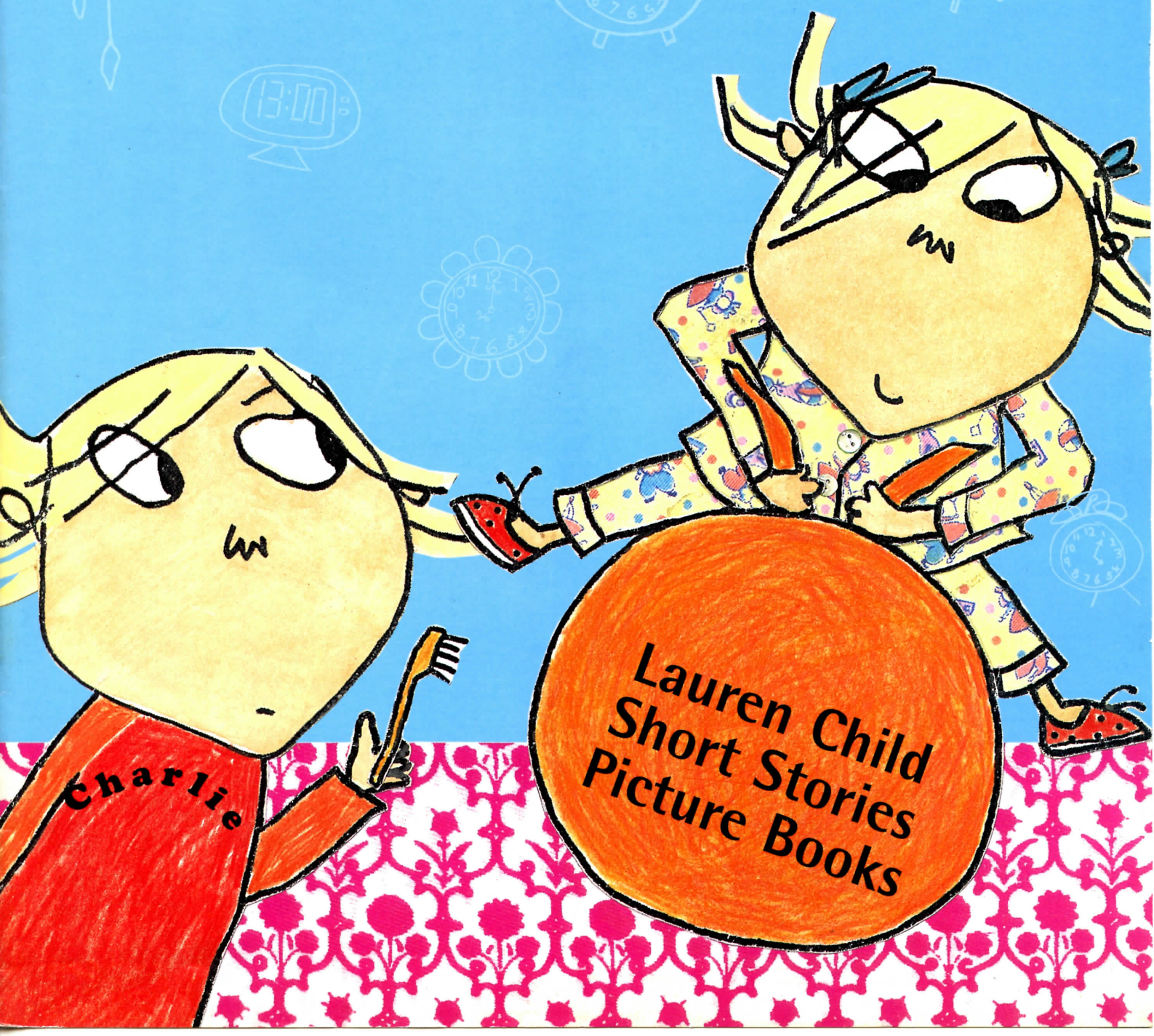


# BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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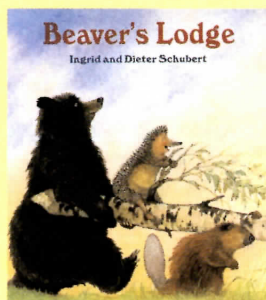
*the children's book magazine*



charlie

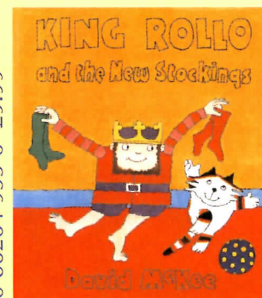
Lauren Child  
Short Stories  
Picture Books



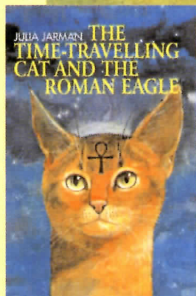


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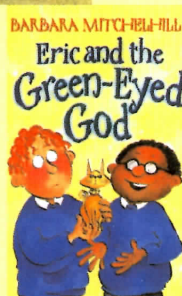
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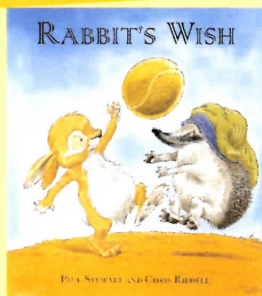
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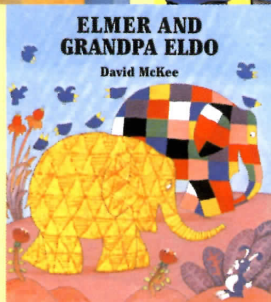


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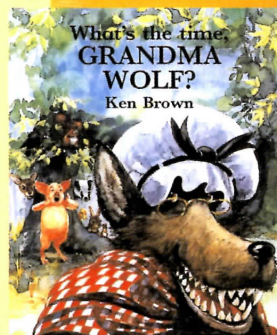
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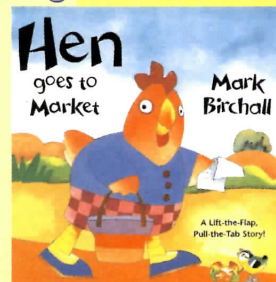
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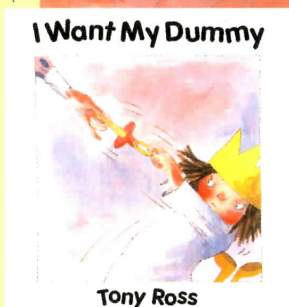
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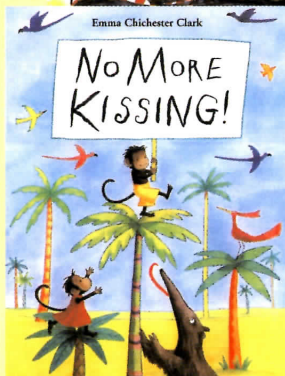
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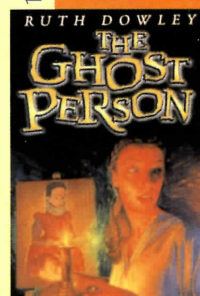
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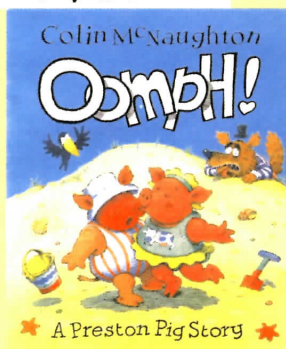
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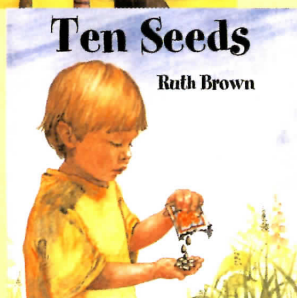
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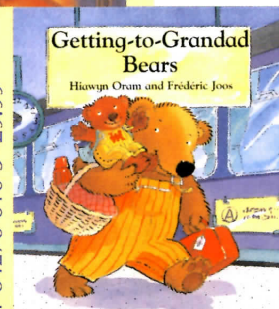
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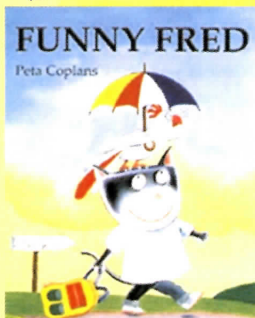
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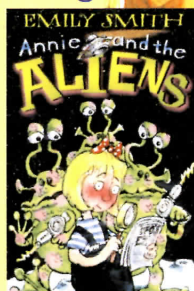
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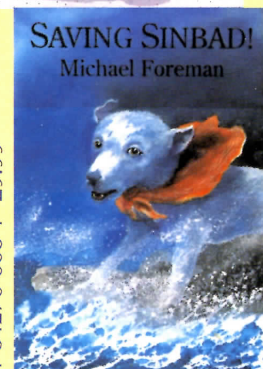
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2001

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# Contents

3

## Editorial

4

## 2001 Picture Books for the Not So Very Young

Elaine Moss on the latest picture books.

8

## Authorgraph No.128

Lauren Child interviewed by Joanna Carey.

10

## Windows into Illustration

Bob Graham on his recent picture book, *Max*.

11

## Inspiring Reluctant Readers No.2

Cynthia Dummett and Anne Marley on books that worked.

12

## Short Stories for Young Readers: the Neglected Genre?

Peter Hollindale on the unique qualities of the short story.

14

## BfK Briefing

News • Prizes • Events • Useful Organisation • Letters to the Editor • 'I Wish I'd Written' • Good Reads

17

## Reviews

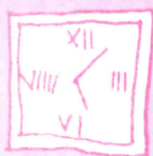
Index of Titles and Star Ratings 17  
Reviewers 17  
Books About Children's Books 17  
Now Out in Paperback 18  
Under 5s (Pre-School/Nursery/Infant) 19  
5-8 (Infant/Junior) 20  
8-10 (Junior/Middle) 21  
10-12 (Middle/Secondary) 23  
+ Editor's Choice 24  
12+ (Secondary) 25  
+ New Talent 26

28

## Classics in Short No.27

Brian Alderson on Ursula Moray Williams' *Adventures of the Little Wooden Horse*.

## CoverStory



This issue's cover is from Lauren Child's *I Am NOT Sleepy and I WILL NOT Go to Bed*. Lauren Child is interviewed by Joanna Carey on page 8. Thanks to Orchard Books for their help with this May cover.



# EDITORIAL

The National Literacy Trust is calling for a 'national commitment' to support early language development for our youngest children. 'Language is the key to learning,' their press release tells us. 'Children who fail to develop adequate speech and language skills in the first years of life are far more likely to experience reading problems at school compared to those who grow up in a language-rich environment.'

Whilst 'language-rich' is a loathsome phrase that beggars definition (as in 'cotton-rich' or 'wool-rich' for chain store socks), BfK could not agree more that we need, as the National Literacy Trust has it, 'a national commitment to ensure that all parents and carers of 0-3 year olds and our communities are able to support children's language development from the earliest age.'

The Trust is, we are told, 'setting up a national steering group in order to focus attention on the issue and will be producing a "good ideas" guide for professionals working with parents and carers in order to arm them with information and practical advice about introducing children to books and reading from the earliest age.'

But just how much do we know about children's responses to books 'from the earliest age'? In the 1970s pioneering New Zealanders, Dorothy Neal White and Dorothy Butler and Australian, Virginia Lowe, described in detail the part books played in the early lives of the children they observed, Cushla, Carol and Rebecca. However, the generally disappointing standard of discussion of books for the very young suggests that the relationship between early developmental issues and first books is not much known about or considered.

In the next issue of BfK, we will then be



Rosemary Stones

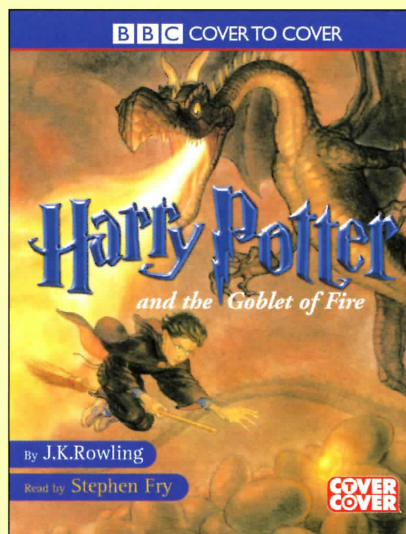
taking a look at the research evidence to date in this area. We will also be featuring some recent board books as well as old favourites. And, as part of our focus on early development, we will be publishing

the first part of five-month-old Jack McKeene's reading diary, as observed and recorded by his father.

For Melanie Klein, who applied Freud's findings to the analysis of small children and developed play techniques which opened the door to their unconscious, symbolization occurs in an early developmental stage and is the outcome of anxiety\*. The child's sense of loss can, in good enough development, be filled with her/his own resources, ie the use of symbols enables the child to explore this anxiety and explore the world

via symbolic activity. The capacity to symbolise which is the basis of creativity, can be seen in small children via verbal activity and play. Their interaction with books is a fruitful area for further investigation.

\*The Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of the Ego' (1930), pp 219-232 in Volume I: *Love, Guilt and Reparation* by Melanie Klein.



Stephen Fry's rendition of this Harry Potter title gets a five star review on page 23.

## BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine

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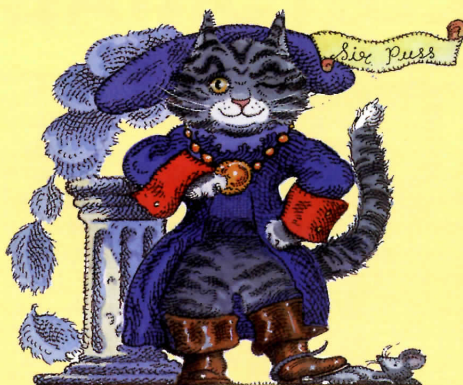
# 2001 Picture Books for the Not So Very Young

It's Spring and our thoughts (at BfK anyway!) turn to picture books. This year's vast output includes titles from innovative newcomers as well as household names. But how good are they? **Elaine Moss** investigates.

In Wanda Gág's classic 1929 picture book **Millions of Cats** (still available on Amazon.com) an old man and an old woman who long for a cat to keep them company find themselves, because of the old man's inability to choose, besieged by 'hundreds of cats, thousands of cats, millions and billions and trillions of cats' all clamouring for their attention. On the receiving end of the season's unbelievably enormous output of picture books, I felt similarly overwhelmed – as, indeed, do many parents and teachers when faced with stocking their children's bookshelves or libraries. The old man and the old woman sensibly let the cats fight it out amongst themselves, so I decided to do the same with the picture books, having first adopted a single principle.

The yardstick I would use to measure the worth of the mountain of submissions was the one Kurt Maschler and I had formulated for the Maschler Award, in our capacity as founder judges, way back in 1983: I would look for 'works of imagination in the children's field in which text and illustration are of excellence and so presented that each enhances yet balances the other'. I am sad to say that nine-tenths of the submissions for four to eight year olds (books for toddlers will be covered in July) instantly disqualified themselves – but that still left plenty from which to choose a short list of possible recommendations.

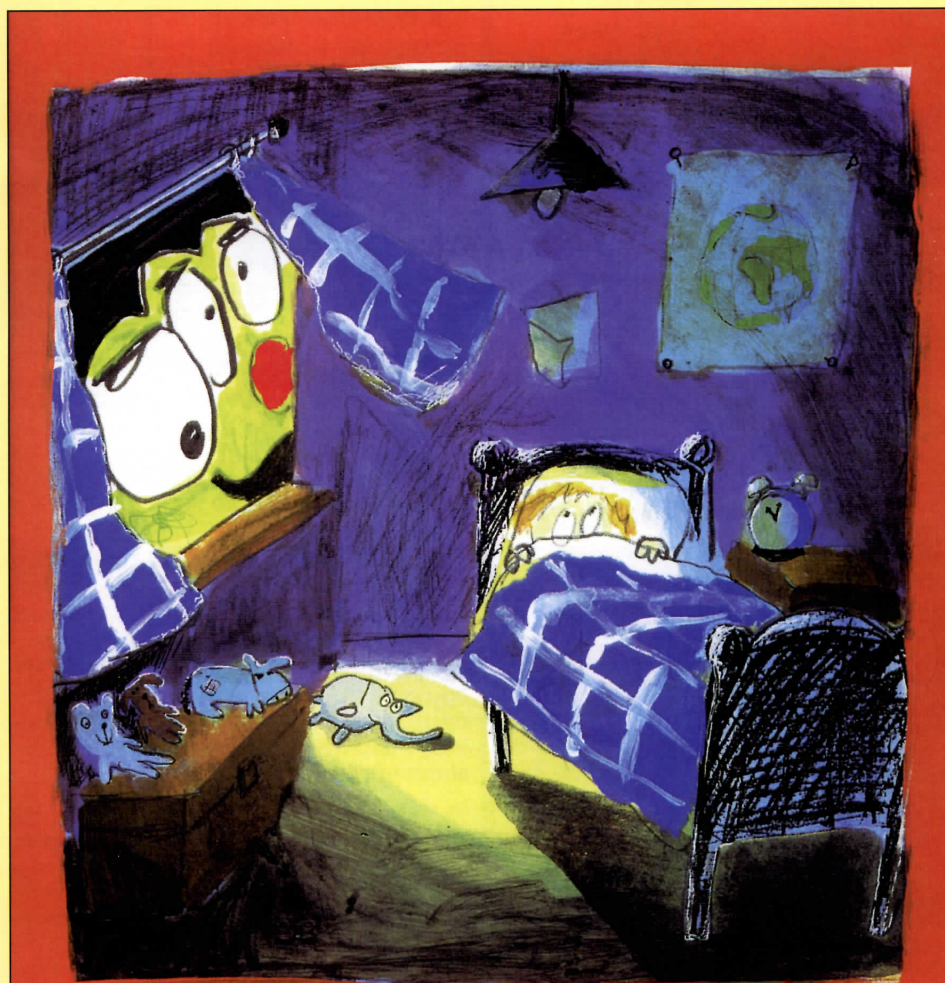
## Folk tales retold



Quite the most attractive and imaginative of the new retellings of folk tales is **Puss in Boots** in a version proclaimed on the title page to be 'Written by Mr. Philip Pullman and Illustrated by Mr. Ian Beck, Starring Puss himself, and featuring One Ogre ... A Beautiful Princess ... And of course Jacques, the Hero'. This most generous and handsome book takes as its inspiration the vigour of the early chap book versions. But using a large format and colour printing (in the manner of Walter Crane) and a variety of page design that includes strip cartoon,

bubble talk and cut-outs, it is a masquerade as cheeky as the conniving Monsieur Puss himself. Philip (**Northern Lights**) Pullman writes a racy, vivid text which Ian Beck illustrates with verve in brilliantly designed, restless pages. A delight.

Sedate, by comparison, and soft in texture, is the retelling of the Hans Christian Andersen story **The Ugly Duckling** by Kevin Crossley-Holland (using an abridged form of the Bodley Head translation) with Japanese-style illustrations by Meilo So. Crossley-Holland has given today's children, so often short-changed with only half the story in picture book versions, all the features of Andersen's bitter tale of rejection that spread far beyond the duck family into the wider world, and echoed so closely his own personal tragedy. A slight jerkiness in the text over the first few pages, probably occasioned by the necessity to align it with the pictures, gives way fairly soon to a smooth rendering of this compelling story, one that never fails to touch the hearts of readers. Meilo So's stencil-style watercolours of meadow, pond, farmyard, farmhouse and their inhabitants can be as aggressive as, more often, they are lyrical.



Lucy dived under her covers.  
She prayed the CREATURE would go away.  
But it wouldn't.

From **Nothing Scares Us**.



## Identity crises

Metamorphosis seems to be in the air this season; not only does the Ugly Duckling (once again, above) become a Swan, but Lawrence David and Delphine Durand's **Beetle Boy** actually acknowledges its debt to Kafka on the title page! 'Gregory Sampson woke one morning to discover that he had become a giant beetle,' this story begins. How to dress for school? What to eat? How to alert his parents, the bus driver, his teacher to his dilemma when all of them, and even his friends (except his best friend) are too busy to notice? With six legs he can easily work out  $3 \times 2$  by counting on them ('Not fair!' says his friend); and with six legs and two antennae it is certainly simpler to score goals at soccer. But Gregory is desperate for human recognition of his very personal problem – and that only comes when the family can't find him at supper time because he is crawling around on the ceiling. Lawrence David's witty text is mirrored in Delphine Durand's clear, bright, absurd pictures that will repay a great deal of attention. Akin to Florence Parry Heide and Edward Gorey's **The Shrinking of Treehorn** (1975) with its unforgettable teacherly response, 'We don't shrink in this class!', **Beetle Boy** is also sure to be a winner.

