7

## Lovesick

Lynda Waterhouse, ill. John Kent,  
0 7136 4983 6

## Roy Kane TV Detective

Steve Bowkett, ill. Dave Burroughs,  
0 7136 4955 0

## Thirteen Candles

Mary Hooper, ill. Maureen Gray,  
0 7136 4984 4

★★★

A & C Black 'Graffix', 80pp, £3.99 each pbk

'It's a comic, It's a book, It's a Graffix!' blazes the slogan on each of the fourteen titles so far in this series that includes titles by the likes of Bernard Ashley, Mick Gowar and Michael Hardcastle. Teen readers with a jaded palate get a visually appealing, quick fix satisfier of a cream puff novel - a tightly plotted short, rapid-read, modern tale of five to seven chapters told through comic-style illustrations on every page, where the narrative is boxed and the dialogue speech-bubble wrapped.

One can imagine a bevy of addicted reluctant readers devouring the set as their reading diet and feeling well satisfied with what they have achieved. Maybe it might spur them on to more demanding material.

The love story, *A Boy Like That*, relates the conflict between Beth and her parents when a new, bad boy turns up at school and dad, who is a teacher there, uses his insider knowledge to dissuade his daughter from mixing with the wrong sort. Fortunately for the unlucky pair our Rafe proves not so bad after all. *Lovesick* is another love story. Here the horror of Tessa's personality conflict with her English teacher turns to nightmare when the self same cruel lady is none other than dad's new girlfriend 'Snugglepuss'. *Roy Kane TV Detective* is on the case of a missing gemstone and the vengeful illusionist, the 'Shadowman'. *Thirteen Candles* is a kind of horror tale, where Julia is troubled by a shadowy presence, which only she sees. Is it malicious or is it in fact protecting her? A family secret reveals its real identity. DB

## The Fear Not Angel

★★★★

Walter Wangerin Jr, Lion, 128pp,  
0 7459 4044 7, £10.99 hbk

This collection of six stories by an American author draws liberally on the oral tradition, though supplemented with literary infusions.

The stories are by and large modern fairy tales with the usual mixture of magic and make-believe. Some are suffused with religious and spiritual sentiment, expressed more explicitly than encountered in children's literature nowadays on this side of the Atlantic. (The author was for many years a Lutheran minister.) They set out to evoke a sense of wonder at the mystery and beauty of creation and invite reflection on the cycle of life, death and renewal in nature, and in human affairs the nature of being and reality.

The stories are however sufficiently grounded in a child's world to hold the attention of all but the most worldly of 8-12 year olds. The collection is in a sense genuinely American, featuring an African-American story ('The Fear Not Angel' which gives the collection its title and cover image), a couple of Native-American stories and the rest from mainstream America.

The metaphysical element elevates the book above the common-place and, with the approach of the new Millennium, may well find a ready market. EL

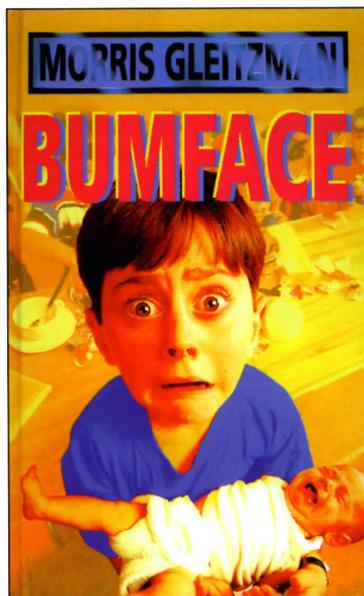
## Off the Road

★★★★★

Nina Bawden, Hamish Hamilton, 160pp,  
0 241 14023 4, £10.99 hbk

The year is 2040 and Tom's grandfather, Gandy, receives an official letter informing him that he has reached the age where he is to be installed in Nostalgia Block 95 where he will be 'looked after' for ever. Gandy, however, has other plans; he makes a daring break for the outside world. Afraid for his grandfather's safety, Tom follows him to find that life on the outside is not what he expected. Beyond the Wild Wood he is forced to confront the values and beliefs of his regulated urban existence on 'the inside'.

