

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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the children's book magazine



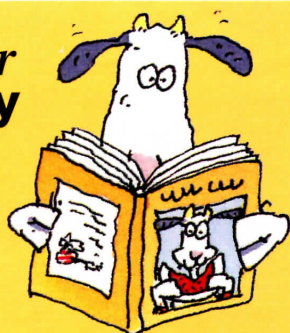
PICTURE BOOKS • IAN BECK
COLIN AND JACQUI HAWKINS

ILLUSTRATION
SPECIAL!

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Cover Story



This issue's cover is from Colin and Jacqui Hawkins' *Daft Dog* (see Authorgraph, p12). Thanks to HarperCollins for their help in producing this May cover.

EDITORIAL

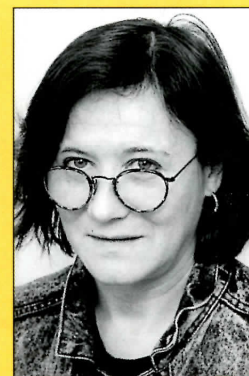
Children's literature's silence in respect of people with learning disabilities in almost all but a handful of non-fiction titles has perhaps been tacitly understood as a graceful gesture rather than as an evasion. As Toni Morrison put it in respect of race in her essay 'Black Matters', 'to notice is to recognise an already discredited difference'. But silence and evasion in respect of disabilities have consequences for all our children, not just for those who are excluded from our fictions.

Last year Rachel Anderson's *The Scavenger's Tale**, a dystopian fantasy set in London in 2015, was published. The most extraordinary aspect of this extraordinarily powerful novel for older readers is in its depiction of people with learning disabilities.

Britain has now only one trade that flourishes. Agriculture has failed, livestock is diseased, the armaments industry is finished. All that is left is medical expertise and donor transplants.

London is the capital of the world for donor transplants and the organs that are needed are culled from those who have been classified as Dysfuncs. The main character of the story is a boy called Bedford who was found abandoned in an alley by Old Ma Peddle who cares for him and his adopted siblings. These include a sister, Dee, who has Down's Syndrome, as well as Rah who has a brain 'the size of a pigeon's egg'. The drama of this powerful story is in Bedford's growing realisation of what the charming Community Health and Welfare Monitors are really up to when they take people away for 'care'. He attempts in vain to save his family from their clutches.

Anderson's portrayal of Dee and Rah is as fully rounded characters. Further, she boldly confronts within her pages the fear that such differences engender in us and our difficulties in recognising it and talking about it. One of Bedford's friends, for example, wants to save some children with



Rosemary Stones

Down's Syndrome from the cull because, as a Christian, he loves them. But as Bedford wryly observes, he cannot actually tell them apart or bear to touch them.

Anderson is perhaps uniquely qualified as someone who lives and works with children with learning disabilities to create these characters who cannot easily create themselves in fiction. Truly innovative and daring writing of this kind can help young readers look at their shadow side, at their (and



From Raymond Briggs' *Ethel & Ernest*, a book in which the ordinary is made extraordinary (see p28).

our) projections into people who are different and begin to admit more freely to prejudices and fears which will thus become available to be thought about. Only then can people with learning disabilities really be seen as people.

Rosemary

* in *Playing in the Dark*, Harvard University Press, 1992

** *The Scavenger's Tale* is published by Oxford University Press, 0 19 271736 7, £5.99

Millennium Questionnaire

Inserted into this issue of BfK, you will find a questionnaire which asks about the children's books which you rate most highly and which have had significance for you. Endings and new beginnings provide opportunities for taking stock, and as this millennium draws to a close we value the opportunity to ask you, our readership, about the children's books which mean and have meant the most to you. In our November issue, the final issue of this century and this millennium, we will publish your thoughts about which books have been and will continue to be important and your views on what will be important in the future. Thank you for filling in the BfK questionnaire.

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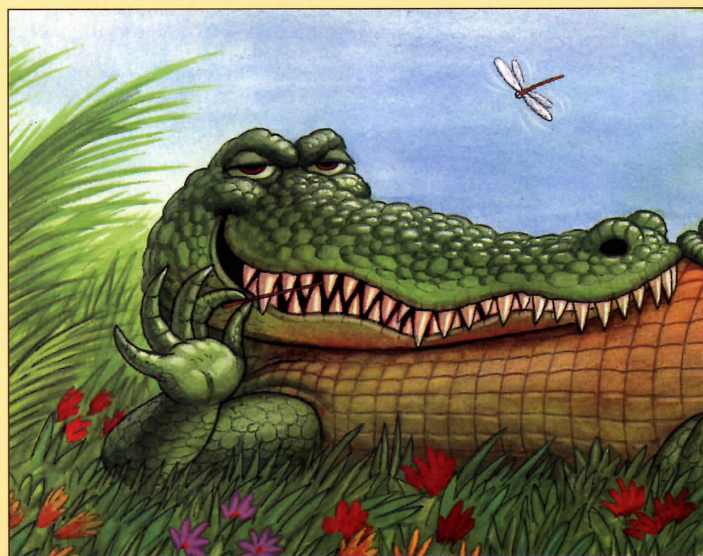
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New Picture Books: Individual and Idiosyncratic

Quentin Blake searches through the current crop of Spring picture books for titles that have that certain something that sets them apart.

Over the years, I have to admit, I have had plenty of dealings (in books) with funny animals, so that perhaps I am hardly the person to be making the following observation; but going through the pile of picture book publications before me, I must confess to being a touch dismayed by the droves of them: funny dogs, funny goats, funny lambs, funny monkeys, the whole funny menagerie. If a lot of this is quite stereotyped it is nonetheless quite acceptable, quite harmless. But, ungraciously to single out one example: **The Selfish Crocodile** (text by Faustin Charles, pictures by Mike Terry) tells a jungle story of a crocodile who is made happy by a mouse who daringly removes his aching tooth; harmony then prevails amongst the river's inhabitants. It's hard not to let one's mind wander to **Doctor De Soto**, William Steig's treatment of a similar plot, and to remember Steig's poise and discretion, his sense of scale, and his sense of *all* the difficulties of the situation. The idea of that kind of involvement is what sets me off through these new publications on the look-out for books that have something individual or idiosyncratic about them.



From *The Selfish Crocodile*.

The poet of the picture book form

It is a natural reaction to turn straightaway to John Burningham, a sort of poet of the picture book form, and of visual improvisation. Somehow Burningham always seems to have a strong sense of where he is going but to be surprised by the route; he seems to be re-inventing drawing on each occasion, and making up pictures out of whatever materials come to hand. Last year, in **Cloudland**, there was a more deliberate bringing-together of two elements: drawing and photography. I don't remember any reviewer being as impressed as I was at the way he brought it off – getting those alert-eyed, tentatively-pencilled children to inhabit the clarity of real-life cumulus. It was a feat. Now, in **Whadayamean**, he mixes together photography and quite a lot of other things. God comes down to check up on what a mess we have made of the world and makes a tour with two children who happen to be picnicking under a tree; and Burningham's techniques are

particularly effective for scenes of pollution – seem, sometimes, almost to be made of detritus – as well as impressive effects of light and weather. Probably no one else could propose a story in which the problems of the world are resolved by two children invoking the authority of God. But it's impossible not to respond to it, and I leave it to other BfK reviewers to discover the possible range of children's reactions.

Electric energy and great atmosphere

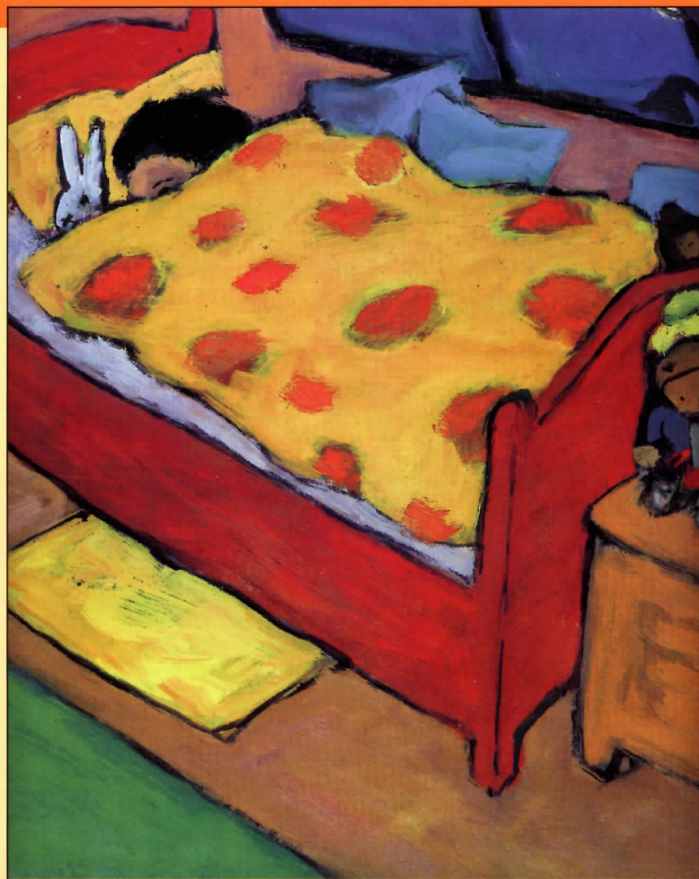
Another rather similar ecological fable – **The Tale of the Heaven Tree** by Mary Joslin and Milo So – has a completely different visual treatment: line, electric with nervous energy, and a lively use of watercolour. It is able to convey not only a scene of devastation but also the springing life of trees and birds which is the main message of the book.



From *Whadayamean*.



From *The Tale of the Heaven Tree*.



From *And If the Moon Could Talk*.

There is no message in *And If the Moon Could Talk*, but a great sense of atmosphere – conveyed less in Kate Banks' text than in the illustrations of Georg Hallensleben. Hallensleben works in what one has to describe as a painterly style, unusual for an illustrator. You can see the marks of the paint, applied with a brush of the sort generally used for oil-paint, and as a result almost any small detail is impossible. The compensation is a sense of richness and substance; and in this book the artist uses this painterly style to depict wonderfully evocative night scenes: dark houses with lights shining in their windows, mountains, moonlight reflected in water. The best double-page spreads are effectively small paintings; and perhaps it is to be expected that to relate typography to them is a problem. It is not always perfectly solved here in a book that is in other respects very attractive to the eye and the feelings.

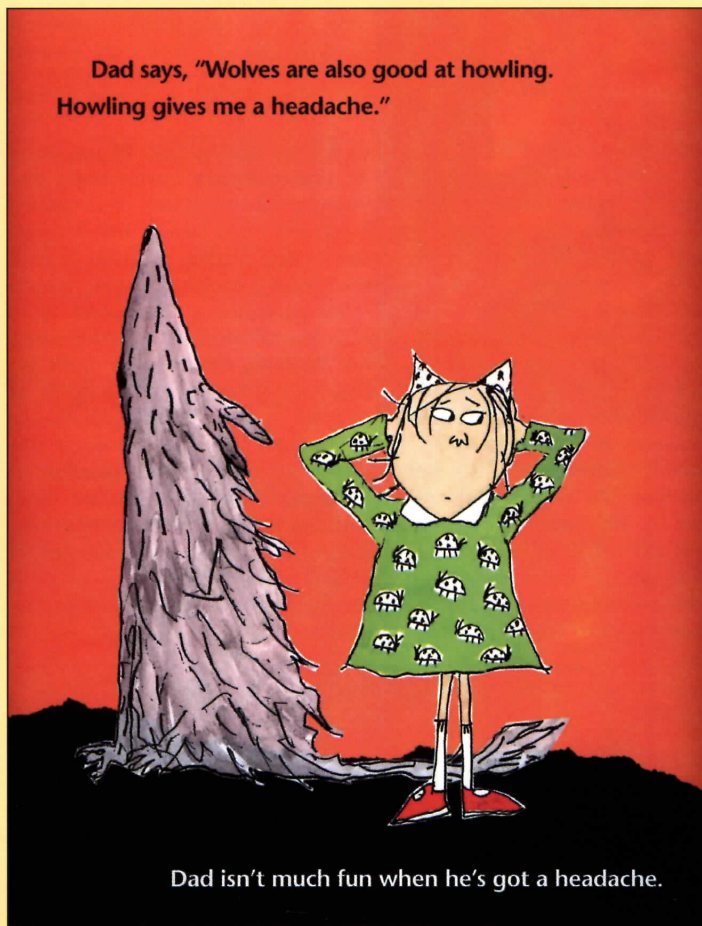


From *What if?*

On the wild side

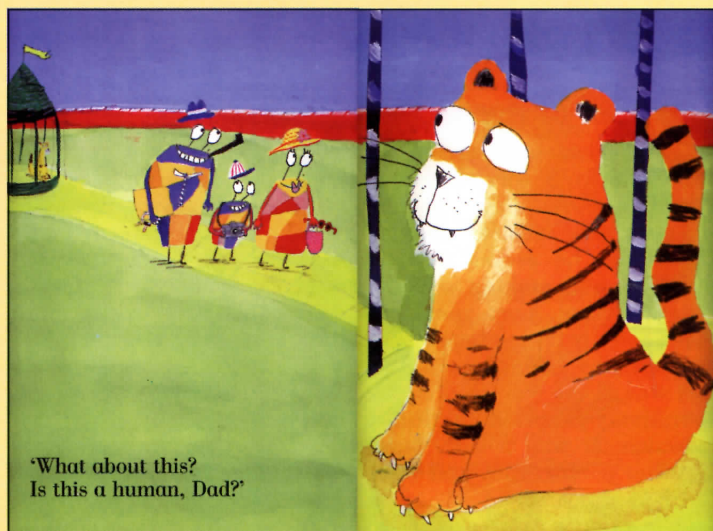
This does not exhaust the range of approaches amongst the books I have chosen. Of three which are identifiably on the wild side (is the wild side a bit further out than it used to be, or do I just imagine that?) the most visually attractive is Joanna Walsh's. *What if?* explores the rich and attractive territory

already visited by, for instance, John Burningham in *Would You Rather?* and by Michael Rosen in some of his verses, but there is obviously plenty of room here for more speculation. Walsh carries it out with a happy mixture of cut-paper shapes, free crayon drawing and snippets of ready-printed matter from elsewhere. This is a nice world to be in, and if there is any slight sense of self contradiction, it comes from the fact that the technique is essentially decorative. Perhaps a touch more reality would help to convince us that, after the disappearance of 'our' parents, it is really the cat getting the breakfast.



From *I Want a Pet*.

Lauren Child's drawings in *I Want a Pet* are engaging and certainly wild; try to imagine Steig with a hangover. We are reassured that in this book we are not meant to be well-behaved. If the potential for fun is not completely realised it may be for two reasons. One is that the way the drawings are arranged doesn't show the same freedom of approach in the



From *The Photo*.

drawings themselves – they sit opposite us in the middle of the page, not ever allowing the depiction of some of the characters mentioned. If granny and granpa are as crazy as the animal, I want to see them. The other reason, or at least so it seemed to me, was that once into the mode of caricature the artist could have gone even more heavily for the unattractive features of the prospective pets. However, the book ends with an elegant twist that leaves the reader speculating happily beyond the limits of the story.

The Photo by Neal Layton has a goofily cheerful story about a family of aliens landing in a zoo for a day out that might not be out of place in a children's comic. What distinguishes it is that it too is, in its mad way, painterly: you can see paint quality, scribbling, gouging, and some people may feel it is *too* childish. But the humour is infectious and the way the pictures take the page has actually been thought about – every double-page spread is a new experience, and moves the story on.



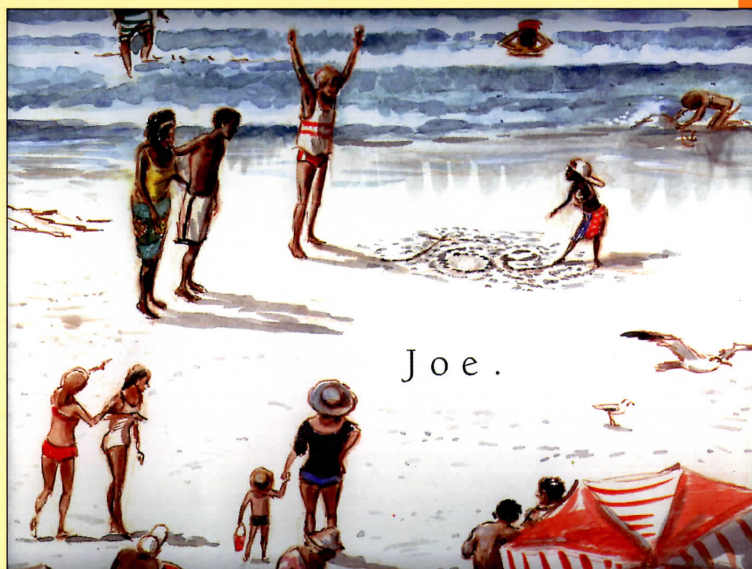
From
New Born.

Taxidermy at bay

The other end of the spectrum, I suppose, is **New Born**; a book about the new baby by Kathy Henderson with pictures by Caroline Binch. The book is described as being perhaps for the new arrival's older siblings; but I suspect that its most appreciative audience will be of mothers themselves, who will be able to supply the necessary warm response. The illustrations which record the baby's varied play of expression and reaction have the air of being scrupulously copied from photographs or, perhaps, scrupulously copied from life with the aid of photographs. The process works quite well for the baby itself, less well for the domestic scenes. The masterpieces of this kind of art are those of natural history and botanical illustration, and many of them are wonders; but the difficulties increase with the treatment of larger creatures; and to keep any hint of taxidermy at bay while retaining a high degree of precision calls for serious control of disposition, colour and lighting. To know that it can be done we have only to look at (say) Caravaggio or Ford Madox Brown; but most of us who want to tell stories have to settle for some kind of compromise.

Lively and convincing

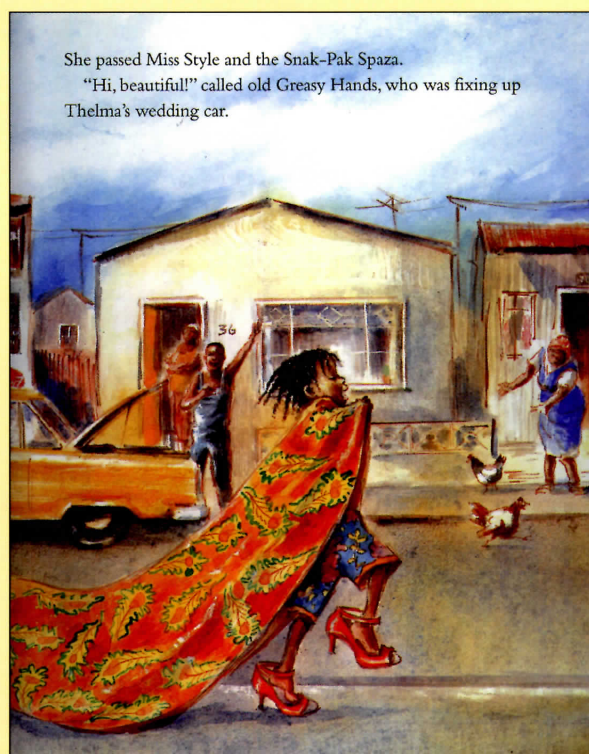
Rather a good form of compromise (if compromise it is) is to be found in two books by Niki Daly. The illustrations have a straightforward air about them – the people in them have proportions very much like life, shadows are cast in a natural way – and the stories are pretty straightforward too. In **The Boy on the Beach** the two parents and their son arrive at the beach, in due course the youngster goes off to explore, gets lost, is discovered by the lifeguard and returned to his parents. And yet all the time the author/artist is in charge of what he is



From **The Boy on the Beach.**

about. The pictures have a broad, open-air, breezy feel to them. At the end the boy writes his name in the sand and we know it at last; and on the very last page the tide is coming in and washing it away.

In **Jamela's Dress**, the same way of drawing deals with rather different subject matter, noting the details of everyday South African life, and though it is to rather more comic effect than **The Boy on the Beach**, the characters are similarly lively and convincing. It might be possible to call this kind of work unpretentious, middle-of-the-road; but why aren't there more people in the middle of the road doing it? Perhaps it is harder than it looks?



From **Jamela's Dress.**

Eroding credibility

But to return to the animals. It does seem sometimes that the organisers of the Kate Greenaway medal are bent on eroding the credibility of the award. At any rate last year they decided that the best thing for them to do to extend knowledge and to promote the cause of quality in children's books would be to give the medal to the same person that they had given it to only a few years before. Saying this is not an attempt on my part to

From *Buffy: an Adventure Story*.

ually arrives at the meeting of Buffy and the little girl, Mary Kelly. There is a giant heart radiating around them, but somehow the feeling is conveyed to us already.

Polar bears and seals

Polar bears are fascinating both because of the coherence and proportion of their large sculptured forms – those huge paws, those narrow wedge-like heads – and because of the desolate landscape in which they live. There are two books here about polar bears, both worthy of their subject and not dissimilar in their virtues. Michael Murpurgo's *The Rainbow Bear* is the more humanised of the two, but then he has to think some quite poetical thoughts. Michael Foreman brings off a variety of effects, both of the wide vacancies of the arctic landscape and of the skyscrapered city and of the activities of the bear itself. There is one very striking picture of the bear in the water seen from below where subject and technique match perfectly. You really need to know your way with watercolour to be able to do that.