A double identity crisis presents itself in Satoshi Kitamura's **Me and My Cat?** In this story of mistaken bewitchment Nicholas becomes his cat Leonardo and leads a cat's life for a day, whilst Leonardo the cat takes the shape of Nicholas and is dragged unwillingly to school. The fun, as well as the perils of Nicholas living a cat's life are joyously pictured in Kitamura's lively, rectangular, odd-angle, jumping-about illustrations; but when Leonardo in the shape of a boy comes home through the cat-flap Kitamura uses a series of hilarious vignettes to show a boy-in-shape behaving like a cat-in-practice: ravelling up balls of wool, sharpening his 'claws' on the cupboard, sitting in the cat tray! All ends happily with the witch who started the confusion confessing that she had made a mistake – she had really meant to cast her spell on Nicholas's teacher who is seen in the last picture squatting on the table cat-like in front of a mystified class. Enormous fun, demanding rapt attention.

## Overcoming fear

Now for three picture books that look fear in the face: in **Noko and the Night Monster** Fiona Moodie creates a timeless African animal fable, with domestic overtones, to show how fear can be overcome by courage and the call of friendship. The porcupine and the aardvark share a house, the porcupine acting as parent to the aardvark who has to be read to sleep each night because of his fear of the Night Monster. Porcupine, fed up with endlessly reading aloud the wool prices from the 'Farmer's Weekly' in order to send aardvark to sleep, decides this must stop; so he elicits the help of his neighbours – leopard, pangolin, warthog and hyena – to form a composite monster. At full moon 'the monster' appears from behind some rocks and in answer to the porcupine's cry for help, the trembling aardvark braves the dark and comes to the rescue. Beating the 'night monster' into its separate pieces – he finds he is no longer afraid. Fiona Moodie's endearing pictures of the animals are preceded by endpaper maps



From *Falling Angels* (see overleaf).

showing where each of them has its home.

Less subtle, but with its own message well conveyed is Frieda Wishinsky and Neal Layton's **Nothing Scares Us**. Lucy and Lenny boast that they are the Fearless Two – and in their games pirates and monsters are despatched with aplomb. But Lucy discovers that she is scared of Lenny's favourite TV programme called 'Creature' which haunts her dreams. Can she admit this to Lenny? Bravely she watches the next instalment of the dreaded programme, only to discover half way through that Lenny has climbed onto the back of the sofa to avoid – a spider! Purposely ugly, large, child-like pictures accompany a suitably prosaic text. What is important here is the message: don't be afraid to be afraid.

Lauren Child's **Beware of the Storybook Wolves** is a far more sophisticated offering which depends heavily on intertext: children who are not steeped in fairy tale will find it hard to follow Herb's nightmare in which the wolves and witches and bad fairies of the storybooks his mother reads to him, are finally fought off by a fairy godmother. There is real terror here, most of all in the

two boy-hungry braggart wolves (who are also stupid, but nonetheless threatening). Large pages of quick-change design suggest the surreal quality of a dream which can also yield its humorous moments: there is one double spread, for instance, where the fairy godmother mistakenly turns the smaller, one-eyed wolf into a princess so we see *him* dressed in a ball gown whilst, on the next page, Cinderella is still washing the dishes. The curlicue fairies finally outwit the spiky wolves, as they do in most traditional tales, but Herb's demand that his mother remove the book of fairytales from his bedroom when she says good-night seems not unreasonable.

## Spiritual connections

Death is the wolf in all our lives but some writers and illustrators for children choose not to employ a metaphor. One of these is the Nigerian writer and photographer Ifeoma Onyefulu. In **Saying Goodbye** she uses the words of her young son Ikenna who asked many questions about the death of his great-grandmother (known as Mama Nkwelle because she was the wisewoman of the village) and the funeral customs and





The more they kissed him,  
the more he screamed.  
The more he screamed,  
the more they kissed him.



From *No More Kissing!*

ceremonies in which he was so proud to take his place. Of course parting is sad and the death of an elder sparks off many reminiscences, but the atmosphere generated by the youthful text and the busy ceremonial photographs in Onyefulu's *Saying Goodbye* is one of joyful participation in a community rite.

More oblique is Simon Puttock and Alison Jay's *A Ladder to the Stars*, a stunningly beautiful and thoughtful picture book about one human life and its connexion with the universe. This may sound grandiose but the magic of the book is in its simplicity. On her seventh birthday night a little girl wishes upon a star that she could 'climb right up into the sky and dance along with it'. The star begins to show off, telling the by now curious moon of the little girl's wish. The moon 'grew round and full pondering the matter, then wasted away to a splinter worrying about what to do' before telling the sun, 'for the sun is also a star and loves all things that love to dance'. The sun, the moon, the clouds and the weather meet and decide to send a seed to earth that will grow

into a very tall tree. Lying in her bed at the age of a hundred and seven the 'little girl', now an old woman, is disturbed by the light from a very bright star inviting her to come outside and climb the tree. 'Are you crazy? ... I am too old and it is too late now'... 'It is never too late,' said the star. 'Why, one hundred years are nothing and no time. To a star they are light and quick like seeds in the wind. You are still a little girl to us and we are waiting for you. Please come.' Pushing her way through the 'satin skin of the sky' the old woman dances with her star – at last. To say that Alison Jay's illustrations perfectly complement Simon Puttock's elegant text is to place her instantly among the foremost picture book artists of our time. Whether it depicts a zodiacal meeting of the natural forces of the universe sitting round a cloud in the deepest blue, or, more prosaically, the old lady lying in bed disturbed by the bright ray of light from her star, each opening is a joy to behold.

Colin Thompson in *Falling Angels* shows how complex and fantastical the same idea can become. This extraordinary work is

about flying as well as dying, about keeping as well as about letting go, about seeing the world with one's heart as well as with one's eyes. Sally makes up 'silly stories' about flying to Africa or the Antarctic to bring back exotic gifts for her grandmother. This ability to 'fly' she shares with her grandmother who lies in bed nearing the end of her life. Some of the spreads in this book are fresh and uncluttered – as when Sally visits the desert or the Polar wastes – but many are crammed full of tiny sections spilling over into one another and harbouring all manner of natural and spooky objects. There is a weirdness here both of subject matter and of perspective but, whether one warms to it or not, what cannot be in doubt is this artist's extraordinary graphic skill.

### Animal tales

David Pelham's graphic skill is legendary: he was one of the first designers to work in the modern paper-engineering field (with Jonathan Miller on the barrier breaking *Human Body*) and here he is again with *A Piece of Cake*. This mouth-watering wedge-shaped offering tells the story, in humorous, often ingenious verse of a family of Housemice who are invited to the Churchmouse children's party: 'The Postmouse said, "Remember that/ Those Churchmice tend to be/ Considerably less fortunate/ Than mice like you and me".' So, finding a slice of chocolate cake under a sitting room chair, the Housemice set out with it as a gift, but at each stage of the long pop-up journey, for various good reasons the Piece of Cake gets smaller and smaller and smaller. However Grandma Churchmouse saves the day: 'For she had baked a *huge* cheesecake/ The vicar, on his knees,/ His faith restored, cried, "Praise the Lord!/ A cake made out of cheese!"' And there, from the last opening, rise up Churchmice and Housemice in party gear, the thanksgiving vicar and beside him Grandma Churchmouse cutting joyfully into the cheesecake. *A Piece of Cake* is no ordinary pop-up since, unlike most of its family, the yardstick of 'balance of text and illustration, each being of excellence and enhancing the other' can be confidently applied. Consume it with care!

And after the mice come the cat, the dog, the monkeys, the swan and the pigeons: Liz Graham-Yooll's *Timothy Tib* is an excuse for a cat-loving artist to paint a tabby sleeping, stretching, stalking, prowling in full-colour full-page pictures that will be every feline-lover's delight. Opposite each picture there is a verse 'At night no longer sweet and mild,/ he's like a tiger, fierce and wild.' with a refrain – *Timothy Tib is a jungle cat* that rings the changes opening by opening as the cat's mood varies, and offers the artist the chance to insert a delicate line drawing below the text.

Michael Foreman's *Saving Sinbad* purports to be written by the heroic, nameless dog who guards over his master and is with him whilst he is repairing the church tower in a seaside town. When the lifeboat is called out the dog watches the daring rescue, then notices that Sinbad, a smaller dog, is struggling helplessly in the towering waves. With great courage he dashes over the slippery rocks, jumps in the sea and brings Sinbad to land. Michael Foreman's watercolours of seascape, church, and 'the barber, the barman, the butcher's boy and bridegroom' rushing into their yellow jackets to become lifeboatmen have all



the intimacy and character of small town life. A conventional, homely picture book, this, and one that the RNLI could perhaps adopt as a fundraiser.

Is it just because the setting is African that Emma Chichester Clark's new picture book **No More Kissing!** begins to look like the Jean de Brunhoff 'Barbar' series? Maybe it was the two giant elephants kissing their minute baby jumbo that put me in mind of the master. Children who hate being kissed by all their older relatives will sympathise with the little monkey here who hates all the kissing that goes on and tries to prevent the grown-up monkeys (dressed like humans) from kissing the new baby in the family: "STOP!" I shouted. "Can't you see he doesn't like it?" – but Grandma Monkey is canny. "Perhaps you'd like to hold him?" she says. The baby goes on screaming whatever his big brother does to entertain him – until secretly he gives the baby – a kiss. "It was lucky no one was looking." There is humour here as well as delight in the elegant monkeys – Chichester Clark in a new and rewarding vein.

There was a time when all picture books were at least 32 pages long and offered a good read as well as plenty of illustration to sustain the listener. For various economic reasons, as well as the perceived reduction of concentration-span in a generation reared on quick-frame television, their length is now often reduced to 28 pages or even less. But **The Silver Swan** by Michael Morpurgo and Christian Birmingham bravely eschews modern practice and the result is a long and enthralling nature story combined with large soft pastel illustrations – a fulfilling experience rare in today's climate. The story, told by the boy, is of his passion for a swan



that has made her home on a lake near his farm. He befriends her, carefully, and watches when a cob appears and the two swans make a nest together and rear their cygnets. In the woods near the lake a vixen, hungry in the cold winter, is trying to rear her family and the boy realises, before the fatal encounter between his swan and the vixen, that both have a right to live. His swan is mortally wounded before the cob can come to the rescue, but the boy traces her corpse into the woods and retrieves a feather, watches over her family and sees with pleasure the cob mate again. The story is told by Morpurgo with commendable directness and is illustrated by Birmingham in soft focus large pictures, often close-ups of boy and swan, that one would gladly hang on one's wall.

It is good to see Jeannie Baker, collage-artist extraordinary, making a reappearance with **Home in the Sky**. In the foreword she explains the genesis of her story and in an



From *Home in the Sky*.

afterword she tells older readers about her painstaking technique (she took two years to make the pictures) and about the difference between domestic and feral pigeons. Light, the homing pigeon at the centre of her story, strays onto the New York subway system and is taken home by a boy whose mother persuades him to release Light so that he may fly back to his owner, a rooftop dweller called Mike. Scraps of material, feathers, leaves, wood, hair and newsprint have been magically transformed into a most memorable picture book. ■

**Elaine Moss** is a frequent contributor to **Signal** magazine and was for ten years the compiler of the annual **Children's Books of the Year** guide. She was a founder judge of the Kurt Maschler Award and won the Eleanor Farjeon Award for distinguished services to children's literature.

### Details of books discussed

**Puss in Boots**, Philip Pullman, ill. Ian Beck, Doubleday, 0 385 41032 8, £10.99

**The Ugly Duckling**, Kevin Crossley-Holland, ill. Meilo So, Orion, 1 85881 838 9, £9.99

**Beetle Boy**, Lawrence David, ill. Delphine Durand, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 5105 7, £9.99

**Me and My Cat**, Satoshi Kitamura, Andersen, 0 86264 925 0, £9.99

**Noko and the Night Monster**, Fiona Moodie, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1694 0, £10.99

**Nothing Scares Us**, Frieda Wishinsky, ill. Neal Layton, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 4679 7, £9.99

**Beware of the Storybook Wolves**, Lauren Child, Hodder, 0 340 77915 2, £9.99

**Saying Goodbye**, Ifeoma Onyefulu, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1700 9, £10.99

**A Ladder to the Stars**, Simon Puttock, ill. Alison Jay, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1575 8, £10.99

**Falling Angels**, Colin Thompson, Hutchinson, 0 09 176817 9, £9.99

**A Piece of Cake**, David Pelham, Jonathan Cape, 0 224 04669 1, £8.99

**Timothy Tib**, Liz Graham-Yooll, Ragged Bears, 1 85714 207 1, £8.99

**Saving Sinbad**, Michael Foreman, Andersen, 1 84270 008 1, £9.99

**No More Kissing!**, Emma Chichester Clark, Andersen, 0 86264 598 0, £9.99

**The Silver Swan**, Michael Morpurgo, ill. Christian Birmingham, Doubleday, 0 385 41022 0, £10.99

**Home in the Sky**, Jeannie Baker, Walker, 0 7445 7585 0, £9.99



# Authorgraph No.128

## Lauren Child

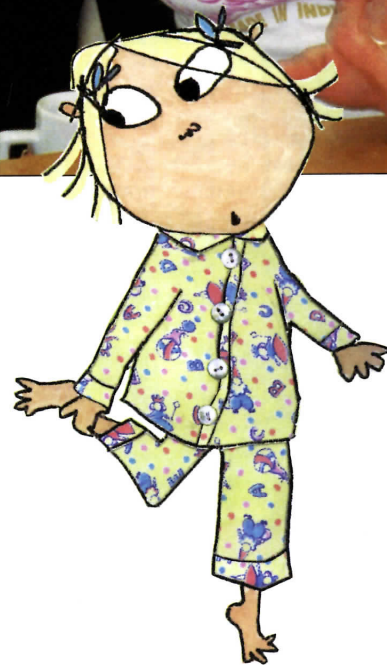
Lauren Child interviewed by Joanna Carey

Illustrators have certain basic requirements – such as access to well lit studio space, and a regular income to keep the wolf from the door. But what about the isolation? It can be a lonely job. Lauren Child has found the ideal solution to all this – she does two jobs at once: working as a receptionist for a friend's design company, the desk at which she creates her picture books is the same as that from which she answers the company telephone. I arrange to meet her at the premises in a converted warehouse by the river at Chelsea. A clanky iron-age lift takes me up to the studio, a vast space where Lauren (a tall, immaculately made-up blonde in T shirt and jeans who manages to be both impossibly glamorous and reassuringly funny and unpretentious) has a corner all to herself; a sort of designer Wendy-house with a pinboard full of cards and drawings, a work top with computer and telephone, and shelves bristling with pens, pencils and brushes, and bulging with copies of her books in several different languages.

She now has six titles to her name and her distinctive style is an entertaining mix of unruly, cartoony drawing, witty observation and bold page design that borrows more than a little from the advertising world and incorporates lots of retro '50s styling and licourice allsorts colours. Along with her adventurous typography and inventive, often weirdly disorientating photographic collage, the abundance of surface pattern and jokey detail creates a wonky childlike sense of perspective where everything on the page clamours for attention.

She made an early impact with the wonderfully funny *Clarice Bean That's Me* which chronicles the comical ups and downs of family life – with a stressed-out father, a confused grandpa, an angst-ridden teenage brother, a boy-crazy sister,

an annoying little brother and a new age mother who likes to relax in the bath listening to whale music. The drawing has a rash, impulsive feel and it is no surprise to hear that as a child she loved Quentin Blake's work. 'I remember buying books simply because they had his drawings on the cover – I loved the expressive quality of his scribbly images. And I loved the Madeline books by Bemelmans; they have such mood and atmosphere. I loved E H Shepard too and Carl Larssen but it wasn't just books, I was obsessed with the whole Holly Hobbie thing at one point. But my greatest source of inspiration was – and is – Snoopy. I've always been fascinated by the way Snoopy appeals across the generations. I found when I'd outgrown the "tweeness" I appreciated it in a different way. I'm intrigued by that "crossover" and the way those very strong



characters live on, and generate all that merchandise! I've still got all my Snoopy stationery – all in its packaging, untouched. I'd like to see my characters take on a life of their own in film, TV and, yes! merchandise!' She smiles a serene, angelic smile and her diamanté hair slide twinkles.

She went to art school to study illustration but this was a huge disappointment. It simply did not live up to her expectations. Educated at a comprehensive school in Marlborough, Lauren did her sixth form at Marlborough College where her father was the art teacher. 'He ran a truly amazing art department, he was a really inspiring teacher who really made you want to draw, made you understand things, whether it was through drawing in a straightforward classical way, or learning about cubism, or Matisse or whatever. Anyway, after that, at art school in Manchester, there was almost no teaching. I had a very chippy tutor who





continually put me down for being a posh girl from the south who, in his view, probably just wanted to do flower paintings. It was all very negative, no input. Other students were more resourceful. They were used to being left to their own devices, they weren't waiting to be taught. It was awful. Life drawing for example – until I went to art school, I'd never understood how people could have thought life drawing was boring. There was no feeling of excitement or discovery about it. I was totally disillusioned. There were some good teachers but generally speaking you were ignored. I was away for two weeks at one point and nobody noticed. I left after a year. Really, I should have made a stand, and left after two weeks.'

She reapplied for places elsewhere and ended up taking the next year off travelling, waitressing, learning to drive and eventually taking a place at City and Guilds (an independent art school in London) to study decorative arts. After this she embarked on a series of jobs making furniture, decorating china – taking commissions to paint curtains and murals, window dressing for Harvey Nichols, and, with a friend, painting the spots on Damien Hirst's spot paintings: 'Paid by the hour – rather than by the spot – which was a shame as I was really quick. No, I wasn't involved in his pickled sharks or the sawn-in-half cows, but I saw them – and smelt them' she says. And with another friend, an actor, she held regular 'activity days' with the idea of learning new skills, like making lamps. This involved welding and making lampshades out of sari silks and led to the formation of a company called Chandeliers for the People: 'No, I didn't think up that name, it was a witty friend.' But their Blue-Peterish zeal failed them when it came to hawking the stuff round expensive shops like Liberty's, so another friend (friends play a vital role in this saga) organized sales in fashionable watering-holes like the Groucho and the Cobden club.

'Eventually though, I realized I had to get my act together, get back to what I'd always intended, and write a book. I had actually written a book when I was 18 (with a friend) and it was accepted by Macmillan but they wanted too many changes. It was all too complicated. It was exciting for a few minutes, but we were too young for that kind of commitment, really. I think we were just in it for the lunch and then it was all over, so in the early '90s I decided to have another go. I applied for the Royal College of Art to do an MA but I didn't get in' (she's clearly still a bit miffed about that) 'and then a friend sent my portfolio off to someone who worked in a design studio, whose advice was to stop flitting about and write a book.' So, with a bit of help and encouragement (from a friend, of course) she set about writing a book: 'I really had no idea how to start. I remember saying to my friend, "do you think it's all right to do it like this, in this sort of conversational style?"' And it is that 'conversational style' that makes Clarice Bean such a real and



engaging character. And it is all those odd jobs and experiences that give these books their dotty charm and their kaleidoscopic visual diversity – the sari-silk left over from lampshade days is recycled as wall paper in *Clarice Bean*, and the clouds round Clarice's Dad's skyscraper office were inspired by photographic prints on Harvey Nichols carrier bags – 'though naturally I took my own photos so as not to infringe copyright' Lauren assures me hastily. And then there is her ability to remember what it was like to be a child. 'I can see it all more clearly now – life gets easier after 30 (she's 35 now) and I can remember what it was like to be Clarice Bean's age, round about 7, when you have no control over your life: even when you gain a little independence, you're still so *vulnerable*. It's a feeling I still get when I walk down Oxford Street – you're all on your own amongst so many people. My boyfriend laughs at me because I always feel so sad when I see people queueing up to buy their sandwiches – it reminds me of packed lunches and how, at school, your packed lunch was your one connection with your mum at home. And restaurants make me sad, it's the thought of all those people in need of a bit of mothering.'