Bawden has written a compelling and convincing dystopian novel. Through the creation of two radically contrasting societies she explores concepts of age and youth; power and authority. But broad social and political issues are explored in the context of intimate family relationships so that the reader cares about the future of the characters whose world is but a stone's throw from our own. NG



## Bumface

★★★★★

Morris Gleitzman, Viking, 192pp,  
0 670 88337 9, £10.99 hbk

Angus is his actress mother's 'Mr Dependable', taking care of his younger brother and sister as she works her way through a succession of TV series and failed marriages. He dreams of being a pirate - the 'Bumface' of the title - roaming the high seas in search of adventure, absolved of adult responsibilities.

He meets 10-year-old Rindi, trapped in preparations for an arranged marriage in India, longing to remain in Australia and enjoy her childhood.

They scheme hilariously - and poignantly - to prevent both Rindi and Angus' mother marrying. Gleitzman's gift for burlesque is used to full effect - the opening pages of the book are startlingly funny - but a consideration of serious issues and their effects on ordinary lives runs insistently near the surface. VR

## Humanzee

★★★

Susan Gates, Oxford University Press,  
176pp, 0 19 271796 0, £5.99 pbk

A memorable opening and a strong story contend with a style of few gradations between the ordinary and the apoplectic and details and behaviour which resist credulity. The opening is wonderfully intriguing; the smokey, dark Victorian atmosphere of a flea circus is suddenly revealed, in the ringing of a mobile phone, to be just an act. But out of this background of the circus freak show comes the Humanzee, the missing link between human and chimpanzee. In rescuing him, Nemo and his family face the anger of a group dedicated to their beliefs in biblical creation. In underground caves, Nemo also discovers the missing link between dinosaurs and

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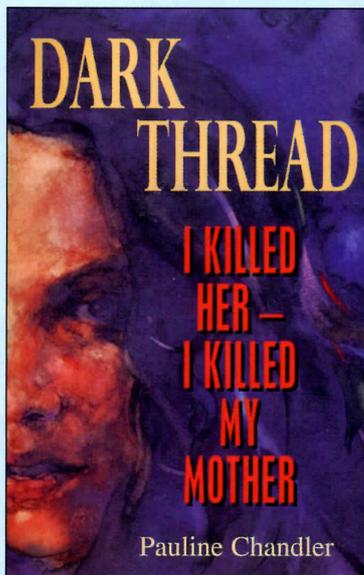
To order: Biblios Distribution Services  
Tel: 01403 710 971 Fax: 01403 711 143

**NEW Talent****Dark Thread**

★★★★

Pauline Chandler, Oxford University Press, 96pp, 0 19 271761 8, £5.99 pbk

Kate and her mother are artisan weavers with a workshop in a renovated mill. When her mother is killed in a road accident, Kate thinks she is responsible – after all, they had just been arguing and Kate had started it. The mill seems full of ghosts and Kate is drawn back into the past and the lives of the children who once worked there. It is a place that is full of dangers but it offers an opportunity for reparation to be made as Kate saves little Tabby from drowning. Weaving is a powerful metaphor for continuity, for links between past and present and for reconstruction as the work of the artist and sculptor Louise Bourgeois has demonstrated. Chandler's novel also focuses on the theme of mother and daughter and the most powerful sections of this rather unevenly written novel are those which deal with the processes of weaving work in which these tensions can be worked upon and in some ways resolved.



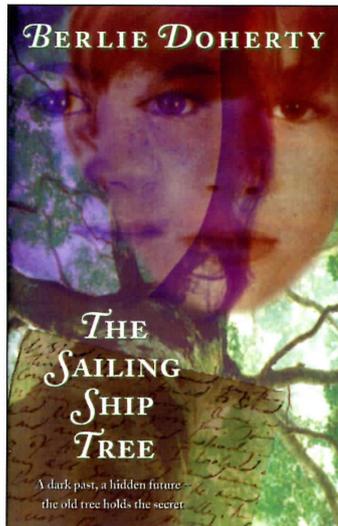
Although the passage from present to past in the novel is abrupt, Chandler has an acute ear for dialogue and a great ability to evoke the past, effortlessly incorporating the detail of daily domestic and mill drudgeries. Overall, a convincing debut. RS

birds before the creationists attempt to kill him and the humanzee. Amidst the hokum there are some thoughtful ideas and some skilful plotting. AJ

