

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

September 2001 No.130 UK Price £3.45

the children's book magazine

Why Harry enchants us • Aidan Chambers • Beverley Naidoo





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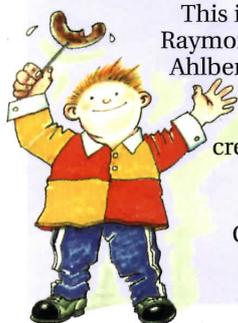
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CoverStory



This issue's cover is from Raymond Briggs and Allan Ahlberg's **The Adventures of Bert**. They discuss their creative collaboration on page 9.

Thanks to Puffin Children's Books for their help with this September cover.

EDITORIAL

Whilst childhood can never be culture free, two recent books put forward cogent arguments about the dangers of a consumerism that is affecting our children's health and increasingly invading education, including children's access to books. In **Stealing Innocence: corporate culture's war on children** (Palgrave), Henry Giroux argues that the triumph of democracy is not, after all, related to the triumph of the market.

Read Eric Schlosser's **Fast Food Nation** (Allen Lane/Penguin) and you will never want to eat at McDonald's or Burger King again: Schlosser wants you to know 'what really lurks between those sesame seed buns'. Even more disturbing is his account of how the fast food industry in America (and increasingly in Britain) 'both feeds and feeds off the young', insinuating itself into all aspects of children's lives whilst leaving them prone to obesity and disease. His points are reinforced by Giroux's **Stealing Innocence**, a compelling account of the way that corporate culture is encroaching on children's lives. In the States, it seems, school notices and class displays may now carry advertisements. A particularly chilling example, given Coca Cola's recent deal with J K Rowling which will enable them to use Harry Potter in their promotions, is the case of two high-school students in Georgia who were expelled for wearing shirts with the Pepsi logo during an aerial photo-shoot of

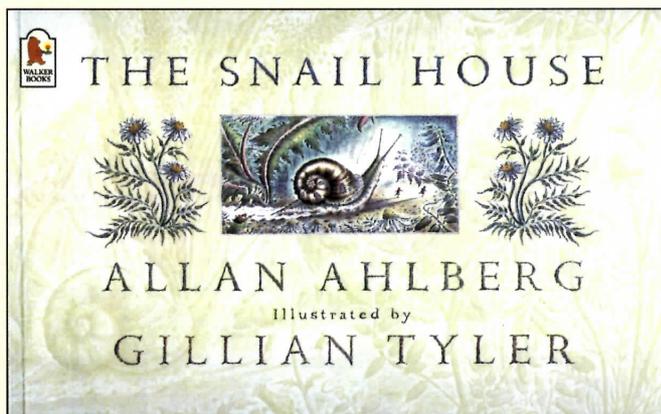


Rosemary Stones

students dressed in red and white to form the Coke logo as part of a Coca Cola sponsored event.

Publishers of children's books inevitably look for marketing opportunities in our schools – hence, for example, the HarperCollins / Walker crisps promotion. Should we be worried that teachers and parents were put in the invidious position of encouraging their children to eat crisps so that their school could have free books? And what about the Rowntree Nestlé sponsored Smarties prize, not to mention Sainsbury's sponsorship of the Sainsbury's Baby Book Award? These prizes play a genuine and important role in promoting interest in children's books and reading but if there is a line to draw in relation to the commercial interests of the corporate giants, where should that line be drawn?

Rosemary



A five-star review for Allan Ahlberg and Gillian Tyler on page 22

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THE OTHER SIDE OF

Known for powerful novels which brought the realities of apartheid to life for young readers in the UK (*Journey to Jo'burg*, *Chain of Fire*, etc), Beverley Naidoo's poignant and highly topical novel about asylum seekers, *The Other Side of Truth* (reviewed BfK No. 123), is this year's winner of the Carnegie Medal. BfK is honoured to reproduce Beverley Naidoo's acceptance speech in which she calls for 'a more reflective and deeper approach' to exploring our common humanity.