From *The Rainbow Bear*.

Arctic Song by Miriam Moss and Adrienne Kennaway also has a poetic idea, but uses it in the cause of information. The two bear cubs in their search for whale song make a tour of the other arctic creatures, all depicted in a manner which is confident, clear and dramatic. Both these books are distinguished by a strongly rhythmic text; both imaginative and informative, words and images hold a satisfying balance.

call into question the merits of that recipient; but wouldn't an alert jury have taken the opportunity of drawing attention to **Queenie the Bantam** and the excellent Bob Graham? Perhaps the present book, **Buffy: an Adventure Story**, isn't the very best Bob Graham – a number of the earlier scenes, like the talented little dog who is the hero getting kicked out of the stage door of the theatre, are treated in a family stereotypical comic-book style – but it is very enjoyable all the same. And the true pure experience that one can expect from the creator of **Crusher is Coming** and other masterworks eventually

Finally the book that seems to me to give the most private and individual experience among the works I have mentioned. **Selkie** uses the traditional idea of the seal inhabited by a girl who at certain times emerges from her seal skin and can be seen by humans. A gleaming seal's head, alert with life, dominates the book's cover. It is on the cover also where there is the only discordant note: the single word title in a silver ribbon-like lettering which, though no doubt

Above, from *Arctic Song*; below, *Selkie*.

kindly meant on the part of the publisher, would seem to have more to do with chocolates or silk stockings and which doesn't at all suggest the intensity of this curious book. In many ways – its careful working, its decorated borders, its hint of something like naivety – this might almost be a nineteenth-century work. There's something reminiscent of the fairyland illustrations of Dicky Doyle; and there's no attempt to turn the young hero into anything like a self-conscious television-watching child of the present time. We are told that Gillian McClure based her illustrations on the experience of visits to the island of Colonsay. Whatever spirit informs them, they seem full of the sense of another time and another place; an experience genuinely created and preserved. ■

Quentin Blake is the illustrator of, amongst many others, the books of Roald Dahl. His own books have won the Whitbread Award and the Kate Greenaway Medal. He was Head of the Illustration Department of the Royal College of Art from 1978–1986.

BOOK DETAILS

The Selfish Crocodile, Faustin Charles, ill. Mike Terry, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 3857 3, £9.99

Whadayamean, John Burningham, Jonathan Cape, 0 224 04753 1, £9.99

The Tale of the Heaven Tree, Mary Joslin, ill. Milo So, Lion Publishing, 0 7459 3957 0, £10.99

And If the Moon Could Talk, Kate Banks, ill. Georg Hallensleben, Andersen Press, 0 86264 869 6, £9.99

What if?, Joanna Walsh, Jonathan Cape, 0 224 04752 3, £9.99

I Want a Pet, Lauren Child, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1212 0, £9.99

The Photo, Neal Layton, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 3546 9, £9.99

New Born, Kathy Henderson, ill. Caroline Binch, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1262 7, £9.99

The Boy on the Beach, Niki Daly, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 4134 5, £9.99

Jamela's Dress, Niki Daly, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1347 X, £9.99

Buffy: an Adventure Story, Bob Graham, Walker, 0 7445 6192 2, £9.99

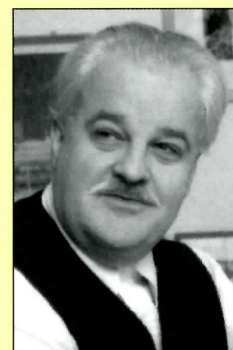
The Rainbow Bear, Michael Murpurgo, ill. Michael Foreman, Doubleday, 0 385 40984 2, £9.99

Arctic Song, Miriam Moss, ill. Adrienne Kennaway, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1326 7, £10.99

Selkie, Gillian McClure, Doubleday, 0 385 41013 1, £9.99

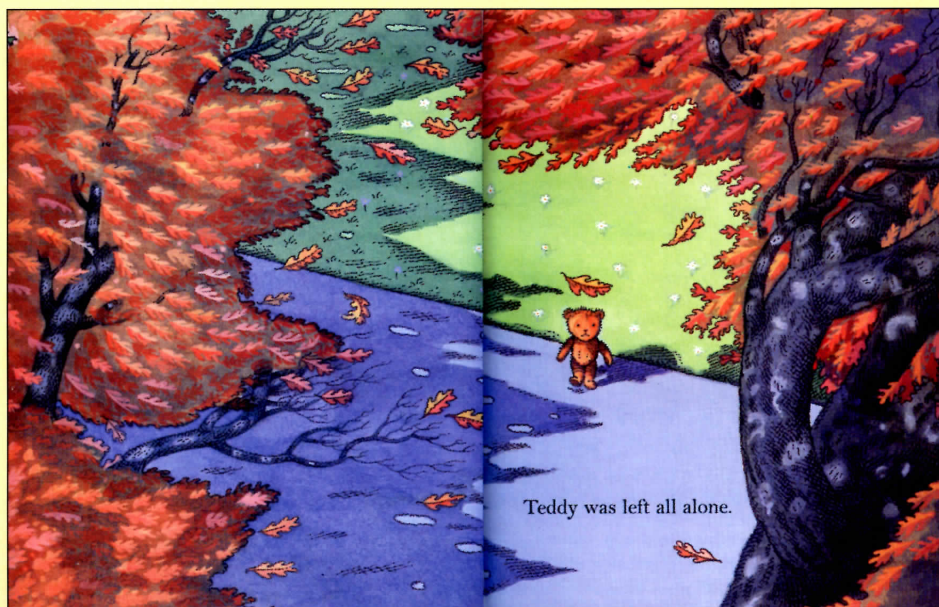
Windows into Illustration

Ian Beck is Master of the Art Workers Guild and an outstanding illustrator of children's books. He explains the techniques and the thinking behind his work.



The sequence of drawings I should like to analyse is to be found in **Home Before Dark**. It begins with a double spread; this image is bled out to the edge of the page. I like to use bleed sparingly; to balance the bled pages with those that keep the drawing confined in a shape or a rule. Using the full bleed is a bit like suddenly going 'wide-screen', it should ideally be a dramatic moment. In this case a sleeping child has dropped a Teddy Bear from her buggy, and mother and child have set off for home, leaving the bear on the path. The page before has been a contained drawing, and a drawing seen from a distance. Ideally in a picture book the turn of a page should bring a revelation or a surprise, in this case the first full bleed picture in the book. The copy on the page is very simple, one line; 'Teddy was left all alone'. The teddy has previously been seen lying on the path, now he is standing up and looking fearful. There is an important atmosphere that must be conveyed by this picture, although it is quite lyrical it must have an undertow of menace. The late afternoon shadows creep across the page like lagged fingers towards the small figure of the bear. The viewpoint is from high up among the autumn trees, which are seen as foreground. I have laid several layers of blue and neutral grey washes across the paper, then I have layered yellows and reds across the area of the leaves, which I have then painted in using body colour or gouache. As with all my drawings there are any number of initial roughs and preparatory sketches, just getting the feel of the pose right. I work entirely from imagination, I like to trust the mixture of memory and imagination, I believe this somehow helps to get to the emotional essence of a pose, where a figure is concerned. The lines and hatchings I add last after the colours have been laid on, in order to keep the lines clear.

The double spread now turns over into two separate images contained within rules. The bear is seen peering through the dark iron railings of the park. This image is seen in a kind of forced perspective, with the bear way down at



He walked up to the dark iron railings.



And he pushed, and squeezed, and squashed up his tummy until . . .

the bottom of the picture looking rather lost and forlorn. Here expression is important, and with the kind of iconic faces that I use I must try out several variations in rough form to get the feeling right. The essential thing here is dramatisation, the bear is trapped behind railings, we must make the most of this moment, with textures, like those on the railings themselves, and with lighting, the shadows across the path behind him, as well as with the point of view of the picture. The image on the opposite page is the same size,

only now we are closer to the bear, and the perspective is reversed; from bird's eye view, to worm's eye view. We must also sense that the sky is darkening through the sequence of pictures, the bear must after all get home before dark. ■

Ian Beck's books include **Poppy and Pip's Bedtime** (HarperCollins), **Round and Round the Garden** compiled by Sarah Williams (Oxford University Press) and **The Owl and the Pussy-Cat** by Edward Lear (Transworld). **Home Before Dark** is published by Scholastic.

Evaluating Picture Books

Thousands of new picture books are published each year – from simple board books for babies, to the works of artists like Raymond Briggs, Quentin Blake, Michael Foreman and Maurice Sendak – books for which there is really no upper age limit. But with so many books around, have we begun to take the skills of the illustrator for granted? Joanna Carey looks at some recent titles.

Learning to read pictures

Given the vast range of talent that exists, the different aims and intentions of the artists, the variety of techniques, from the traditional to the innovative, and the myriad ways in which images can relate to words, it is frustrating, as a reviewer, that there are so few opportunities to select – let alone evaluate – more than a handful of the picture books that jostle for attention. Too often reviews are restricted to just a brief outline of the story, and a couple of words to sum up the illustrations ... 'delightfully rumbustious' perhaps, or 'breathtakingly magical' – nice quotes for the back of the paperback, but inadequate in every other respect. Other art forms aimed at children – like film, television and music (even trainers) – are regular subjects for critical discussion in the media, so why not picture books? The National Curriculum has cited the development of 'visual literacy' as an important part of art education: picture books not only give children their first experience of art appreciation, but also offer opportunities right across the age range to 'explore the art of looking' and to

understand and respond to the many ways in which we learn to read pictures.

Emblematic flourish

Early reading skills – both visual and literary – are given instant lift-off in Charlotte Voake's **Alphabet Adventure** which takes the reader on a journey from Atlas to Zebra in a rickety little plane. Even as you open the book there is a promise of adventure in the wide blue yonder of the airy endpapers. With black line and watercolour wash, Voake sends the spindly little plane swooping and looping over castles, forests, fields and mountain, with frequent stops to pick up new words. The drawing is fast, the mood is buoyant and breezy. Rather like Quentin Blake, Voake wields her pen with an emblematic flourish, conjuring birds ... binoculars ... yachts and volcanoes from just the merest squiggles as the story skims along. With mercurial colour washes, the carefree, free-flying spontaneity of **Alphabet Adventure** is heightened by the formal

and beyond ... There is suspense as the page, in turning, becomes a door, opening on to the inky luminosity of the night sky, and there, in the snow, a wild cat. The child's eyes meet the mesmerizing gaze of the lynx, who as in a dream, looms larger and larger on the page then, (like Briggs' Snowman) takes him on a soaring adventure through the night. Up and up they go to the moon ... could those craters be giant paw-prints? ... while the child clings to the close-textured luxuriance of the cat's fur. With atmospheric colour changes, vertiginous aerial perspectives and dizzying use of scale, this is a thrilling fantasy which sees the boy brought safely back to earth, back to the close-knit cross-hatched security of the cabin where the inert – but reassuring – figure of his father still sleeps by the fire.

Eloquent use of colour

Emma's Doll by Brian Patten is another after-dark fantasy which again makes eloquent use of colour. Working with oil

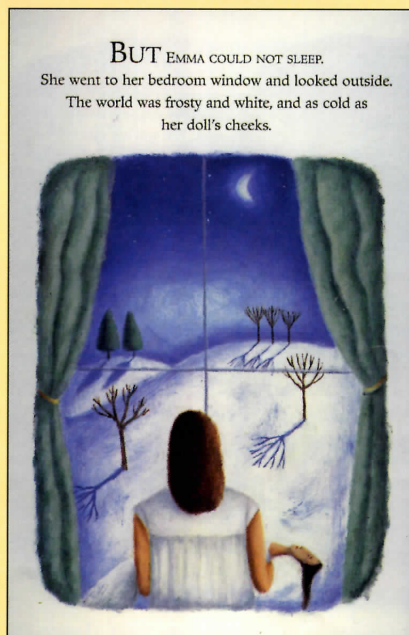


From *Let the Lynx Come In*.

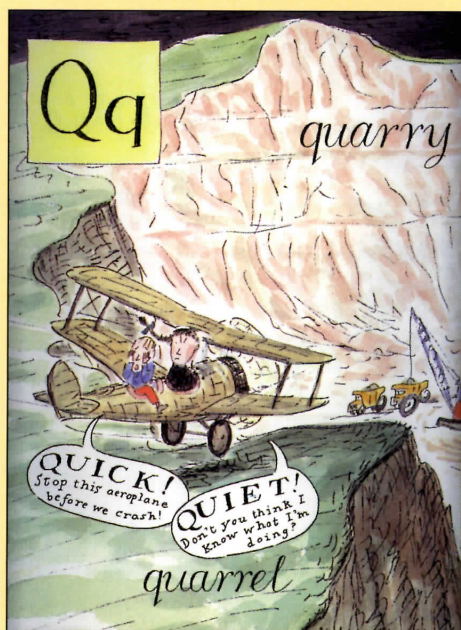
elegance of the beautiful hand-drawn lettering, whose easy graceful rhythms are, in turn, echoed in the swift calligraphy of the drawing ... just look at the delightful plump zebras on the last page, and the complementary curves of the lettering. (And it is interesting too to look at other books by Voake, like **Here Comes the Train**, where the (typeset) text strikes up a different but no less resonant relationship with the drawings.)

Sensitive and Precise

Patrick Benson also uses line and wash but creates a very different effect with a more ordered technique. His drawing is sensitive and precise and he uses an intricate system of hatching and cross-hatching to create tone, form and texture. **Let the Lynx Come In** by Jonathan London is set in a log cabin in a snow covered forest. Colours are soft, and the intimacy of the dark shadowy interior is emphasized by the richly textured wood-grained surfaces that enclose it. It is peaceful. Dad sleeps in a chair by the fire, but the little boy's eyes immediately alert you to the window



From *Emma's Doll*.



From *Alphabet Adventure*.

paint, and framing each picture with gentle sfumato textures, Alison Jay sets the mood with warm earthy colours, lit from within by a glowing translucence. But there is a sadness here, evident in Emma's melancholy pose. Her doll – an intriguing replica of herself – is broken and lies lifeless on her lap. The iron bars of the bed cast sombre, cage-like shadows on the wall and through the square panes of window Emma looks out on a cold moonlit scene. She needs help. She clearly needs magic, and, defying her (unseen) mother, she carries the lifeless doll down the gently seductive curve of the staircase, out along a winding path ... and into the woods. With the wistful, elongated Modigliani-like proportions of her figures, the symbolic symmetry of the houses she draws, the spiky, swooning trees and the stiffly prancing animals, Alison Jay has an enchanting visual language all her own that invests this already poetic text with a further gravity and tenderness. (And with much the same imagery – she brings a similar magic to the spacious airy design of *The Lion Treasury of Children's Prayers*.)



From *Squids will be Squids*.

Bewitching finesse

One of the (many) unusual things about *Squids will be Squids* by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith is that the designer's name (Molly Leach) joins those of the author and illustrator on the title page. This off-the-wall collection of 'Beastly fables with fresh morals about all kinds of bossy, sneaky, funny, annoying, dim-bulb people' certainly leaves no stone unturned in the pursuit of inventive design. Sporting a wide range of typographical styles, quirky collages, eccentric blurbs, and historic endpapers featuring an Old English woodcut representation of the legendary Stinky Cheese Man, this book is suitable for 'Ages 49-630 (in dog years)'.

The fables – gross, cheeky, poignant and hilarious by turns – feature some rum characters including a Tongue, a pair of Scissors and a self-centred Slug – who is so busy making a friendship bracelet (for herself) she doesn't notice the approaching steam-roller. The extravagant, often savage wit of Lane Smith's illustrations is heightened by the extreme delicacy of his technique – the stippled, speckled, finely enamelled textures have a bewitching finesse and the larky snippets of advertising material put a streetwise contemporary spin on these wacky morality tales.



December, from *The Year in the City*.

Soft, grainy pencil line

Paul Howard is one of a select number of naturalistic illustrators. His is not a photographic realism, but one based on drawing, understanding and observation of the human form. *The Year in the City* with a text by Kathy Henderson, is a succession of images – full-colour plates with accompanying sprightly vignettes – that take you through the seasons in a city chock-a-block with traffic, people and buildings ... but it is not a moan about pollution but a multi-layered, multi-cultural celebration of life in an urban environment – a study of human activity, group behaviour, with everyone, young and old, rubbing along together, hustling, bustling on their way to work, to the shops, to school, to the park – or simply sitting it out, like the old man dozing by the bouncy castle. With a soft, grainy, pencil line and the rich tonality of his watercolours, and working from every conceivable angle, these busy compositions are full of humour and incident. The drawing is witty and detailed in its observation, but fresh and unlabourious in execution. Children of all shapes, sizes and colours are unsentimentally portrayed and there is an underlying sense of community throughout. Seasonal changes in light and colour and texture are perfectly captured and the final spread shows a firework display over the roof tops for New Year... A lively, intelligent book – an uplifting and affectionate chronicle of the late twentieth century.

Purposeful naivety

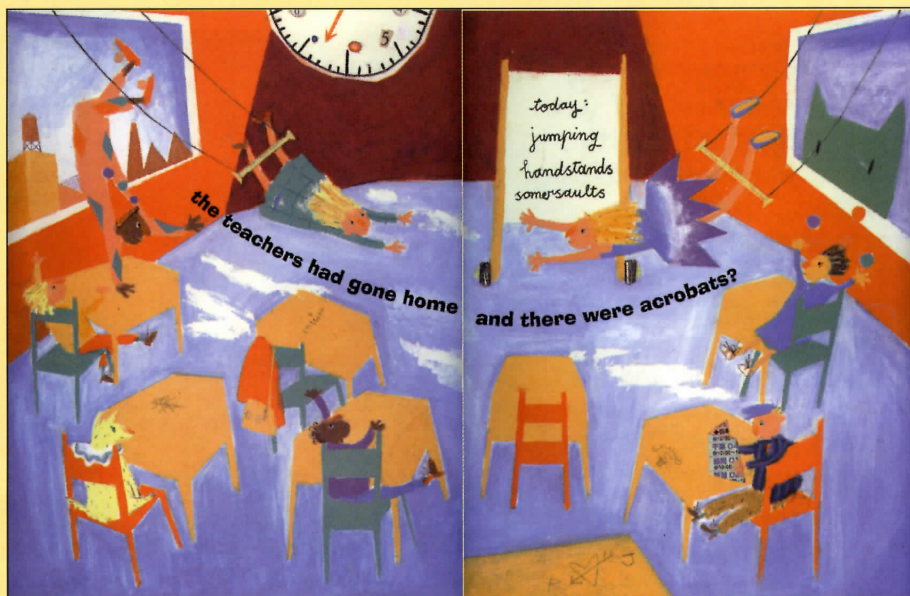
There is a rather different fin-de-siècle feel to Joanna Walsh's anarchic picture book *What if?* – a carnivalesque fantasy in which a small child imagines a day where all the usual order is turned upside down. At first sight it looks like

the work of a small child, with crude, schematic drawings and torn paper collages, but this is a cunning blend of purposeful naivety and sophisticated design that borrows freely, not just from the nursery but also from David Hockney's '80s paintings with their wide flattened out perspectives and bold staring colours. The story is slight and the text is minimal but Walsh makes maximum impact with clever use of scale, engagingly comic characters, rich patterns and strikingly theatrical page design. ■

Joanna Carey is the former Children's Books editor of *The Guardian* and a writer and illustrator.

Books Mentioned

- Alphabet Adventure**, Charlotte Voake, Jonathan Cape, 0 224 03596 7, £9.99 hbk
Here Comes the Train, Charlotte Voake, Walker, 0 7445 5582 5, £9.99 hbk
Let the Lynx Come In, Jonathan London, ill. Patrick Benson, Walker, 0 7445 4038 0, £9.99 hbk, 0 7445 6041 1, £4.99 pbk
Emma's Doll, Brian Patten, ill. Alison Jay, Viking, 0 670 87523 6, £10.99 hbk, Puffin, 0 14 056245 1, £4.99 pbk
The Lion Treasury of Children's Prayers, compiled by Susan Cuthbert, ill. Alison Jay, Lion Publishing, 0 7459 3961 9, £20.00 hbk
Squids will be Squids, Jon Scieszka, ill. Lane Smith, Viking, 0 670 88227 5, £12.99 hbk (Puffin, 0 14 056523 X, £4.99 pbk – August 1999)
The Year in the City, Kathy Henderson, ill. Paul Howard, Walker, 0 7445 2579 9, £9.99 hbk, 0 7445 6042 X, £5.99 pbk
What if?, Joanna Walsh, Jonathan Cape (A 'Tom Maschler' book), 0 224 04752 3, £9.99 hbk



From *What if?*

STARTING OUT WITH BOOKS

It seems to be the season for early years projects ending in Start. Well, here are two, anyway: Bookstart and Sure Start; and, in both, 'start' refers to a child's very earliest years, their importance in establishing a secure and healthy beginning in life, and the need to support parents.

Bookstart, a programme begun by the Book Trust and the Basic Skills Agency, and piloted by Birmingham Libraries, has just been given the boost of £6 million sponsorship by Sainsbury's. This should make sure that, within the next two years, every parent in the U.K. with a new baby will receive free books and information about the value of reading and libraries to very young children.

Sure Start is a government programme that set off with 60 'trailblazing' authorities in April to tackle social exclusion at root and 'offer extra support when it really matters to families keen to learn about parenting skills, nurturing and the development of babies and young children' including, says David Blunkett, 'reading with their children'.