**The Sailing Ship Tree**

★★★★★

Berlie Doherty, Hamish Hamilton, 208pp, 0 241 13615 6, £10.99 hbk



This beautifully crafted, elegiac novel operates equally successfully on two levels – as a work of fiction and as a social document. Set in Lancashire in the years preceding World War One, it moves between the Big House and the cottage in the grounds, linking the destinies of Master George from the former and the Hollins twins, Dorothy and Walter, from the latter. Doherty's wonderfully assured grasp of the ethos of both worlds and her remarkable vision of childhood as a period in which apparently rigid class distinctions can be transcended combine to create a totally engaging story, which tellingly charts a move from separation to integration. Highly recommended! RD

**Dolphin Luck**

★★★

Hilary McKay, Hodder, 256pp, 0 340 71659 2, £10.99 hbk

*Dolphin Luck* is a piece of pure escapism and moves at a pace fast enough to leave the reader without time to wonder at some of the bizarre events which occur in the seemingly rather ordinary Robinson family. When their mother falls ill and both parents have to go away on a sunshine holiday in the depths of winter, Beany and Sun Dance stay with next door neighbour Mrs

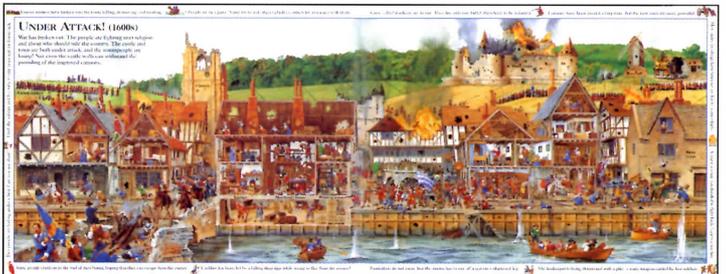
Brogan. Meanwhile their two older siblings are despatched to Yorkshire to stay with their unconventional Aunt Mabel, who turns out to be even more eccentric than anyone in the family realised. But is she really Mad Aunt Mabel? And what are Ant and Perry to do with her collection of animals, not to mention the parrot, when she unexpectedly vanishes? At home Sun Dance is sure a burglar will be unable to resist the allure of the Robinsons' empty house and is determined to catch him (or her), and Beany endeavours to track down the Viking dolphin sword which has the power to grant wishes. All ends happily for the members of the engaging family Robinson in the third book in a series about their antics and exploits. VC

**A Street Through Time**

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Dr Anne Millard, ill. Steve Noon, Dorling Kindersley, 32pp, 0 7513 5535 6, £12.99 hbk

I just love this sort of book where the reader can trace the development of a place – in this case a street along a river-bank from 10,000 BC to the



present day. Initially, though, I was a little disappointed with this particular example with its busy drawings, cut-away pictures and copious annotation but it has grown on me the more I have looked at it. The landscape format is right for the linear nature of the street and the book opens nicely and sits well on a table for detailed study and is certainly big enough for two or three readers to look at and talk about together. Everyone will find their own favorite 'themes' to follow through the pages – I particularly liked the castle from Iron Age fort to its present status as a tourist attraction and the fact that the inn/pub has stood on the same site since the 1200s (not too happy with its present status as a trendy wine-bar though). The Roman pages remind you once again what an amazing civilization it was. SR

**Stand Up for Your Rights**

★★★

Two-Can, 96pp, 1 85434 631 8, £12.99 hbk, 1 85434 573 7, £7.99 pbk

Published to mark the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, this title has all the strengths and weaknesses you would expect for a book written and illustrated by young people from all over the world and edited by committee (or in this case two editorial committees and a Design and Illustration team).

Wonderfully comprehensive in its treatment, the book takes each article of the Declaration, explains it simply and then illustrates through case study, poems and pictures how these rights are abused or ignored around the world. Plenty of information, then, although the artwork, gathered from around the world, varies in quality.