Right from the start, Lauren Child seems to have mastered the art of integrating text and illustrations. In the Clarice Bean stories, with their cheerfully chaotic sock-strewn domestic interiors, each of the characters has its own distinctive typeface so you can always see who is talking – and when Frank Sinatra is singing on Clarice's Dad's stereo, his words swirl seductively round the turntable 'to give the idea of music'. Against colourful backgrounds composed of cunning photographic montages, swishy watercolour washes, fabric collages featuring sari silks, chintzy floral prints and abstract '50s motifs, she superimposes cut-out figures drawn with a bold black line – 'No it's not ink. I just can't use pen and ink. I know that's meant to be the most spontaneous medium, but people using pen and ink always draw over a pencil line, don't they? So I just use pencil – it's much less inhibiting, and I can

rub it out if I go wrong. Then I scan the pencil drawing into the computer and print it out in black onto cartridge paper which I can then continue to work on with paints, collage or whatever. I love the computer because it keeps the whole thing fluid – you can juggle things around. Sometimes a drawing might be just right, but the scale might be wrong, in which case I can keep the spontaneity of the drawing by resizing it rather than having to draw it all again.'

She demonstrates: resized and rearranged, her characters sit patiently on the screen, waiting to be printed out, but, it seems it will not be long before Lauren's dreams of seeing them step off the page and take on a life of their own are realized – Clarice Bean has already been optioned for film/TV adaptation and as for *I Will Not Ever Never Eat a Tomato*, featuring Charlie and Lola, Lauren is planning to cut out the middleman and learn how to do her own animation and get them up and running herself ... 'and see if I can be involved in the licensing and the merchandise too', she says gleefully. ■

Photographs by Joanna Carey.

### Lauren Child's books in order of appearance

*I Want a Pet*, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1212 0, £9.99 hbk, 0 7112 1339 9, £4.99 pbk

*Clarice Bean That's Me*, Orchard, 1 84121 029 3, £10.99 hbk, 1 84121 583 X, £4.99 pbk

*I Will Not Ever Never Eat a Tomato*, Orchard, 1 84121 397 7, £10.99 hbk, 1 84121 602 X, £4.99 pbk

*My Uncle is a Hunkle Says Clarice Bean*, Orchard, 1 84121 399 3, £10.99 hbk (1 84121 624 0, £4.99 pbk, Sept. 2001)

*Beware of the Storybook Wolves*, Hodder, 0 340 77915 2, £9.99 hbk (0 340 77916 0, £5.99 pbk, June 2001)

*I Am NOT Sleepy and I WILL NOT Go to Bed*, Orchard, 1 84121 821 9, £10.99 hbk

*What Planet Are You From, Clarice Bean?*, Orchard, 1 84121 819 7, £10.99 hbk (Sept. 2001)

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



# Windows into Illustration: Bob Graham

Bob Graham's witty, deftly expressive pen and wash illustrations interact with his understated texts with admirable economy yet warmth and wit. Here he explains the techniques and thinking behind his recent picture book, **Max**.

**W**hen Max and his Superhero mum and dad flew in through the window and onto my drawing board they presented me, as an author and illustrator, with a unique problem: my previous picture book families had been ordinary in the best sense of the word. The patchwork of small events in their lives made their stories unique; it made them extraordinary. Max, along with Captain Lightning and Madam Thunderbolt were an extraordinary family, a family flying in the Jet Stream, that I was at pains to make just a little bit ordinary.

They also presented me with a wonderful freedom of visual possibilities. Suddenly I could have my family with their bright little capes and boots doing cartwheels at six thousand feet. Heady stuff for me, and fun.

The layouts stopped a bit short of a comic book approach, but were accommodating enough to let the narrative ramble along in a combination of words and pictures. For this I am indebted to Deirdre McDermott at Walker Books.

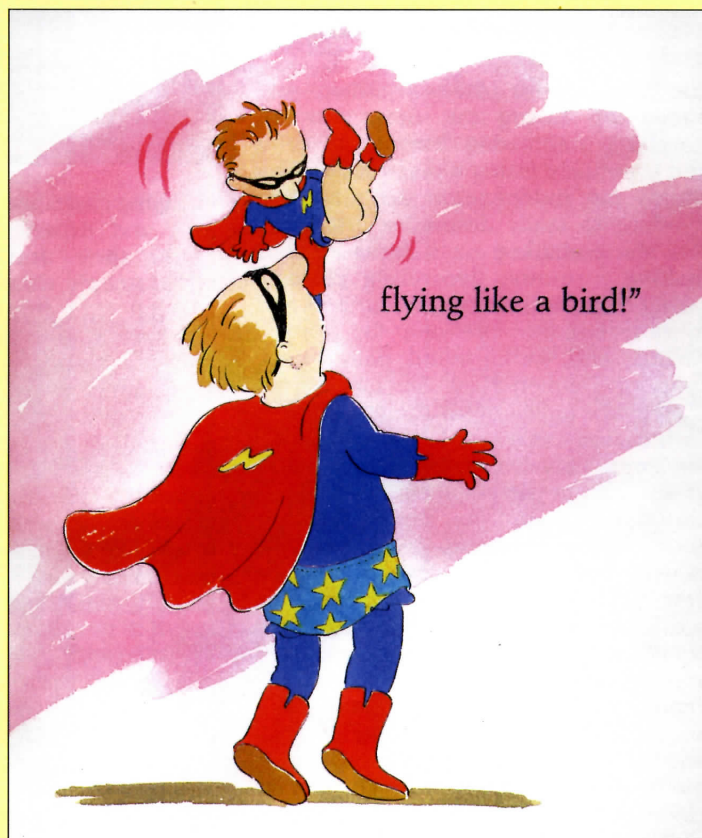
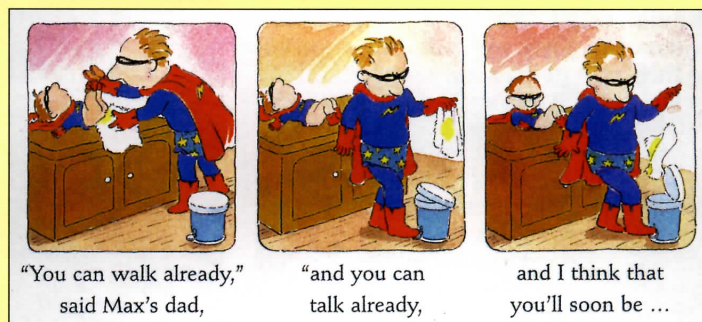
The pictures were made with pen and ink. I started at school before the Day of the Biro, when pen nibs were dipped into inkwells set in the desk and each child carried a blue ink blob around on a bump on their index finger. I still have my bump and my stain and through them I stay proudly connected to my childhood.



Try as she might, Miss Honeyset couldn't keep him firmly in his seat in class.

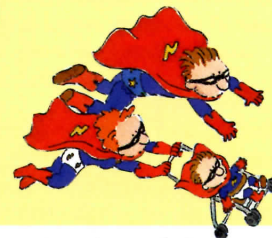
These pen drawings were then coloured with watercolours, inks, crayons, coloured pencils and powdered chalks (a kind of poor man's air-brush.). If this sounds complicated – it's not. In fact it is of utmost importance to me that technique is not apparent. I prefer it to sit way in the background, rather than say, 'look at me, look at me.' This way, the reader is more aware of the content, rather than how it is achieved.

Far more important to me is the drawing; how people are placed in relation to each other, their body language. And again, I prefer it if this is not readily apparent or obvious. Expressions on faces should need some interpretation. I like to leave it up to the readers to do some of the work – to read the pictures in their own way.



When I am illustrating, I hate leaving my desk for 'reference'. I like to think of my characters acting in little one-act plays with minimal sets – a lounge chair, a TV set and a dog as props; but to treat these in such a way that they never become boring. There must be a visual surprise with each turn of the page.

When **Max** eventually went to print, many of these things had been accomplished for me as an author and illustrator, again with help from Walker Books. ■



**Max** is published by Walker Books (0 7445 6787 4, £9.99 hbk). The paperback is due in August (0 7445 8905 3, £4.99).

**Bob Graham** is the author and illustrator of **Queenie the Bantam** (Highly Commended for the 1998 Kate Greenaway Medal), **Buffy** (Winner of the 1999 Smarties Book Prize silver award) and **Max** (Winner of the 2001 Smarties Book Prize gold award). He has three times won the Children's Book Council of Australia Children's Book of the Year award. His work is featured in **20th Century Children's Writers** (St James Press), **The Oxford Companion to Australian Children's Literature** and **The Proof of the Puddin'** by Maurice Saxby (Ashton Scholastic).



# Inspiring 'Reluctant' Readers

Teacher, Cynthia Dummett, on how sometimes an old book can do the trick, even a tatty old book . . .

**A**s a teacher of children in their first year at school, I prided myself on sending children on to Year 1 with a very positive attitude to books and reading. Some could read by the time they left our Early Years Unit, all were spending longer periods in the book corner and the library, and all loved books.

All except Nicholas, that is.

Nicholas loved stories, rhymes, songs, videos and films, and loved to talk about them, but I had yet to see him *choose* to look at a book of his own accord. His visits to our library were brief. He'd lug the biggest and heaviest book he could see off the shelf, inspect it for damage – the smallest rip would cause him to reject it – and hurry over to the computer to scan the book in so that he could return to the classroom and his favourite activity: bulldozing in the sand tray.

A fortnight before the end of term, a classroom assistant contributed a set of 'Cat in the Hat' books that her own boys had outgrown to the Early Years Unit. I was delighted: my own children had loved Dr Seuss and I'd used them extensively in my adult literacy classes. The combination of sound, sense (and *non-sense!*) and zany illustrations appeals to a wide range of readers. I was a little disappointed that the box contained mainly Beginner Books: not all the writers working within the vocabulary constraints of the series capture the imagination.

But the box of books made me look through my own library at home and as soon as I saw **The Lorax**, I knew it was for Nicholas. It wasn't big but it was weighty in that it dealt with big issues; it entertained

but it didn't talk down; it had a strong story line, it caught the imagination and best of all, it caught the ear. Also, as a result of reading it so frequently to my own children, I had most of it by heart. Unfortunately it was also the tattiest book I had seen for a long time.

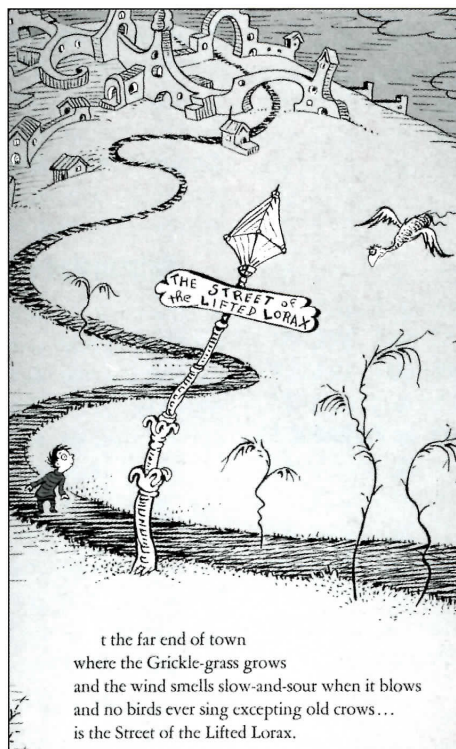
Calls to local book shops drew blanks. Our local librarian reported that the three library copies were out and offered to reserve the book for me, but time was of the essence, so I took my copy to school with me. How to 'sell' it to Nicholas?

Next day, I knelt down beside him at the sand tray as he bulldozed.

'At the far of end town where the Grickle-grass grows and the wind smells slow-and-sour when it blows and no birds ever sing excepting old crows...' I began.

The bulldozer stopped.

'... is the Street of the Lifted Lorax,' I went on.



At the far end of town  
where the Grickle-grass grows  
and the wind smells slow-and-sour when it blows  
and no birds ever sing excepting old crows...  
is the Street of the Lifted Lorax.

And on through the adventure we went, until I got stuck.

'Go on!' urged Nicholas.

'I can't,' I said. 'I'll have to get the book to remind me.'

And that was it. We read it together to the end and he took it home: a book lover.

**Cynthia Dummett** is a teacher, writer and storyteller.

**Cynthia Dummett's top favourite Dr Seuss books for inspiring/motivating reluctant readers**

(HarperCollins, £4.99 each pbk)

**The Lorax**, 0 00 170012 X

**Horton Hatches the Egg**, 0 00 195740 6

**The Cat in the Hat**, 0 00 171303 5

**Green Eggs and Ham**, 0 00 171306 X

**One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish**,  
0 00 171321 3

**Ten Apples Up on Top**, Theo LeSieg,  
0 00 171323 X

**Fox in Socks**, 0 00 171311 6

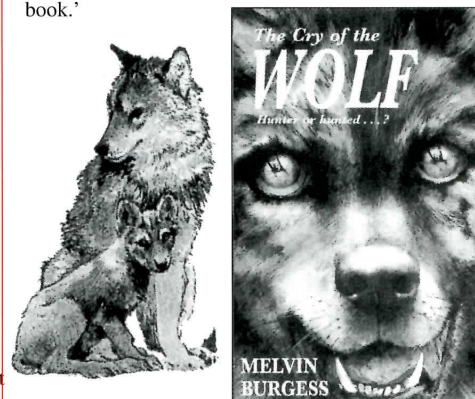
**The Berenstain Bears and the Spooky Old Tree**, Stan and Jan Berenstain, 0 00 171284 5

Librarian, Anne Marley, on a book that gripped a disruptive teenager. . .

**I** did a book talk in a secondary school to 13/14-year-olds some time ago now, but I remember it very clearly. It was in one of our less affluent areas of the county and this particular class of teenagers were not really very book orientated. The teacher asked me in to see if I could generate some enthusiasm, as a new voice with new books often can have an impact that their regular teacher can then follow up.

I talked about a few books, asked them their opinion about book jackets, asked them what they liked to read – which ranged from 'Sweet Valley High' to motorbiking magazines – and whilst most of the class participated, there was one particular girl who was disruptive and attracting the teacher's attention.

I decided to read to them from Melvin Burgess' **The Cry of the Wolf**. We talked about the striking cover and then I told them the beginning of the story – about the last English wolves and the Hunter who is out to destroy them. I read for about ten minutes, from the part where the Hunter attempts to kill Silver, the female wolf who has gone with her cub for sanctuary with humans. Ben, the boy who originally finds her and her cub, tries to fight the Hunter off, but fails. The writing is incredibly powerful and is made for reading aloud and there wasn't a sound from this group for the entire reading and at the end of the chapter there was silence, followed by them clamouring for more. Of course, the response is – 'Well you'll find out what happens if you read the book.'



But the most interesting response was from the disruptive girl who till this point hadn't shown any interest. She was leaning forward so far in her seat that I thought she would fall off and at the end, she had tears in her eyes. It turns out, as she told me afterwards, that she loved animals and wanted to work with them when she got older. The teacher was amazed at her reaction, as she'd never shown much interest in books before, but now she has something with which to help her build.

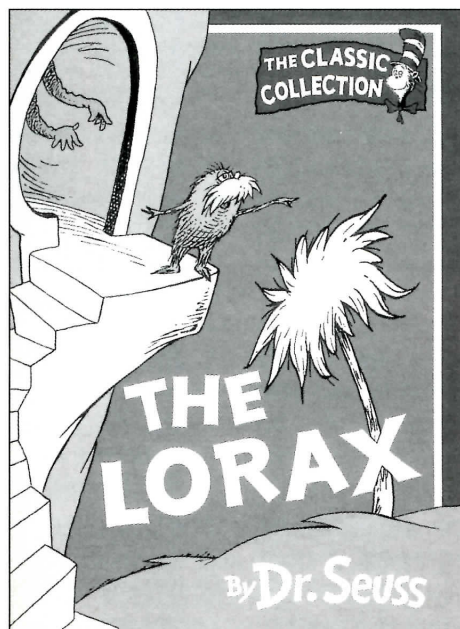
I'm a great believer in 'the right book for the right reader at the right time'. **The Cry of the Wolf** was just such a book for this reader at this particular time.

This kind of experience makes me feel that what librarians do is one of the most important and rewarding jobs there is. ■

**Anne Marley** is the Principal Librarian, Children's and Schools Library Service, Hampshire County Library.

**The Cry of the Wolf** by Melvin Burgess is published by Puffin, 0 14 037318 7, £4.99 pbk.

Readers who would like to contribute to this series are invited to submit an account of their experience (500 words) to the Editor. Please mark your submission 'Reluctant Readers'.





# Short Stories for Younger Re

Why are collections of short stories so rarely published when their particular features can serve a young audience so well? And why are talented short story writers so underrated? **Peter Hollindale** discusses the unique qualities of the short story.

In Roald Dahl's story 'The Great Automatic Grammatizator', a character who has won a bogus reputation for writing good short stories complains that publishers think his genius is misdirected. 'Everyone tells me I ought to do a novel ... All sorts of publishers are chasing after me day and night begging me to stop fooling around with stories and do something really important instead. A novel's the only thing that counts – that's what they say.'

This story was written long before Dahl's success as a children's writer, and though these words are spoken by an unappealing character, one detects a personal ruefulness and resentment behind them. Dahl was a natural short story writer. When he attempted to write adult novels, the results were disastrous. Although he later managed full-length books for children, many of his big commercial successes, such as **Fantastic Mr Fox** and **George's Marvellous Medicine**, are essentially short stories. Even **Danny the Champion of the World**, one of his longest children's books, is expanded from a small-scale 'adult' story. These tales are often elastic creations, and the boundary between story and novel is vaguely marked. Dahl was not alone in crossing it – Robert Westall's fifteen-page short story 'Urn Burial', first published in 1984, became a fully-fledged sci-fi novel in 1987. But the short-story form has its own unique and underrated strengths.

## ● A publishing enigma

Short stories are a publishing enigma and a readerly puzzle. Their attractions are obvious. For the youngest children 'Tell me a story' does not mean 'Tell me Chapter one of a novel.' It means, 'I want events and a satisfying closure before I go to sleep.' Later on, the short story is convenient for teachers, fitting neatly into school periods, assemblies and examination questions, and older readers should find it ready-made for a sound-bite world. Yet publishers show little confidence in its potential as 'reading of choice', unless the author's name already commands attention as a novelist.

Only in one genre – the ghost story and tale of the supernatural – does the short story enjoy undisputed dominance.

Many books on the market are clearly aimed at institutions. For instance, the name of J.J. Overell is not yet well-known, though it deserves to be. His two collections of stories of home and school for primary school children, **The Thought That Counts** and **Whoever You Are**, are accompanied by a statement of moral utility from the publishers. 'There is no stressing of an obvious moral, but each story involves an important point which will be absorbed by the readers. They have already proved popular for reading aloud in school assemblies and Religious Educational lessons.' If this worthy purpose gets the stories read, well and good. But these are living, vivid, sometimes funny, sometimes painful, sometimes truly joyous excursions into the business of growing up. They have the freshness of everyday living about them, and need to be set free from institutional formalities. The morals will look after themselves.

Thematic collections also have an eye on the classroom, or school

library. They have their uses, of course, but they can also be dull brown wrapping-paper, hiding the bright light of individual stories. How can truly outstanding short stories achieve the same enduring prominence as truly outstanding novels? This is a problem no one has yet solved. For instance, the Mammoth collection **Family Tree** includes Anne Fine's story 'Fabric Crafts'. This story has been printed at least twice before, once in Viking's **The Trick of the Tale** and once in Jan Mark's **Oxford Book of Children's Stories**. Quite rightly, because it is a comic masterpiece of anti-sexist writing, that makes its point through successive rapid detonations of surprised laughter. When Anne Fine's name is mentioned, 'Fabric Crafts' should come to mind as readily as **Goggle-Eyes** or **Madame Doubtfire**, but it doesn't. Exceptional short stories are like woodland saplings searching for light: most remain smothered by their larger, book-length neighbours.

## ● Outstanding work

Thematic or regional collections currently available include some outstanding work. Two stories in particular, both by established writers, deserve the free-standing reputation that collections rarely give. One is Melvin Burgess's 'Coming Home', also in **Family Tree**. A book of stories about family life inevitably highlights family break-up nowadays, with children routinely cast as victims. Burgess's Laurence is a victim of sorts, but he is also a spy, exploiter, agent provocateur, and would-be blackmailer, enjoying his power over adults and his contempt for them. He is a thoroughly nasty piece of work. This is the unseen face of family breakdown and divorce, an unsentimental show of its corruptive opportunities for children. The story is utterly convincing in its bleak and compact ruthlessness, as fine an achievement in its way as **Junk**.