But what else is going on? **Clive Barnes** investigates at the grassroots.



Gail Spence, Children's Outreach Officer, storytelling at Ludgershall Playgroup.

Children's librarians have a key role in local Bookstart schemes, and have long been aware both of the value of books to babies. So it is perhaps a good time to remember what else they have been doing to promote the sharing of books in young families through contacts with parents and carers.

Words on Wheels in Birmingham

Birmingham's Words on Wheels was not the first, and is by no means the only, 'book bus' to spread the gospel of reading by covering itself with head turning artwork and getting on the road. My own authority has one too, and the neighbouring authorities of Hampshire and Portsmouth have 'Family Library Link' vehicles, whose particular remit is to serve pre-school children and their families. Yet 'Words on Wheels' does demonstrate the versatility of the species; for, unlike many mobile libraries, it has always been mainly a promotional vehicle rather than offering a loan service.

Although Words on Wheels was originally funded in 1991 to serve the inner city, its mission has grown over the years and now it boldly goes throughout the city, acting as a flagship for the library's services to younger children. Because it is not committed to a regular timetable of stops, Words on Wheels is able to respond to a variety of demands on its use. Some of these are large community events, like Birmingham Leisure Department's 'Fun in the Park', or Business in

Education's 'Learning Day', which gives children with learning difficulties a taste of different work experiences. For World Book Day last year, it became a travelling bookshop, visiting schools at some distance from bookshops to give children an opportunity to spend their book vouchers. In 1996-7, it took part in a concerted effort to increase the use of libraries by young families in the ethnic minority population. It has become an easily recognised part of the library service. Jo Heaton, one of Birmingham's Children and Youth Librarians who is responsible for booking the bus out, told me that, at the end of February, it was already booked out until July.

Words on Wheels is a large vehicle, bigger than a fire engine, yet its driver, Colin Johnson, regularly manoeuvres it into school playgrounds and health centre car parks. It carries only about 400 books, so there is space for display, for leaflets, some spoken word cassettes, a collection of books on child development intended for carers, 'big books', and, most importantly, space to sit and read. The books are chosen not only to reflect the multicultural background of Birmingham's children but also to be attractive to children of differing abilities and needs: they include novelty and pop-up titles, touch and feel books, and a supporting collection of children's book characters and puppets, which is especially popular with children with special needs.

On the afternoon I visited Words in Wheels, it went out to a pre-school group. In the bus were Ayub Khan, one of the Children and Youth Librarians, and Christine Farelly, from Small Heath library, who acted



The outside of 'Words on Wheels' stopped at Old Wycliffe School Pre-school Group.



Gail's travelling exhibition at Ludgershall Playgroup.

as a local contact for the pre-school. For the children, the bus itself was the obvious big attraction and they came in, both excited and shy, taking a little time to explore, choose a book and find an adult to share it with. The pop-up and novelty books were most popular and some children took a break from reading to play with the toys. To close the session, Ayub sat them all down for a group storytime. There was plenty of opportunity to talk about books and the library to the pre-school staff and to some of the parents who came on the bus to collect their children.



Ayub Khan storytelling with staff and children of Old Wycliffe School Pre-school Group on 'Words on Wheels'.

This was a fairly routine visit, a promotion of books and the local library. But Jo Heaton is keen to make more targeted use of Words on Wheels for those children and families whose access to the library is most limited. The morning visit had been a monthly visit to a nursery that integrated special needs children. Here Jo did leave a small collection of books from which parents were able to choose titles for their children to take home. The bus has been used recently with women's refugees and with older children with behavioural difficulties; and there are plans to work with families in the Birmingham Prison Visitor Centre and with Travellers' children. There is tremendous potential here, which arises, in part, from the library staff's contacts in the wider professional and voluntary network.



A sergeant reading with his daughter in the army library at Larkhill.

Families in Rural Wiltshire

Much the same challenges, although in very different circumstances, face Gail Spence of Wiltshire Library Services. She is responsible for a project, funded by the National Year of Reading, to support shared reading among families with young children in the villages and army bases on Salisbury plain.

The families on the bases are often separated, with the men sometimes deployed abroad. The units are moved regularly, so that the families tend to stay in the area for only a maximum of two years. For those wives without their own transport, it may be difficult to get off the base. It is a life that can have instability and isolation built into it.

Beginning last September, Gail, the Children's Outreach Officer, has only a year to make an impact. She has been concentrating on three bases and their adjacent villages, working with the library in the nearest town, Amesbury, the part-time libraries in the villages, and with the army, which is well aware of the support that its families need. Most of all, she has been working with any organisation that has contact with young children and their families in the area, from the Pre-school Learning Alliance to the British Legion, shamelessly promoting herself through army newsletters and popping up at a variety of venues, including a Christmas Bazaar, where she was lucky enough to meet some dads. Gail may not have a brightly painted vehicle, but she has become, in her own words, a 'roving exhibition centre', with her own table top display boards, leaflets, and bookmarks, all explaining who she is, what she is doing, and giving advice on choosing and sharing books. And, of course, she has the books themselves.

When I met Gail at the beginning of March, she had spoken to health visitors and post natal groups and she had almost finished visiting every playgroup in her area. Local swimming pools and leisure centres were lined up for after Easter. She was buoyed up by a library open day at one of the small part-time libraries, pleasurably surprised that sixty children and parents had turned up, and she was looking forward to an under fives week in the largest village library at Tidworth in June.

Reaching parents is always the most difficult thing to achieve, even though Gail always arranges her visits to playgroups at a time when parents are encouraged to come early to collect the children. She has found that many people are not aware of the value, or even the possibility of using books with children who cannot yet read, that they are worried about damage to books, and that they still regard the library as an unfriendly place. Most of all, she has found that parents are astonished at

the range and quality of the books. She has also found that some voluntary and professional workers are surprised at the library's enthusiasm for shared reading and by the wealth of books available.



Children and parents looking at the table top exhibition at Shipton Bellinger Playgroup.

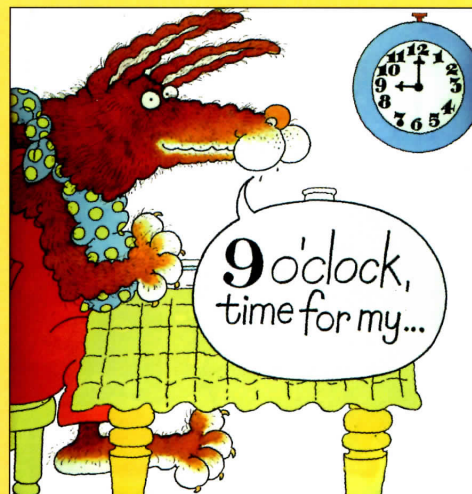
This sort of work is not easy, whether on Birmingham streets or in rural Wiltshire and it is impossible to measure its effect in the short-term. As Ayub Khan wrote about Birmingham's promotion to ethnic minority parents with under fives, 'We learnt... that improving the uptake of our service by non-users had to be a long term objective.' Then again, it is something to which librarians are committed and it is heartening to see something like Bookstart, whose value has been proven, take off nationally. What is not so heartening is to look down the list of organisations that the government sees as having a significant role to play in Sure Start to find no mention of libraries. Perhaps we have as much to do to convince the policy makers and professionals as we do some of the parents.

Clive Barnes is Principal Children's Librarian, Southampton City and a regular BfK reviewer.

Authorgraph No.116

Colin Hawkins &
Jacqui Hawkins

Colin and Jacqui Hawkins interviewed by Stephanie Nettell



Mr Wolf went off 'like a starburst' in Colin Hawkins' head. One Wednesday, daughter Sally came home full of this wonderful playground game, What's the Time, Mr Wolf?, and instantly he could see it as a pop-up. He and Jacqui worked over the weekend, got it together by Monday, excitedly phoned Judith Elliott at Heinemann, took it to her on Wednesday (on layout, *not* toilet, paper, as she enjoys saying), who bought it on the spot (while Jacqui waited on a yellow line). One week! 'As far as we're concerned, from way back she was the First Lady of publishing: we owe a lot to her.'

Mr Wolf appeared in 1983, the culmination of an explosively active period. But it had not always been like that. In 1979 they had been fruitlessly showing *Witches* to everyone, until Granada agreed to look at it for a while. They looked so long that the Hawkins, fighting for survival, took other ideas to other people, and just when Granada, spurred into action by the French firm Albin Michel at Bologna, decided to take it, the other publishers started coming back - 'Remember that idea you left with us x months ago?' - and in two years they found they had gone from no publisher to four.

They continued to be astonishingly prolific, and today are published worldwide. Hugely successful in France, they are still with Albin Michel; the classic split-page word-game, *Pat the Cat*, which Brenda Gardner got up and running at Evans' Pepper Press, still sells phenomenally via Dorling Kindersley Family Learning, who also bought many of their Heinemann titles; and the Evans' *How to Look After Your Cat / Dog* 'manuals' (the closest they've come to being serious) are now with Walker. Granada were taken over by Grafton Books, who were taken over by Collins, who became HarperCollins and published scores more Hawkins books. They have watched over the award-winning *Whose House?* and the explosive success of the *Foxy and Friends* series, and are now smacking their lips over another series that begins with *Greedy Goat* and *Daft Dog*, jolly tales that affectionately transform vices into virtues.

Jacqui and Colin have known each other a long time: theirs is a watertight working, talking, loving partnership. Although Jacqui was brought up in south-east London and Colin in Blackpool, it happened that each family returned every holiday to its Irish roots, farms only a mile apart. One belonged to Colin's uncle, who in effect had taken the place of his dead father, the other to Jacqui's 'real' grandmother (as opposed to the

English one) to whom she had to write every week. Through her ferociously Catholic mother, she grew up in an Irish ghetto, with no comics, no chewing gum, no Bonfire Night, 'as if you were in the middle of Ireland without the niceness that went with it, until you went there for holidays. *That was home.*' They have returned throughout the rest of their lives, 'the warmth and affection that envelops you the minute you go back' tugging them 'home' so strongly they are restoring a ruin there, where one day they will live permanently.

Although aware of each other, they did not meet until their mid-teens, and, perhaps thanks to the anxious prayers of Jacqui's mother, not properly until Colin was at Blackpool Art School and Jacqui working in London. Later, as she realised what she wanted, she went to Goldsmiths College, studying graphic design. They married in 1968. Colin defied the art school wisdom of the sixties by landing a fat job as a reportage illustrator on the *Daily Express* - Crufts, Chelsea Flower Show, decorative column heads. Total freedom, loadsamoney, but also the creatively killing knowledge that the work was unlikely to appear. In 1971 the dilemma was solved when the *Express*, downsizing, offered tax-free cheques for redundancies ('people were killed in the rush, and they had to re-employ many of them'), and he went freelance.

Times became hard. 'I used to illustrate realistically in those days: I was good, but there were other people better or longer in the market.' Jacqui suggested humour. 'He would *not* listen to me! Because he had such a facility for cartoons he tended to negate it.' She

worked in a design studio until their son Finbar surprised them, returning when he was rising-three; then they freelanced together, eked out by Jacqui teaching in a boys' school and Colin at Medway and Norwich Schools of Art. On the point of despair, he had started teaching full-time, when 'Sod's Law meant things took off'. As freelance illustrators of other people's books they had had to wait for the phone to ring, but as producers of the whole package, words and illustrations, they got a hearing. 'It was the only way you could step the other side of the line.'

From the beginning they were a team, but Jacqui - even today quieter, rather self-effacing - stayed in the background, unnamed or with a jokey credit (*by Colin Hawkins and an old witch*) until the HarperCollins reissues. She ponders why. '*Witches* evolved from coming back with Sally from playgroup and we used to do a drawing every day' - Colin: '*You* used to do a drawing every day' - 'of a different witch shopping, cooking etc. Eventually they became a book, but I was teaching by then and didn't go to the meetings. Colin wasn't





This is Greedy Goat.

sent the proofs, only the final book, which hadn't got my name on it. When he angrily pointed this out' – Colin takes up the story – 'the publisher said, "Well, we can't put every little housewife's name on all the books." Well, without *this* little housewife, the book wouldn't be here!' Jacqui continues: 'Awful, and it was a woman who said it! Well, I stood back from those books because I never would work for that editor, as you can imagine, and just worked with Colin and never bothered about my name until they were reprinted.' Now they are all – *Witches, Spooks, Vampires, School* etc – gathered in a restructured series that thrills them both.

They work opposite each other, zipping round the desk with doubts, ideas, advice, working on

different stages but as an indivisible unit, each crediting the other. Colin: 'People see the final book, but before that you have lots of roughs, overdrawings, talking, working out words. In all the books before *Whose House?* it may appear to be my particular illustration but the work has been maybe 60-70 per cent Jacqui's.'

Now you can see two styles, one familiarly sharp, Gothic, the other the rounder, softer feel of the enchantingly detailed *Whose House?* and the gentle domesticity of *Foxy* – yet even the *Foxy* books, insists Jacqui, are balanced collaborations. But she does love these younger books. Colin: '*Whose House?*, essentially Jacqui's in terms of illustration, is a milestone. For ever and ever I've seen these beautiful roughs coming through, but it's "No, you convert them" so they end up with my slight edge to them. It's taken me ten years to persuade her! So I'm delighted it's had that response [a Parents Gold Award to match *Foxy*'] – it'll be easier to get her to do another one!' Jacqui: 'But I really like the ideas stage, the planning and roughs, going down different routes to solve a problem. I could never have worked in children's books without Colin to sneak up behind – "Yes you could" – "No I couldn't... the horrible exposure of each time opening your folder..." 'But the joy, the passion, of showing a great idea...!' 'True, I love being there for that.'

Colin's the performer (whence, says Jacqui, came Sally, their actress daughter), but like a scriptwriting team they bounce off each other, capping corny jokes, scrubbing bad ideas, smoothing wrinkles, until the offered product is almost guaranteed publishable. Even the nightmare experience of doing their own paper engineering for *Mr Wolf* taught them what to offer the experts. Their whole philosophy is to make books *fun*; regardless of educational fashions, this, they believe, is the only way to get kids reading. They slip in lavatorial jokes – 'very immature, but publishers can be so anal,' and indeed that final giggle in *Whose House?* was too much for America – as well as every pun and groan known to *Beano*.

They have taught their children that enjoying your work matters more than money, and in the end 'the good times came with children's books.' Their house in London's Blackheath says they are right – an elegantly angular, airy creation by the fifties architect Patrick Gwynne, now protected by the

National Trust, it would look from above 'like a Mickey Mouse head with two ears', one of which is a bright studio, gay with puppets, pirates' ships and their own spooky-monster merchandise from Boots, with their bedroom above, the other the sitting-room and bedrooms of their now-absent children. Life does look good, as we sit in the vaulted open living area, by the central fire, watching a pilot for the TV series of 52 five-minute animated films about *Foxy* and his little-but-not-to-be-ignored sister (based on the Finbar and Sally of long ago, and close to Jacqui's heart).

What's the time, Mr Wolf? Surely it's HAWKINS TIME! ■

The Books – a small selection

From Collins Children's Books:

Whose House?, 0 00 136021 3, £10.99 hbk

Witches, Monsters, Spooks, Pirates, Vampires, School, Aliens, and Grannies, £4.99 each pbk

Foxy and His Naughty Little Sister, 0 00 198219 2, £9.99 hbk, 0 00 664564 X, £4.99 pbk

Foxy Plays Hide and Seek, 0 00 136018 3, £9.99 hbk

Foxy and Friends Go Racing, 0 00 664565 8, £4.99 pbk

Daft Dog, 0 00 198209 5, £9.99 hbk

Greedy Goat, 0 00 198334 2, £9.99 hbk

From Egmont Children's Books:

What's the Time, Mr Wolf?, 0 7497 1747 5, £4.99 pbk

Mr Wolf's Week, Mr Wolf's Birthday Surprise, £4.99 each pbk

I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly, Old MacDonald had a Farm, Noah Built an Ark One Day, The House That Jack Built, £4.99 each pbk

From Walker Books:

How to Look After your Cat / Dog / Hamster / Rabbit, £6.99 each hbk, £4.50 each pbk

Come for a Ride on the Ghost Train, 0 7445 2171 8, £8.99 hbk, 0 7445 3671 5, £4.99 pbk

Photograph courtesy of Collins Children's Books.

Stephanie Nettell is a critic, author and journalist on children's books.

NEWS

Collins & Brown has formed a Children's Books division bringing together Belitha Press, David Bennett Books and Pavilion children's books which will retain their imprint identities.

Goosebumps author, R.L. Stine, is the children's author whose books are most borrowed in Britain from public libraries according to a survey by the Registrar of Public Lending.

EVENTS

Talking Books is a conference on Saturday 22nd May for anyone interested in children's literature with talks, seminars and discussions about books and how to encourage young people to become readers. Speakers include Jacqueline Wilson, Celia Rees, Brian Moses, Ian Beck and David Fickling. Details from the Reading and Language Information Centre, The University of Reading, Bulmershe Court, Earley, Reading RG6 1HY (Tel: 01189 318820; Fax: 01189 316801).

PEOPLE

Miriam Hodgson of Egmont Children's Books has been named Editor of the Year at the 10th annual British Book Awards.

Linda Banner, Associate Director of Marketing for Watts Publishing, and **Kate Agnew**, Manager of Heffers' Children's Bookshop, have jointly won a Nibbies Award for an Outstanding Contribution to the National Year of Reading at the 10th annual British Book Awards.

Nick Arnold of the Horrible Science series is to chair the Junior Panel of the 1999 Rhône-Poulenc Science Book prize.

Roy Blatchford, the first Director of Reading is Fundamental, has moved back to secondary Headship with the task of establishing a new school in Milton Keynes. Roy is also a regular BfK reviewer. His successor at RIF is **Alan MacKenzie**.

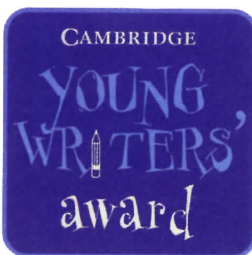
Scholastic Children's Books are pleased to announce the appointment of **Robert Walster** as Art Director and **Katherine Thornton** as Publishing Administration Manager. Robert was previously Art Director with the Watts Publishing Group and Katherine was at Egmont Children's Books.

Contributors: BfK team. Submissions welcome.



BANNER

COMPETITION



Teachers are invited to send for an entry form and teacher's pack for **Cambridge Young Writers' Award** for autobiographical writing organised by Cambridge University Press and Cambridge University. The closing date is 31st May 1999 and the competition is open to each age group from Years 2/3, 4, 5 and 6. Details from Rosemary Hayes, Durhams Farmhouse, Butcher's Hill, Ickleton, Saffron Walden, Essex CB10 1SR (tel/fax: 01799 531192, e-mail: r.hayes@btinternet.com).

Correction *Beverley Mathias writes:*

Thank you for the prominent piece about REACH (BfK 115). Your journal seems to reach most staff rooms these days. Unfortunately the Helpline number quoted is wrong as BT gave us an incorrect number. The new (and correct) number is 0845 604 0414.

Useful Organisations

No.6: **IBBY** (International Board on Books for Young People) British Section

iBbY

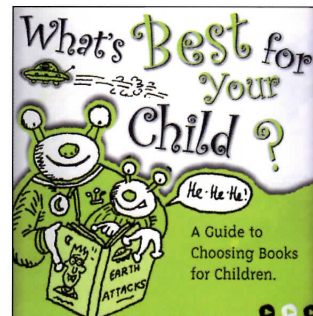
c/o The National Centre for Research in Children's Literature, Roehampton Institute London,
Digby Stuart College, Roehampton Lane, London SW15 5PH
(tel: 0181 392 3008).

Founded in 1958 as a border-crossing network of people and organisations interested in children's books and as an organisation that could promote tolerance and international understanding, IBBY has 60 member countries around the world. It organises biennial conferences and celebrates Hans Andersen's birthday on 2nd April (International Children's Book Day). Every two years it gives a prestigious international award to an author and an illustrator for the body of their work. National IBBY sections can also put forward outstanding titles for inclusion in the biennial IBBY Honour List.

After an absence of five years, the UK rejoined IBBY in 1995 and there is now an active British Section which has, amongst other activities, been the driving force behind the Children's Laureate scheme (see BfK 113).

PUBLICATIONS

What's Best for Your Child?: A Guide to Choosing Books for Children is a jolly information leaflet aimed at parents and other carers and full of practical tips. Single copies are available on receipt of a stamped A4 envelope from Scottish Book Trust, Scottish Book Centre, 137 Dundee Street, Edinburgh EH11 1BG.



Obituary

In Loving Memory of Wendy Boase

1944-1999

David Lloyd of Walker Books writes:

Wendy and I worked together for almost 20 years as Walker editors; she gave me my job as editor in 1981, and from then until now I took my lead from her in so many ways. Not that I, or anyone else, could be much like her – she was unique in her energy, her concentration, her passion, her dedication to every aspect and detail of her work. She worked astonishingly hard, and she had astonishing amounts of fun outside work too. She loved books, and she turned her hand with equal skill to fiction, non-fiction, novelty books, picture books – any kind of publishing, in fact, that was author or illustrator led. It has been said that Wendy lived for Walker Books – she helped found the company in 1978, and experienced and guided every stage of its remarkable history. But her life also contained deep friendships, and it is both as a true friend of the heart and as an inspirational editor that so many of us, so deeply, will miss her.