“ I am delighted and very honoured by this award. It matters to me deeply that in acknowledging this book, you are acknowledging the existence of a submerged world of refugees in our very midst. Equally, I am honoured that you are acknowledging my particular writer's map to provide a route into that world.

Historical amnesia

I am very aware of how Africa, the continent of my origin, has shaped so much of my writing. I was born in South Africa because my four grandparents were economic migrants. With their Russian and Cornish backgrounds, they set off from Britain one hundred and more years ago with the implicit knowledge that, whatever their fears, the colonies offered excellent prospects to Europeans with white skins and an eye for enterprise. The door was wide open and every African country entered by Europeans had something of value on offer. In South Africa the prospects were especially good, indeed worth fighting a war over –

one European tribe against another, British and Boer. I hint at that wider debt of Europe to Africa because of historical amnesia over such uncomfortable matters. Yet the fractures and pain in much of Africa today cannot be understood without examining its political inheritance. Writers have a particular responsibility not to indulge in amnesia and I want to acknowledge my own particular debt to writers from Africa who know that all individuals are umbilically connected to a wider world. There is such a thing as society – and it matters.

In my writing, I have always aimed to reveal the impact of the wider society and its politics on the lives of my young characters. I begin *The Other Side of Truth* in Lagos just after the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa, the writer who spoke vociferously about the despoiling of his land through the unholy alliance of multinational oil companies and Nigeria's then military dictatorship. A current lawsuit, brought by his family in the USA, maintains Shell participated in his torture and death. My novel reflects the dangers of the time, especially for a journalist committed to speaking out the truth, like Sade and Femi's father. Witnessing their mother killed in an assassination attack is, however, just the beginning of their trauma.

The world into which the children are thrust overnight is the submerged world of refugees in our midst. Smuggled into London, these young people – brought up with the idea of the importance of 'telling the truth' – are plunged into an underworld of illegality. It is a world that is largely

submerged under public indifference and increasingly overt hostility, fuelled by the irresponsibility of politicians and media who are prepared to appeal to the lowest common denominator. The land of the BBC World Service – which has ruled over the children's breakfast table in Lagos – has pulled up the drawbridge.

The treatment of refugees

Four years ago when I stepped in to that world, I was appalled by what I found on my detective trail. I had to imagine what I saw and heard through the eyes and ears of

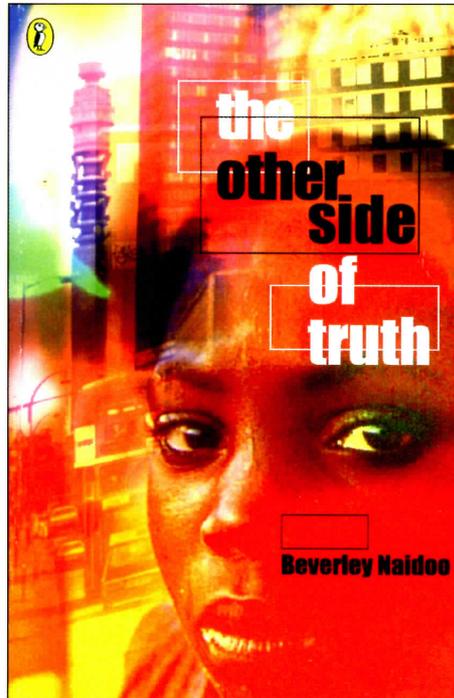


TRUTH

a child. I believe I saw only the tip of the iceberg and that since then politicians have vied with each other on how to thicken the ice. Four years ago, the so-called 'hotel' for refugees given temporary respite near Heathrow Airport felt like an army barracks. Now our politicians talk proudly of barracks. Campsfield House, where refugees are held near Oxford, is nothing like a house. It is a prison at the end of a leafy lane. The young man I visited there came from Nigeria. Coincidentally, he was a journalist, like my characters' father. The little gestures of contempt and humiliation rankled as deeply as the confinement.