A very handy book to support PSHE work on Human Rights but children will need to be directed to it – it is not one to just put on the shelves and hope it will go. SR

**Vicious Veg**

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Nick Arnold, ill. Tony De Saullles, Scholastic 'Horrible Science', 160pp, 0 590 19811 4, £3.99 pbk

Here we go again. By leading with picturesquely 'horrible' facts about plants, Arnold gradually introduces us to what it is to be one and to the place of the plant in the planet. So – plants eat horrible things like cow muck and dead flies, do horrible things like smell dreadful and poison people, compete viciously with each other for light, space and food, die and turn into coal and compost, and when you eat them, as the whole planet does, one way or another, they make you fart (but then doesn't everything?). There can be many more horrible fates for a tree than to end up as this frolicsome folio, for as the text concludes with its dying breath, 'Where would we be without plants?' My dad was right when he said 'All that meat and no potatoes makes Jack a dull boy.' He would have enjoyed this one. I did. TP

**REVIEWS 12+ Secondary****Two Barks**

POETRY ★★★★★

Julie O'Callaghan, ill. Martin Fish, Bloodaxe, 64pp, 1 85224 427 5, £6.95 pbk

A collection of poems for 11-year-olds upwards without an alien or demon headmaster in sight – wonderful! These poems are for real people who think and worry, have fun, quirky ideas and daydreams.

O'Callaghan has the knack of climbing into your head and writing poems which reflect the myriad of thoughts a teenager goes through in any one day. What do you think about when you look into a glass of orange juice? Have you ever wondered where your life is going and followed it quietly down the street? How do you get hair with Zing? There is also a riveting stream of consciousness poem about waiting at home alone. This book is for all those who did not

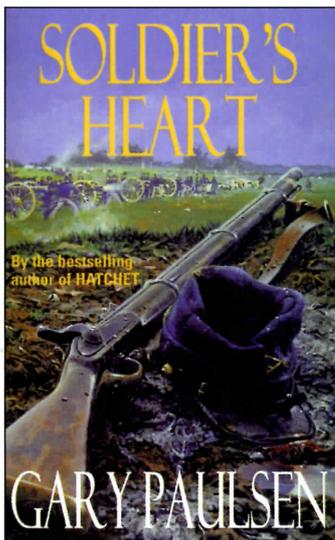
want to go to the young people's concert or the children's art exhibit, when... All you want to do/ is sit in the kitchen/ twirling spaghetti/ onto a fork/ and after that/ to stop at the window/ as if watching for snow.' HT

**Soldier's Heart**

★★★★

Gary Paulsen, Macmillan, 128pp, 0 330 37076 6, £3.99 pbk

Fifteen-year-old Charley volunteers to fight in the American Civil war looking for excitement and adventure and learns, very quickly, the physical horrors and awfulness. The story is short and Paulsen tells it starkly and sharply mostly as a series of snapshots, vivid moments of going into battle, of hunger and of waiting where the writing has the fine detail of things seen and heard and felt. History comes to life in the actuality of Charley's life and this war, despite



its time, seems very modern – the human perception does not seem to change. The Author's Note at the end linking it back to a real life makes the story more poignant and deepens the sense of history and story in tandem. AJ

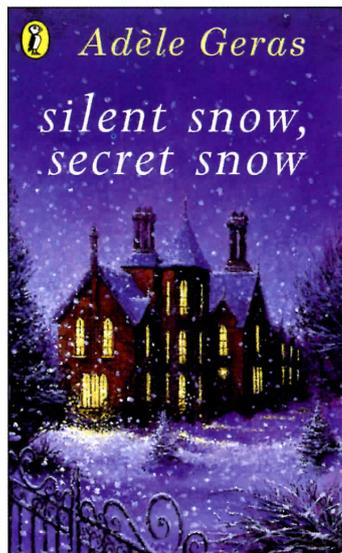
**silent snow, secret snow**

★★★★

Adèle Geras, Puffin, 160pp, 0 14 038564 9, £4.99 pbk

The family come together to spend Christmas at grandmother's house and prepare to enact again the family rituals of past years. Against this background of the well-known and

well-loved continuities of the past, each character brings their own secret from the world of change and uncertainty. With the snow falling, roads closed and telephone lines down, the scene is set. The ingredients are grand: the characters extend from baby to aged maestro and the secrets include teenage loves, homosexuality, divorce, wedding, abortion, possible cancer and the death of a well-loved pet. It may seem too much but all is skilfully interwoven, all has its place. The stories and revelations develop in a carefully stage-managed drama of relationships, of losses and gains, which is moving, thought-provoking, wise and fun to read. AJ



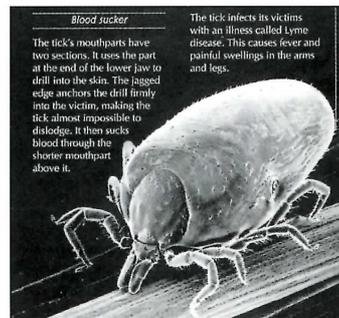
**The Usborne Complete Book of the Microscope**