I agree pretty much with everything you write in your editorial on the standard of

Now an amazing BBC TV series!

AQUILA

Andrew Norriss

A spaceship from the past - can it change the future?

A black and white portrait of a woman with long, wavy hair and bangs, smiling. She is wearing a dark top. The background is dark.

A group of approximately 15 young children of various ethnicities posing for a photo in a classroom setting. They are arranged in several rows, some sitting on the floor and others standing. The background shows shelves with books and educational materials.

*Reviewed by the full-time children
in Red Class (Nursery) aged 3½ to
4½ years*

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

Brian Alderson is chief children's book consultant for *The Times*.

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 Principal of Walton High, Milton Keynes, and was founding UK Director of Reading Is Fundamental.

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.

Peter Hollindale is Reader in English and Educational Studies, University of York.

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

Adrian Jackson is General Adviser – English, West Sussex.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Elizabeth Schlenther 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.

Nicholas Tucker is a lecturer in Psychology at Sussex University.

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Books About Children's Books

No Go the Bogeyman

★★★★

Marina Warner, Chatto and Windus, 448pp, 0 7011 6593 6, £25.00 hbk

In her study of fairy tales, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, Marina Warner demonstrated her remarkable ability to make fertile connections between past and present, the anthropology of folktale and contemporary artefacts, fiction and fact. In an age of specialisation she is unafraid to be a cultural polymath. The book was important for children's literature, not only because it enriched our understanding of fairy tales but because Warner's eclectic method brought stories for children out of the ghetto to which 'adult' criticism so often consigns them, and treated them unpatronisingly as a significant part of the broader culture.

In *No Go the Bogeyman* she displays the same impressive qualities and attitudes, turning her attention this time to bogeymen, ogres, cannibals, giants, child-killers, paedophiles and other monsters. *No Go the Bogeyman* is about fear, not least our fears for and of children, and the many strategies that adults and children use to engender and tame it.

The book is split into three sections, 'Scaring', 'Lulling' and 'Making Mock', reflecting the three strategies – of externalised terror, soothing consolation, and mocking laughter – which between them cover most of our efforts to name and subdue the demons. The shortest of these sections, Warner's study of lullabies, is the most strikingly original contribution to children's literature criticism. Lullabies have been strangely neglected. In a dazzling analysis Warner demonstrates the complexity of instincts and motives at work in these notionally simple poems in song. The words of lullabies are often disconcertingly brutal. Neutralised for infants by the charm of the music, they can voice the mother's exhaustion and aggression, the resented cares of child-rearing, but they also express anxieties for the baby in its vulnerable present and imagined future, warding off strangers and aggressors and displacing possible real-life harms onto imagined monsters. For good measure, they teach key linguistic skills.

Elsewhere childhood is an omnipresent concern in the book, and children's stories past and present are repeatedly invoked as evidence of the changing chemistry of terror and delight. As a cultural analysis of our current anxious, envious and contradictory attitudes to childhood, the book is courageous and persuasive. A set of brief but penetrating studies of individual books, including Dahl's *The BFG*, Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* and David McKee's *Not Now, Bernard*, are points of focus in a rewarding and finally disturbing contribution to cultural history.

Not Now, Bernard, a bitterly funny and poignant book, illustrates a key element in Warner's presentation. Bernard, consumed and incorporated by a monster, is then supplanted by it, but his parents, negligently busy with their own concerns, fail to notice. For them,

Bernard in both incarnations is a peripheral monster in their lives. The story is part of a pattern in which modern adults idealize a hypothetical childhood while failing to meet children's true needs. They engage in what Warner calls 'a generalized cult of childishness', which is unprecedentedly vengeful towards any breach of its 'coveted realm of enchantment', whether by adults or children themselves. Adult abusers and children who kill have joined the bogeymen nowadays. I think Warner's analysis is correct, and this exhilarating work of scholarship forbids any complacent view of present-day childhood. PH

Jonathan Swift

★★★★

Victoria Glendinning, Hutchinson, 336pp, 0 09 179196 0, £20.00 hbk

'Farewell, deelest ickle MD. Lele deer ME. Lele lele lele sollahs bosc.' Which is not a quote from Harry Hemsley's long-forgotten *Horace*, or a rejected draft for *Peepo!*, but Jonathan Swift closing, in typical fashion, one of the letters that were collected as *The Journal to Stella*. Puzzlement is often expressed as to why this 'strange, grim man' should engage in baby-talk – and, equally, elsewhere, as to why his ferocious account of Lemuel Gulliver's travels into several remote nations of the world should have found its way into the nursery – and is still thought by many to be a book for children.



As Glendinning shows, such contradictions run all through Swift's life and works – inexplicable except by explanations that themselves become contradictory. She is fascinated by them, and this has led to her writing not a fashionable 900-page tombstone biography but what she calls in eighteenth-century fashion a 'character'. A chronological framework needs to be present, since the sequence of personal and political events helps to suggest reasons for the contradictions, but Glendinning is analyst rather than annalist and allows the framework to dissolve whenever reflection is prompted or whenever she needs to examine some other character with a role in Swift's ultimately tragic life.

This method makes her book approachable by readers who do not care for tombstone exhaustiveness. Diversions, say, into the importance

of coffee-houses, or the conduct of my lords Oxford and Bolingbroke, or the nature and reception of scatological verse are seamlessly integrated into the character-study itself, and even the notes-and-sources documentation – amusingly labelled 'Trainspotting' – is managed in a far more civilised fashion than in academic tomes (pity about the proof-reading though – '*saeva ignatio*' indeed!).

Although Glendinning commences her remarks about Gulliver with some sensible comments on its appeal to children (chucking in a reference to the *Alice* books as 'startlingly Swiftian in their play on scale and optical reversions' – and a mention of *The Borrowers* too) she cannot be expected to dwell on the Captain's fate in the hands of Bowdlerising publishers or the makers of cartoon movies. But her 'character' still has much to offer anyone surveying contemporary, let alone eighteenth-century, children's literature. The whole book is a reminder that writers have powerful reasons for constructing the texts before readers get their chance – and in her beautiful final chapter, 'Midnight', Glendinning surely takes us as close as anyone to the complex forces that generated Swift's words upon the page. Furthermore, to observe with her his fierce, uncompromising, and above all lucid polemics you cannot help but reflect on the meagre and frequently obscurantist discourse of today's didactic fictioneers and critics. (The Dean could have taught the rap-chaps a thing or two as well.) BA

Teaching Poetry in the Primary School: Perspectives for a New Generation

★★★

Dennis Carter, David Fulton, 160pp, 1 85346 567 4, £14.00 pbk

The Poetry Book for Primary Schools

★★★

Edited by Anthony Wilson with Sian Hughes, The Poetry Society, 152pp, £7.95 pbk (plus £1.25 p&p)

Two books with excellent ideas for poetry teaching in primary schools came out at the end of last year, on first impressions rather daunting.

Teaching Poetry in the Primary School grew out of the Clwyd Poetry Project and aims to stop the decline of poetry in schools and reconcile the spirit of creativity, the needs and nature of the child with the demands of the National Curriculum and the Literacy Strategy. Carter is critical of the programmed approach of the Literacy Hour and wants to prove that poetry has a 'unique and powerful role to play in developing children's literacy'. The book describes at length the many different ways poetry can be used in the Literacy Hour with ideas for lessons, cross-curricular activities, strategies for teaching and week by week plans for classes for all the primary years. Throughout, Carter

emphasises the importance of the 'poetic voice' and teaching children to (as Seamus Heaney puts it) 'credit marvels'. There is discussion on some excellent poems from the traditional poets – Wordsworth, Keats, Stevenson – but a more diverse range of poets could have been included to represent the richness of language and approach. Where are the contemporary poets? Philip Gross has managed to squeeze in, but Milligan, McGough and Rosen are dismissed as 'comic poets', not weighty enough to be included in a serious poetry programme. Only two women poets are mentioned and although multi-cultural poetry is mentioned in the Appendices, no poems are actually used in the lesson plans. Apart from the obvious loss of diversity, it is also worth remembering that children will be meeting poems in dialect in the GCSE years, and that the so called 'comic poets' and younger contemporary poets have much to say about the 'poetic voice' and crediting marvels.

The Poetry Book for Primary Schools is a treasure trove of contemporary poems, activities, interviews, lesson ideas and debate which can be used throughout the primary years. Although not specifically for the Literacy Hour, much will be relevant to it. The editor's enthusiasm and commitment to making poetry matter are evident. It is a relief to hear the poet's voice. Poets like Valerie Bloom, Philip Gross and Ian Macmillan all have helpful and inspirational things to say and the choice of poets and poems is wide ranging.

As a book to quickly dip into for ideas and specific approaches, the layout and chapter headings present some obstacles. Word plays are in boxes too small to be reader-friendly and the contents list and headings need to give a clearer idea of what is being covered. Wilson rightly says that poetry in schools depends on teachers and their enthusiasm and love for poetry, but then seems to assume that everyone reading the book is one of these teachers.

Both Carter's and Wilson's books have gold inside the pages, particularly for the teacher who is already steeped in poetry and who looks for opportunities to use it in the classroom. But many teachers avoid using poetry as a way of language development or encouraging the poetic voice because they just do not feel comfortable or sure enough of their strengths in this area. Both these titles assume that teachers need minimal support in looking at and responding to the actual poems.

My advice to teachers is to use Carter and Wilson's books in tandem for a thorough and contemporary approach to creating an atmosphere and a structure for teaching poetry after reading Ted Hughes' *Poetry in the Making* (which will inspire you and 'bed' your ear) and Adrian Mitchell's *13 Secrets of Poetry* (which will give you confidence). In this way you will be able to help children to (as Ted Hughes puts it) 'find the words that will unlock the doors of all those many mansions in the head and express something of the crush of information that presses in on us.'

HT

Now out in Paperback

Three, four and five star hardbacks or trade paperbacks previously reviewed in BfK and now published as mass market paperbacks.

Under 5s PRE-SCHOOL/NURSERY/INFANT

Granny and Me

FICTION ★★★

Penelope Farmer, ill. Valerie Littlewood, Walker, 0 7445 6043 8, £3.50

Reviewed BfK 112, September 1998:

'Six tales of Ellie and her rather self-consciously youthful Granny who breezes in to help deflect attention from a new baby brother.'

Goal!

FICTION ★★★★★

Colin McNaughton, Collins Picture Lions, 0 00 664654 9, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 108, January 1998:



'This latest picture book starring Preston the pig, the world's most brilliant footballer, needs little introduction...a picture book of rare comic zest.'

8-10 JUNIOR/MIDDLE

Fog Hounds. Wind Cat. Sea Mice

FICTION ★★★★★

Joan Aiken, ill. Peter Bailey, Hodder, 0 340 75274 2, £1.99 pbk

Reviewed BfK 105, July 1997:

'Three elegantly crafted short stories which dexterously weave magic into everyday matters and the everyday into magic.'

10-12 MIDDLE/SECONDARY

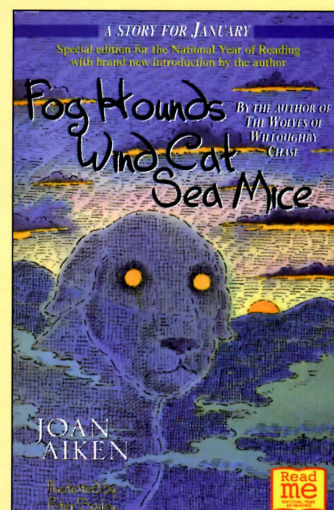
Dolphin Luck

FICTION ★★★

Hilary McKay, Hodder, 0 340 71660 6, £3.99 pbk

Reviewed BfK 115, March 1999:

'All ends happily for the members of the engaging family Robinson in the third book in a series about their antics and exploits.'



REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant

Jigsaw Farm

★★★

Claire Duffett, ill. Rachel Connor, Red Fox, 10pp, 0 09 926519 2, £4.99 board novelty

This novelty item consists of four die-cut board books which join up to make a jigsaw. Each features a different farmyard animal (hen, horse, cow and pig) with a simple descriptive text giving some information about it. The illustrations tend to the jolly rather than to accurate representation.

The text is pitched at children of about two. My one-year-old found the jigsaw tabs good for turning the pages with and – inevitably – for chewing; they also bent rather easily when being unlinked, so do not expect a long life for these titles. Inoffensive on the whole – the jigsaw element seems a rather pointless embellishment. AG

A Kiss Like This

★★★★★

Catherine and Laurence Anholt, Puffin, 32pp, 0 14 055944 2, £4.99 pbk

This is a delightful bedtime cuddle of a book for two: inviting its readers to kiss, blow raspberries, giggle, wriggle and jiggle with Little Cub and Big Golden Lion. What if it does owe something to *Guess How Much I Love You* and *So Much*; there is as much here for 2-4 year-olds and anyone lucky enough to share the story with them. There is a different word for each animal's kiss, as Jumpy Monkey, Squawky Parrot, Big Fat Rhino, Slippery Snake and Old Grey Elephant find Little Cub irresistible: tickly, pecky, nuzzling, 'ss-slow hiss-sing' and slurpy, sloppy. There is even excitement and danger. Would



you like 'Mean Green Hungry Crocodile' to give you a 'snippy, snappy, kiss'? A perfect match of text and picture from the Anholts, which celebrates the inimitable intimacy of a story shared between a small child and someone they love. CB

Love is a Handful of Honey

★★

Giles Andreae, ill. Vanessa Cabban, Orchard, 32pp, 1 86039 791 3, £9.99 hbk

Having shared this picture book a number of times with two four-year-olds who never miss their evening 'milk and stories', I can find little positive to say about it. One cliché tumbles upon another; from the cloying title to any of the couplets one might choose to quote:

'Love is that warm cosy feeling
You get when you cuddle your Mum,
And love is that feeling of laughing
out loud
When somebody tickles your tum.'

There is some humour and affection in the drawings of the bear family but familiar images of rainbows, picnic hampers, honeypots and Men in the Moon really do need more invention

than we are given here. If you want joy, compassion, understanding and good sense in your storytelling with bears, turn to Martin Waddell and Jez Alborough. RB

Fergus Goes Quackers!

★★★

Tony Maddox, Piccadilly Press, 32pp, 1 85340 566 3, £4.99 pbk

Fergus is an appealing white and brown dog of indeterminate breed. Here, he is followed by five baby ducks who have lost their mother. 'Woof, woof' say the ducklings imitating Fergus, and soon all the farm animals thinking this is a new game start making the wrong noises.

The pictures and text combine to make a pleasant story which will amuse the very young. There is, however, no degree of originality in either which would lift it into a more memorable category. This is one book in a series about Fergus. VC

Where is Little Croc?

★★★

Alison Boyle, ill. Julie Lacome, Walker, 24pp, 0 7445 4922 1, £4.99 hbk

Little Croc hides in different rooms while mum tries to round him up for his bath – on the way we are asked to spot assorted crocodilian toys cunningly hidden amongst other spiky green things. The repetitive text is printed large and clear above the unexceptional but pleasant illustrations, which also include speech bubbles and action sequences.

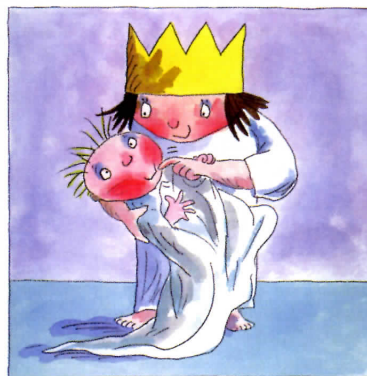
Good for pre-school sharers – slightly older children will be as surprised as I was that all this hiding takes less than five minutes according to the clocks

in every room – it would take much longer in our unruly household! AG

I Want A Sister

★★★★★

Tony Ross, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 878 5, £8.99 hbk



Ross's Little Princess is back, with the eccentric royal family and friends that we already know from *I Want My Potty*, *I Want to Be* and *I Want My Dinner*. The Queen announces she is pregnant and the Little Princess is as foot-stampingly incorrigible as ever in coming to terms with the idea of the new baby. Perhaps they all know something she does not about the gender of the new royal scion, for they do their best to convince her that brothers can be just as much fun as sisters. This is a gentle lesson in sexual equality for pre-school children, full of Ross's brilliant touches of characterisation and silliness. There are golden crowns on the Princess's knickers and the plastic dustbin: and a separate little drama going on at the foot of the page as the household cats decide they can't face another baby like the Little Princess. CB

Brand New Baby

★★★★

Bob Graham, Walker, 32pp,
0 7445 6141 8, £9.99 hbk



On the bus, Walter suddenly woke up.



He struggled and curled his fingers.



His face changed colour, and he burped very loudly.



"Wow!" said Wendy.
"Not bad!" said Edward.

It was the most interesting thing Walter had ever done!

Graham's keen observations and gentle portrayal of family life are apparent in both text and illustrations in this warm and witty book. The story opens with Mum heavily pregnant. Dad seems a man of few words yet he holds the fort admirably whilst Mum is in hospital, helping the two small children adjust to the new birth. The children are not impressed by the baby, big sister describing him as 'a bit like a sleeping prune'. Dad fetches Mum and baby Walter home (he arrives late, say the pictures, Mum has been ready and waiting for HOURS!) and of course family routine then revolves entirely around the new baby. The illustrations show harassed parents with the same spouty hair and bemused expressions, coping as best they can with sleepless nights and two demanding children. A wonderful, memorable book for a family to share when preparing for the arrival of a new baby, and for long after. GB

The Gruffalo

★★★★

Julia Donaldson, ill. Axel Scheffler, Macmillan, 32pp,
0 333 71092 4, £8.99 hbk



Donaldson has written a cleverly constructed rhyming tale for 3-7 year olds, in which a mouse escapes predator after predator by conjuring up the spectre of the imaginary Gruffalo, who grows more terrible with each conversation: 'His eyes are orange, his tongue is black. He has purple prickles all over his back.' Imagine mouse's surprise when he meets this awful beast who is real after all, and, worse, learns that mouse sandwich is the Gruffalo's favourite food. Never mind,

resourceful mouse is equal to the occasion and uses it to his own advantage. Scheffler's illustrations, particularly of the huggable, bemused Gruffalo, tell the story succinctly and with humour adding a touch of reality with a working woodland of fallen trees and piles of logs waiting to be collected. Yes, courage and cunning can overcome the worst odds. CB

Just Like Floss

★★★★

Kim Lewis, Walker, 32pp,
0 7445 6129 9, £9.99 hbk

Floss's five puppies are strong and sturdy but only one is to be kept on the farm to help Floss herd the sheep. The one who shows himself to be 'just like Floss' is the littles, Sam, who is unafraid one snowy day when confronted by sheep with hard black heads and horns. Sam stares into the eyes of an old ewe and she and the rest of the flock retreat.

The words are simple and well-chosen, leaving Lewis' visual images to convey this tiny slice of life on a hill-farm in winter. The illustrations range from the landscapes of the end papers to close-ups of people and animals in which texture is so graphically conveyed that one longs to run a hand over the rough-coated sheep. The design is excellent; the landscape format suits the content and the page layout works well, particularly in the scenes where Sam runs over the fields to confront the sheep. VC

Frog in Love

★★★★

Max Velthuis, Andersen, 32pp,
0 86264 872 6, £4.99 pbk

Life throws many problems at Frog, and how he works through and eventually resolves them provides thoughtful discussion material for readers. Previous Frog titles include *Frog is Frog* and *Frog and the Stranger*. In this new picture book, Frog presents with strange symptoms. He doesn't know if he is happy or sad, and his heart thumps faster than usual.



Hare thinks hard, 'just like a real doctor', and proclaims he must be in love. Frog delights in this diagnosis, and decides the lovely white duck is his heart's desire. 'A frog can't be in love with a duck,' announces the pragmatic pig. 'You're green, and she's white.' The graphically simple pictures are inextricably linked with the text throughout, and the conclusion of this delightful story is perfect. 'A frog and a duck... Green and white. Love has no boundaries.' GB

The Wrong Overcoat

★★★★

Hiawyn Oram, ill. Mark Birchall, Andersen, 32pp,
0 86264 867 X, £9.99 hbk

Everybody in the family is delighted with Chimp's new coat – except Chimp, who wants something more flamboyant and suitable for bowling. So frustrated does he become with the praise heaped on his coat that he threatens to take it off in public – and he is not wearing anything underneath. Eventually, he comes to a creative compromise with a sartorially challenged kangaroo.

This is a straightforward little tale about the kind of mini-ordeal that many young children will be familiar with. It makes a significant point about individual choice and initiative within the framework of a lighthearted animal story. Birchall's pastel and watercolour illustrations in this, his first picture book, are humorous and topical – the swaggering procession of duded up animals on the way to the bowling alley is instantly recognisable as a cohort of pre-adolescents putting on the style. Highly recommended for all readers. GH

Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse

★★★★

Kevin Henkes, Hodder, 40pp,
0 340 71465 4, £4.99 pbk



This joyful, exuberant book by an American author/illustrator has particular appeal. There is an immediate intimacy in the way that Lilly talks to us, through pictures and captions, whilst the narrative continues, knowing she has our full attention. Lilly LOVES school. She loves the pointy pencils, the way her shiny red boots go clickety click on the floor. But most of all, Lilly loves her teacher, Mr Slinger, a love which is almost tangible in the illustrations. Mr Slinger is 'bright as a button', in his artistic shirts, with a different coloured tie for each day of the week. The characters' emotions are particularly well shown in the lively illustrations. Patience is called for in the plot, but this is nigh impossible for a small rodent in love with her teacher! The resolution of this somewhat cautionary tale is witty and wonderful. GB

The Runaway Tractor

0 7460 3489 X

Pig Gets Stuck

0 7460 3488 1

BIG BOOKS

★

Heather Amery, ill. Stephen Cartwright, 16pp, Usborne
'Farmyard Tales', £9.99 each pbk

Usborne have been trawling their backlist to find something to publish in big book format. These two episodes – I cannot bring myself to call them stories – are set on Apple Tree Farm and feature Mrs Boot the Farmer and her two children Poppy (a passive character who says nothing in either book) and Sam who utters a few banal words.