Just as relentlessly truthful is Jackie Kay's 'The Five Sisters of Kintail', in an anthology of Scottish stories, **Points North**. Kay is a distinguished poet. Her uncompromising clarity of vision is brought to bear in this excellent story on the awkward, much-evaded subject of female adolescent bullying. Mary becomes a victim of her own girl-gang because she is much later than the others in starting to menstruate, and suffers increasingly hurtful persecution as the odd one out. Some silent areas of widespread pain are opened up in this brief, compelling story. The book is bound to circulate mainly in Scotland, but for teenage girls the experience has no frontiers, and nor should the story.

## ● Single-author collections

The best guarantee of permanence is still, it seems, to publish a single-author collection on the coat-tails of successful longer fiction. Several recent books fall into this category. Philippa Pearce, for example, is not a natural novelist. The bulk of her published work consists of short stories, mostly acerbic domestic incidents or spooky tales. Yet where would she be without the backing of **Tom's Midnight Garden**? (And where would Jan Mark, the most gifted of all present-day practitioners, have been without **Thunder and Lightnings**?) The title-story in Pearce's latest collection, **The Rope and other stories**, is Pearce at her best, exploring the small-scale, private, unspoken entrapments which always lie in ambush for a child. The small, closed incident which resonates in a life, and changes it, is perfect terrain for short stories.

Michael Morpurgo is another who has earned his short story collection, **From Hereabout Hill**, by means of longer (and still underpraised) fictions – Morpurgo often seems in closer touch with real children than the majority of writers. There is something engagingly intimate and



# Readers: the Neglected Genre?

confidential about his writing, and it means he can trust the child with narrative shocks of unhappiness. There are plenty of those in **From Hereabout Hill**, but the varied experience he offers is deep, authentic and worthwhile.

Like Michael Morpurgo, Martin Waddell in his collection provides helpful notes for the reader, explaining how each story came to be written. Waddell's **The Orchard Book of Ghostly Stories** sounds misleadingly like an edited collection, but all are Waddell's own exploration of Ireland's ghost-haunted landscapes. Preserving the voice of the oral storyteller is one of the short story's special roles, and Waddell's book is like a conversation with a secret Ireland.

Helen Dunmore is another whose best writing for children seems to be in the short story form, and **Aliens Don't Eat Bacon Sandwiches** is a richly diverse and enjoyable collection which illustrates the sheer range that the genre can offer. The title story is science fiction. 'The Mars Ark' is a futurist, dystopian story, sci-fi of another kind, a 'wake-up call' to global warming if anyone still needs it. War, and the pity of war, are there in 'The Old Team' and 'The Airman's Sixpence'. 'Wolf Weather' is an unforgettable snow fantasy, and 'Great-grandma's Dancing Dress' another tale about a bullied girl (a younger one this time) with an outcome both cheering and convincing. Dunmore's stories, like most of those in single-author collections, mainly originate in commissions for edited compilations, but her distinctive imagination is present everywhere and the quality is consistently high.

The collection **Talk to Me**, by the American writer Avi, is another exceptional book. All but one of the seven stories are in the category of domestic realism, but their angles and perspectives are consistently unexpected. Like many good stories, they make everyday experience seem sharp and strange. Perhaps the best of them is the savagely funny 'Fortune Cookie'. To celebrate his thirteenth birthday, Parker insists on being taken out to dinner by both his estranged parents. Forced parenthood is what he practises. This marvellous story is like Anne Fine, with an extra litre of acid.

## ● In disguise

A highly successful if infrequent ruse for propagating the short story is to disguise it in a quasi-novelistic form. The 'linked short story' format is nothing new. It was used by Kipling (another short story writer who was ill at ease with novels) in **Just-So Stories**, **The Jungle Book** and **Puck of Pook's Hill**. Roald Dahl perceived its strengths in the episodic **Boy** and **Going Solo**, and it has proved especially well-fitted to quasi-autobiography for children. Earlier examples of note were Jane Gardam's **A Few Fair Days** and Berlie Doherty's **White Peak Farm**, and now it has produced a classic (though a very challenging one for most children) in David Almond's **Counting Stars** (reviewed in **BfK 126**).

Since precedents for the linked short story go back to **The Arabian Nights** it seems strange that writers have not used it more. Anne Fine did so, extremely effectively, in **Step by Wicked Step**, in which several children, isolated accidentally in an ancient house, and prompted by the house's past, exchange their individual experiences of parental break-up and broken homes. With so long a fictional history behind us of the 'tale-within-a-tale' it seems long overdue that children's fiction should pick up cues from writers like Kipling and find new ways of blending novel and short story. Awkward but rewarding experiments like Lucy Boston's **The Children of Green Knowe** have led to disappointingly little technical

innovation, and Fine's book is still a rare kind of hybrid.

The most straightforward form of all, of course, is the episodic life of a single character or group, like Richmal Crompton's **Just William**. Crompton's true modern day descendant is Roger Collinson, whose characters Willy (**Willy and the Semolina Pudding**) and Grisel (**Grisel and the Tooth Fairy**) will put unmissable domestic anarchy in the path of every six- and seven-year-old.

Our fast-paced, multi-media world seems perfectly adapted for short stories, yet they are still overshadowed by novels, and even by poetry. The genre is neglected, too little is published, and educational functionalism rules the market. There is scope and need for writers, publishers, librarians and booksellers to experiment with form, presentation and promotion. Perhaps, one day, another book of short stories will win the Carnegie Medal. We might even scale again the heights of 1980, when the winner was Peter Dickinson's **City of Gold** and the runners-up included Jan Mark's **Nothing to be Afraid of** and Jan Needle's **A Sense of Shame**. ■

**Peter Hollindale**, formerly at the University of York, is now a freelance writer and teacher.

In the next issue of **Books for Keeps**, Nikki Gamble discusses the place of short stories in the curriculum.

## ● Recent books discussed

**The Thought That Counts**, J.J. Overell, ill. Robin Lawrie, Acorn Editions, 0 9065 5416 0, £5.99 pbk

**Whoever You Are**, J.J. Overell, ill. Robin Lawrie, Lutterworth, 0 7188 3008 3, £7.50 pbk

**Family Tree**, edited by Miriam Hodgson, Mammoth, 0 7497 3684 4, £4.99 pbk

**Points North**, edited by Lindsey Fraser, Mammoth, 0 7497 4034 5, £4.99 pbk

**The Rope and other stories**, Philippa Pearce, ill. Annabel Large, Puffin, 0 14 130914 8, £4.99 pbk

**From Hereabout Hill**, Michael Morpurgo, Mammoth, 0 7497 2872 8, £4.99 pbk

**The Orchard Book of Ghostly Stories**, Martin Waddell, ill. Sophy Williams, Orchard, 1 86039 421 3, £12.99 hbk

**Aliens Don't Eat Bacon Sandwiches**, Helen Dunmore, Mammoth, 0 7497 3861 8, £4.99 pbk

**Talk to Me**, Avi, Hodder Signature, 0 340 74965 2, £4.99 pbk

**Counting Stars**, David Almond, Hodder, 0 340 78479 2, £10.00 hbk

**Willy and the Semolina Pudding and other stories**, Roger Collinson, ill. David McKee, Andersen, 0 86264 929 3, £3.99 pbk

**Grisel and the Tooth Fairy and other stories**, Roger Collinson, ill. Tony Ross, Andersen, 0 86264 689 8, £3.99 pbk



## NEWS

**Second Children's Laureate**

The appointment of the second children's laureate, following on from Quentin Blake's triumphant reign, is to be announced on 16 May. BfK gathers that the hot favourite is Jacqueline Wilson. This year's judging panel, chaired by Mark Lawson, is Quentin Blake, Antonia Byatt, John Dunne, Julia Eccleshare, Lindsey Fraser, Susan Hancock, Emma Powell and David Teale.

**World Book Day Title Criticised**

Booksellers have complained about the 'adult' language in Kate Cann's teenage novel *Shop Dead* (Scholastic), one of the books chosen to be a World Book Day £1 title.

## EVENTS

**Once Upon a Summertime**

Once Upon a Summertime, the Children's Books Ireland Summer School, is to be held from 18–20 May, in the Irish Writers' Centre, Parnell Square, Dublin. Speakers include Margaret Mahy, Kevin Crossley-Holland, Siobhán Parkinson, storyteller Pat Ryan, Malorie Blackman, Malachy Doyle and academic Dáithí Ó hÓgáin. Concurrent lectures on Saturday by Seosamh Ó Murchú and Liz Laird. A biannual award in recognition of outstanding service to Irish children's books/literature will be awarded at the conference. Further details and booking from Claire at CBI 00353 1 8725854 or [childrensbooksire@eircom.net](mailto:childrensbooksire@eircom.net)

**21st Annual Writers' Conference**

Eight children's authors including Michelle Magorian, Michael Coleman, Tessa Kraling and Billi Rosen will be running workshops and courses for aspiring writers at this event from 29 June to 1 July at King Alfred's College, Winchester. Further details from Barbara Large, Chinook, Southdown Road, Shawford, Winchester, Hampshire SO21 2BY, tel: 01962 712307, e-mail: [WriterConf@aol.com](mailto:WriterConf@aol.com)

**The Art of the Japanese Picture Book**

As part of the Japan 2001 Festival, a touring exhibition of the work of leading contemporary Japanese picture book illustrators (including Ryouji Arai, Noboru Baba, Shin'ta Cho, Shuhei Hasegawa, Akiko Hayashi, Satoshi Kitamura, Daihachi Ohta, Youko Sano, Susumu Shingu, Kouta Taniuchi and Seizo Tashima)

will be at Birmingham Central Library from 5 May to 16 June 2001; at the National Theatre, London, from 9 July to 18 August 2001; and at the Centre for the Children's Book, Newcastle, from 29 September to 3 November 2001. Lectures, events for schools, readings, storytelling, workshops and talks by the illustrators will accompany the exhibition. A catalogue will also be available. Further information from Jilly Paver, Project Co-ordinator: 020 8748 2828.



## Useful Organisations No.15:

**Action for Children's Arts**

Organisation to support and increase children's arts activity around UK

240 The Broadway, Wimbledon, London SW19 1SB

Fax: 020 8545 8365

e-mail: [membership@childrensarts.org.uk](mailto:membership@childrensarts.org.uk)

website: [www.childrensarts.co.uk](http://www.childrensarts.co.uk)

Annual subscription: sliding scale, from £15 for individuals up to £40 for LEAs and major arts companies

ACA promotes, develops and celebrates all the creative and performing arts for and with children. We want access to the arts for all children because we believe in the importance of the arts in personal fulfilment and in nurturing creativity. We aim to secure better funding and a wider understanding of the value of children's arts. To achieve this we share ideas

and best practice across all art forms with fellow professionals. We provide information and help by networking through a newsletter available in print and through e-mail, through a well-tended website and at an inspiring annual conference. We lobby decision makers and the media, and involve teachers and parents in action to develop and widen children's access to the arts. We plan showcase events and awards to increase the visibility of children's arts. We advise teachers, librarians and others on how to create successful arts events; we also encourage organisers of successful events to share their ideas and experience. ACA needs the support and energy of people who share our commitment to children's arts – we look forward to hearing from you.



## Obituary

**FRANCES LINCOLN**  
Independent publisher  
1945–2001

*Laurence Anholt writes...*

Words were Frances Lincoln's life. As a publisher, as an academic, as a bibliophile, Frances loved words; and yet she used them sparingly. She had this rare and generous quality – Frances listened more than she spoke. How embarrassed she would have been by the many glowing words that have been used to pay her tribute! A glance at any Frances Lincoln catalogue will show the rich and varied list she built from almost nothing – superb gardening, interior design and children's books reflect just a few of her passions. What was more extraordinary was that Frances achieved this by treating people so well; she was unfailingly kind and philanthropic. Perhaps the most poignant moment at her memorial service was the final meditation, in which so many of us who use words for a living, were united in silence – in the end, Frances was loved more than words can say.



The 2001 Newbery Medal, one of the US's most prestigious awards, has been won by Richard Peck's **A Year Down Yonder** (Dial Books). The Caldecott Medal (for illustration) has been won by David Small's **So You Want to be President?** (Philomel). The Michael L Printz Award for excellence in literature for young adults has been won by David Almond's **Kir's Wilderness** (Delacorte Press).

**The Big Guide 2: Irish Children's Books** (ed. Valerie Coghlan and Celia Keenan, Children's Books Ireland, 1 872917 06 2) contains articles on contemporary Irish children's literature as well as hundreds of reviews of recent titles. Available from Gill & Macmillan, Hume Avenue, Park West, Dublin 12, Ireland at £16.00.

**Wales in English** (Welsh Books Council, ISSN 1362 3176) is an annotated bibliography of books and other materials in English which relate in some way to Wales and the Welsh way of life. Available free from the Children's Books Department, Welsh Books Council, Castell Brychan, Aberystwyth Ceredigion SY23 2JB.

Congratulations to **Grace Kempster** who leaves her role as Head of Library, Information, Heritage and Cultural Services in Essex to become Director of Information Services Management for the British Council, based in Manchester. The aim of the post is to lead knowledge management development for the British Council and to lead the library and information centres in 110 countries across the world, as well as developing new and exciting creative products and services. It is an exciting time for Grace to be joining the Council, but a sad loss for children's public libraries in the UK. Grace has always been a wonderful ambassador for library services to children in this country and has been the source of inspiration to many children's librarians through her work with the Youth Libraries Group and later as an influential member of the Library and Information Commission.

**Jill Coleman** has been appointed Managing Director of A & C Black which is now owned by Bloomsbury. She joins the Bloomsbury board.

**Carolyn Hughes** is the new School Library Service Manager for Essex. She was previously the Principal Library Adviser and takes over the service at a challenging time as it currently faces delegation. But with the support of the School Library Service Team, she looks forward to an exciting future!

**Philippa Milnes-Smith**, Managing Director of Puffin Books, is leaving the company. It is thought that her departure follows Penguin's Chief Executive, Anthony Forbes-Watson's decision not to include her on Penguin's new main board, reorganised following its acquisition of Dorling Kindersley. 2000 was a difficult year for Puffin's backlist lists following the reduction in school book budgets.

Valerie Coghlan, librarian, joint editor of **The Big Guide 2: Irish Children's Books** and regular BfK reviewer, has been appointed review editor of **Children's Books in Ireland**.

**Lisa Edwards** has been appointed Senior Commissioning Editor Non Fiction at Scholastic Children's Books. She was previously a Senior Editor at Hodder Wayland. **Caroline Edgley** has been appointed Commissioning Editor Media, Pre-School and Picture Books. She was formerly Managing Editor on the Kingfisher Fiction list.

**Venetia Gosling** has been appointed to the board at Hodder Children's Books as Editorial Director, Fiction. **Maurice Lyon** has been appointed Senior Commissioning Editor, Non-Fiction.

*Contributors: BfK team, Anne Marley. Contributions welcome.*

The Simon Elvin Award is a poetry competition open to young writers between 11 and 18 years. Young poets can enter as many poems as they like. The closing date for entries is 31 July 2001. Launched in 1998, the Simon Elvin Award was set up by the Poetry Society and supported by Simon Elvin Greetings Cards. It acknowledges the huge amount of talent amongst young writers and provides an opportunity for that talent to flourish. As part of their prize fifteen overall winners will spend a week tutored by poets Stephen Knight and Amanda Dalton at the Arvon Foundation centre at Lumb Bank. For further information telephone 020 7420 9894 or visit [www.poetrysoc.com](http://www.poetrysoc.com)

Having read Caroline Pitcher's new novel, **Silkscreen**, recently myself, I was surprised to see it reviewed amongst 10–12 books (BfK 126) rather than in your Secondary section. It is published in the Mammoth Contents series, which I had thought was intended for the 12+ age-group: indeed both the subject matter and the narrative style of **Silkscreen** are more appropriate for this age-group than for younger readers. Perhaps if the reviewer had seen it as being a title for your 12+ section, he might have realised that the novel's 'subtleties and shifts' would be easily understood by the older reader, to whom what he calls 'the early confusion' of the story would also be quite clear.

123 Castelnau, Barnes, London  
SW13 9EL

While I was looking through the recent **Books for Keeps** reviews I was struck by how many non-fiction books are still being produced about the Holocaust. And, one could argue, rightly so. However when a novel about this period emerges the protagonist seems to be inevitably a Nazi (such as Jurgen Wolf in **Final Victory**) and a member of the Hitler Youth (not that boys ever had the choice), supporting the belief that the only good German is a dead one. The World War Two 'resistance' story **In My Hands**, also featured in the March issue, is from Poland, a country which still denies its involvement in many crimes against the Jews.

We do live in Europe, like it or not, but the increasing number of anti German incidents in England, stones thrown at school buses, the trashing of cars with German number plates,

make it clear that World War Two is still a dominating influence. I have written a book about a German boy who is very much aware of his country's past, and who comes to live in present day England, where he is ultimately the victim of a racist attack. I have offered the idea to several publishers, all of whom turned it down as being 'of insufficient interest'. Only one asked to see the manuscript. Since as writers, teachers and parents our concerns must be educational, without being didactic, I wonder how long it will be before the *Durmstrang* stereotype disappears from children's books. Do your other readers have any opinions on this I wonder? Or am I a voice in the wilderness?

Althoff Strasse 3, 12169 Berlin, Germany

We were sorry that Henry Harris disapproved of the approach of our very popular book, **Gruesome Grub and Disgusting Dishes** (BfK 126). His perspective as a top chef is perhaps a touch purist, or even puritanical? We were extremely careful to include in our book a balance of sweet and savoury recipes to be cooked from scratch using fresh ingredients. We felt that a touch of humour would get kids into the kitchen enjoying making food rather than stopping for a burger and chips on their way home. The maligned Snot Surfers is a delicious leek and potato soup, Sick on Toast is the humble but nutritious scrambled egg on toast with carrots, tomatoes and ham, Cow Pat Pudding is a scrumptious chocolate biscuit cake, and so on. Our feedback has been very positive with everyone enjoying the jokes and the recipes.

b small publishing, Pinewood,  
3a Combe Risings, Kingston upon  
Thames, Surrey KT2 7JT







# 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

Audio books are rated for the quality of the reading, not the book.

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

## REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

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

**Rosemary Auchmuty** is a writer and children's books historian.

**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, Notts.

**Urmi Chana** previously worked as a researcher and lecturer on bilingual issues in primary education. She now teaches part-time in the primary sector.

**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.

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

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

**Annabel Gibb** lives in York and is a Learning Support Tutor.

**Peter Hollindale**, formerly at the University of York, is now a freelance writer and teacher.

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

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

**Lois Keith** taught English for many years and is now a writer.

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

**Rudolf Loewenstein** is a Dominican friar working in a London parish.

**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.

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

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

**Helen Taylor** teaches at Homerton College, Cambridge and is the director of *The Voices Project* – a literature in the community project and festival in Cambridgeshire.

**Sue Unstead** was a publisher of children's non-fiction for 25 years and is now a freelance editorial consultant and writer.