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Kirsteen Rogers, ill. Kim Lane, Gary Bines and Peter Bull, Usborne, 96pp, 0 7460 3107 6, £12.99 hbk, 0 7460 3106 8, £9.99 pbk

For me the big thing about microscopes is the way that by magnifying the structures of familiar things they explain how those things are good at what they are good at. Barbs on a feather, the hooks and loops of Velcro and the matted fibres of newsprint, when seen under highpower, not only fascinate for their own sake but add so much more to our understanding of everyday things. And that is what this book does best – it provides lots of 'Wonder-Book' style close-ups for amazement and enlightenment.

Many of these close-ups come from the electron microscope – not something found in every home – so this is more than 'fun projects for your microscope' although this latter element is present too and the book should act as a powerful stimulus to micro-possessors. We also find out about the microscope as a tool in industry, forensics and medicine and learn something of its early development. This historical bit is put, rather puzzlingly, towards the end so it is not till we have thrilled to the mouthparts of the sheep tick (our dog loves that page!) and nanotechnological marvels that Hooke and van Leeuwenhoek – the granddaddies of it all – get a mention.



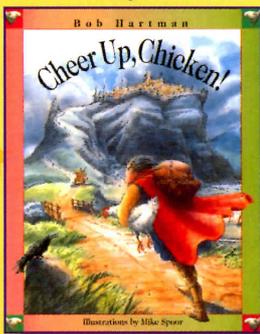
And full marks for the observation that a good quality low power instrument will always give better results than a cut-price magnum. This great introduction to microscopy is worth its price for the pictures alone, but provides much else useful as well. TP

*Picture books reviewed this issue relevant to older readers*

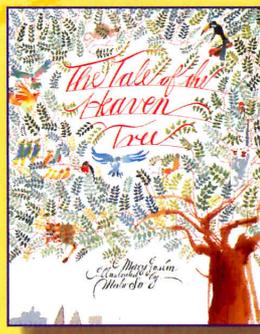
- Lost Property (see p20)
- A Night on the Tiles (see p20)
- A Dog's Life (see p20)
- The Frog Prince (see p22)
- Squids will be Squids (see p22)
- Space Shuttle (see p24)

**Beautiful and thoughtful picture books**

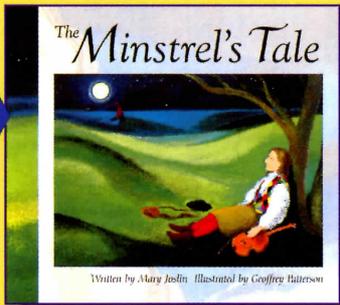
Bob Hartman's zany fable **Cheer Up Chicken**, now in paperback May, £4.99



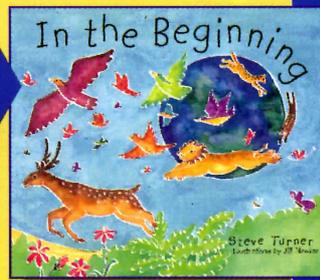
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# CLASSICS IN SHORT No.14

Brian Alderson

*Is it a bird? Is it a plane? Ain't it absurd; ain't it a pain?  
No! It's not Superman but ...*



## Author

James Matthew Barrie (b. Kirriemuir 1860, d. London 1937; created baronet 1913, OM 1922); founder/captain of the Allahakbarries cricket team, novelist etc. but not otherwise implicated in children's literature.

## Genre

A multivalent dreamscape.

## Evolution

**1902 The Little White Bird:** a fragmented novel, whose chapters 13-18 are later published separately (see below).

**1903 Peter Pan:** a kind of scripted pantomime first produced at the Duke of York's Theatre, but no text then published.

**1906 Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens:** separate publication of the **White Bird** chapters, garnished with illustrations by Arthur Rackham. A *succès d'estime*.

**1906 The Peter Pan Keepsake:** a prose version of the play edited by Daniel O'Connor 'with Mr Barrie's kind assent, to enable children to revive their memories' of the story. A slightly amended version appeared in 1907 as **The Peter Pan Picture Book** (illus. Alice B Woodward) and this text remained in print for over sixty years.

**1911 Peter and Wendy:** Barrie's own novelization of the play, including much material that also appears in its elaborate stage directions and explanations.