In both books, the pedestrian text is arranged with a single line at the top and two longer lines at the bottom of each page. This, it is claimed, provides two versions: one for 'novice' readers and one for 'more advanced' readers. Even in big book format I cannot imagine either version holding a child's interest. The watercolour illustrations are flat and static and add nothing; the most they have to offer in terms of visual literacy is a little yellow duck which for no apparent reason, is to be found in every picture. JB

All Fall Down

0 19 272356 1

Cat on the Mat

0 19 272355 3

Toot, Toot

0 19 272357 X

BIG BOOKS

★★★★

Brian Wildsmith, Oxford, 16pp,
£10.00 each pbk

The Fish who could wish

BIG BOOK

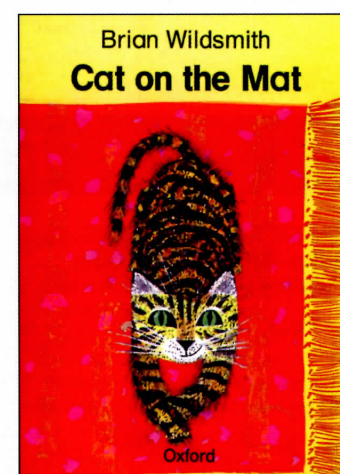
★★★★

John Bush, ill. Korky Paul, Oxford, 32pp, 0 19 272360 X,
£12.99 pbk

Teacher to class 'Where's this week's story set?'

Five year-old: 'On the Big Book stand, Miss.'

Such is the subliminal message to young children of the literacy hour! Pedagogical debate aside, one of the powerful and lasting aspects of the way primary schools now approach the teaching of reading is the presence of a wonderful array of Big Books. These four titles handsomely justify their new packaging.



Wildsmith's animals – always intriguingly poised on the page – have captured beginning readers for nearly two decades now. Here in mega-size they fairly bristle with energy, humour and warmth, their eyes and smiles noted especially by the reception group with whom I shared the titles. The books also

NEW Talent

Little Bo Peep's Library Book

★★★★★

Cressida Cowell, Hodder Children's Books, 32pp, 0 340 72284 3, £12.99 hbk novelty

Little Bo Peep has, of course, lost her sheep. Perhaps the library has a book about how to find them. The helpful librarian, Mother Goose, directs her to lamb in the cooking section where she meets Big Bad Wolf (browsing through *Basic Little Girl Cookery*) who follows her to the crime section (where the Queen of Hearts is engrossed in *Mrs A. Summer's Day's Who Stole the Tarts*) and then the natural history section where she finds A. Shepherd's *How to Find Sheep*. From the library shelves it is possible to retrieve and actually read these titles with their helpful hints (remove the rubber armbands, for example, before cooking *Mary Mary à la Mer*). Cowell plunges the reader into a most convincing nursery rhyme world that is wittily



contextualised. Her fresh white pages with their quirky, knowing sheep trotting after Bo Peep are laid out with confident flair and her scratchy line illustrations with their textured wash sparkle with vibrant blues, pinks and greens. And the library setting! This book even has a date stamped library sticker and a cataloguing bar code. Some young readers might like to make their own miniature books to put on the library shelves, quite apart from joining their local library. While there are shades of the Ahlbergs in its genesis, Cowell succeeds in making this title very much her own. An outstanding book, let alone first book. RS

provide excellent display material for the relevant classroom topic – a set to invest in!

The Fish who could wish lends itself equally strongly to the large format: castles, cars, Spanish guitars and more are here given the full Korky Paul treatment in a tale that is a simple piece of nonsense. The brief narrative reads well aloud and has sufficient accessible pattern in its telling to be valuable literacy hour material. Well beyond that function, the quixotic blue and turquoise illustrations are a sheer delight, guaranteed in my experience to stimulate young readers themselves to go off and draw, paint and glue with equal fun and vigour. RB

Blooming Cats

BIG BOOK ★★★★★

David R. Morgan, ill. David Parkins, Scholastic, 32pp, 0 590 66091 8, £15.99 pbk

The ten Blooming Cats include Saucy Tom, Brave Nancy, Brainy Sue and

the Tiddleywink Twins. Each cat, drawn in a cartoon style, has its own unique personality but they are also a close knit group. When the retired school caretaker who has befriended them collapses in his house, they hatch a plan to get help for the stricken pensioner.

Written entirely in the present tense, this big book version of *Blooming Cats* should guarantee it an even larger audience. Perfect for use in literacy hour with top infants or lower junior classes. AK

Ring-a-Ring O'Roses: A Collection of Nursery Rhymes and Stories

★★★★★

Illustrated by Justin Todd, Viking, 160pp, 0 670 87302 0, £14.99 hbk

Definitely not a pretty-pretty Nursery Rhyme collection, this assortment of the better-known rhymes,

interspersed with stories such as 'Goldilocks', 'Chicken-Licken' and 'Puss in Boots', is illustrated in an idiosyncratic style that ranges from 18th-century rustic vignettes reminiscent of Stubbs and tiny sequences to represent each verse of rhymes such as 'Simple Simon', to almost three-dimensional Tenniel-esque caricatures. These latter often use intense colours and unusual perspectives, giving a strong and at times slightly menacing feel. The pictures are often very literal and are full of movement.

Text size and arrangement on the page are used imaginatively to reflect meaning or intonation – carried to extremes this becomes irritating but is often effective. There is an index of first lines.

As with any collection of this kind, personal taste is the final arbiter. Some may feel that these images are too powerful for the youngest readers – they certainly challenge our notion of what is suitable for children. I see this title best used as part of a nursery/reception class library where children could share and enjoy commenting on the pictures with friends, rather than as a primary source of rhymes for a family. AG

Dazzling Diggers

FACTION ★★★★★

Tony Mitton, ill. Ant Parker, Kingfisher, 24pp, 0 7534 0350 1, £3.99 pbk

One of a series of four, this is an excellent little picture book celebrating the power and utility of digging



machines. The text consists of ten rhyming couplets, each occupying the caption space of a double sized spread showing the diggers at work, operated by cartoon animals. The language is as busy and eventful as the illustrations. As well as the rhymes, which are catchy enough for a class to memorise after a few tellings, the lines are rich with onomatopoeia and alliteration, and are packed with vivid vocabulary. The end page presents a simple, illustrated glossary of digger bits.

A simple and attractive book that presents a splendid spread of lively language. GH



A pop-up tipper from *Truck Jam*.

Truck Jam

★★★★★

Paul Stickland, Ragged Bears, 16pp, 1 85714 158 X, £11.50 hbk novelty

Trucks roar, rumble and roll in this latest adventure by Stickland. A giant pop-up with amazing paper engineering, this book will have special appeal. The 5, 6 and 7-year olds with whom I shared it just loved it (dare I say, especially the boys). Each of the seven double spreads has just a few rhyming words describing the action, and sometimes the words are cleverly obscured until the reader interacts with the book, manoeuvring the pop-ups to reveal the rhyming text. 'Green means go, start off slow.' The brilliant red and yellow fire engine is full of detail, and, whilst there is an on-going plot, every page has its own story. 'Oh no! The engine's blown! Can they fix it on their own?' No, they cannot, but luckily along comes a big tow truck, skilfully driven by a woman in a baseball cap. Great fun, and a book to marvel over. GB

REVIEWS 5–8 Infant/Junior

There's a Monster Who Eats Books in our House

BIG BOOK ★★

Sally Grindley, ill. Arthur Robins, Macdonald, 32pp, 0 7500 2649 9, £12.99 pbk

Exploring the theme of caring for books and enjoying books, alongside the perennial problem of living with younger siblings, *There's a Monster ...* is a useful tool with which to encourage discussion with younger children. Although a good story, I am not convinced that this picture book works as a Big Book. The lively illustrations are bright and attractive and bring to life the humour in the story. But why a BIG book? The

cartoon bubble text is too small to use as a shared text. AK

The House Cat

BIG BOOK ★★★★★

Helen Cooper, Scholastic, 32pp, 0 590 66022 5, £15.99 pbk

Tom-Cat shares a house with downstairs occupants, Mr and Mrs Spode-Fawcett, and Jennifer's family who lives in the flat above. When the Spode-Fawcetts move house they take the cat with them. This picture book tells of the many adventures and mishaps that befall Tom-Cat as he finds his way back home.

This stunning big book version emphasises the rich creativity of Cooper's wonderful artwork. Whether



it be the cool elegance of the Spode-Fawcetts' flat or the frightening claustrophobia of House-Cat's travelling cardboard cage or the cosiness of Jennifer's settee, Cooper captures each mood with seemingly effortless perfection. Using interesting perspective and variety of layout to great effect, this is a book that will be loved by children and adults alike. I thought it was superb – and I hate cats! AK

The Golden Cage

★★★

Ivan Jones, ill. Ken Brown, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 844 0, £4.99 pbk

Abigail, a spoiled little rich girl, has everything she wants except company, so she decides to assuage

her loneliness by capturing a songthrush and demanding that it sing for her every morning. When it refuses to, she assumes that this is because of dissatisfaction with its quarters, so she ensconces it in ever more sumptuous prisons until its steadfast silence drives her into a tantrum. Nemesis arrives in the form of an Hitchcockian visitation from vengeful squadrons of songbirds.

This is a very straightforward and readable story with a clear moral. Brown's realistic paintings emphasise the wistfulness of the opening, the terror of the climax and the resignation of the conclusion. There is a lot here for younger readers to talk about, anticipate and enjoy. GH

The Great Castle of Marshmangle

★★★★

Malachy Doyle, ill. Paul Hess, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 792 4, £9.99 hbk

An intriguing picture book about a boy who at the age of five meets his peculiar old granddaddy for the first time. His mum surrenders him to this gnomelike little harlequin, who takes him through a convoluted landscape to a twisty house where nothing is called what it seems to be. The old man speaks in allusive riddles that give a poetic twist to everyday objects, while the semi-surrealistic paintings that take up most of the book provide a similar twist to our perceptions of the story. In the middle of the night, when the boy has settled to sleep in his Fortywink Cockpit, a commotion below leads to a near disaster. This bare summary cannot convey the very idiosyncratic oddity of this brief, charming tale. If you love books (and the pictures within them) that look at life from a quirkily skewed angle, and if you love wordplay, then this is a book you will love sharing with children of all ages. Hickory Horseradish's naming game is one that might well catch on in your home and classroom. GH

Dr White

★★★

Jane Goodall, ill. Julie Litty, North-South Books, 32pp, 0 7358 1063 X, £9.99 hbk

This book is based on a true story about a little white dog (Dr White) who was long ago adopted by a children's hospital in London, and whose love for the young patients there helped in their recoveries. Pet-assisted therapy continues today, with stringent health and safety checks of course, and in many ways this beautifully cast tale is a celebration of the way the companionship of animals can assist rehabilitation. Not surprising then that sharing this book with a group of six-year-olds proved a real winner. Julie Litty's pictures of acutely sick children being nuzzled up to by the cuddly Dr White are endearingly drawn, with the end-pages cleverly including what amounts to a sort of register of all those faces who have been helped in this way.

The narrative has a deftly cast central twist; the severe health inspector banishes the dog, later to find out that Dr White's secret presence has saved his own daughter. Here is a children's picture book of real compassion and joy, and one that repays many readings. RB

The Brave Sister: A Story from the Arabian Nights

★★★★★

Retold by Fiona Waters, ill. Danuta Mayer, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 3904 9, £12.99 hbk



This is a beautiful book. The story tells of Parizade, the eponymous 'Brave Sister' who succeeds in a quest in which her two brothers had previously come to grief. Parizade also rescues the brothers, and is responsible for reuniting their parents, separated by the machinations of her wicked aunts at her birth.

Mayer's sumptuous illustrations are in the spirit of Eastern paintings: the colours are rich and vivid and the eye is drawn by the fine detailing in her depiction of the characters and landscape. There is great variety in the size and disposition of illustration: some occupy whole pages, others less. The use of white space is generous, creating a relaxed incorporation of pictures with text. A well-known anthologist, Waters' retelling is lively and imparts a warmth and lightness of touch to the story.

At £12.99 it may seem expensive for one story when whole collections are available for similar amounts of money. However, in a school library it would also be of relevance to the Art Department, thus catering for a wide range of ages and interests. VC

The Stone

★★★★★

Dianne Hofmeyr, ill. Jude Daly, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 1231 7, £10.99 hbk



Subtitled 'A Persian legend of the Magi', the genesis of this captivating tale lies in the journals of Marco Polo. Passing through the town of Saveh in

Editor's Choice

Whadayamean

★★★★★

John Burningham, Cape, 48pp, 0 224 04753 1, £9.99 hbk

One day God wakes up and decides to visit earth, the planet he made as 'a paradise where animals and people could live with air to breathe and water to drink'. Accompanied by two children on his journey, God is horrified by the pollution, starvation, killing and discord he encounters. He entrusts the children with the task of telling the grown-ups 'to change the way they are living'. As this is a story, the adults listen to the children and 'the world became a better world'.

A fable for our times, this handsomely produced landscape picture book is illustrated in the style that Burningham developed for *Cloudland* (discussed BfK 105). Cut out figures of rather vulnerable looking children are placed against sombre landscapes of industrial



waste and destruction depicted by photographic collage and sombre oils. The impact is wrenching as the small figures are dwarfed by the scale of our planet's destruction. The cadences of Burningham's rather stark text have something of the feel of a bible story: 'And so it came to pass that the men with the money stopped cutting up the trees, dirtying the waters and fouling the air.' Perhaps miracles will happen. RS

Persia, he came across three strange, ornate tombs with domed roofs. Balthasar, Melchior and Jasper were the three men buried in the tombs, and Hofmeyr's narrative offers a fascinating perspective on them as the Three Wise men following a fiery light in search of a baby king who would bring 'justice, and healing, and peace to the world'. For children familiar with the biblical account, the adventures recounted here – of stargazing magicians who brave scorching winds in the desert until the discovery of a simple shelter beneath the star – make for compelling reading. The denouement in two striking parts, challenges assumptions in arresting style.

What distinguishes this publication is the outstanding complementary nature of text and illustration. Each highly coloured double spread succeeds somehow in being both understated and extremely detailed so that the important pace and exciting vision of the story are roundly communicated. Highly recommended for all primary children as part of their general reading for religious and moral education. RB

Space Baby

★★★★★

Annie Dalton, ill. David Axtell, Mammoth 'Yellow Bananas', 48pp, 0 7497 3131 1, £3.99 pbk

Life becomes hard for Cameron, a young black boy, after his father leaves. Cameron, his older brother, Tee, and sister, Riley, are looked after by their grandmother but Tee starts hanging round with Jankro's gang. Everything seems to be going wrong until suddenly the Space Baby arrives – or is she an angel as gran thinks? Space Baby brings a kind of harmony with her that helps to solve problems. This enables Cameron finally to face up to Jankro's gang and come to terms with his father's absence.

This is an unusual fantasy story that deals with several important themes, including absent parents, bullying and responsibility. As well as this, it looks at growing up, showing not only how easy it is to become involved with a gang but also how it is possible to stand up to them. *Space Baby* is an imaginative and intriguing story that does not preach but may help young readers to start thinking about these issues. Illustrated with painterly full colour pictures. AR

Iggy Pig at the Seaside

0 340 71361 5

Iggy Pig's Dark Night

0 340 71362 3

★★★

Vivian French, ill. David Melling, Hodder, 48pp, £3.50 each pbk

Iggy Pig in this new series of beginner readers for 5-8 year olds, is an appealing character, bright as a button and so intent on enjoying life that he does not stop to think about the intentions of the 'big grey animal' that keeps bouncing up to play with him. It is an old joke but one that parents and children might still enjoy, particularly if text and illustrations always worked as well together as they do in the opening to *Iggy Pig at the Seaside*, where Mother Pig gets sick and the wolf exhausted on their way to the beach. Unfortunately, neither French's stories or Melling's illustrations live up to their promise. *Iggy Pig at the Seaside* runs out of ideas as soon as it gets there: and *Iggy Pig's Dark Night* introduces a whole farmyard of coy alliterative characters – Chicky Chick, Lucky Lamb and Dusty Dog – with a chorus of Baas, Meeows and Woof Woofs, that took me back to my own childhood school readers. Books like this, with a controlled vocabulary and frequent repetition of words, are

difficult to do well, and more trouble should have been taken. Each title invites you to flip the pages to see one of the characters running through the book: in *Iggy Pig's Dark Night* you are promised 'a hungry wolf' but actually it is dear old 'Dusty Dog'. CB

Too Big!

★★★

Geraldine McCaughrean, ill. Peter Bailey, Corgi Pups, 64pp, 0 552 54618 6, £3.50 pbk

Seven-year-old Neil's mother always likes to buy him clothes that he will 'grow into'. His latest cricket jumper makes him feel like a 'satsuma in an orange peel'. Then Mum buys a wardrobe Too Big to fit through the front door...

McCaughrean, whose list of honours include both the Guardian and Whitbread Awards as well as the much coveted Carnegie Medal, has written a very funny tale about a boy who is not listened to. The generously sized print is ideal for new readers and the simple but effective line drawings punctuate the story well. AK

Ruby's Recipes

★★★

Akulah Agbami, ill. Sharon Lewis, Mammoth, 64pp, 0 7497 3072 2, £3.99 pbk

Ruby's mother is often busy in her Caribbean restaurant, The Sugar Cane Corner, and Ruby wants to learn to cook so that she can help her. At first Ruby's attempts are disastrous with scones that taste like old socks, but finally, Ruby's mother decides to give Ruby weekly lessons in the restaurant.

Ruby's Recipes cleverly combines storytelling with simple recipes. It can be used in two ways, as a storybook, or as a storybook and starter cookery book. It is divided into four stories, each story containing a basic recipe (scones, jam tarts, Crunchie and ginger cake) with full cooking instructions. The stories, through Ruby's mistakes, also describe the problems that can occur. And there is an epilogue at the end of the book, which gives ten handy hints to help a young cook. This book has a joyful no nonsense approach to cooking and is a fun and easy way to start learning. AR

Return of the Killer Coat

★

Susan Gates, ill. Josip Lizatović, Walker 'Sprinters', 64pp, 0 7445 6391 7, £3.50 pbk

Andrew tries to convince classmate Alice that her secondhand coat, previously his, is a dangerous killer, eating anything it can lay claim to. Eventually Alice, who does not really regard the coat as more than an inconvenience, agrees that it must be destroyed.

As in many 'easy readers' (this one is published as a 'Sprinter'), the author's explanation of events is so curtailed by the need to be succinct that the story is rendered ever more nonsensical and unconvincing.

The difficulty of depicting a coat as an animate object in the many black and white illustrations is not quite overcome by Lizatović and I found some of them incomprehensible as

well as unattractive.

AG

Emmelina and the Monster

★★★★

June Crebbin, ill. Tony Ross, Walker 'Sprinters', 64pp, 0 7445 6044 6, £3.50 pbk

Imagine the story of Perseus and Medusa with a comic twist. Emmelina has two sisters, greedy Gina and vain Dina. The Queen wants rid of a monster which turns everyone who looks at it to stone. The question is whether brawn (Gina), beauty (Dina) or brains (Emmelina) will win the day.

This amusing tale is liberally illustrated with the manic characteristic line drawings of Tony 'I Want My Potty' Ross. Crebbin is the author of that wonderful big book, *The Train Ride*. AK

The Oxford Treasury of World Stories

★★★★★

Michael Harrison and Christopher Stuart-Clark, ill. Paul Dainton et al, Oxford, 144pp, 0 19 278144 8, £14.99 hbk



'The Star-Wife', a story from South America.

This is a rich collection of twenty-three stories from every continent and many countries. Some of the stories or their protagonists will be well-known, such as Anansi the Spider, the Tomten, Robin Hood, and the Monkey King from China. Others are less familiar, or they are adaptations or variations of traditional tales. A very useful feature of the book consists of four pages at the back which contain a note on the origin and background to each story, and an explanation of where and why the authors may, in some instances, have veered slightly from well-known versions of the tales. The preoccupations and vulnerability of human beings, wherever they live, are reflected in the stories which tell of love and longing, greed and covetousness, bravery and nobility of spirit. The tempo of the retellings varies to suit the theme, but each has an immediacy and an ability to engage the listener and to reflect the oral traditions within which many of the tales have originated.