## TITLES REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE

		Page			Page
All the Things I See	★★★★★	19	Never Play Snap with a Shark	★★★	23
Archer's Goon	★★★★	24	Old Magic	★★★	26
Arf and the Greedy Grabber	★★★	21	Oliver Cromwell and his Warts	★★★	26
Bad Dreams	★★★★	22	Penguin in the Fridge and other Cool Poems, The	★★★	22
Bartlett and the Ice Voyage	★★★★	19	Phantom's Fang-tastic Show, The	★★	21
Bloodtide	★★★★★	19	Planet Machine, The	★★★	21
Bluebeard's Castle	★★★	25	Puffin Book of Amazing Animal Poems, The	★★★★	20
Bob and the House Elves	★★★★	21	Respect	★★★★	23
Breaking Up	★★★★★	26	Rocking Horse Land and Other Classic Tales of Dolls and Toys	★★★★★	21
Britannia on Stage	★★★★★	24	Sam's Dream	★★★	21
Brothers	★★★★★	25	Sam's First Day	★★★	19
Cast Away	★★★	23	Sausage and the Little Vistor	★★★★	20
Children's Literature	★★★★	18	Sausage and the Spooks	★★★★	20
Climb Aboard the Poetry Plane	★★★	22	Sausage in Trouble	★★★★	20
Dare Game, The	★★★★	19	Schicklgrüber	★★★★★	17
DK Guide to Weather	★★★	25	School for Sausage	★★★★	20
Don't Step on the Crack!	★★★★	19	Secret Heart	★★★★★	23
Eight Days of Luke	★★★★	24	Secret Life of Sally Tomato, The	★★★★★	19
Even More Nonsense	★★★	20	Shacked Up	★★★★★	26
Flip Side, The	★★★★	25	Shrinking Mouse	★★★★★	18
Four Children of Night, The	★★★	22	Singing to the Sun	★★★	20
Fuels for the Future	★★★★★	24	Story of Ireland, The	★★★★★	23
Grow Organic Eat Organic	★★★★★	23	Stuck in Neutral	★★	25
Hans Christian Andersen	★★★★	18	Sucked In	★★★	22
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (audio book)	★★★★★	23	System Shock	★★★	23
Jack's Tree	★★	21	Take Up Thy Bed and Walk	★★★★	18
Joker	★★★	21	Tiger and Me	★★★★	20
Joking Wolf, The	★★★★	20	Tiny Rabbit Goes to the Park	★★★	19
Keeping the Air Clean	★★★★★	24	True Believer	★★★★★	26
Keeping Water Clean	★★★★★	24	(Un)arranged Marriage	★★★	26
Kiss the Cow!	★★★★	20	Vampyr Legion	★★★	23
Lady Lollipop	★★★★★	20	Vision of Beauty	★★★	19
Mine's a Winner	★★★	23	W is for World	★★★★★	19
More Jessame Stories (audio book)	★★★	20	Waste Recycling and Re-use	★★★★★	24
Mr Potts, the Potty Teacher	★★★	21	Welcome to the Snake Hotel	★★	22
My Brother's Ghost	★★★★	19	What Do We Think About Bullying?	★★★★	23
My Surprise Book of Night and Day	★★★★★	21	What Do We Think About Death?	★★★	19
My Surprise Book of Pirates	★★★★★	21	What would we do without Missus Mac?	★★★	18
My Surprise Book of Seasons	★★★★★	21	Witch Child	★★★★★	24
My Surprise Book of Senses	★★★★★	21			

## Books About Children's Books

### Schicklgrüber

★★★★★

Robert Colling-Pyper and Margaret Stavridi, with an introduction and translation (into German) by Walter Sauer, Andernach: Kari, [36] + 52pp, 3 934547 54 0, £15 pbk inc. p&p from The Book Centre, 26 Fawkon Walk, Hoddesdon,

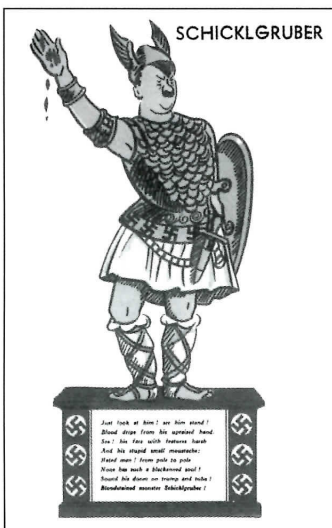
Hertfordshire EN11 8TJ (tel: 01992 467497)

A German collector has recently published a work of Teutonic profundity on the heirs of Struwwelpeter. In some 500 double-column pages he has described over 1600 items which derive in one way or another from Heinrich Hoffmann's classic picture book of 1845 (see BfK 119, November 1999). Among the most surprising of these is no. 1254 which was

discovered in an Oxford bookshop a few years ago and is now presented to a wider world in a skilfully edited facsimile.

**Schicklgrüber** takes its title from the lampooning of Adolf Hitler that went on in Britain from the time of his coming to power. The adaptation of Struwwelpeter to this end is already known in Humbert Wolfe's *Truffle Eater* of 1933 and Robert Spence's *Struwwelhitler* of 1941, but what





makes Schicklgruber surprising is its publishing in 1943 by Thacker's Press of Calcutta. It was devised for the British community and the forces in India, with profits going to the Red Cross, but until that lucky find in Oxford it was unknown to history.

As a political parody – a notoriously fragile genre – the book is as good as could be expected. It follows closely both the graphic design and the (English) verse patterns of its original and adapts Hoffmann's cautionary stories to its topical purposes in a way that still retains interest. (Joe Stalin is the dog who takes a chunk out of Cruel Adolf's trousers; von Keitel, the pincer man [very neat], snips off poor Francie's thumbs.)

As a facsimile the present production is a credit to its German publishers, who have fortunately found an English distributor. The full colour is carefully reproduced, and the editor, Walter Sauer of Heidelberg University (a Struwwelpeter specialist), has not only given parallel texts of this version and its English original, but has added for German readers a brilliant translation of Colling-Pyper into his own language. A bi-lingual introduction sets out all the discoverable facts about the book, which (final surprise) he has been able to ascertain from Margaret Stavridi, the illustrator, who is alive and well and living (aged 94 or thereabouts) in sheltered accommodation in London. BA

### Hans Christian Andersen: the life of a storyteller

★★★★

Jackie Wullschlager, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, xvi, 506pp, 0 7139 9325 1, £20 hbk

'He was a bony bore, and stayed on and on.' Thus Kate, daughter of

Charles Dickens, in 1857, and thus the problem confronting anyone attempting a life of Andersen. His rise from abject poverty to European fame – the Ugly Duckling bit – is easy to do. It begins in near-farce, with the gawky, barely-literate country-boy convincing the gentry of Copenhagen that he has a talent that must be fostered, and it ends with novels, and, above all, the *eventyr*, that were the justification for it all.

But after that there are the many years (and, under the guidance of Wullschlager, the many pages) of bony boredom. He should not be denied his natural pride in fulfilling a destiny that only he had really believed in, but his self-obsession, his hypochondria, his sponging, and his delight in getting orders of chivalry from the crowned heads of Europe does not make for thrilling reading.

The problem has been a staple one for English biographers of Andersen ever since R. Nisbet Bain published his excellent monograph in 1895. His successors have mostly updated facts in the light of new information and have then sought some angle to make their work distinctive. Wullschlager goes for a steady, step-by-step account of the life, paying due attention to the manifold Danish sources, not least Andersen's journals and correspondence, and her personal contribution consists of ruminations on the dear man's psychology. Danish scholars, she notes, have mostly been wary about speculating on his repressions and his bisexuality, as also dwelling on all those little crosses in his diaries.

She does a workmanlike job, and the writer's writings – which are surely our sole interest in reading about him – are summarized and linked, where feasible, to perceived swings in his temperament. That critical method tends towards the mechanical and readers of BfK may well regret that Wullschlager does not give a more systematic assessment of the *eventyr*, their place in children's literature, and, especially, the chequered history of their translation and publishing in Britain and the USA. Her grasp of children's literature from the time of their publication onwards is shaky (symbolised perhaps in her spelling in several references to William *Wentmore* Story and Ernest *Shepherd*, and her not noting that Hansel and Gretel's soppy Sandman comes from Humperdinck, not Grimm). She does however make some acute comments on the *eventyr* as stories for telling and as invented folktales and it is a pity she did not explore such things more deeply, leaving the travelling tuft-hunter to look after himself. BA

Brian Alderson's translations from Andersen have appeared most recently in *The Swan's Stories*, illustrated by Chris Riddell (Walker Books).



### Lois Keith Take Up Thy Bed and Walk

Death, Disability and Cure in  
Classic Fiction for Girls

### Take Up Thy Bed and Walk: Death, Disability and Cure in Classic Fiction for Girls

★★★★

Lois Keith, Women's Press, 288pp, 0 7043 4651 6, £11.99 pbk

It is well known that authors of classic novels for girls used death or serious illness and injury to punish, tame, or redeem their heroines. If some really good characters (Helen in *Jane Eyre*, Beth in *Little Women*) and some really bad ones (Judy in *Seven Little Australians*) have to die to bring the rest into line, others are 'merely' struck down with paralysis (Katy in *What Katy Did*, Klara in *Heidi*, the eponymous heroine of *Pollyanna*) yet miraculously recover – in defiance of medical science then and, as Lois Keith observes, now. Keith shows us how popular was this motif of disability, how powerful the message of cure through faith and good behaviour and, ultimately, how stigmatising this approach to physical impairment. It is as if it was impossible to depict a disabled person leading a happy, fulfilling life. And still is, as Keith demonstrates in a concluding survey of modern children's fiction featuring characters with disabilities.

Children, especially girls, get used to denying part of themselves when they read: otherwise we could never have coped with the succession of books that treated characters like ourselves as marginal, undesirable, 'other', or simply non-existent. Even allowing for the historical and social context, the message of *Little Women* or *What Katy Did* is a depressing one: that girls need to put aside their youthful exuberance and ambition to

become subdued, domestic adult women (*Good Wives*). Yet generations of girls have enjoyed these novels, revelling in the positive depictions of lively girlhood. Keith shows us that disabled people too can enjoy these classics, but she also makes it clear that disability is more than a metaphor. The reality for disabled readers is that they have to seek far and wide for *any* literary role model, let alone a positive one.

Accessible but scholarly, good-humoured but challenging, this book offers a fresh and important perspective on children's literature. RA

### Children's Literature

★★★★

Peter Hunt, Blackwell, 334pp, 0 631 21140 3, £50 hbk, 0 631 21141 1, £14.99 pbk

Edgar in *King Lear* tells his listeners to 'Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say'. Peter Hunt's introduction to children's literature, aimed widely at students across a range of disciplines and at the general reader, tries hard to do both these things and keep a balance between them. He sets out to 'provide information', but contends that 'the joy of the subject should guide us'. As it proves, he is far more interesting, entertaining and original when speaking from the heart than when he is deferring to an academic duty. The book opens with a section on history and theory, and closes with a set of entries on 'Topics' such as 'Censorship', 'Gender' and 'Literacy'. This material is short, sketchy and over-compressed. It is there to meet obligations to student readers. In between, the bulk of the book is given to a critically eclectic, often highly personal survey of some forty writers and thirty individual texts. Duty and feeling, information and enjoyment, formal theory and old-style appreciation, all rub shoulders in these short essays. Hunt is at his best when seeking to reconcile critical orthodoxy with private enthusiasm or dislike. His pleasures (Arthur Ransome, Rudyard Kipling), admirations (Judy Blume, Anna Sewall) and hostilities (Ted Hughes) can diverge sharply from routine attitudes, and sometimes he reports much praised achievements (Philippa Pearce, Philip Pullman) with significant reserve. Underlying the whole discussion is a recurrent note of regret for literary and imaginative standards that he feels are disappearing: at times the essays read like elegies. Start and finish excepted, the result is a constantly agile, challenging, attractively informal book that will provoke the specialists and enlighten all who share 'the joy of the subject'. PH

## 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

#### Shrinking Mouse

★★★★★

Pat Hutchins, Red Fox, 32pp, 0 09 940056 1, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 113, November 1998:

'A young picture book that can deftly provoke ideas as well as offer a good read is a book to be celebrated. The 'shrinking' is of course about perspective and horizons, and successive pages draw the beginning reader into wondering about distance and disappearance. Its

simplicity commends it highly, its ideas invite many re-readings.'

#### What would we do without Missus Mac?

★★★

Gus Clarke, Andersen, 32pp,

1 84270 016 2, £4.99 pbk

Reviewed BfK 121, March 2000:

'Told from the point of view of a small child, this book celebrates the comfort and security at school provided by Mrs Mac who is always there when needed most. She plasters cut knees and broken



glasses, fixes jammed zips, pins snapped elastics, and everywhere she goes, her beaming smile goes too. A calm, reassuring book for young children.'

### 5-8 INFANT/JUNIOR

#### What Do We Think About Death?

**NON-FICTION** ★★

Karen Bryant-Mole, Wayland 'What Do We Think About' series, 32pp, 0 7502 3218 8, £4.99

*Reviewed BfK 114, January 1999:*

'Two pages at the end of this book explain to parents and teachers how children may react to death and how to use the book as part of a coping strategy. Photographs and large print make the main text appealing, and there is a basic explanation of life – what it means – and the ending of it. The book is intentionally secular.'

#### W is for World

**NON-FICTION** ★★★★★

Kathryn Cave, Frances Lincoln with Oxfam, 32pp, 0 7112 1364 X, £5.99

*Reviewed BfK 114, January 1999:*

'We think of alphabet books as being for the very young but this one would both delight and inform children up to about eight years. A large number of countries across continents are included and the daily life of different adults and children is brought to life by a clear interesting text and photographs of exceptional quality.'

### 8-10 JUNIOR/MIDDLE

#### Bartlett and the Ice Voyage

★★★★

Odo Hirsch, ill. Andrew McLean, Bloomsbury, 176pp, 0 7475 4614 2, £4.99

*Reviewed BfK 118, September 1999:*

'A somewhat spoiled young queen learns that in the farthest reaches of her seven kingdoms, there grows a fruit so delectable that anyone who tastes it will want to eat little else. The queen demands that the fruit be brought to her. Bartlett the young explorer is summoned, and he and his silent colleague set off in search of a solution requiring "inventiveness and perseverance". This is a splendid quest adventure.'

#### All the Things I See: Selected Poems for Children

**POETRY** ★★★★★

Jenny Joseph, Macmillan, 96pp, 0 330 39150 X, £4.99

*Reviewed BfK 122, May 2000*

'Jenny Joseph's poetry is the mundane world as news – newly seen, fresh. It can be very beautiful, as in the haunting "Hare and Tortoise". And quietly impassioned: "Keep me in wine and olives/ Buy me winter hats/ And you can have my brooches/ My pictures and my cats." And it has other things too – since it is the real rare thing, a book that is a poetry.'

#### My Brother's Ghost

★★★★

Allan Ahlberg, Puffin, 96pp, 0 14 130618 1, £3.99

*Reviewed BfK 123, July 2000:*

'Presented as an authentic memoir of a childhood haunting, this book opens with an almost casual account

of the writer's 10-year-old brother being killed by a milk-float. Ahlberg seems to have set himself the challenge of creating a reflective tale from a grim but believable set of circumstances. The book is rich in sentiment, but almost free of sentimentality.'

#### The Dare Game

★★★★

Jacqueline Wilson, ill. Nick Sharratt, Corgi Yearling, 256pp, 0 440 86369 4, £4.99

*Reviewed BfK 124, September 2000:*

'When Tracy Beaker is fostered by Cam, she thinks that life will be "Happily Ever After". However, she soon comes down to earth with a bump and has to face up to the reality of living with a foster mother who does not always let her get her own way. The growth in Tracy's awareness and issues about fostering, truancy, behaviour in school, friendship, the need for affection, and facing up to things are all skilfully and humorously dealt with in the course of this book.'

### 10-12 MIDDLE/SECONDARY

#### Vision of Beauty

**NON-FICTION** ★★

Kathryn Lanky, ill. Nneka Bennett, Walker, 48pp, 0 7445 8219 9, £4.99

*Reviewed BfK 123, July 2000:*

'A picture book for older readers which chronicles the life and achievement of African-American Sarah Breedlove Walker (later known as Madam Walker) who through her activities as manufacturer and seller of black hair products, became by the turn of the 20th century one of the richest women in America. She was also a philanthropist and activist, supporting black causes and remains today a powerful role model.'

#### The Secret Life of Sally Tomato

★★★★★

Jean Ure, ill. Karen Donnelly, Collins, 160pp, 0 00 675150 4, £3.99

*Reviewed BfK 124, September 2000:*

'12-year-old Salvatore d'Amato (see title) might be a bit precocious with language and naively nerdy about girls, but he is a boy with ambition – to kiss a girl (preferably Lucy West) before he has completed his book of "Dire and Disgusting Ditties", based on the alphabet. A proper little turn-on for reluctant to read boys.'

### 12+ SECONDARY

#### Bloodtide

★★★★★

Melvin Burgess, Penguin, 384pp, 0 14 130689 0, £5.99

*Reviewed BfK 118, September 1999:*

'In this dystopian tale, King Val, ruler of half of London, carelessly delivers his daughter, Signy, and her three brothers to the less than tender mercies of their traditional enemy, Conor. In a gruesome scene, the boys are tethered and left to be devoured by a creature who is half pig, half man. Meanwhile, 14-year-old Signy is literally hamstrung by Conor to whom she has been given in a marriage as part of a now betrayed treaty. The insatiable tyranny and gross appetites of this powerful mythic tale convey an implicit challenge which teenage readers will respond to – learn to restrain your appetites or, like Conor who would be King, you will consume your own kind.'

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

#### Tiny Rabbit Goes to the Park

★★★

John Wallace, Viking, 32pp, 0 670 88813 3, £9.99 hbk, Puffin, 0 14 056652 X, £4.99 pbk

Tiny prepares for a day at the park, popping bits and pieces into his backpack. Well spaced pictures enable the very young reader to anticipate the large, clear text, thus enabling gratifying independence for re-reads. Lastly, Tiny carefully packs his beloved toy, Bunny. As Tiny plays at the park, we see Bunny fall out of the backpack, landing in the picnic hamper. Absorbed in play, Tiny does not immediately discover Bunny has gone. Again the pictures anticipate the text as friends help search. Pig suggests something to eat might cheer them all up, and of course, we know then the story will have a happy ending. GB

#### Sam's First Day

**DUAL LANGUAGE** ★★★

David Mills, trans. Sujata Banerjee, ill. Lizzie Finlay, Mantra, 24pp, Bengali/English, 1 85269 632 X, £6.99 pbk

This is a delightful picture book with illustrations which enrich the easy-flowing text. The story is one which children can identify with as we follow Sam from home to his first day at school. Although a chatterbox at home (amusingly illustrated), he becomes very quiet at school. It is only at the end of the day when he sees his mum and sister coming to pick him up that he finds his voice again! There are some lovely details in the illustrations which invite engagement with the story and discussion of young readers' own memories of the 'first day at school'. The use of speech bubbles in the first few pages is imaginative – rather than writing Sam's actual words, Finlay fills them with pictorial references and the word 'Blah' – a delightfully graphic way of inviting us to

compose his chatter, in whatever language we choose. The Bengali text is clear and well placed above (or alongside on some double page spreads) the English version; an excellent dual text. Available in 16 other dual language editions. UC

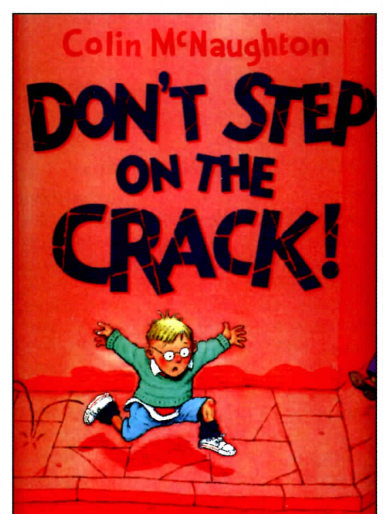
#### Don't Step on the Crack!

★★★★

Colin McNaughton, Collins, 32pp, 0 00 198417 9, £9.99 hbk

Following the old adage about not stepping on a crack in the pavement, this cautionary tale illustrates some untoward events which might ensue if you do step on a particular crack in a particular pavement in a particular town. Perhaps the worst of these might be your dad turning into a hippy, your mum going for a younger look, forgetting to put on trousers before going to school, or turning into a pig.