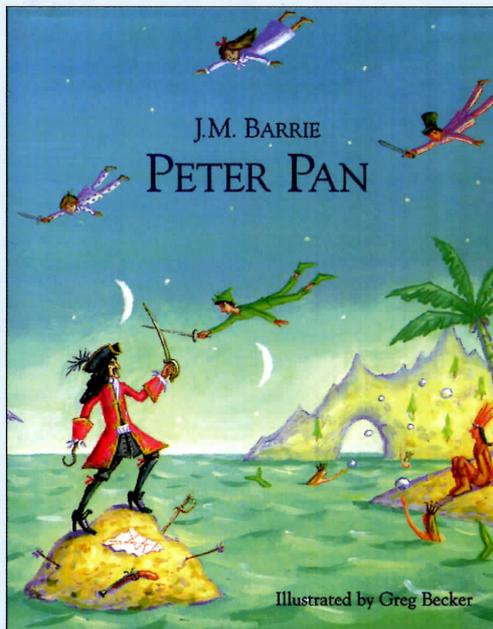
**1928 Peter Pan:** the eventual publication of the play-text, with a 26-page Dedication 'to the Five' who inspired it.

## Copyright

In 1929 Barrie gave rights over all versions of **Peter Pan** to the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children. In 1987 the legal term expired and Lord Callaghan succeeded with a Bill in the Lords to restore the Hospital's continuing right to royalties (but not its control over variant interpretations). Presumably now, Europe's 'harmonization' of copyright has returned **Peter Pan** to full protection till 2007 (where will the Lords be then?).

## So what's Peter's story?

As a 1902 resident in Kensington Gardens he is shown to already possess three attributes which will figure in his stage career: an initial capacity to fly (stemming from his



new-born consciousness of pre-natal life as a bird); a consequent desertion of his mother in quest of liberty and 'fun' (hence his status as 'eternal child'); a bizarre knowledge that babies who fall out of their perambulators are rapt away by the fairies – Peter's removal from W8 to the Neverland in the play engenders a multiplication of fantastic events, many deriving from Barrie's attachment to, and larks with, the five sons of Arthur and Sylvia Llewelyn Davies. Peter intrudes upon the Darling family while the nursemaid, a Newfoundland dog called Nana, is unfairly in disgrace. He shows them how to fly and they zoom off to the Neverland along with Peter's pugnacious coadjutrix, the fairy



Tinker Bell. Here they meet Peter's tribe of Lost Boys who survive in a landscape of boyhood romance circa 1900: an underground house and a varied population of redskins, wolves, fairies, with a regular threat from pirates led by Captain Jas. Hook. The antagonism between Peter and this Old Etonian scoundrel forms the theme of the most dramatic action, but it is underlain by the tensions between Wendy, as child-mother, and Peter, as amnesiac Gauleiter. Whether his cocky intransigence becomes tragic when the children return home is matter for debate. (The best-realized characters in the whole show are Nana and the Lost Boy, Tootles.)

## Reception and criticism

Beerbohm got it right when he called the first production of the play 'a riot of inconsequence and exquisite futility'. While the Kensington Gardens story may be ridiculous, its rootedness in a known place and its controlled register of satiric whimsy give it a comic charm. But the play, and the narratives derived from it, present a farrago of happenings 'in such wise that one can conceive nothing that might not conceivably happen' (Beerbohm again). Nevertheless, the play itself has always been able to overcome this deficiency through spectacular 'business' – just as Peter's fascist tendencies have been disguised by usually having him played by a Principal Girl. And, undeniably, the psychological dilemmas at the heart of the story – tortuously articulated by Jacqueline Rose in **The Case for Peter Pan** (2ed. Macmillan, 1992) – have an inexhaustible interest. **Peter and Wendy** does plug some narrative holes in the play, experiments like **Hook** show a potential which Barrie did not exploit, but his home made myth of the gains and losses of maturation and the fragility of child/adult relationships cannot help but endure. ■

The illustrations are taken from the ACC (Antique Collectors' Club) Children's Classic edition illustrated by Greg Becker (1 85149 702 1, £12.99 hbk). For a fully edited text of **Kensington Gardens** and **Peter and Wendy**, see the one-volume World Classics edition, **Peter Pan and Kensington**, ed. Peter Hollindale (OUP, 0 19 283929 2, £5.99 pbk).

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