The work of six different artists is used throughout the book. Almost every page is illustrated in full colour

with pictures that range from full page to vignettes. Styles and media vary greatly and have been chosen well to suit the text which they accompany. My only quibble about this fine volume is that the artists are not credited on the title page or in the notes on each story but listed at the very end with page numbers only. VC

One Big Family: Sharing life in an African village

NON-FICTION ★★★

Ifeoma Onyefulu, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 1346 1, £4.99 pbk

Onyefulu's first book, *A is for Africa*, has become a familiar title in school libraries. In this new book the author uses her camera to explore a fascinating aspect of African life, 'ogbo' (pronounced or-BO) or age-group. A 6-year-old Nigerian girl explains how boys and girls born at the same time work together throughout their lives with their ogbo. We see decision-making, many aspects of work, and various celebrations through the eyes of this child. The book is a masterly match of informative text and stunning photography. It is present day Africa, showing how traditional village life continues. Various family members may work in the cities, but they return to their ogbo to support village life, and join celebrations. The traditions surrounding death are beautifully described. Another must for the library, and also one to celebrate in the home. GB

Geeta's Day: From dawn to dusk in an Indian village

NON-FICTION ★★★

Prodeepa Das, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 1234 1, £10.99 hbk

This author's *I is for India* is familiar to many, and this new book is similarly a feast of information about the customs, religions and culture in India. The author states that India is a country of villages, where some people are born, grow up and die in their own village without ever moving to another place. 6-year-old Geeta's day begins like many another's world-over, with teeth cleaning and taking a bath. As her day progresses it is possible for readers to compare and contrast Geeta's world with their own. The similarities and differences will provide much food for thought. The colour photography is stunning, beautifully presented on what appears to be handmade paper. Additional factual information is presented in italics in this rich and vibrant book. GB

I'm Happy

★★★

0 7502 2334 0

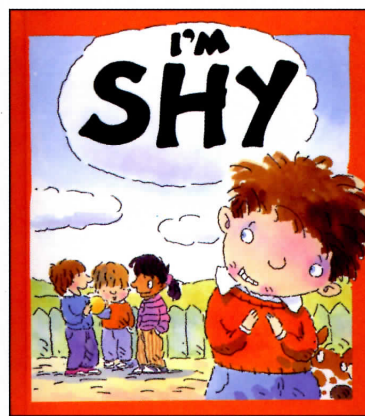
I'm Shy

★★★★

0 7502 2335 9

Karen Bryant-Mole, ill. Mike Gordon, Wayland 'Your Feelings' series, 32pp, £7.99 each hbk

These two books should appeal to children and adults alike. With their



vivid and cheerful comic illustrations, large print and sympathetic approach, they will be useful for the literacy hour as well as PSHE lessons. Each book has notes for parents and teachers - helpful for lesson planning - and a short list of further stories to read on the subject. *I'm Shy* is a particularly sensitive and witty approach to a painful emotion. *I'm Happy* is welcome as showing a positive emotion, but also includes the opposite feelings of anger and sadness. Other books in the series cover boredom, loneliness, worrying, unfairness, and feeling bullied. ES

At Home

0 7502 2265 4 hbk,
0 7502 2393 6 pbk

Having Fun

0 7502 2264 6 hbk,
0 7502 2394 4 pbk

Going on a Trip

0 7502 2305 7 hbk,
0 7502 2580 7 pbk (July 1999)

In the High Street

0 7502 2306 5 hbk,
0 7502 2579 3 pbk (July 1999)

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Karen Bryant-Mole, Wayland 'Fifty Years Ago' series, 32pp, £9.99 each hbk, £4.99 each pbk

The books in this series, supporting history and literacy at key stage 1 (infant level), all have the same clear format. Each double spread consists of a large colour photograph of how things are now and a black and white photograph of a similar activity fifty years ago. For example, in *At Home* the 'playing indoors' pages show a boy and a girl at the computer and the family from the past engrossed in a board game. I am not a great fan of uniform double spreads but they do add coherence to these books and reinforce the relentlessness of change.

Words in bold throughout each book provide a core text and smaller print sets out helpful background information. The 'I remember' anecdotes from people alive fifty years ago are not an original idea but they do work well and are lively and varied. In *In the High Street* fifty years ago Frank's friend gives him a bite of a banana - 'It wasn't like anything I'd ever eaten.'

Retrieval devices are excellent: contents page, index, glossaries and headings are all beautifully clear. Notes to help parents and teachers explain the photographs and a literacy hour checklist are useful features. Both 'then and now' as an organising theme and having

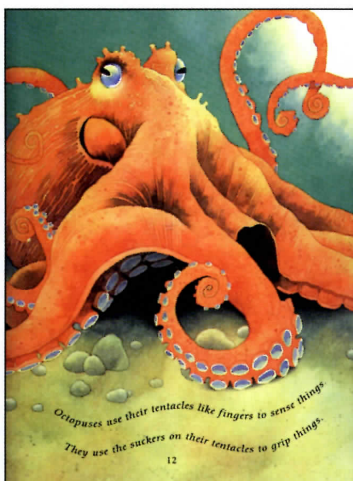
different generations of real families to personalise comparisons are well established devices. A strength is the recognition that attitudes change as well as material circumstances. For example in **Having Fun** the recent trend against the use of animals in circuses is shown in text and pictures. Issues like this often lead to involved talk and reflection. The quality of photographs has improved generally in information books but here they are often particularly well chosen. For me the image in **Going on a Trip** of the primary children walking to school struck a chord. MM

Gentle Giant Octopus

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Karen Wallace, ill. Mike Bostock, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 2881 X, £9.99 hbk

The female Giant Octopus is a gentle creature intent on finding a cave den where she will lay her eggs only once. Wallace tells the story of the octopus's journey using the same powerful imagery that made her **Think of an Eel** so engaging. The octopus is 'huge like a spaceship' and has long tentacles that 'fly like ribbons behind her'. Intent on her last quest 'her body stretches like toffee' over the sea bed. Young readers of about 4-7 will get a real sense of what it might be like to have a flexible body that can be squeezed through the tiniest of holes. Text to tell the story with smaller print to provide a wealth of detailed information work well here and the interaction between text and illustration is mutually enriching. Bostock creates fascinating pictures



of the octopus sinking into the sea bed 'like a huge rubber flower' and of the huge quantity of eggs 'hanging like grapes on a string' from the cave den roof. The final image shows the contrast between the female octopus shrinking in the shadows as the babies, squirming and wriggling with life, swim up from their egg sacs. MM

The Usborne First Book of Numbers

NON-FICTION BIG BOOK

★★★★★

Angela Wilkes and Claudia Zeff, ill. Stephen Cartwright, Usborne, 16pp, 0 7460 3504 7, £9.99 pbk

This book makes learning about numbers fun. It covers all the basic

concepts including adding up, taking away, multiplying and dividing and has strong sections on comparing things, sets, and odd and even numbers. Five to seven year olds would enjoy and benefit from it and, in some cases, it might be helpful to slightly younger or older children. Teachers will be able to use the book to start off particular number topics or to reinforce and consolidate learning in an entertaining way. Young children find counting pictures of objects, animals and people easier than dealing with figures which are essentially abstract. To progress they do need to move from the specific to the general and this book helps them do this. For example, on the Dividing page children are first invited to share the six pictured chicks between two children. Next they are invited to join a cartoon figure, called Clever Clogs, in writing about the chicks using number and symbols - $6 \div 2 = 3$. There is nothing new about this - but it is done particularly well here.

The large, bold print and brightly coloured illustrations make the book suitable for sharing with a class or group. Everything that appeals to the age group seems to be here - witches and cats, lions, lorries, balloons and babies, toys and food and, above all, beautifully drawn children engaged in all sorts of activities. The games, for example finding the little duck hidden on each double page, will reinforce enjoyment.

I am always delighted to find books that not only ask good questions but also invite the children to formulate their own. This happens on the page showing a cross section of the floors of a hotel. Teachers will also be able

to extend the tasks on each topic and the book should prove to be a very attractive and useful addition to Key Stage 1 mathematics resources. MM

Rome and Romans

NON-FICTION BIG BOOK

★★★★★

Heather Amery and Patricia Vanags, ill. Stephen Cartwright, Usborne 'TimeTraveller', 16pp, 0 7460 3491 1, £9.99 pbk

Not every successful small book makes a good big book but this visit to Ancient Rome, which has its inspiration in Usborne's **Time Traveller Rome and Romans**, works extremely well in its magnified form. Cartwright's splendid annotated drawings will lead to lively talk in group and class contexts. Particularly striking in large format are the pictures of 'At the Public Baths', showing clearly how underground pipes bring fresh water and how hot air travels through tunnels to heat the baths, and 'In the Streets of Rome' showing the magnificent roads and buildings of Rome.

The book is visually dynamic - we get a strong sense of citizens of different status going about their lives at home, at school and at work and enjoying their leisure shopping and at sports events like The Circus and at The Chariot Racing. Smaller series of pictures at the head and foot of some pages show us the stages in gladiator combat, procedures in cleaning clothes and in preparing food. These could be models for children's own writing. MM

REVIEWS 8-10 Junior/Middle

Jeremy Brown and the Mummy's Curse

0 7445 6047 0, £3.99 pbk

Jeremy Brown on Mars

0 7445 5912 X, £7.99 hbk

★★★

Simon Cheshire, ill. Hunt Emerson, Walker, 80pp

The second and third in a series of tongue-in-cheek stories about weedy schoolboy Jeremy Brown, who is, in fact, a Secret Service agent. When his tie bleeps or shoe buzzes he knows MI7 is calling. **Mummy's Curse** sees Jeremy and his sidekick Patsy Spudd travelling to Egypt to see Sheik Yabelli in order to unravel the mystery of the menacing robotic mummies, the first of which bursts out of the sarcophagus of Psidesalad II. **Jeremy Brown on Mars** follows our intrepid there as he attempts to outwit the twenty-four tentacled, concrete loving aliens who have destroyed the British University for Monitoring Stars (BUMS) and threaten to do the same to Grotside school and the entire planet.

With clear cut, black and white characterisation, suitably accompanied by a bold cartoon comic picture per chapter, the plot bubbles along. Both books work well as up to date juvenile parodies, gently poking fun at James Bond with plots that are fantastic but fun. AK

Fantastic Mr Fox

★★★★★

Roald Dahl, ill. Quentin Blake, Puffin, 88pp, 0 670 88025 6, £12.99 hbk



This early Dahl title has been given new illustrations by Quentin Blake, the illustrator of Dahl's later novels. **Fantastic Mr Fox** is one of the most satisfying of Dahl's stories, not only in its content, in which greed, power and cruelty are outwitted by daring and cooperation, but in its elegant construction: the increasingly desperate attempts of the farmers to

kill Mr Fox, followed by his sweet revenge and a great feast, which brings together all the underground animals - while the farmers wait in vain above, dripping and shivering in the dark ('And so far as I know, they are still waiting'). If the countryside lobby has a banned books list, this should be top of it.

Blake can match Dahl for drama, panache and wit; and he has a gentleness and irony that softens Dahl's Grand Guignol vulgarity and adds another dimension. Not only does he humanise the vile farmers but he has a wry look at the fox family. Mr Fox looks suitably dashing in kiefich, purple frock coat and yellow waistcoat, but Mrs Fox looks improbably confined, and very mumsy, in a white polka dot smock dress with a high collar. Is this a suggestion that Dahl has reversed the images of human and animal to such an extent that the foxes have become almost a parody of the perfect male dominated nuclear family?

This edition is expensive, and is intended as a gift book, but you get at least one Blake colour illustration a page, which is not bad value. CB

Extra Time

Jenny Oldfield, ill. Maggie Downer, 1 902260 13 9

Hostage

Malorie Blackman, ill. Derek Brazell, 1 902260 12 0

Ghost for Sale

Terry Deary, ill. Steve Donald, 1 90226014 7

Lift Off

Hazel Townson, ill. Philippe Dupasquier, 1 902260 11 2

What's Going on, Gus?

Jill Atkins, ill. Kate Aldous, 1 902260 10 4

Tod in Biker City

Anthony Masters, ill. Harriet Buckley, 1 902260 15 5

★★★

Barrington Stoke, 72pp, £3.99 each pbk

Here is a series of short, straightforward stories written to encourage independence among emergent and reluctant readers. Well-known names have been signed up to create simply-told tales on a variety of subjects that will appeal to a target readership ranging from 8+ to 13. According to the publisher, the format, including the cream pages and black and white illustrations, has all been carefully researched to provide the most reader-friendly presentation possible. It is worth trialing a few titles before making a commitment to the full set.

Extra Time is the humorous tale of a football-mad boy who is a hero on the pitch, but not so brave when it comes to asking a girl out. As for

tactics she can leave him standing! Obviously suitable for the upper end.

Hostage is more serious. This sees a kidnap attempt on a jeweller's daughter, which is foiled by the plucky young girl herself. In the process she recognises just how much her dad really loves her. There is a multi-cultural facet to this one, but only in the illustrations.

Ghost for Sale asks a lot of questions that should give the reader something to respond to. This yarn concerns the purchase of a so-called haunted wardrobe from an old, respected lady who might just be a serial con-artist.

Lift Off is another jokey title about an imaginative boy who is adept at avoiding all exercise, but whose wild fancies let him down when it comes to avoiding taking part in the School Sports Day.

What's Going on, Gus? rests at the lower end of the age-range and is the farcical account of a baby-sitter, Mrs. Pick's, first time looking after Boomer, Yeti, Gus and Punk the cat.

Tod in Biker City is a thriller that takes us to the future when water is deadly scarce and water diviners, like Tod's dad, are worth kidnapping. Gangs of bikers roam the land prepared to kill to get the precious liquid that they need. When the father goes missing there can only be one likely cause and Tod must ride to the rescue. **DB**

Little Dad

★★★

Pat Moon, ill. Nick Sharratt, Mammoth, 96pp, 0 7497 3262 8, £3.99 pbk

Imagine crossing the films **Big** starring Tom Hanks, with **The Incredible Shrinking Man** and **Look Who's Talking** and you have the gist of **Little Dad**. Grumpy little brother, Benjie, wants to be big whilst, in sheer frustration, Dad says he would not mind being small again. The dual transformation that follows produces Big Benjie (a six footer baby brother to Sam and Holly) and Little Dad (a toddler-sized dad who talks like a baby and wears a nappy). Holly and Sam struggle with Mum to put things back to normal.

A comic and appealing book for young fluent readers and listeners (as long as the person reading it aloud remembers whether they should be speaking in a high squeaky voice or a deep one!). With cartoon style illustrations. **AK**

Land of the Long White Cloud

★★★★★

Kiri Te Kanawa, ill. Michael Foreman, 120pp, 1 86205 075 9, £9.99 pbk

In her preface to this collection of Maori stories, Te Kanawa explains that the impetus to collect and set them down came after a gathering of Te Kanawas in 1987 at their ancestral home in New Zealand. She also states that these retellings are her own recollections of stories heard in childhood, and that she has not attempted to authenticate them.

While not qualified to judge their authenticity, to this reader the collection is striking for the vigour of the tales and their retelling. Some of



the stories are about the creation of New Zealand and of the gods and monsters who frequently engaged in conflicts and battles with humans. Some end in death and destruction, others in accommodation of various sorts as in the story of mortal lovers Wetenga and Putawai and the child Putawai bore Manoa, a wairua or spirit. The spirit world is an active one, and is often intertwined with that of the tribes people who inhabit a landscape of changing colours and moods. Sometimes it is lush and green, sometimes suffused with a golden yellow light, and frequently, mysteriously blue as in the story of lovers Hinemoa and Tutanekai. Foreman's images of water, calm and still at times, but also raging around Maori canoes, remain in the imagination. **VC**

Dinosaur Pox

★★★

Jeremy Strong, ill. Nick Sharratt, Puffin, 128pp, 0 14 038979 2, £3.99 pbk

Life, as 10-year-old Jodie sees it, is appallingly unfair: her hair is all wrong, freckles are everywhere, a young brother is permanently tiresome and parents exist only to frustrate her every move. Little wonder, then, that she appears such a grumpy young woman – an impression which persists until her miraculous transformation into a dinosaur. Subsequently, events at home, school and beyond take a series of hectic turns and diversions, resulting finally in a Jodie more in tune with herself and her surroundings. It all amounts to lively, well paced and undemanding reading, its zaniness – just about – kept under control. **RD**

The Lion Graphic Bible

★★★★★

Script Mike Maddox, ill. Jeff Anderson, lettering Steve Harrison, Lion Publishing, 256pp, 0 7459 2708 4, £20.00 hbk

English Bibles are always translations and at times translations of previous translations. So there can be no objection when new versions of the original continue to appear. Even so, **The Lion Graphic Bible** might still ruffle some Christian feathers. For here is an easily assimilated Bible not

particularly doctored to protect young readers from its more controversial aspects. Presented with such a visually compelling account, children may well come away knowing more about more of the stories than was once thought good for them.

This version is illustrated and written by a team experienced in comic strip techniques. They know therefore how to tell a good, pacy story with the minimum of words and in pictures of all shapes and sizes, with different formats separating parables, dreams, and angelic visitations from actuality. Modern dialogue is used throughout: 'Really darling, don't go on!' 'Shut up and keep crawling', or from the resurrected Jesus to his disciples, 'Well don't just stand there. I'd like something to eat!' Faces are also contemporary, though dress is not. As with actors in old-fashioned Biblical films, hair is stylishly coiffeured and teeth white and even (unless you are a villain). Backgrounds show Middle-Eastern scenery, props and architecture, but most pictures consist of faces in close-up delivering speech bubbles. There is a tendency towards stereotype here; Jesus, for example, is usually shown breaking out into a cheerful grin after performing a miracle.

By selecting from the Apocrypha as well as from the Old and New Testaments, the text mixes familiar tales of Moses, David and Daniel with the lesser-known exploits of Judith, Ezra and Esther. All their stories come over as real rather than as allegories. Shockers like the slaughter of the Canaanites by the Israelites determined to kill 'everyone and everything in sight' are represented in gory detail. The normal Christian re-arrangement of the Old Testament books in order to make them represent an unbroken prophetic line stretching to the coming of the Messiah is followed. Yet the prophets themselves come over as heroes (or not) in their own right, with their prophetic function often something of an after-thought.



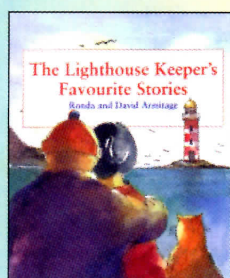
Instead it is the examples of bravery and treachery, honesty and scheming, chastity and lust, mercy and cruelty, modesty and vanity that stand out most vividly in these tales. Fairy story motifs exist as well: there are talking animals, food that appears by magic, dreams that prophesy and founding infants who grow up to be rightful leaders. Modern children may well find many of these stories

The Armitages Return....

Two new books by the much loved Armitages are to be published in June.

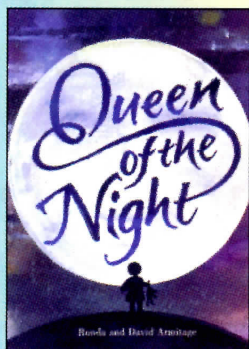
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SCHOLASTIC

fascinating; whether they will also warm to them is more questionable. As it is, girls may object to God's description of Adam as Eve's master, while Jewish children may dislike the unforgiving way their ancestors are depicted in this version of the New Testament. But more generally it is the single-minded fanaticism that might grate for readers in our more pluralistic times. Ancient warrior-heroes seem rather like today's sinister Taliban fighters, bearing spears instead of sub machine-guns. God himself, pictured with Oliver Reed-type features, is more jealous bully than loving father.

The **Lion Graphic Bible** is never a sacrilegious work. But when complex stories appear in such basic forms they invite fairly basic responses in return. Christ, for example, comes over as a mostly sympathetic figure. But the type of comic strip shorthand used to depict his unyielding sense of conviction may well make little ultimate sense except to the already converted. Old Testament figures are sometimes shorn of their worst excesses but are still often most unattractive. This is not wrong in itself, and the publishers should be congratulated for bringing back into popular circulation stories that have often been left to languish unread because of their general embarrassment factor. Yet Christians looking to this book as an aid to conversion or steadying the faith should be aware that the opposite could happen with readers who may simply not like a lot of what they see and read. Not for the first time, the Bible – made as accessible and colourful as it is here – could serve as a problem for Christianity as well as its main support. NT

Stars and Planets

NON-FICTION BIG BOOK

★★

Alastair Smith, Usborne, 16pp, 0 7460 3503 9, £9.99 pbk

A great deal is included in this book about the solar system. Page headings include: Our Solar System; The Sun; The Moon; The Rocky Planets; Planet Earth; Gas Giants; Heavenly Bodies; and Exploring Space.

Although there are some remarkable photographs of the moon and planets the double spreads in this big book vary in quality. The 'Heavenly Bodies' pages with arresting pictures of a comet, an asteroid and a galaxy on pages 12 and 13 are likely to inspire an imaginative response. These pages not only impart concepts about phenomena in space but could also be used in a shared reading input to the Literacy Hour to model headings, captions and the relationship between text and illustrations. On the other hand rather too much is crowded into

'Exploring Space' and 'Gas Giants' and, for me, the introductory double spread does not communicate the wonder of the solar system. Because the reach of the book is so great and so many difficult concepts are included one sometimes gets an impression of bits of interesting information being offered before we proceed to the next topic. The Space Shuttle, Space Probe and Satellite illustrations, all included in the double spread 'Exploring Space', deserved more room and more detailed labelling.

Perhaps the book aims to provide an introduction to space phenomena and modes of exploration and, if so, it achieves some success. But I think what we need, particularly for older primary children, is more detail about less content in some of the big books we select. MM

Who was Alexander the Great?