The author's voice points out that the crack might not be in your town, or your street or your pavement, but



then again it might, 'so just in case ... Don't step on the crack!' The bespectacled lad addressed has just the right air of bewilderment, and young readers will empathise with him as he comes to grips with the arbitrariness of life seen through folk-



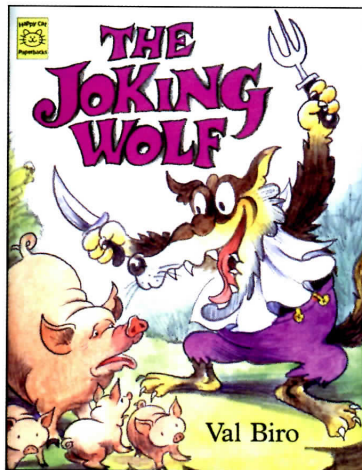
lore and superstition. While the illustrations and text are not vintage McNaughton, there is an engaging and lively feel to this picture book. VC

## The Joking Wolf

★★★★

Val Biro, Happy Cat, 32pp,  
1 903285 00 3, £4.99 pbk

A lesser-known Hungarian folktale, the story is masterfully penned by Val Biro, his hilarious illustrations further lifting the lively text. Silly Wolf meets a group of starved animals thrown out in spring by an angry farmer. Wolf decides to eat Goat, Horse and Pig, but each in turn suggests he wait till autumn, by which time they will be succulently fat. By now, children recognise 'The Three Billy Goats Gruff' theme, and cannot wait to see the story's resolution. How each creature gets the better of the gullible Wolf is cunningly told, readers revelling in the Wolf's dilemma. His protestation, 'But I was only joking!'



allows him escape, but without dignity. 'Really,' thinks Wolf, 'what's the world coming to when people can't take a joke any more?' GB

## The Puffin Book of Amazing Animal Poems

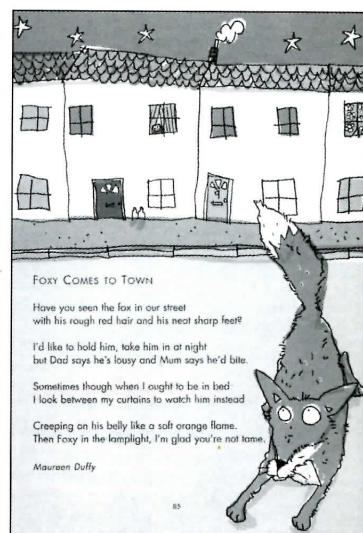
POETRY

★★★★

Puffin, 128pp, 0 670 89126 6,  
£12.99 hbk

My initial feelings about yet another collection of animal poems were proved wrong in this case. There are over 100 traditional and contemporary poems about all sorts of animals from many different cultures. Each of the six sections is illustrated by a different artist and combine to produce a lively colourful romp through the animal kingdom.

From Shel Silverstein's delightful 'It's Dark in Here' - 'I am writing these poems/From inside a lion,/And it's rather dark in here.' to the less familiar traditional Australian rhyme about the kangaroo 'Old Jumpety-Bumpety-Hop-and-Go-One', there is something here for everyone, but especially for nursery and infant age groups. HT



# REVIEWS 5-8 Infant/Junior

## Kiss the Cow!

★★★★

Phyllis Root, ill. Will Hillenbrand, Walker, 32pp,  
0 7445 4056 9, £9.99 hbk

With a lilting, poetic text, this picture book tells of Mama May with her vast family of children. Annalisa is the most curious, stubborn child of all. They depend on their cow Luella for milk to drink and to make into 'cheese so fresh it squeaks between their teeth'. Mama May sings to Luella, thanking her daily with a kiss on the nose. When Annalisa secretly decides to milk Luella, she remembers the magic song, but will not kiss the slobbery bristly cow. So next day, Luella gives no milk. No kiss, no milk, no cheese. Mama May soon works out why, and we watch with interest as she pleads with Annalisa to change her mind. This hilarious book has a wonderful, complementary match between text and the appealing pictures which are full of gentle humour. GB

## Tiger and Me

POETRY

★★★★

Kaye Umansky, ill. Susie Jenkin-Pearce, Red Fox, 32pp,  
0 09 972210 0, £4.99 pbk

If you want to spark lively talk on animal rights, get your hands on this picture book! Told in gentle, rhyming verse ('I went to the jungle./I met a small tiger./I said to the tiger/'Well, how do you do?') the reader is jolted when the tiger replies, 'Terrible'. The tiger tells the little girl in graphic detail how his brothers are captured and caged in a zoo. She thinks this situation deplorable, and assures the tiger she will sort it. Her vigorous campaign takes off as she targets friends, newspapers, television, the government and even the Prime Minister in her determination to right wrongs. Her message comes over loud and strong, with supporting illustrations appealing directly to the reader. By the last page, we feel exhilarated by the success of her efforts as the tigers are returned to their environment. A

book to encourage discussion about rights, and one where the talents of author and illustrator are combined with skill. GB

## Even More Nonsense

POETRY

★★★★

Michael Rosen, ill. Clare Mackie, Hodder Wayland, 32pp, 0 7502 2880 6, £10.99 hbk

Twenty chunks of word play from Rosen's prolific pen are accompanied in this large picture book by suitably manic illustrations and marginalia contributed by Clare Mackie, mainly featuring small animals cracking puns and enacting other linguistic jokes. As in his earlier collections, Rosen shares and celebrates children's preoccupations with the flexibility of language, taking everyday words, snippets of conversation, silly names, insults and quarrels as themes, and subjecting them to comical repetition and modulation. I don't think that there is anything here that will take its place alongside the Jumbies or the Nin Nan Nong, but this is an enjoyable book which might stimulate children's own inclinations to mess about with language. GH

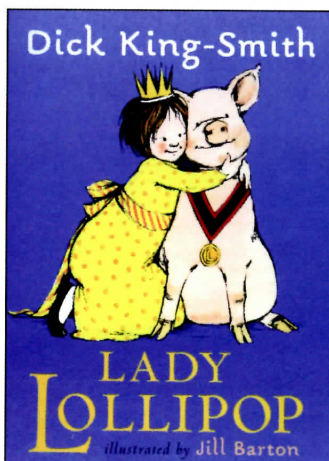
## More Jessame Stories

AUDIO BOOK

★★★★

Julia Jarman, read by Adjoa Andoh, Cover to Cover, 1hr 5mins unabridged,  
1 85549 346 2, £3.99

A pleasingly varied collection of stories in which the mundane details of everyday life are nicely balanced with some special highpoints and excitements. Jarman's extended Afro-Caribbean family is well-constructed and Jessame's interaction with her grandparents and her cheery aunt is affectionate without being overly sentimental. Adjoa Andoh gives each of the characters a clear and warm personality and doesn't try to overdramatise the highpoints of the stories so saving them from becoming falsely thrilling. Good value, too, as there are a lot of stories making it a very full tape. JE



## Lady Lollipop

★★★★★

Dick King-Smith,  
ill. Jill Barton, Walker, 128pp,  
0 7445 7872 8, £3.99 pbk

This is a terrific book with five marvellous characters. Princess Penelope is the spoilt child of the fearsome Queen Ethelwynne and her hen-pecked husband, King Theophilus. When Penelope demands a pig as a birthday present she gets one - an intelligent sow called Lollipop. However, the princess needs the help of poor Johnny Skinner to train it so that it will be able to live in the palace. The arrival of Johnny and Lollipop has a dramatic and positive effect on all the palace inhabitants. By the end of the story the reader will like each and every one of them.

King-Smith's masterful storytelling is matched by Barton's superb ink wash illustrations. The facial expressions of all the characters, but especially those of Lollipop, are just perfect. AK

## Singing to the Sun

★★★★

Vivian French, ill. Chris Fisher, Walker, 160pp, 0 7445 7852 3,  
£9.99 hbk

This is a collection of eight original

tales in the fairy-tale tradition, which will make them popular with many young listeners.

In the tale which provides the book's title, a tabby cat and a court jester assist a young lord to make the choice between power, love and wealth. The nursery rhyme, 'There Was an Old Woman Who Lived in a Basket' is the inspiration for 'Under the Moon', featuring an obsessive cleaner who tries to remove cobwebs from our illuminated satellite. 'The Thistle Princess' sees a lone thistle demonstrating the wisdom and courage to help a childless royal couple. My favourite is 'Little Beekeeper', the little girl who ultimately succeeds where her foolish and arrogant brothers fail, by filling the Royal Castle's Great Hall, leaving no nook or cranny unfilled. Unfortunately, having failed in their quest, the three brothers live the rest of their lives as croaking toads. AK

## Sausage and the Little Visitor

0 7136 5471 6

## Sausage in Trouble

0 7136 5475 9

## School for Sausage

0 7136 5473 2

## Sausage and the Spooks

0 7136 5469 4

★★★★★

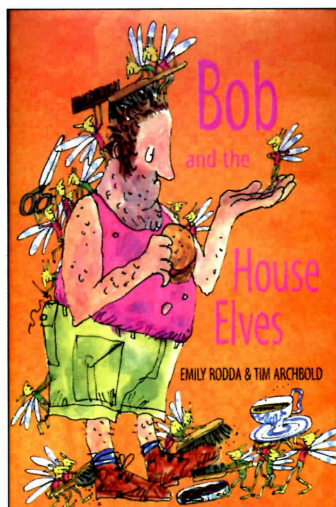
Michaela Morgan,  
ill. Dee Shulman, A & C Black  
'Rockets', 48pp, £7.99 each hbk

I have found previous series of 'Rockets' both useful and popular with young novice readers of 7 to 10, and these are no exception. They manage to provide an entertaining story, in straightforward language, clearly set out with text, speech-bubbles and illustrations well-integrated, told in an unpatronising way - perfect for beginners, and useful for any child struggling with reading.

The 'Silly Sausage' series, for younger readers, features an endearing



sausage dog and two snooty cats who provide a commentary on his activities and is told in short sentences with a fair bit of repetition. Despite this a good range of vocabulary and some useful spelling patterns are introduced. Situations of the 'everyone's scared sometimes' type are addressed, and the books all give a gently affirming message, not least to the young learner. AG



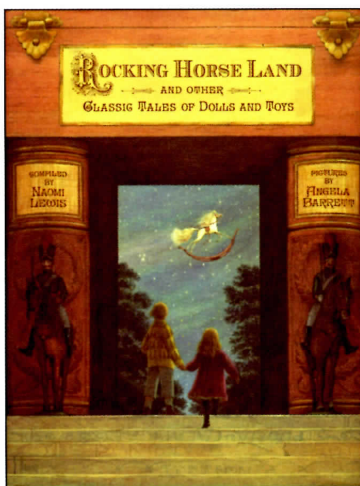
### Bob and the House Elves

★★★★

Emily Rodda, ill. Tim Archbold, Bloomsbury, 64pp, 0 7475 5074 3, £7.99 hbk

Rough, tough, untidy Bob the Builder finds his house suddenly overrun with helpful house elves who insist on cleaning, tidying and generally making a nuisance of themselves. At last, with help from his neighbour, Bob comes to an agreement with the elves and a happy ending ensues.

Lots of pictures, short sentences, repetition in reasonable quantity and a bit of word-play make this an ideal first novel for independent reading: Bob is affectionately described by Rodda, and Archbold's Quentin Blake-ish illustrations add some wicked touches to a gentle, fun tale. AG



### Rocking Horse Land and Other Classic Tales of Dolls and Toys

★★★★

Compiled by Naomi Lewis, ill. Angela Barrett, Walker, 128pp, 0 7445 5566 3, £12.99 hbk

The jacket of this compendium very clearly signals its contents: an open doorway, framed by two book spines and flanked by toy soldiers on horseback, shows a boy and girl stepping into what is clearly a land of imagination and magic. In her introduction Lewis remarks on the magical nature of the link between a child and a doll (or toy), a link which she implies mirrors the realities of life for children and adults.

Each of the five stories is accompanied by a brief introduction setting it in context. They range from Mrs Fairstar's 'Memoirs of a London Doll' to tales from Andersen and Baba Yaga to E. Nesbit's 'The Town in the Library' and also include stories by Ruth Ainsworth and Laurence Housman.

Barrett, though shortlisted for the Maschler and Greenaway Awards on occasion, is an underestimated illustrator. While this is not exactly a picture book, the generous quantity of illustrations and their disposition on the pages show her talents to full

effect. She accompanies each of Lewis's introductory pages with a silhouette which captures the essence of the story which follows. For most of the other illustrations her palette is muted, capturing a spirit of mystery and makebelieve with a tonal effect. The detailing is very fine whether it is in the toys in the tin soldier's nursery, the dolls' house on the contents page or in the 'library' town.

This is a book with a strong appeal to the nostalgic, but that should not deter teachers and librarians who want to stock books in their classrooms and libraries with very high production values as well as content. VC

### My Surprise Book of Seasons

Valérie Guidoux, ill. Olivier Latyk, Martin Matje and Frankie Merlier, 0 19 910773 4

### My Surprise Book of Senses

Adèle Ciboul, ill. Clémentine Collinet and Frankie Merlier, 0 19 910771 8

### My Surprise Book of Pirates

Anne-Sophie Baumann, ill. Rémi Saillard and Olivier Nadel, 0 19 910772 6

### My Surprise Book of Night and Day

Valérie Guidoux, ill. Régis Faller, Philippe Mignon and Charlotte Roederer, 0 19 910774 2

**NON-FICTION** ★★★★★

Translated by Anthea Bell, Oxford, 32pp, £6.99 each hbk novelty

What a pleasure to receive a package of books that children and adults fell upon on opening. The four-year-old has already claimed *Pirates* as his own; the seven-year-old wavers between *Seasons* and *Senses*; and the teacher wants to scoop up the lot!

French publisher Nathan are to be

congratulated on producing such an inventive and refreshingly original non-fiction series, and Oxford for spotting their appeal and acquiring the UK rights. Don't be put off by the hackneyed series title or the bitty covers (although the spot lamination looks great), for inside you will discover a wealth of flaps, acetate panels, cut-out windows, tabs, wheels and other novelties that are not only fun but really help explain how things work. Turn a wheel to see how our planet turns on its axis; lift a series of flaps to see the seasons change through the year, or spin a wheel to discover how our eyes are tricked by optical illusions. *Senses* has raised indentations on its pages to introduce braille, while a little mouse on an elasticated string is included to test your reaction time. There are also little books within books – a pirate's recipe book, a mini newspaper to unfold, a letter to open, a trunk to be unpacked and its contents sorted into seasonal drawers of clothes – as well as practical activities, experiments and games.

Quirky, humorous artwork packed with detail and enlivened by hand lettering is sprinkled with busy *enfants* in chic attire, revealing the books' French origin, yet the illustrations work just as well for a British child. There is a wonderfully light touch in the witty approach, suggesting that author and illustrators were given free rein to be inventive, while Anthea Bell's translations manage to retain the sound of an author's voice. One tiny quibble (pointed out in the hope that OUP will correct on a reprint) – a number of flaps have the text transposed, leading to some mysterious captioning.

Part of the appeal of the series is the quality of the production and the scale of the books – a neat square format, with thick matt board covers, and sturdy card pages to ensure that the flaps will survive repeated use. At £6.99 a book, these are good value and I would just as happily give these as birthday presents to a child between five and seven years (not something you can say with confidence about all non-fiction for this age group) as recommend them for classroom use. SU

## REVIEWS 8–10 Junior/Middle

### Joker

★★★★

Anthony Masters, ill. Michael Reid, 0 7136 5325 6 hbk, 0 7136 5326 4 pbk

### Sam's Dream

★★★★

Michael Hardcastle, ill. Tony O'Donnell, 0 7136 5402 3 hbk, 0 7136 5407 4 pbk

### Arf and the Greedy Grabber

★★★★

Philip Wooderson, ill. Bridget Macketh, 0 7136 5403 1 hbk, 0 7136 5408 2 pbk

### Jack's Tree

★★

Georgia Byng, ill. Lucy Su,

0 7136 5400 7 hbk, 0 7136 5405 8 pbk

### The Planet Machine

★★★

Steve Bowkett, ill. Liz McIntosh, 0 7136 5399 X hbk, 0 7136 5404 X pbk

### Mr Potts, the Potty Teacher

★★★

Colin West, 0 7136 5467 8 hbk, 0 7136 5468 6 pbk

A & C Black 'Comix', 64pp, £7.99 each hbk, £3.99 each pbk

These titles form a set of six 'Comix' books where, the publishers claim, the stories move as fast as the pictures. Each book presents as a long comic strip, which will probably appeal to children for whom a lengthy text is rather off-putting.

Suitably bold black and white pictures for all but one book (the exception being *Jack's Tree*) work well with the stories.

*Jack's Tree*, about a boy trying to save a tree from being felled in the local park, is the least successful of the six, as the characters are too stereotyped even for a comic book, and the monochrome pen and wash illustrations sit uneasily in the comic strip format. *Sam's Dream*, by experienced sports fiction writer Michael Hardcastle, about a boy being invited to a big match by an international footballer and *The Planet Machine*, a sci-fi tale, particularly suit the comic style. However, in both these titles, there is a confusing mix of speech bubbles and traditional speech marks which is irritating.

*Mr Potts, the Potty Teacher* is a humorous tale about a forgetful and bumbling teacher who tries to arrange a firework display for the

school fete but mistakenly hires the local demolition man, Dynamite Dave, to make the celebrations go with a bang! *Joker* tells of an escapist who disappears in mysterious circumstances and *Arf and the Greedy Grabber* is about a practical joker who unexpectedly encounters a thief and becomes involved in a police inquiry. AK

### The Phantom's Fantastic Show

POETRY

★★

Wes Magee, ill. Leo Broadley, Oxford, 64pp, 0 19 276217 6, £3.99 pbk

There are plenty of the jaunty, spooky type verses in this collection but not enough truly haunting poems. Compare this to Philip Gross's excellent *Manifold Manor* and you'll see what I mean. HT

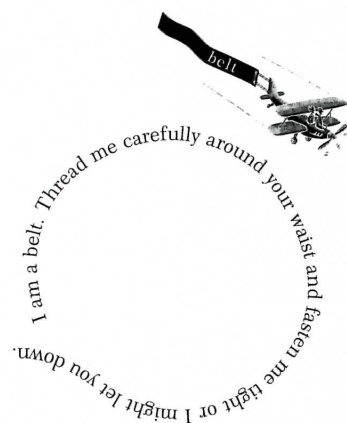


## Climb Aboard the Poetry Plane

### POETRY

★★★

John Foster, Oxford, 64pp,  
0 19 276245 1, £3.99 pbk



Best known for his poetry anthologies, Foster's new collection of his own poems shows he has a real way with words. There are poems about families, school and the weather, mixed with more challenging poems about elections in South Africa, the space race and the pressures on athletes to be the best at any price. Foster's deceptively simple approach ensures issue based poems like 'Black Crosses' have a powerful impact on the young reader - 'The hands that stole our lands were white./The hands that forged our cross were white./This slip of paper is white./I could crush it in my fist./My hand trembles/As I make my mark - /A black cross.'

HT

## Sucked In

★★★

Paul Jennings, ill. Terry Denton, Puffin, 72pp,  
0 14 131199 1, £3.99 pbk

Never let doctors preserve your bits in bottles! The said slimy pieces will never be content to have left you and, as with Trevor's appendix, could prove a definite health hazard to others. This is a crazy, edge of nastiness tale, hugely illustrated, where text and picture combine to intrigue and stimulate in that weird, slightly naughty, audience captivating way that Jennings has with storytelling. A library must-have for both junior and secondary schools. An obvious choice for boys.

DB

## The Penguin in the Fridge and other Cool Poems

### POETRY

★★★

Peter Dixon, ill. David Thomas, Macmillan, 64pp,  
0 330 48019 7, £3.50 pbk

## Welcome to the Snake Hotel: Slithering poems

### POETRY

★★

Chosen by Brian Moses, ill. Lucy Maddison, Macmillan,  
64pp, 0 330 48261 0, £3.50 pbk

Love, liars, looking for friends - *The Penguin in the Fridge* is a mixture of the lighthearted and the more thoughtful moments in life. The

'wacky' title of this collection is misleading - there are some real gems inside.

There are lots of ludicrous poems about reptiles and amphibians in *Welcome to the Snake House*. Some good fun is to be found amongst the pages, but after a while, the relentless jokes about snakes and crocodiles begin to pall.

HT

## The Four Children of Night

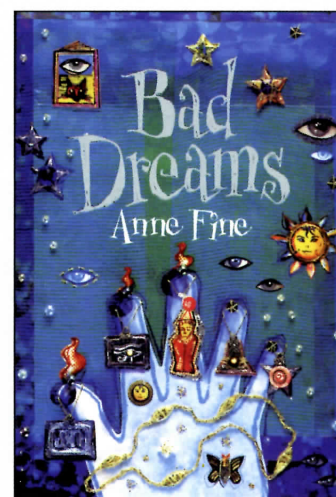
★★★

Weem Whitaker, Oxford, 128pp,  
0 19 271846 0, £5.99 pbk

During a storm, Peter feels a sense of foreboding, although the rest of his family is at ease. When a lull occurs, he goes out to check on things - but straying too far he is pulled out to sea with the Seafolk. There he is drawn into a quest where he encounters a whole myriad of unusual creatures from all parts of the earth. During this quest he is assisted by Moke, a renegade goblin, and Elsa, the daughter of a hermit.

Dialogues and scenery in the story are richly described by Whitaker with the sort of detail that lends credibility and interest to the proceedings. Questions, too, are raised that are worth pondering. My one complaint was that this book could profitably have continued for a few more chapters without detracting from the whole.