Images I saw while researching constantly took me back to South Africa. The long queue forced to wait outside the gigantic Immigration and Nationality Department at Croydon brought back childhood memories of the Pass Office in Johannesburg. I had set my previous novels in my birth country in order to explore how we human beings treat each other – our capacity for evil and for good. But after the first democratic elections, I felt it was time to bring some of the issues that concerned me home to England. I say 'home' because, more than 30 years ago, this country offered me, and others close to me, a refuge. The irony was that the apartheid regime also received a good deal of support from the same British government.

Exile brought loss and disconnection. My body was here in England, but much of the time my heart and mind were in South Africa. While my feet walked and cycled freely along country lanes around York, my head was frequently inside the prisons where my brother and many others were locked away. However, as a white South African with at least one pukka British grandfather, obtaining subsequent British nationality was not difficult. So I did not experience the deep fear that hangs over so many asylum seekers – that they will be forcibly returned to the tyrannical state from which they have fled. Nor did I



personally experience the racism.

Exploring our common humanity

Literature is a bridge into other worlds. It offers a route into exploring our common humanity. Yet librarians still tell me of young white people who look at book covers with black people and think that the story will have nothing to do with them. The all too frequent question 'Are all your books about black people?' reveals the racialised frame. How profoundly different to the moving question asked by a teenage girl in Palestine last year: 'Are all your books about humanity?' There is a tremendous need in this society for literature that enables young people to cross boundaries... that enables them to explore issues of 'race', class and gender that John Major dismissed as a waste of time in education. How could I have begun to understand the experience of my characters without sensitivity to these very issues? Sir Herman Ouseley's report on Bradford indicates just how deeply racialised our society remains. Mr Blair and New Labour, you say you are about social change. Well, I ask you to stop paying lip-service.

We need a more reflective and deeper approach.

Let me give an example. Talking about literature provides a splendid forum for discussion and deepening understanding. But this needs time for creative engagement and critical reflection. David Blunkett expresses horror at the racism mouthed by young white people. Yet he does not realise how his own prescriptions have reinforced the sidelining of education for social justice. A few lessons in citizenship will not put this right. This government's functionalist approach to the teaching of literacy is particularly insidious and damaging. It does not, for instance, think it necessary for primary teacher-trainees to engage creatively and critically with children's literature themselves. We have government-backed campaigns to promote reading at the same time that literature is being reduced to a static comprehension exercise. This is schooling not education. Unless you surprise us, Estelle Morris, we should begin to talk of the DFSE – the Department for Schooling and Employment.

In this climate, the Carnegie Shadowing scheme valiantly encourages discussion of fiction and critical, engaged reading. But I believe you are having to work against the tide. I salute librarians, teachers as well as other writers for young people including all my companions on this wonderful shortlist. Ours is the struggle to maintain a forum in which we can all, young and old, grapple with ideas about being human on our fragile earth.



Beverley Naidoo is a writer and educationalist. **The Other Side of Truth** is published by Puffin (0 14 130476 6) at £4.99. The Carnegie Medal is awarded annually by The Library Association for 'an outstanding book for children and young people'. It was first won by Arthur Ransome in 1936 for **Pigeon Post**.



The Carnegie and

The winners of this year's Library Association Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medals, the most prestigious children's book awards in the UK, have been announced. Did the right books win? **Rosemary Stones** investigates.

The big hitters on this year's Carnegie shortlist were Philip Pullman's **The Amber Spyglass**, Adèle Geras's **Troy**, Jamila Gavin's **Coram Boy** and Beverley Naidoo's **The Other Side of Truth**. That two of these books were published by David Fickling reminds us yet again that good fiction (in Fickling's case initially published in handsome hardback editions) does not happen without editors who are committed to long-term investment in authors and to high literary standards.