Ill. Peter Dennis, 0 7500 2272 8

Who was Tutankhamun?

Ill. Mike White, 0 7500 2377 5

NON-FICTION

★★★★

David Nasmyth, Macdonald, 48pp, £11.99 each hbk

This is a new series of children's biographies of figures in ancient history, and its presentation is familiar. There are double page spreads and the information is served up in paragraph chunks, headed with black boxed questions like, 'What happened when a king died?' and 'How did Macedonia come to be so powerful?' The illustrations come from the Hollywood school of dramatic historical reconstruction and, although the two titles have different illustrators, it is difficult to see any distinctiveness of style. The concept and design of the books is conservative and inflexible. Both titles have maps on the endpapers but none in the body of the text, where they would have been a great help, particularly in following Alexander's conquests.

Nasmyth's texts, which do an excellent job of integrating chronology, historical background and personality, offering knowledgeable introductions to their subjects for 8-12 year olds are the best thing about these titles. The way in which Nasmyth draws inferences about Tutankhamun and his time from the objects found in the tomb is a simple, but effective, illustration of the way in which archaeological evidence is used. His writing is clear and logical; take out the black boxes, and his prose might even flow. There are good glossaries and indexes. Space ought to have been found for 'further reading' lists. CB

Henry VIII

Gill Munton, original text by Katrina Siliprandi, 0 7502 2280 8

Victoria

Margaret Stephen, original text by Richard Wood, 0 7502 2281 6

NON-FICTION

★★★

Wayland 'Our Kings and Queens' series, 32pp, £8.99 each hbk

These are 'differentiated text' versions of Wayland titles first published in 1995: new, simplified texts in large print, written around exactly the same illustrations as the original titles.

Neither book overcomes the problems arising from this change. Each text is a précis of the original and tends to lurch where passages have been omitted. The arrangement of the books, each of which start with an overview of the reign before going back to the beginning, is confusing for the intended audience. Some illustrations are made out of place or redundant, or require more explanation, because of the changes in text. But, at the same time, captions to the illustrations shrink and become less specific: although there are two illustrations of Victoria's mother, we never learn her name; we are shown an engraving of Henry attacking a town in France but are not told where the siege is. The literal impossibility of the dynastic painting which shows Jane Seymour standing next to her grown child Edward VI, when she had, in fact, died just after childbirth, is not explained.

Nevertheless, the original titles were good, particularly in their use of a wide range of contemporary pictorial sources, and the new authors have worked with care and skill to produce simpler accounts. These focus more on personality than policy but make an acceptable and approachable introduction to the reigns for 7-9 year olds and older less able children. CB

What Do We Think About Disability?

0 7502 2209 3

What Do We Think About Family Break-Up?

0 7502 2212 3

NON-FICTION

★★★★

Jillian Powell, Wayland, 32pp, £8.99 each hbk

Wayland's 'What Do We Think About' series should be useful both for the classroom and for parents on a one-to-one basis. Clearly laid out with large print and colour photographs, the style is uncluttered and the facts simple. **Family Break-Up** seems intended mostly for children who are

Can anyone else help your parents?

Sometimes when parents are not getting on together, they try to get help. They go to see someone who will listen and let them talk about their problems.



They may still decide to break up.

12

experiencing divorce and, therefore, emphasises the changes this may mean and the fact that divorce is not the child's fault. Some basic information about counselling and step families is included. **Disability** will be most useful in schools as an upbeat introduction to disabled people's lives and how they cope. Each book contains a simple index, a short glossary, notes for parents and teachers and a list of organisations that provide support. The series is beautifully produced and a pleasure to handle. Other 'issues' in the series include alcohol, bullying and death. ES

Fabulous Feasts

NON-FICTION

★★★★

Peter Kent, Macdonald 'Wide-Eyed World' series, 32pp, 0 7500 2526 3, £9.99 hbk

This entertaining book draws attention in a light-hearted way to the sorts of banquets people from ten different historical periods and contexts might have enjoyed, including a Stone Age mammoth meal (8000 BC), a Viking supper (850) and a front line Christmas celebration (1914). Each double spread shows a feast in progress with food, drink, people and animals in lively profusion.

At the beginning it is suggested that the book can be used as a literacy resource to 'identify a range of information text elements including headings, lists, bullet points and paragraphs'. I think other books would serve this sort of purpose better. The menus here are not conventional, and features like the 'Spot the Guzzling guests' game make the book a source of amusement and fun rather than a resource for study. But the book might well invite some children to see history as enjoyable and I would display it, open at the appropriate page, to enliven a history topic. It would also be a good addition to a child's home collection. MM

REVIEWS 10-12 Middle/Secondary

Macbeth

★★★★

Retold by Bruce Coville, ill. Gary Kelley, Macdonald, 48pp, 0 7500 2545 X, £4.99 pbk

Kelley's sombre but subtly blood tinged paintings evoke an authentic aura of menace, intrigue, violence and diabolism in this treatment of

the most compact of Shakespeare's plays. Coville's prose retelling is admirably clear and brisk, though perhaps the latter quality is somewhat overdone. The author makes the point that the purpose of retelling is to provide an outline of the story that will draw the reader towards the original play, and I am sure that this handsome and slightly scary looking book will succeed in

this – the illustrations are highly compelling and some of Shakespeare's dialogue is effectively incorporated into the prose. However, I feel that Coville could have lingered longer and indulged the reader a bit more in depicting some of the struggle and turmoil of the drama, particularly in the climactic episodes of battle, murder and necromancy. GH

Beauty and the Beast and other stories

★★★★

Retold by Adèle Geras, ill. Louise Brierley, Puffin, 96pp, 0 14 055621 4, £6.99 pbk

Geras's retellings are literate and eloquent, with a deliberate touch of the archaic. They pay attention to the



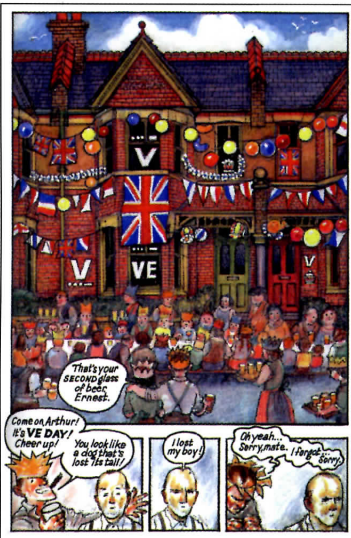
'Rapunzel' from **Beauty and the Beast** and other stories.

settings of the tales and the characters' conscious motivations. In contrast, Brierley's illustrations, reminiscent of Edvard Munch, explore the psychological reverberations of the stories. Beauty sits at a table beneath billowing curtains, an empty plate before her, a red rose at her feet, while the Beast approaches down a vulva like corridor. The 'mother' who imprisons Rapunzel in the tower appears wearing a nun's habit. Although the text could be read aloud to younger children, the way in which it works with the illustrations suggests an audience of ten and above. Mostly, text and illustration complement one another, without being worried by discrepancies in details. But readers may be disappointed that the largest dog met by the soldier in 'The Tinderbox' is shown as having eyes no bigger than dinner plates rather than mill wheels. CB

Ethel & Ernest: A True Story

BIOGRAPHY ★★★★★

Raymond Briggs, Jonathan Cape, 104pp, 0 224 04662 4, £14.99 hbk



A comic strip biography of Briggs' parents, each page blazes with colour and fizzles with invention. Pictures and typeface change in size according to the emphasis of the moment. Background detail is meticulous, while in the foreground characters grow, diminish and sometimes threaten to fall apart altogether. This is because Briggs

draws people both as they are and at other times as expressions of what they are feeling. But never as caricatures; the overwhelming atmosphere is of warm affection for and between the parents about whom their artist-son has now produced this lovely, moving book.

Their story concerns nothing less than birth, marriage and death against a background of normal domestic ups and downs set in the shadow of an impending world war and the enormous changes coming in its wake. The ordinary is made extraordinary through Briggs' ability to catch the moment and the emotion accompanying it. **Ethel & Ernest** is for everyone of ten and above and seems bound to become a classic. NT

Panther

★★★★

Martin Booth, Puffin, 128pp, 0 14 038978 4, £3.99 pbk

A short, pacey large-ish print read. 14-year-old Pati, ambition to produce TV wild-life documentaries and already an expert on big cats, is on a family caravan weekend in Devon and determined to track down the panther that is killing local sheep. Teamed up with Simon, two years younger but already determined to be a great game warden in Africa, they spend the weekend combing the moors while their dads fish and mums potter. Pati gets lucky with a sighting and then, through applying her knowledge and tracking skills, finds the den where the family group lives. All highly implausible but you are carried along by the tale – and you get to learn quite a bit about panthers en route. SR

The Oxford Treasury of Time Poems

POETRY ★★★★★

Edited by Michael Harrison and Christopher Stuart-Clark, Oxford University Press, 160pp, 0 19 276175 7, £14.99 hbk

Soon the floodgates will open and anthologies for the millennium will start to pour through. This anthology of Time poems should stay afloat for years to come. Beautifully produced with a range of stunning illustrations, Harrison and Stuart-Clark have selected something for everyone and every eventuality. Subjects range from childhood, birthdays and memories, to disappointments, decisions and death. It covers the ticking minutes and the eternal questions of time. The poems and poets you hope will be there are there – Rossetti, Larkin, Dickinson and Hughes; accompanied by lesser known poems by Derek Walcott, Michael Rosen, U.A. Fanthorpe and Philip Gross, to name just a few. The quality of poetry should lead the reader on to collections by individual poets. The editors have also unearthed the poem that should be in the millennium dome – take a look at Tennyson's 'I Stood on a Tower in the Wet'. The anthology will be heart-pulling and thought provoking for anyone over 10 and will be (as R.S. Thomas says in 'A Day in Autumn') 'something to wear / Against the heart in the long cold.' HT

Brother Brother, Sister Sister

★★★

Helen Dunmore, Scholastic, 128pp, 0 439 01084 5, £4.99 pbk

Tanya, 11-year-old diary-writer and unwilling sister of baby quads, has to help her tired and overstretched parents look after the babies while staying cool in the eyes of her friends, or so she thinks. Eventually, a crisis finds these same friends happy in fact to help her baby-mind.

'I didn't have time to think about it all properly. There was too much going on' Tanya comments – she might be describing the book itself, which is disappointingly unclear in its intention, depending on unlikely responses to the family's situation, and introducing a confusing range of serious themes which are not properly followed through or resolved. This is a well-worked subject, poorly handled here, though my 11-year-old tester enjoyed it 'because I like babies and I like diaries'. That about sums it up, really. AG

Spin of the Sunwheel

★★

Elizabeth Arnold, Mammoth, 176pp, 0 7497 3389 6, £4.99 pbk

'You mustn't worry, after all, I'll soon be sixteen...' Thus Gwen to her parents as they leave her (and Den the dog) on the Thames on their boat *Brigantia* while they go to visit a dying Grandad. But shortly after their departure there is an accident at one of the locks and Gwen finds herself being rescued by an apparition called Brigid, oddly insistent on referring to our heroine as 'Guendoloe'. What follows is a fantasy tale of river gods, goddesses and their ghosts, where Gwen is 'sucked into a vortex' of the past. Sometimes quite gripping, sometimes melodramatically overwritten, this is an uneven, but intermittently engaging, novel. RD

Dangerous Reality

★★★

Malorie Blackman, Doubleday, 192pp, 0 385 40680 0, £10.99 hbk

Another fast-moving computer-based adventure from this highly regarded writer. All seems to be going well for Dominic. His mum is gaining fame as the inventor of VIMS – the Virtual Interactive Mobile System – a sort of robot that can boldly go where no humans would, could or should to disarm car bombs, detect land mines or go down pipes to search out blockages. Best of all Mum is about to marry Jack whom Dominic sees as the ideal stepdad. Then things take a turn for the worse as VIMS goes haywire on an important test. Sabotage from within the team is suspected and Dominic decides to get involved. A surprise ending introduces some ideas to think about in an otherwise straightforward tale and Dominic learns some important things about love and friendship. SR

The Sacrifice

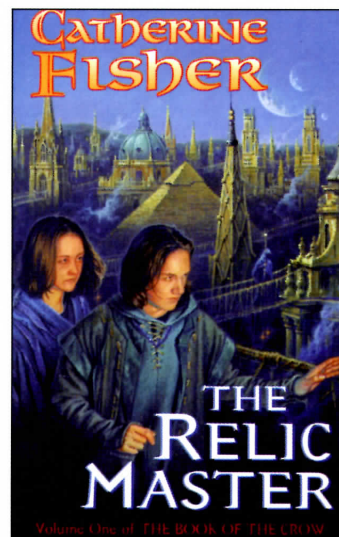
★★★

Diane Matcheck, Bloomsbury, 208pp, 0 7475 4159 0, £4.99 pbk

Matcheck's rites of passage novel tells the story of a brave young Apsalooka woman. Given the birth name Weak-one, she sets out on a

hunting quest so that she might be acknowledged as a warrior by her people and earn a true name. But first she must lay to rest the ghost of her twin brother Born-great who seems to mock her attempts. She encounters many dangers before she is eventually captured by a Pawnee raiding party

Sacrifice is an exciting story. In the first half of the book danger is ever present and the writing maintains a tense and frenetic pace. The later chapters provide some contrast in tone when Weak-one develops a special bond with her young Pawnee captor and finally learns the importance of self-sacrifice and humility. NG



The Relic Master

Red Fox, 0 09 926393 9, £3.99 pbk

The Interrex

Bodley Head, 0 370 32436 6, £10.99 hbk

★★★★

Catherine Fisher, 224pp

In these, the first two volumes in *The Book of the Crow*, Fisher creates a plausible other world. Beneath its exciting and imaginative surface the discerning reader will detect lurking shadows; the dangers of our blithe disregard for our environment and the unforeseen consequences of our technology and genetic experiments.

Galen and his scholar, Raffi are outlawed because they follow the Old Order, believers in *The Makers*, who created the world in which they live. Their pursuers are *The Watch* who use brutal, totalitarian methods to expunge all reference to the past and to retain their own wealth, influence and power. Among them is Carys, haunted by feelings that all is not as it should be, yet brainwashed to obey and destroy the likes of Galen and his kind. The action-packed battle between good and evil begins when they uneasily join forces on an odyssey to find *The Crow* in the dark city of Tasceron and then *The Interrex*, who is the rightful heir to the kingdom.

A demanding, must-read for fantasy buffs. DB

Shadow Spinner

★★★★

Susan Fletcher, Bloomsbury, 224pp, 0 7475 4179 5, £4.99 pbk

Each night Shahrazad tells her



husband, the Sultan, the stories to keep herself alive but each night it becomes more difficult to find new tales that will entertain him. Marjan, a young crippled storyteller, visits the harem and is taken to Shahrazad so that she might pass on her stories. Shahrazad tells one of Marjan's tales and finds that the Sultan remembers it as a favourite from childhood but Marjan cannot remember the ending and must search for the old, blind storyteller from whom she heard the tale.

A story of peril and intrigue beautifully written to evoke the sensuous atmosphere of the harem. The novel asserts the power of stories to educate and awaken dulled emotions; 'People take what they need from the stories they hear. The tale is often wiser than the teller.' NG

The Flesh Eater

★★

John Gordon, Walker, 256pp, 0 7445 6073 X, £3.99 pbk

The Midwinter Watch

★★★★

John Gordon, Walker, 208pp, 0 7445 5932 4, £9.99 hbk

The cover of *The Flesh Eater* promises that the story will 'make your flesh crawl' and while it is a page-turner, the book is gruesome and plain nasty in the way that it both describes and dwells on physically sickening detail. The ancient, flesh-eating Mary-Lou is brought back to life by the evil Guy March and his partner in the apparently genteel and peaceful surrounding of a present day East Anglian town. There are readers hooked on horror, who will have their taste satisfied but it is sensibility-blunting inhuman stuff, cheaply used for entertainment.

In *The Midwinter Watch* everything is snow-bound and so the arrival of the train is astonishing to Sophie, Jack and Simon, even more so because the line no longer exists. A stranger alights from the train, with a hazy notion of the present, including the dispensing of a ten-shilling note to Simon. The mystery is underway. The stranger has stolen a watch which connects present to past and is determined to get hold of the even more powerful watch of the title and so find a fortune in gold stolen almost a hundred years ago. The three children have to stop him. That opening and the final scenes, with past and present fusing as Sophie hurtles along the missing railway line

and into the snow, are especially good in an exciting and satisfyingly well-told story. AJ

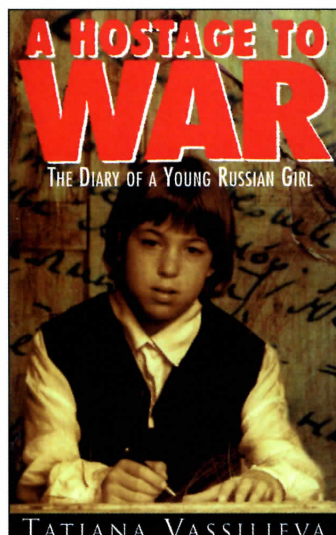
A Hostage to War

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

★★★★★

Tatiana Vassilieva, trans. Anna Trenter, Collins, 176pp, 0 00 675166 0, £4.50 pbk

This autobiographical novel is written in the form of a diary kept by a 13-year-old Russian girl trapped in the famine caused by the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. It is an intense and very vivid record of endurance and understated heroism. After suffering months of starvation, Tania is transported to work in the farms and factories of the Third Reich. She endures pitiless toil, sustained by comradeship, the fragile indulgence of some of her captors, and the hope that her family might still be alive. As the Reich collapses, Tania flees from the carpet bombing of her workplace into the larger wilderness of a Europe laid waste by war, at last reaching Russia where she finds that victory has come at a massive cost.



The voice of an innocent and bewildered young person is sustained throughout the book, and it is the naivety and immediacy of this voice that makes this such a powerful testament. That a staggering 20 million Soviets died in the war is a numbing statistic. This simple, powerful book helps to give us some insight into the misery that went into the creation of that figure. GH

Stephen Biesty's Incredible Body

NON-FICTION

★★★

Richard Platt, ill. Stephen Biesty, Dorling Kindersley, 32pp, 0 7513 5841 X, £12.99 hbk

Stephen Biesty's own body gets the treatment he has used so successfully, in a number of other books, on liners, locomotives, castles and others: exploding, sectioning and dissecting to show us how it fits together and works. One of the joys of his approach is its complexity and intricacy; the magic of the mechanism. But it seems less appropriate here, applied to a living organism, than it does applied to an actual machine or a building. The mechanical analogy pervades the book. For instance, there are teams of

tiny men working away in the muscles and the organs to make sure the body runs smoothly. This produces extremely complicated illustrations, which resemble the incredible contraptions of a Jules Verne imagination. This is part of the Biesty fascination. But do not expect to find a clear approach to the way the human body operates. To get the best out of the book, you need to know a lot before you start, and be at least 11 years old. Then you can pore over the pages and enjoy both the big picture and the diverting detail without worrying too much about getting the pieces back in the right places. CB

Mental Illness

Vanora Leigh, 0 7502 2179 8

Animal Rights

Barbara James, 0 7502 2180 1

Alcohol

Emma Haughton, 0 7502 2182 8

Genocide

Reg Grant, 0 7502 2181 X

NON-FICTION

★★★★★

Wayland 'Talking Points' series, 64pp, £10.99 each hbk

These four well made and robust information books come in appropriately funereal livery, the black gloss of the covers broken only by pastel titles and monochrome photographic motifs related to the themes. The coverage inside the books is not as sepulchral as these exteriors suggest, though one would not of course anticipate a light-hearted romp through any of these topics.

All of the books are written in clear but uncondescending prose. They present the available information well and allow it to speak for itself, though discussion prompts are inserted at strategic places. The texts are illustrated with contemporary photographs, most of them in colour. My only reservation about the layout is the occasional use of models in obviously posed photographs, a slightly meretricious touch which to my mind detracted a little from the very honest and forthright presentation of issues. As far as 'balance' is possible and desirable, the books provide it. Leigh is frank about the misery caused by mental illness, but provides optimistic information about promising drug regimes, alternative therapies and greater public honesty. James describes the cruelties involved in vivisection, dolphinarium, big game hunting and factory farming but poses questions about benefits to medicine and other aspects of human welfare. Haughton provides grim evidence of the human costs of alcohol consumption, but points out some of its benefits and the inconsistent attitude of society to other drugs. Predictably, Grant's book on genocide, written in collaboration with Amnesty International, provides the most painful reading. He makes the point that this practice appears to be as old as history and as widespread as humanity, and that we are no nearer to ending it than we were at the end of the second world war, when 'never again' was the unanimous response to the death camp revelations.

These are informative and thought provoking books, highly recommended for KS3 (12/13 year

olds) and beyond. Each book has been written in collaboration with consultants who are acknowledged in the credits. GH

The Spark Files

1. Space Race

0 571 19368 4

2. Chop and Change

0 571 19369 2

3. Shock Tactics

0 571 19370 6

NON-FICTION

★★

4. Bat and Bell

0 571 19371 4

NON-FICTION

★★★

Terry Deary and Barbara Allen, ill. Philip Reeve, Faber & Faber, 96pp, £3.99 each pbk

Well, he did it – Horribly – for History, and got away with it to prolonged applause – some even from this quarter. Can he do it for science? Here the Deary Palatable Products Plant (inc) has taken as its raw material Boring Science and, with Allen turning the handle, reprocessed it into 'The Spark Files' in which a family of laughable latter-day Leakeys (Haldane's, not Louis) with more than a dash of Bastable in their make-up stumble explanatorily across selected scientific facts and mysteries.