RL



## Bad Dreams

★★★★

Anne Fine, ill. Susan Winter, Corgi Yearling, 160pp,  
0 440 86424 0, £4.99 pbk

When a friend of yours is having troubles, what ought you to do? Introverted Mel, who prefers reading to all other things (with the possible exception of swimming), is about to find this out when she is asked to befriend Imogen, a new girl in her class. There is something definitely odd about Imogen as Mel gradually discovers, and for once in her life Mel is moved to consider and help people other than herself, however unwisely she may do so. Fine once again shows that she has an ear for dialogue and the world of children, in a story that is both sympathetic and frightening in

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**BLACK**



turn. Her treatment of magic interacting with the mundane everyday world is an interesting touch in this page turning story. RL

## Never Play Snap with a Shark

POETRY ★★

Chosen by John Foster, ill. Sally Kindberg, Macmillan, 96pp, 0 330 39370 7, £3.99 pbk

A collection of contemporary, cautionary verse chosen by John Foster featuring many of the Macmillan poets. These poems cover almost every awful situation you can imagine and the grim consequences for the characters involved. From Kenneth who was too fond of gum and jammed his jaws and Paul who turned pale after logging into www.dracula.co to Violet Henn who learned why she must never chew a felt tip pen and Penelope Knox who was too fond of chocs and was buried in a dairy box. Great fun. HT

## Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

AUDIO BOOK ★★★★★

JK Rowling, read by Stephen Fry, Cover to Cover, 20hrs 55mins unabridged, 1 85549 660 7, £49.99

Fourteen tapes, packed in two boxes (and sold as two separate parts, too), just manage to contain the compelling but rambling sprawl that is *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Four books on, JK Rowling has set herself free from the tight structure that shaped the first three titles and has written a story of more extravagant invention: the Quidditch world cup, a glorious take-off of its footballing counterpart; Dobby and Winky, the elves released from slavery and struggling to find a way of living in the free world; Rita Skeeter

the hellish journalist with the Hello touch; the heavily stereotypical wizarding schools from France and Eastern Europe are just four of the new additions to the now-familiar world of Hogwarts School and its huge cast milling around Harry Potter and his friends Ron and Hermione. And all this set against a chilling opening revealing the growing power of Lord Voldemort matched by a conclusion which proves how truly dangerous he has become. Rowling's control slips just occasionally but Stephen Fry never falters. His skilful reading of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* is totally irresistible. He encompasses the huge and complex plot with subtlety, setting off the hilarity of the mass wizarding activity at the World Cup against the extreme menace of the raising of the Dark Mark and maintaining that balance of humour and terror to the very end. JE

## Grow Organic Eat Organic: A practical activity book for beginners

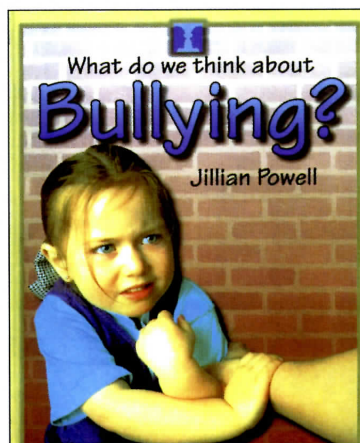
NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Lone Morton, ill. Martin Ursell, b small, 24pp, 1 874735 91 3, £4.99 pbk

The way they go on about it you would think that organic gardening was something new, so it is refreshing to see that Morton begins her book by showing that, in fact, non-organic gardening is the newer development, having become the 'norm' only since 1940s. My dad never did anything else but grow organically.

Morton shows us how to set ourselves up for natural gardening and it isn't long (p8) before we reach the compost heap. Most of what follows is what to grow and how to grow, followed by sections on friendly wildlife and – most valuable – a contemporary and UK based contact list.

This is a book that embodies its own message – modestly produced, economic of space, locally based and cheap, it is an excellent and completely practical guide to starting to garden properly. And it could not have come out at a better time. TP

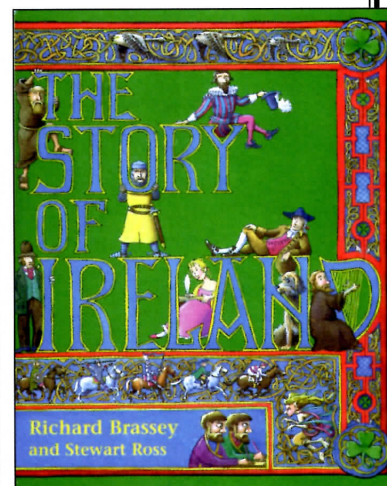


## What Do We Think About Bullying?

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Jillian Powell, Hodder Wayland, 32pp, 0 7502 3222 6, £4.99 pbk

This is a paperback reprint of a book in a series first published in 1998. The series, which includes books on adoption, alcohol, disability, drugs, family break-up, death, and our environment, is useful for PSHE and Citizenship lessons and includes colourful (if rather staged) photographs. There is emphasis on the fact that bullying is never the victim's fault and on the importance of telling a trusted adult. Helpful notes for parents and teachers are included. ES



## The Story of Ireland

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Richard Brassey and Stewart Ross, ill. Richard Brassey, Dolphin, 40pp, 1 85881, 849 4, £4.99 pbk

If 'the story of Ireland', in all its historical, social and linguistic complications, has to be presented in comic-strip format in forty pages, then this is as successful and entertaining a version as one could fairly expect. Colourful, playful and informative, it chronologically covers some 2,000 years, from Ptolemy's ancient map – 'it looks a bit odd to us now but he got quite a lot right' – to the roaring Celtic tiger, with particularly effective use of various information panels focusing on 'Irish Icons' of architectural, literary and geographical interest. The engagingly colloquial tone of the text is well matched in the good-natured humour of the illustrations: all in all, a very considerable achievement. RD

# REVIEWS 10–12 Middle/Secondary

## Mine's a Winner

★★★

Michael Hardcastle, ill. Bob Moulder, 0 7136 5353 1

## Cast Away

★★★

Caroline Pitcher, ill. Peter Dennis, 0 7136 5340 X

## System Shock

★★★

Liam O'Donnell, ill. Janek Matysiak, 0 7136 5338 8

## Respect

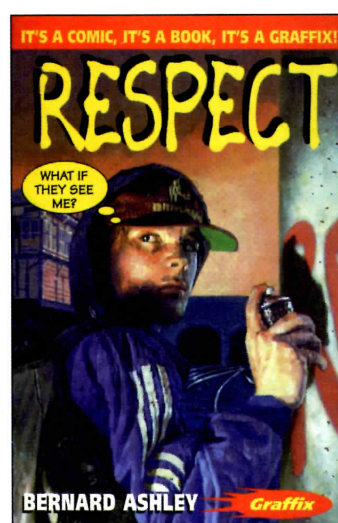
★★★★

Bernard Ashley, ill. Kim Harley, 0 7136 5336 1

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

These titles are numbers 27 to 30 respectively in the 'Grafix' format of comic strip/short story, aimed principally at reluctant, early teenage boy readers. If you have devotees of the series already, they will want to keep up with latest additions to the set.

*Mine's a Winner* centres on an ambitious, rather self obsessed male



horse rider, attracted to Sadie, who seems adept at catching him at bad moments and putting him down a peg. When he saves her from a fate worse than a broken fetlock he becomes the winner. Standard story with a gentle mocking humour.

*Cast Away* finds a group of youngsters on a residential trip and

stupidly venturing out to an offshore island at night. Tumbling down cliffs, ghostly heebie-jeebies and all the usual stuff occurs until they land safely back in the hostel and are forgiven. Some subtle love interest and characterisation, but mainly predictable.

*System Shock* involves two boys and a girl transported inside computer games fighting off all the baddies that inhabit Virtual Reality. Plenty of computerspeak to be going on with and a visually lively presentation.

*Respect* tells the tale of Mal, who, desperate to gain respect in his new school, thinks that the way to do it is to take up a challenge set for him by a pair of graffiti kids in his class. The extra tag of the disgraced teacher father and the way Mal learns that respect comes from a more selfless approach to those nearest to him gives this title the edge on the other three. DB

## Vampyr Legion

★★★

Alan Gibbons, Dolphin, 192pp, 1 85881 835 4, £4.99 pbk

They thought it was all over after *Shadow of the Minotaur* but the evil

Gamesmaster is at it again. Phoenix once more enters the world of the computer game and this time is fighting Dracul (*sic*) following on from Bram Stoker's tale. The Van Helsing of the original is represented here by his daughter and grandson. Phoenix leads them and a small team (spot the names of famous European footballers) to the infamous castle for the dramatic finale. While this tale is not in the same league as the first book, those who have enjoyed that will like the continuity of entering the computer game and the regular wild, bloody battles. Where will the next game be set? AJ

## Secret Heart

★★★★★

David Almond, Hodder, 208pp, 0 340 76482 1, £10.00 hbk

William Blake famously saw angels in Peckham. Joe Maloney, the hero of *Secret Heart*, sees a tiger in Helmouth, a neglected estate on the edge of an unnamed north-eastern city. The tiger has come with the final tour of Hackenschmidt's Circus, or at least its spectre has, for the circus no longer boasts wild animal acts. This is the story of a friendship between outsiders: Joe, the fatherless,



## Editor's Choice

### Witch Child

★★★★★

Celia Rees, Bloomsbury, 240pp, 0 7475 4639 8, £10.99 hbk

Mary is a witch – or, as she says, 'so some would call me'. Her narrative, told in the form of a diary, begins in 1659 with the torture and hanging for witchcraft of the woman she has always thought of as her grandmother. How, then, is Mary to be saved? Rescued by a mysterious woman and dressed as a puritan, Mary joins those who are emigrating to America in the hope of a better life, free from persecution. But fear of witches travels with her...

Rees's vivid narrative brings confidence and feeling to her subtle unfolding of events. A strong sense of the past is conveyed with deft touches as lice are combed from hair, or a Tithingman pokes those in a congregation found slumping or nodding. Mary, always warily on the margins of her new community as it voyages to the 'New World' and attempts to settle there, observes with an outsider's eye and the reader too, identifies with her caution. For where can this free spirit, this witch or not-witch find real acceptance?



Rees's outstanding fiction carries not only historical and psychological conviction but it has been admirably served by her publisher who have put care and thought into the elegantly inviting design of this book. From 'Mary's' wary gaze on the jacket cover that commands your attention to the contemporary wood engraving of the ducking of a witch to the chapter openers written by a 'quill pen', there is a satisfying rightness to this production. Young readers will be enthralled. RS

offers a new beginning to his characters and a powerful experience to his readers. CB

### Britannia on Stage: 25 Plays from British History

★★★★★

Geraldine McCaughrean, ill. Richard Brassey, Orion, 224pp, 1 85881 799 4, £5.99 pbk

McCaughrean has adapted a quarter of the stories from her collection of tales of British history (*Britannia*) as short one act plays. With a minimum of props and costumes – helmets alone distinguish Roman soldiers – and a lot of audience participation, there is plenty of dramatic invention to match the colour and excitement of her original retellings. Robert the Bruce lies on a bench inside 'a three-sided structure like a bus shelter', and the tireless spider is manipulated on the end of a pole above his head. Emily Davison dies under the hooves of the King's horse while a bookie shouts odds about some strange horses: 'War of the Sexes 16 to 1. Man's Tops, 7 to 10 on. Free and Equal isn't a runner!' There are plays for large and small casts. There are songs and poems, and assorted sound and light effects, including the possibility of a blinding arc lamp for Grace Darling's lighthouse. Ten of the plays have already had their first school performances and it is to be hoped that a lot more children and parents will soon have a chance to enjoy some of this, in McCaughrean's words, 'hugger-mugger treasury of adventure, comedy, tragedy, heroes and villains'. CB

### Eight Days of Luke

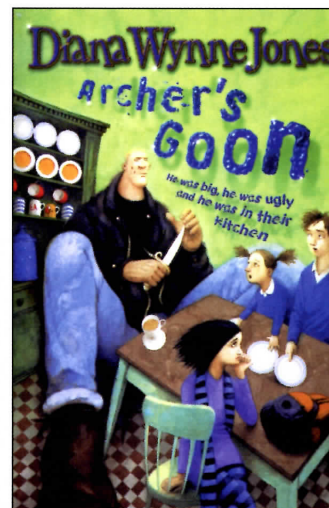
Ill. David Wyatt, 208pp, 0 00 675521 6

### Archer's Goon

Ill. Paul Hess, 320pp, 0 00 675527 5

★★★★★

Diana Wynne Jones, Collins, £4.99 each pbk



*Eight Days of Luke* first appeared in 1975 and *Archer's Goon* nine years later but they are as freshly fantastic as ever, just waiting, with their new covers and illustrations, to intrigue the next generation of readers. What is particularly engaging is the way the ordinary just opens into the extraordinary and vice versa so that we have gods treading the earth. In *Eight Days of Luke* David curses his grotesque relatives oppressively in charge of his grey, parentless world and releases Luke, a fugitive from an underworld, and from then on he finds himself having to prove Luke's innocence to his pursuers, led by Mr Wedding. The excitement is continuous and works on many levels so that the present day adventures are also the replaying of Norse myths where Luke is Loki. *Archer's Goon* has an even more vivid present and a family home which is broken into literally by the arguments of another god-like family. The mystery here is even more intriguing, the humour more playful and these 'gods' even more physically real – starting with Archer's Goon himself. There is a mazy series of twists in the plot as Howard also tries to solve the mystery – what has kept the fantastic

five brothers and sisters, caught up in this place for so long – but here finds himself more deeply involved than he or we can have imagined. These titles dwarf the Harry Potter books, and there is a wonderful vein of humour in them, but maybe Potter readers will have to find their way to Wynne Jones and discover that for themselves. AJ

### Fuels for the Future

Steve Parker, 0 7502 3231 5

### Waste Recycling and Re-use

Steve Parker, 0 7502 3240 4

### Keeping Water Clean

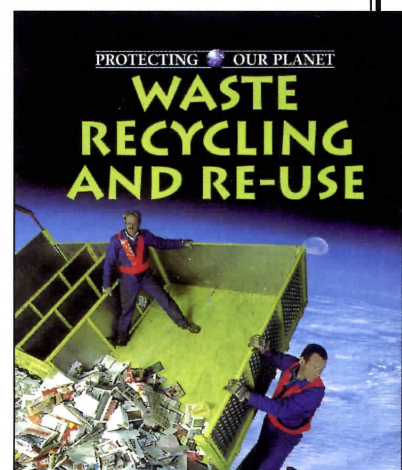
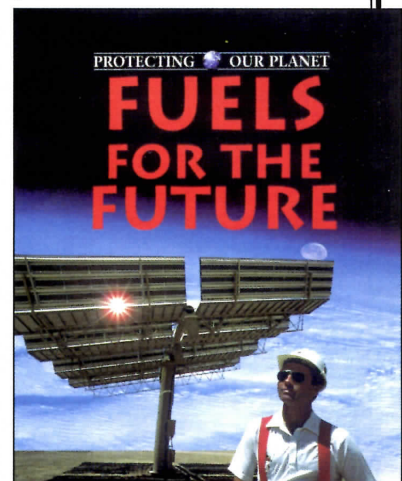
Ewan McLeish, 0 7502 3239 0

### Keeping the Air Clean

John Baines, 0 7502 3238 2

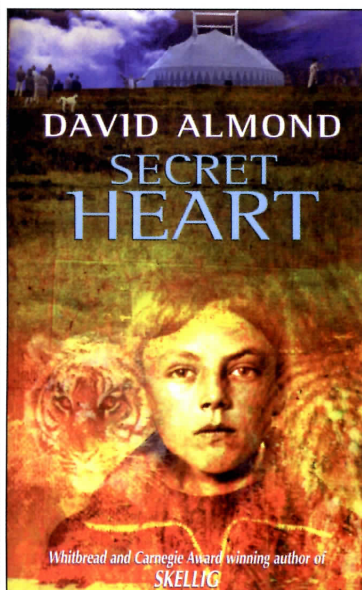
**NON-FICTION** ★★★★★

Hodder Wayland 'Protecting Our Planet', 48pp, £5.99 each pbk



The emergence of this quartet in paperback is long overdue, and the failure to update their bibliographies must go down as a missed chance. That said, though, the reappearance of these excellent primers of environmental strategy is much to be welcomed. The authors have all achieved star quality in their fields and the even-handedness of their approach creates a model of objectivity in a subject area which, despite its increasing familiarity, can still bring out the hysteric in many a less able writer (and editor).

Parker's mood is, as usual, friendly/technical. In *Fuels* he ranges through conventional fuels (not omitting food) before examining



stuttering truant, and Corinna, the orphan girl on the flying trapeze with holes in her tights; a tale of blighted dreams and fading hopes.

Yet, like Blake's Tyger, Joe's tiger is both beautiful and terrible, and Almond conjures visions of longing, and rituals of tenderness and cruelty, that show both the best and worst of the secret heart. Corinna, wild and free as a lark in flight above the safety net; and the great wrestler Hackenschmidt, humiliated, beaten and bloodied in his own circus ring. While, in the dark wilderness beyond the motorway, like Kurtz in the African jungle, Joff and Stanny Mole hack off the head of a panther they have slaughtered. Almond's achievement is to transform a threadbare, despairing, and often violent reality into a visionary landscape that, through an intensity of imagination and compassion,



energy conservation and the change of lifestyle that may accompany it. Nicely, he makes no distinction between primary energy resources such as sun and wind and the real 'alternatives' which are fossil fuels – many authors see it the other way round.

**Waste** is memorably provocative of thought. An energy-saving light bulb is more polluting to manufacture than an ordinary one; plastic bottles take less energy to produce than glass ones and are just as recyclable. Parker demonstrates at every turn that the arguments about recycling are not as simple as your average bottlebanker believes. Not that this changes the cardinal principle that the best way of recycling is re-use.

Water is the least renewable resource of all. There is no new water,

anywhere, ever. We have to use the same stuff over and over again. So we have to clean it. McLeish's exhaustive study of how this is best and most often done makes a really good read, and his underlying theme of 'Simple does not always mean not as good' is convincingly substantiated by many examples.

Of all the pollution-inspired changes around us none is more noticeable to us ordinary folk than our increasingly extreme weather patterns. Baines explains the complexities of climate change, atmospheric pollution, and countermeasures thereto in the skilfully straightforward way that typifies all members of this series.

So, welcome back to these four – they're as good as any you'll get and should be considered by any library. And if you missed them when they

first came out, as another Parker once crucially observed: 'Now's the time!' TP

## DK Guide to Weather

NON-FICTION

★★★

Michael Allaby, Dorling Kindersley, 64pp, 0 7313 2856 1, £12.99 hbk

With 'Freak Weather Conditions' in danger of being an over-used phrase this atlas-size spectacular seems timely.

It is not, in the true sense, a guide. It will be of little help to the systematic observer of the weather and still less to the forecaster – you won't find 'anemometer' or 'barometer' in the index. But what it does provide is a very good introduction to how

weather works. The illustrated explanations of frontal systems and the relationships between atmospheric pressure and weather types could hardly be bettered – but then from an author with Allaby's credentials we'd expect nothing less.

Pictures of extreme weather conditions dominate, however, and these are of limited use, relegating the text to incidental status in many places – an effect reinforced by overprinting much of it on to clouds, dust-storms and tidal waves. No bibliography, but a significant websiteography, this is a book with a high wow-factor; while it may well put the wind up the incidentally interested reader, the purposive fact-finder will be left in the doldrums. TP

# REVIEWS 12+ Secondary

## Stuck in Neutral

★★

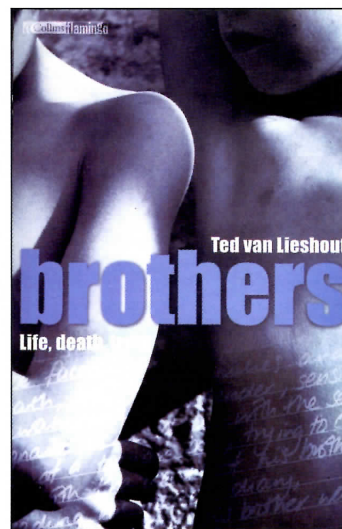
Terry Trueman, Hodder, 128pp, 0 340 80599 4, £10.00 hbk

Shawn is a 14-year-old boy who has cerebral palsy and is unable to communicate. The book is written in the first person and Shawn describes himself as a kind of genius with perfect, total recall, although to the rest of the world he is a 'retard', totally dependent on others for his care. His frequent seizures provide a rather clichéd metaphor for freedom; they allow him to 'soar' and 'fly' and be 'released' from the 'prison' of his body. In the Author's Note, the writer explains that his intention is 'to invent ... how the world might be for a character, based on what life might be like for my son Sheehan,' who also has cerebral palsy. This is an ambitious task and Shawn's voice is not entirely convincing. It often feels that the true voice of this book is that of the father and his concerns about having a disabled son.

Most worrying is the book's justification for the killing of disabled children. The father in the story is a journalist and writer who left the family home years earlier. On an Oprah Winfrey type TV programme, he argues the case for the killing of a two-year-old disabled child by his own father and the reader is asked to share his view that the motivation was love. At the end of the book, he sits by Shawn's bedside with a pillow in his hand, telling his son he loves him. We do not know whether he is about to kill Shawn but are asked to believe that whatever he does, Shawn will be 'soaring' and 'flying free'.

The book develops the idea that since we do not always know what someone like Shawn might be thinking, it is reasonable to assume that a disabled person might be happier being dead and that some lives are too 'damaged' to be worth living. No doubt, other reviewers will call this a brave and moving account or something similar, but I would be very reluctant to put this book into the hands of young readers, just as I would not give them a racist book or one which told the story of how terrible it is to grow up gay or lesbian. Under the Eye of the Clock by Christopher Nolan or Bring in the Spring by Hannah Cole are two better examples of how we can understand the lives, needs and desires of young

disabled people, even those with severe communication problems. LK



## Brothers

★★★★★

Ted van Lieshout, trans. Lance Salway, Collins Flamingo, 152pp, 0 00 711231 9, £4.99 pbk

Why does Luke's mother choose to make a ritual bonfire of his dead brother's belongings on the very day when Luke is going for hospital tests to find out if he himself is suffering from the same hereditary disease? This is just one of many subtle questions of feeling and behaviour raised and presented – with conspicuous respect for the teenage reader's intelligence – in this award-winning Dutch novel. Before the fire, Luke retrieves his younger brother Maus's diary, and finds that, like himself and yet unknown to him, Maus was gay. In a posthumous diary conversation with the brother he had not known well enough in life, Luke undergoes a metamorphosis of feelings, and at last comes to terms with his own sexual orientation. **Brothers** is certain to be categorized as a book about being gay and coming out, and it does indeed explore these matters with admirable power and insight, examining for instance the guilt and repression that gay adolescents may feel because they see themselves as a biological disappointment to their parents. But **Brothers** is much more than a 'gay novel': it deals with illness, death and

bereavement, with parent-child relationships, and with the mystery of brotherly love, in a way which enriches teenage literature. It deserves as warm a welcome here as it has gained in Holland and Germany. PH

## Bluebeard's Castle

★★★

Gene Kemp, Faber, 192pp, 0 571 19318 8, £4.99 pbk

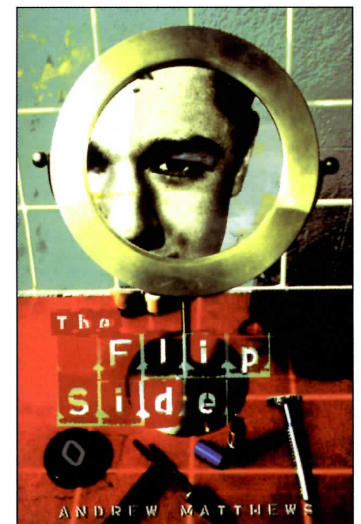
Prefaced by an extract from Perrault's 'Bluebeard', this is a remake in a thoroughly modern idiom of the story of the young bride whose curiosity leads her to discover the gruesome fate of her husband's many previous wives; she escapes a similar end when her brothers rescue her.

In Kemp's version, film director 'Blue Stubble' entices the narrator's sister into marriage, and carries her off to his new venture, a theme park attached to a castle. Her brothers and sisters are invited to visit the castle, where they uncover nasty goings-on in the form of bondage movies starring young women who end up as the victims of murder, their bodies concealed in a waxworks show. The book is episodic and fast moving with the feel of a dream (paralleling the narrator's many revealing nightmares) or of a computer game, when anything might happen, and in any order. There is not much description, background having to be supplied by the reader.

My tester thought it 'good – very modern'. Rather too modern, perhaps: Perrault adds a 'moralité' to his version (admittedly more concerned with the behaviour of the women than that of the killer) whereas here we are presented with ugly events which are kept at a distance and passed over coolly with little comment. No moral is drawn – unless that a midnight feast is more fun than a film director's party.

I would give this a 'PG' rating – while children are exposed earlier and more thoroughly to information about serial killers such as Dr Shipman, and may have seen more explicit movies than I have, we should still be careful not to normalise behaviour which is evil or exploitative. There are many possible responses to this story, depending on the personality and experience of the reader, and if it is to be more than 'five solve a murder mystery', a

deeper engagement with the text is needed than Kemp appears to ask of us. AG



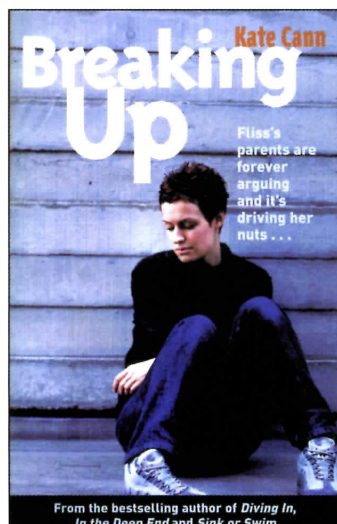
## The Flip Side

★★★★★

Andrew Matthews, Mammoth, 192pp, 0 7497 4258 5, £4.99 pbk

This novel tackles a challenging subject and has some intriguing ideas. Cross-dressing as Rosalind in a class restaging of a scene from *Twelfth Night*, Robert discovers a feminine persona that threatens to elbow aside the awkward teenage male guise he usually shows to the world. Soon he's kissing Milena, the girl he has always fancied, except he is dressed as Rosalind and she is dressed as a man. If that's not enough, his best friend Kevin declares that he is gay. Dealing with some of the same questions of sexual identity as Aidan Chambers' *Postcards from No Man's Land*, this is a much lighter, comic approach, with a spare, jokey first person narrative that reads like a clued up Adrian Mole. It is an enjoyable read that sets out to be both provocative and reassuring about gender roles and sexual behaviour; and the narrative keeps real pain and confusion at arm's length, even at the point when Kevin makes a suicide attempt. CB





## Breaking Up

★★★★★

Kate Cann, Women's Press Livewire, 208pp, 0 7043 4648 6, £5.99 pbk

A new Cann book is always a cause for celebration. The veracity of both internal and external dialogue in **Breaking Up** immediately communicates Fliss's anguish at the disintegration of her parents' relationship and of her own with her boyfriend Simon.

There is an overwhelming sense of isolation permeating the novel – Fliss's over-dependence on Simon for support is graphically communicated and when their relationship crumbles the reader is left with a real sense of loss and anger on Fliss's behalf – a double perspective which allows one to observe and participate at the same time. The real triumph of the book is the reader's awareness that each character is reshaped by events: it is their destroyed relationships which define them, not their independent personalities.

The therapeutic value of **Breaking Up** cannot be ignored: the absolute realism of emotional trauma is slowly replaced by an equally convincing and determined climb to rehabilitation and renewal. VR

## True Believer

★★★★★

Virginia Euwer Wolff, Faber, 272pp, 0 571 20742 1, £9.99 hbk, 0 571 20702 2, £4.99 pbk

Wolff's second novel about LaVaughn and her friends follows the widespread critical acclaim received for **Make Lemonade**. Like the earlier novel, **True Believer** is stylistically accomplished; the heroine's independent and reflective qualities are realised through a poetic first person narration.

LaVaughn's academic potential is recognised by the Guidance Man who makes arrangements for talented, underprivileged children to join challenging education programmes. Specialising in Sciences, LaVaughn begins to question the extreme religious beliefs held by her closest childhood friends; they are growing apart. After her enrolment on a Grammar Programme the narration gradually assimilates to Standard American English reflecting LaVaughn's developing social awareness. **True Believer** charts the search for something to believe in;

## NEW Talent

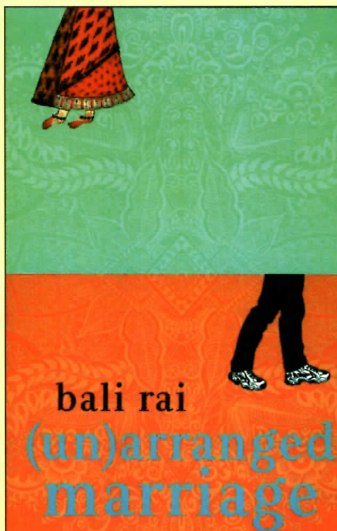
### (Un)arranged Marriage

★★★

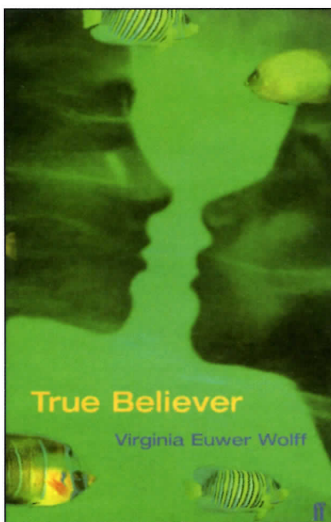
Bali Rai, Transworld, 272pp, 0 552 54734 4, £4.99 pbk

This lively first novel spans five years in Manjit's life, from the ages of 13 to 17. His path, predetermined by his traditional Leicester Punjabi family, is that he will be married at 17 to a girl he has never met before, just as his older brothers were. Manjit's father, a drunk who is given to beating his son with an old hockey stick when he steps out of line, appears to see Manjit as little more than an extension of himself – a boy whose duty it is not to disgrace the honour of the family by marrying out or associating with white or black people. As Manjit's best friend is black and his girlfriend white, trouble lies ahead. Will he succumb to family pressure or find his own way?

Energetically and pacily written, this novel makes up for its lack of characterisation and convincing plotting by sweeping the reader along as the drama unfolds. Tricked into going on a 'holiday' to India, Manjit find himself passportless and a



virtual prisoner in his father's home village in the Punjab. Intended to bring him to his senses, this betrayal intensifies his resolve to take revenge on his family. There is a vitality and freshness about Rai's writing that engages the reader – he is good on locations and has an ear for dialogue and the world that emerges from his hurried prose convinces, almost despite itself. An intriguing debut that promises well for the future. RS



'the possibility of the world making sense someday'; and the discovery that 'Loving is dangerous'. A sensitive reader will detect an ironic undercurrent, recognising that LaVaughn's aspirations are limited by social conditioning.

A subtly challenging read which continues to work on the reader after the book is closed. NG

## Old Magic

★★★

Marianne Curley, Bloomsbury, 320pp, 0 7475 4923 0, £10.99 hbk

Kate has always been aware of her magical powers, inherited from her grandmother Jillian, with whom she lives. When Jarrod arrives in her class she recognises the same power in him – which he refuses to acknowledge until a series of tragedies convince him that his family is cursed and only he can save them.

Jillian sends Jarrod and Kate back in



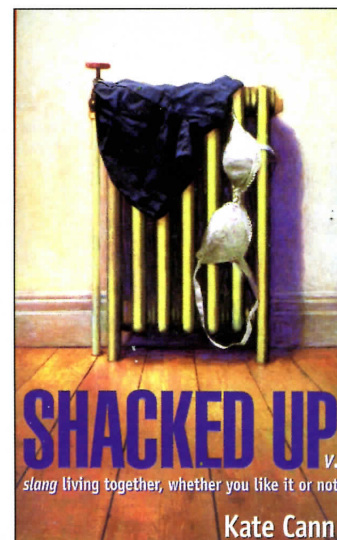
time to 13th-century Britain to unravel the mystery of the curse and destroy it. The details of the black arts and the prejudice surrounding magic and healing are deftly handled but the time travel sequence strikes chords of disbelief. Dialogue does not always ring true and this fractures belief in an already improbable world. There is excitement and romance in Jarrod's battle to lift the curse but some parts of the second section of the book descend into melodrama. **Old Magic** will interest lovers of fantasy able to maintain interest through the protracted first part of the book. VR

## Shacked Up

★★★★★

Kate Cann, Scholastic 'Point', 336pp, 0 439 99534 5, £4.99 pbk

One of Cann's gifts is her ability to write in an utterly believable way about the sexual element of teenage relationships. In **the Deep End** contained the most sensitive description of the sexual act I have ever read in a book for young people and she has achieved exactly the same balance of delicacy and emotional commitment in **Shacked Up**. This sequel to **Hard Cash** tells the story of Rich, homeless after a series of arguments with his father, until a friend lends him an empty flat, rent-free. The only drawback is Bonny,



also unable to live at home and endure the overwhelming emotional manipulation of her eccentric mother, Tigger. Rich must now share his space and his privacy.

The book explores manipulation on several levels: parents and children; boyfriend and girlfriend; same sex friends – with no attempt to take the easy narrative route and little opportunity to second-guess the author. That the story is written from a male perspective is further testament to Cann's authorial talents. This is writing for young people at its best: subtle, humorous, sensitive and, above all, unafraid to tackle contentious issues with honesty and directness. VR

## Oliver Cromwell and his Warts

NON-FICTION

★★★

Alan MacDonald, ill. Philip Reeve, Scholastic Hippo 'Dead Famous', 176pp, 0 439 99610 4, £3.99 pbk

'Oliver Cromwell lays buried and dead, Hee haw buried and dead', according to a traditional Suffolk nursery rhyme, but a wealth of information on this infamous character both alive and dead is to be found in this new paperback. Myths continue to abound about Cromwell, including the whereabouts of his embalmed head, supposedly buried in the grounds of his old Cambridge college. However the salient biographical facts about his life, from a relatively obscure upbringing in Huntingdon to his installation as Lord Protector following the collapse of the Barebones Parliament, are all included. Whether you can wrinkle out such details from the relentless 'dead funny' tone depends on your appetite for the 'Horrible History' approach. The original **1066** and **All That** remains my preference for its memorable wit and underlying assumption that you already possess the basic facts, albeit buried in some cobwebby corner of your memory. The premise for the current series is that history is 'dead boring' unless enlivened with a joke or three a page and a generous helping of gore. One only hopes that the reader can distinguish 'Ollie's secret diary' from the real facts about the Civil War. An extent of 176pp may be more than the average 12+ pupil will need as resource material for project work unless they are truly smitten by the 'Horrible History' bug. SU

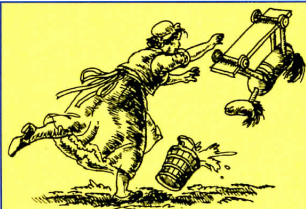


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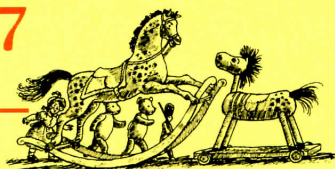




# CLASSICS IN SHORT No. 27

Brian Alderson

*Classic storytelling in bedtime-sized chunks ...*



## Bedtime stories

i see, have got a government seal of approval. Our new Enlightenment is in process of acclaiming and supplying consumer-tested advice for what past generations regarded as a natural human activity. (How it will ever work though, with most children going to bed at 11.15pm may need explanation.)

## What to choose

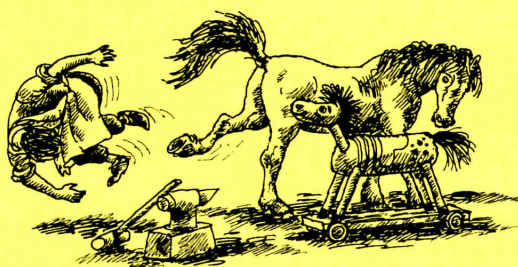
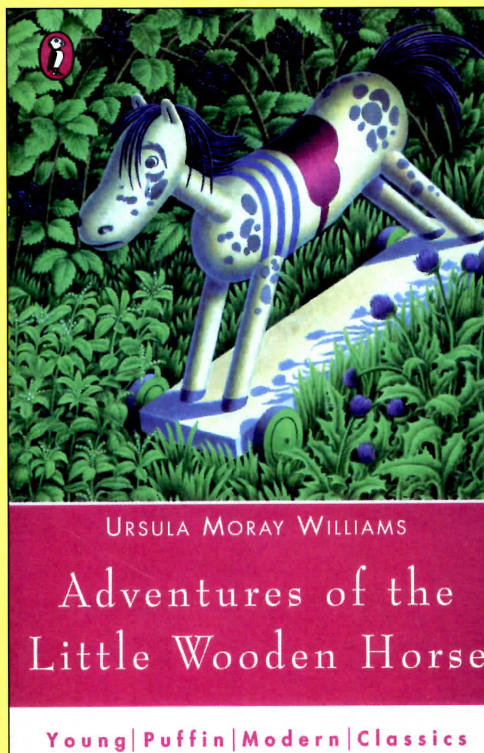
for them is also easy enough for anyone who does not have a tin ear for language and can discriminate between the genuine and the meretricious in today's vast output. But the transitions are worth noting: from simple to more complex picture books, from picture books to story collections and to those full-length stories that split up naturally into bedtime-sized chunks.

## The Little Wooden Horse

and his adventures are an ideal example of this last. The book has nineteen chapters, none of which is longer than eleven pages of generously-spaced letterpress (in the first edition anyway), and all of which are organised in classic storytelling fashion – one crisis after another down to the happy resolution.

## But there is more to it than that.

The story begins by establishing the bond of affection between the little wooden horse and Uncle Peder, the toymaker who constructed him. The horse's efforts to help his master, who falls upon hard times, lead to a series of accidents which carry him further and further away from his home surroundings (perhaps with Carlo Collodi somewhere in the background, influencing the proceedings). Some of these accidents themselves result in the little horse incurring debts of gratitude which amount to stories within the story. Thus, he is diverted from taking a reward to the miner's son, who cleaned him up after a pit explosion, by having to run in a royal horse-race and then by getting a job as a tightrope walker (!) in a circus. Such divagations supply tensions of their own and help to give an organic unity to the whole narrative as the unravelled-up incidents are finally unravelled.



## So who wrote it, and when?

Ursula Moray Williams, who was born in 1911, is what you might call the doyenne of today's children's authors. Her first book, *Jean-Pierre*, illustrated with her own scissor-cuts, was published exactly seventy years ago and was rapidly followed by a succession of stories and plays for younger children, including two collections for Brownies. More adventurous experiments, like *The Pettabomination* of 1933 were precursors for *Adventures of the Little Wooden Horse* which came



out in 1938 with illustrations by Nina K Brisley, sister to the author of *Milly-Molly-Mandy*. Later the little horse was to team up with another particularly engaging Moray Williams character, *Gobbo-lino the Witch's Cat*, who first arrived in 1942.

## Storytelling all the time.

Having been told stories and lived with stories from childhood on, Ursula Moray Williams seems never to have needed to learn her craft, and the secret of the *Little Wooden Horse's* success lies in its plain, undemonstrative telling. Nothing else would have done, for managing the suspension of our disbelief involved writerly feats rather like the wooden horse negotiating his tightrope on two wheels. Readers and listeners must be persuaded that her hero is not only a walking, talking, living wooden horse, but one who can pull barges, shift coal, and outrace stallions. And indeed, at the point when he has, literally, lost his head he more or less functions as a disembodied spirit. Only Ursula Moray Williams's self-assurance, 'quiet and strong' like the horse himself, and her unadorned language can do the persuading.

## 'Long out of fashion'

says the shopkeeper to the gentleman who wants to buy the little horse to try to quell his unruly children, voracious for new toys. But, rough and rowdy though they be, they never want to give him up, and the incident is emblematic of the potential that extremely simple things may have for nurturing the child's imagination. This horse belongs with Edward Gordon Craig and *The Book of Penny Toys* (1899) and Lovat Fraser with the tumblers and whistling larks of his *Book of Simple Toys* (1917) – an assertion of creativity against the ersatz products of the plastic mills. ■

Sadly, *Adventures of the Little Wooden Horse* has recently gone out of print. The illustrations, by Justin Todd, are taken from the 1994 Young Puffin Modern Classics edition.

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