Space Race tackles the roundness of the Earth (Gran Spark is a flat-earthier) and its role in the solar system. *Chop and Change* deals with what we used to call 'Properties of Matter', *Shock Tactics* with elementary electrics. In these three there is little that was not rather more simply explained (and with better pictures) in my 1926 Arthur Mee *Children's Encyclopaedia* and for me at least, Deary's narrative genie labours in vain.

Bat and Bell however is much more of a contemporary entertainment dealing as it does with environmental protection, public need, private greed, council corruption and quality of life (which of course includes football). The result is a much happier read than the other three, and if these 'Sparks' are to ignite anything, then this particular pile of tinder is the one that will catch fire. But for the others, as another Barbara Allen once said: 'Young man, I think you're dying.' TP

The Millennium

NON-FICTION

★★★

Bob Fowke, Hodder, 128pp, 0 340 73612 7, £3.99 pbk

Take one topical subject, add plenty of loosely related facts and ideas, sprinkle in some silly cartoons and pointless quizzes and mix it all together to produce 'The Unofficial Guide'. We are all familiar with the old argument about whether the Millennium occurs at the start of the year 2000 or the end and with the nightmare of the Millennium Bug – well they both get an airing as do various dating systems, the International Date Line and the musings of various religious weirdos who at various times have predicted the end of the world (millenarians). Fun to dip into as you never know whether you will find nuggets of real

interest or the fool's gold of complete trivia. As the author says 'the millennium is just a date plucked out of the air – and a jolly good excuse for a party.' SR

What's the Big Idea? – Food

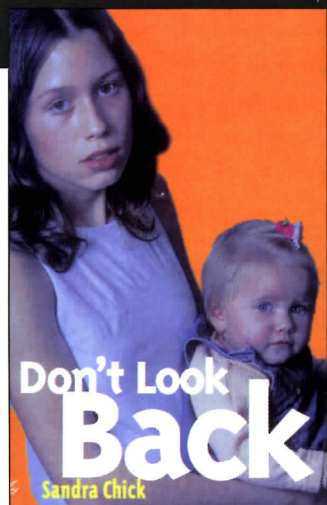
NON-FICTION ★★

Emily Moore, ill. Sophie Grillet, Hodder, 128pp, 0 340 72405 6, £3.99 pbk

This title is a readable quick tour around such issues as the history of food and farming, Third World questions, the rise of the multinationals, health issues (including a couple of pages on genetic engineering), factory farming, organic farming, fair trade etc, etc.

They are dealt with in a conversational style with some jokey (and some not-so-jokey) cartoons thrown in. There is a useful bibliography and address list (including web-sites) at the end. SR

REVIEWS 12+ Secondary



Don't Look Back

★★★★

Sandra Chick, Livewire, 128pp, 0 7043 4958 2, £4.99 pbk

Lisa is 16, unmarried and pregnant by Liam who is unenthusiastic about impending fatherhood. Chick again journeys into disturbing but familiar territory to produce a novel which perfectly captures a painful dilemma.

Her command of character is masterly: Liam is utterly believable – immature, unsupportive, interested only in his peers. Lisa's unrelentingly pessimistic future is realistically explored against a starkly deprived environment. Occasionally, dialogue is less well-tuned: at times it is self-consciously restricted, with philosophical interjections at odds with characters' more usual vocabularies.

Chick is to be applauded for her success in stripping away the romantic mythologies surrounding the frightening reality of teenage pregnancy. VR

Against the Storm

★★★★★

192pp, 0 571 19496 6

The Frozen Waterfall

★★★★★

304pp, 0 571 19495 8

Watching the Watcher

★★★★

160pp, 0 571 17274 1

Coming Home

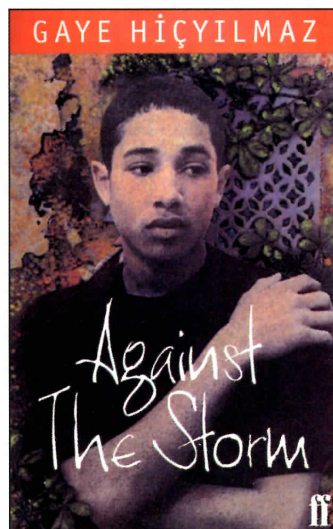
★★★★

160pp, 0 571 19367 6

Gaye Hıçılmaz, Faber, £4.99 each pbk

Hıçılmaz has drawn on her experiences of living in Turkey and Switzerland for these four novels; *Coming Home* is new, the others recently re-issued. The setting in each book is closely observed so that the reader is drawn effortlessly into unfamiliar worlds.

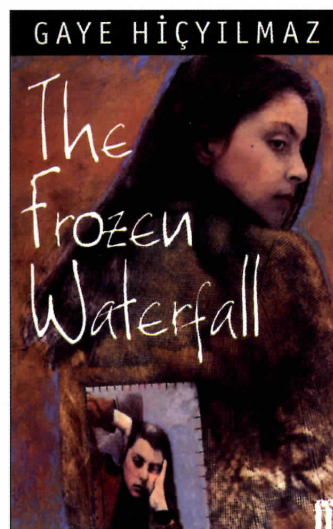
For differing reasons the central character in each novel is forced to confront and acknowledge their



identity; to find their own place in a bewildering and sometimes hostile world. Ankara is the setting for *Against the Storm*. Mehmet is forced to leave his village home with his family to start a new life in the city. But the promise of 'streets paved with gold' dissolves into a harsher reality. Mehmet must learn to survive in the shanty town and on the unfamiliar streets. But he refuses to allow himself to be sucked into the poverty trap and decides to return alone to his home village.

In *The Frozen Waterfall*, Hıçılmaz writes poignantly about 12-year-old Selda's displacement when she is uprooted from her home in Turkey and taken to live with her father in Switzerland. Thrust into an environment where she cannot understand the language or culture, she must decide which path is best for her; a return to her old life or a new beginning.

The theme is explored further in *Coming Home*. Elif has been brought up in London but each summer visits her family in Turkey for a long holiday. On an impulse she accepts the invitation to stay there permanently but soon discovers that her new home



is not what she imagined.

Watching the Watcher is different in tenor; a gripping thriller. 13-year-old Henry is pleased to visit his uncle, a high profile naturalist, but discovers that the nature reserve hides a dark secret. However, like Mehmet, Elif and Selda, Henry is also struggling to find his place in the world. He feels uncomfortable with his family and his involvement in solving the mystery forces him to confront his emotions.

Hıçılmaz' writing is empowering; her main characters are resourceful, independent teenagers who make their own decisions. She is an outstanding and accomplished writer whose style is direct and honest, compassionate but uncompromising. NG

Soundtrack

★★★

Julie Bertagna, Mammoth, 160pp, 0 7497 2980 5, £4.99 pbk

Bertagna strives hard to juggle too many ideas in this novel set in a small Scottish fishing village complete with nuclear sub base and attendant peace camp. Main character Finn feels he does not fit in to the village where he has lived his whole life; he resents his dad and tries to come to terms with his relationship with Ebbie from the peace camp. Uncle Murray drowns when his boat's nets trap a submarine causing a media frenzy; Finn's friendship with naval commander's son is now under threat. Some fine writing but as with her previous book, *The Spark Gap*, you feel that far too much is happening and it could have done with some tighter editing. Try it with Year 9 up (13/14 year-olds), but not for a mass audience. SR

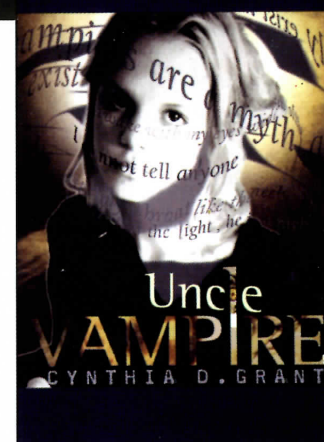
Uncle Vampire

★★★★★

Cynthia D. Grant, Mammoth, 160pp, 0 7497 2303 3, £4.99 pbk

Powerful and compelling, this book is deeply disturbing. Californian teenager Carolyn would like to reveal the secrets of her uncle's terrifying night visits, but cannot bring herself to tell the people who are close to her about them, for fear of being called crazy. Her twin sister Honey knows, but tells her they should keep quiet. Her drug addicted brother Richie knows, but seems powerless to do anything about the situation.

This intensely gripping tale is no ordinary horror story, as the title might suggest, for here Grant is not dealing with crucifixes and garlic but the harrowingly real experience of a sixteen-year-old with a secret which is not only too painful to share but actually too terrifying to face. Carolyn claims her blood is being drained by her Uncle Toddy, but as the pulsating plot develops we begin to realise that, in fact, she is being raped by him. The idea of Toddy being a vampire is, as her High school counsellor discovers, Carolyn's way of dealing with a horrifying reality which is infinitely



worse than her nightmarish imaginings. 'I felt I was dying but he kept me alive, and murdered me again and again and again.'

Grant offers a tight plot, precision engineered narrative and fine-tuned dialogue combined with excellent characterisation. She deals with a very sensitive theme head-on and serves up some surprises in the conclusion which I will not reveal here. Read it. The book has advice at the end about contacting Childline, for youngsters who are, or have been, sexually abused. AK

SS World

★★★★

Terrance Dicks, Piccadilly Press, 176pp, 1 85340 536 1, £5.99 pbk

Tom and Sarah, travelling from New York to London in the year 2015, find themselves victims of transporter malfunction, deposited in a parallel universe where the Nazis have won World War II and the 1000 Year Reich is in its 75th year.

Dicks explores the regime with dramatic gusts as Tom and Sarah try to dodge the SS and find a way of returning to their own universe. Moral dilemmas are examined, too, when they discover that their parallel-universe father is a high ranking SS official and a man with a conscience.

The action is satisfyingly frantic, interspersed with domestic scenes which illustrate the realities of Nazi rule in a more intimate way. Boys, especially, will respond to Dicks' punchy style and relish the neat twist teasingly placed at the very end of the novel. VR

Picture books reviewed this issue relevant to older readers

The Wrong Overcoat (see p21)

The Brave Sister (see p23)

Whadayamean (see p23)

Macbeth (see p27)

Beauty and the Beast and other stories (see p27)

Ethel & Ernest: A True Story (see p28)



"Who will help me choose a new picture book to read?" asked the Little Red Hen

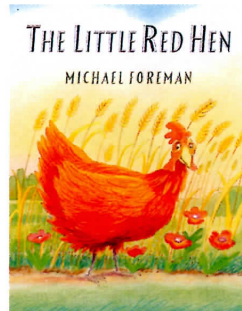


THE LITTLE RED HEN

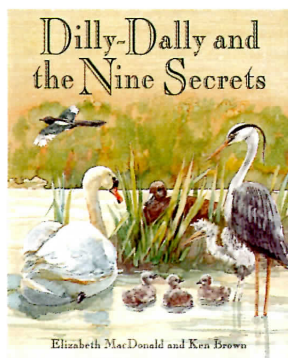
Michael Foreman

0 86264 870 X £9.99

A witty re-telling of this favourite traditional tale.



The Little Red Hen needs help to grow her wheat, but her farmyard friends won't give it. What will she do? Why, she'll do it herself!



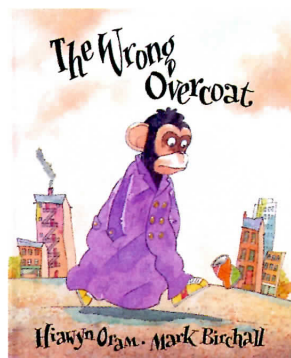
DILLY-DALLY AND THE NINE SECRETS

Elizabeth MacDonald

Ken Brown

0 86264 853 X £9.99

Count along in this beautifully illustrated animal mystery story.

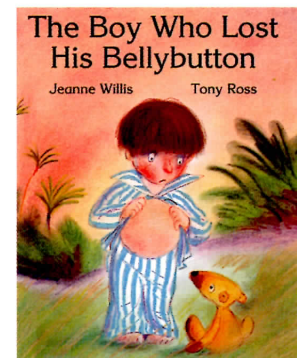


THE WRONG OVERCOAT

Hiawyn Oram Mark Birchall

0 86264 867 X £9.99

Everyone thinks Chimp's new coat is perfect for him— except Chimp, that is. So he sets off to do something about it.

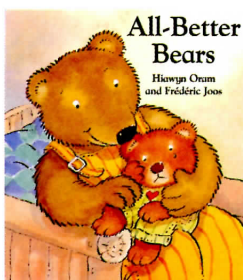


THE BOY WHO LOST HIS BELLYBUTTON

Jeanne Willis Tony Ross

0 8624 824 6 £9.99

Once there was a boy who lost his bellybutton. So he went into the jungle to look for it . . .



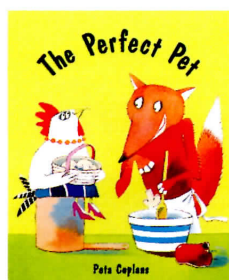
ALL-BETTER BEARS

Hiawyn Oram

Frederic Joos

0 86264 868 8 £8.99

A delightful story to share with the very young.

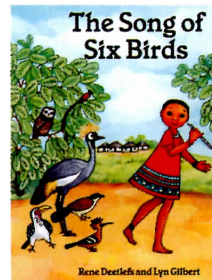


THE PERFECT PET

Peta Coplans

0 86264 873 4 £9.99

An hilarious tale of a very foolish hen in search of the ultimate pet.

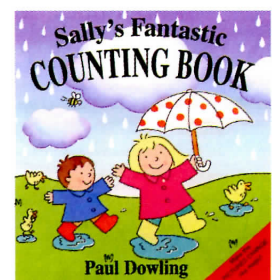


THE SONG OF SIX BIRDS

R. Deetlefs L. Gilbert

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Paul Dowling

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CLASSICS IN SHORT No.15

Brian Alderson

Vive le Bonheur! Here comes ...

His Beginning

Like many another children's book hero, Babar was the brain-child of a parent seeking to amuse her own children. Cécile Sabouraud, a concert pianist, had married the artist Jean de Brunhoff in 1924, and round about 1930 she dreamed up the little elephant while inventing tales for their sons Mathieu and Laurent (the youngest, Thierry, missed out by not yet having been born).

Coming into his Kingdom

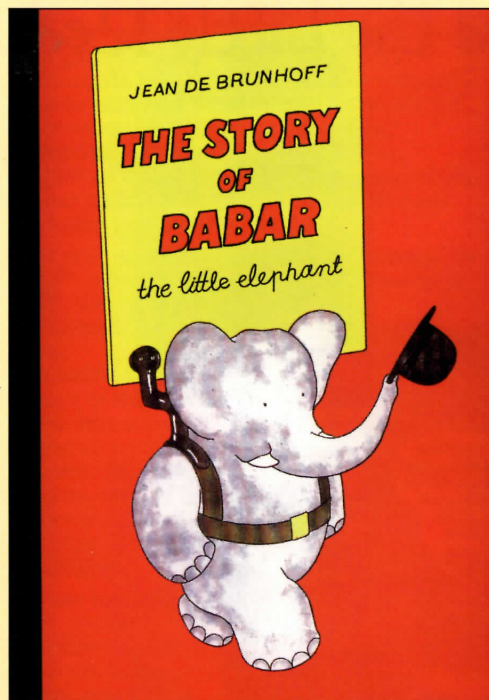
News of Babar was carried to Papa, a man already under threat from the tuberculosis that would kill him a few years later. He had been born in 1899, had served briefly in the French Army in 1918, and, despite his health, was now making his way as a painter. Delighted by Cécile's invention, he turned his skills towards making a picture book, and in 1931 there appeared *L'Histoire de Babar, le petit éléphant* – one of the revolutionary events in children's literature. (And – untypically – its birth was unhindered by the usual commercial pangs. Jean's father was a magazine publisher, his brother was editor-in-chief at *Vogue*, and his brother-in-law was involved with the fashion magazine *Le Jardin des Modes*, under whose imprint Babar first appeared.)

The Story

Little Babar plays in the Great Forest with his family and friends. Then, *quelle horreur!*, Maman is shot by a hunter and Babar runs away. He does not stop till he gets to a town (Paris?) where an old lady – soon to be *dea ex machina* for the series – adopts him. Much taken with gents' tailoring, he is kitted out in pink shirt, green suit, spats and a bowler hat and becomes a man-about-town until his cousins, Arthur and Céleste, arrive. After being regaled on patisseries and also togged out smartly (Céleste's yellow cloche hat is a stroke of genius) they and their mothers prevail upon Babar to return home. There, the King has just died through eating a bad mushroom and when Babar arrives he is chosen King by acclamation. His coronation is combined with his marriage to Céleste, and when the festivities are over 'they set out on their honeymoon in a glorious yellow balloon'.

Why 'revolutionary'?

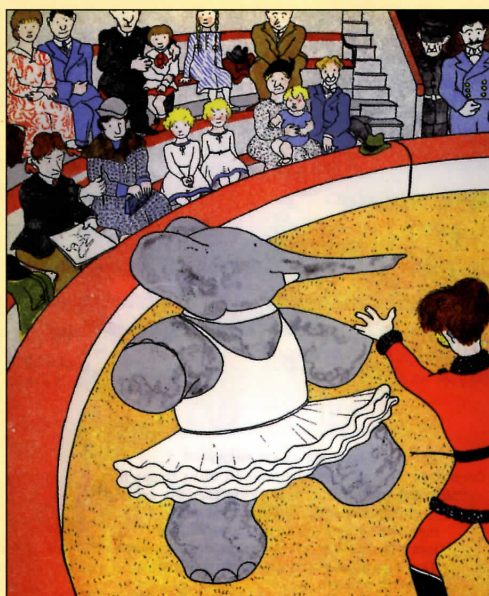
Physically the book was, for its time, spectacular – and a model for later albums by such as Ardizzone, Kiddell-Monroe, Kathleen Hale etc. It was a folio, bound in bright red paper boards, and illustrated with almost cinematic élan. The childlike simplicity of the drawing and the flat, cheerful colouring mask a wonderfully elegant piece of pictorial theatre, enchaned on the page by the flow of the text, winding round the pictures in a completely legible cursive script. In content too Babar joins a few



rare predecessors with its confident, convincing abandonment of every logical norm: practical, pictorial, narrative... Who can doubt Babar *en promenade* in his snazzy red car, or that he should become so quickly a solid citizen, while his rascally cousin Arthur remains a perpetual small boy?

What happened next: Success

Babar was quickly translated for the American and English market. (A.A. Milne introduced it, saying that if anyone did not like it they deserved to wear gloves and be kept off the grass for the rest of their lives.) Its success led on to *Babar's Travels*, *Babar the King*, *Babar's ABC*, *Babar's Friend Zephir* a monkey, *Babar at Home*, and *Babar and Father Christmas*. De Brunhoff had died leaving the last two to be seen through the press (and through the beginning of the War) by his family, and though *Father Christmas* does not seem quite finished, the series as a whole sustains the



comedy, the pictorial frivolity, and the deft conjuring with arbitrary events that so distinguished the first *Histoire*.

And what happened after: Catastrophe

Babar has been the victim of his own success – predictably through the cupidity of the media. Trouble began early, when, with war-time economies, Enid Blyton was hired to edit *The Babar Story-Book*, bringing her Estuary prose to De Brunhoff's spare text, while Olive Openshaw struggled (with rather more success) to convert his huge pictures to modest line drawings. Later on the picture books returned in reduced format, but in 1969, thanks to television, commercial idiocy supervened. *The Story* and *The Travels* were sliced up to make three 'Little Babar Books' apiece, and the seven canonic books of De Brunhoff *père* almost disappeared behind the lacklustre continuations of de Brunhoff *fils* and a continuous flow of unworthy merchandise. (At the publishers now the department labelled 'Characters' seems to know more about what is going on than does 'Editorial'.)

And the Critics?

'I am at his feet' said Milne of De Brunhoff, and the Babar Books, in their original format and their vernal colouring (vernal, that is apart from some marvellously shadowed 'dark plates') do not inhabit a realm where criticism has any relevance. But, as we know, children's books offer rich pickings for Persons of Ideas and attempts have long been made to interpret the 'concealed ironies' or probe the political implications of Elephant-land (Célesteville as Blairite Democracy under a Benevolent Crown etc). Unsurprising therefore that the *Independent* recently reported a Canadian *femme savante* who finds the whole show 'rhinoist' and shot through with Eurocentrism, sexism and 'internalised racism'. Well – she will be wearing gloves and not walking on the grass for the rest of her life; but, out in the Great Forest, you may still hear the unrepentant cries of *Vive le Roi Babar!* ■

The illustrations, © Librairie Hachette, Paris, are taken from *The Story of Babar* published by Methuen Children's Books in facsimile edition (0 416 57650 8, £15.99) and in paperback (0 7497 3759 X, £5.99). The self-portrait of Jean de Brunhoff sketching in the circus audience is from *Babar's Travels*, due to be reissued in facsimile in September 1999 (0 416 54360 X, £15.99). *Babar the King* is available in facsimile and paperback, *Babar and Father Christmas* in facsimile, and *Babar at Home* is due out in facsimile in September 1999.

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