Some trilogies or series tail away after the first volume – cf the awarding in 1956 of the Carnegie Medal to C S Lewis's lacklustre **The Last Battle** rather than to **The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe**, the first volume in 'The Chronicles of Narnia'. However, Pat Barker's 'Regeneration' trilogy or John Updike's 'Rabbit' series demonstrate that subsequent titles can actually improve or grow. Philip Pullman's 'His Dark Materials' trilogy has in **The Amber Spyglass** a grippingly triumphant finale, a book whose scope is both unpredictably ambitious and challenging.

The relatively recent rekindling of interest in historical fiction which was so brilliantly marked a couple of years ago by Susan Price's **The Sterkarm Handshake** (not, regrettably, a Carnegie Medal winner although it did win the Guardian Children's Fiction Award) is ably abetted here by Jamila Gavin's very convincing **Coram Boy**. Set in the eighteenth century, it is a powerful, many-layered family saga set against a brutal underworld where abandoned children are left to die or sold into servitude. Adèle Geras's atmospheric **Troy** is historical fiction of a different kind as both domestic and Olympian dramas are played out against the bloody backdrop of that ten-year siege.

Deserving winner

And so to this year's Carnegie Medal winner – Beverley Naidoo's **The Other Side of Truth**, a novel about asylum seekers that focuses, as ever in Naidoo's writing, on the perspective and internal world of a young person involved in terrifying external events over which they can have no control. Naidoo's impassioned novel is highly topical, not least given the recent murder of a Kurdish asylum seeker 'dispersed' to a run down housing estate in

The Carnegie Medal winner and shortlist

The Other Side of Truth by Beverley Naidoo, Puffin (0 14 130476 6, £4.99 pbk)

The Amber Spyglass by Philip Pullman, Scholastic David Fickling Books (0 590 54244 3, £14.99 hbk; 0 439 99358 X, £6.99 pbk)

Coram Boy by Jamila Gavin, Mammoth (0 7497 3268 7, £5.99 pbk)

Troy by Adèle Geras, Scholastic David Fickling Books (0 439 01409 3, £14.99 hbk; 0 439 99220 6, £5.99 pbk)

The Ghost Behind the Wall by Melvin Burgess, Andersen Press (0 86264 492 5, £9.99 hbk)

The Wanderer by Sharon Creech, Macmillan Children's Books (0 330 39292 1, £4.99 pbk)

Heaven Eyes by David Almond, Hodder Children's Books (0 340 76481 3, £10.00 hbk; 0 340 74368 9, £4.99 pbk)

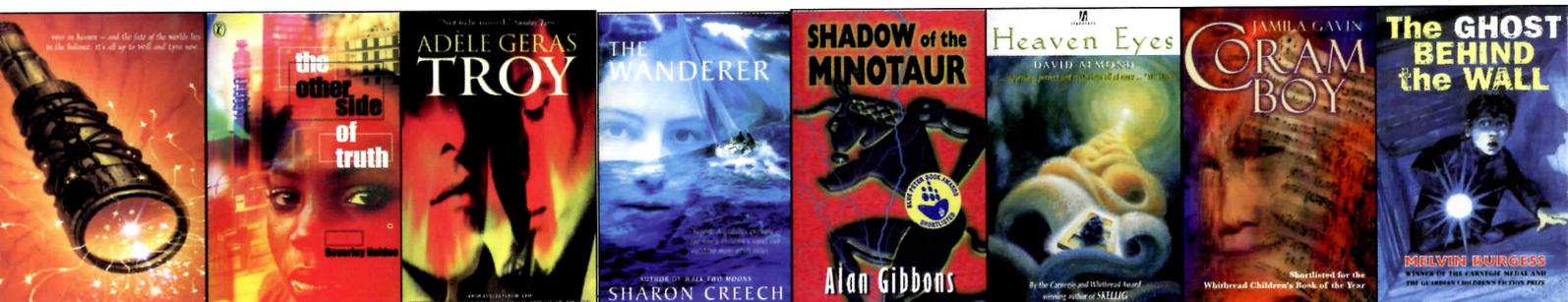
Shadow of the Minotaur by Alan Gibbons, Orion (1 85881 721 8, £4.99 pbk)

Scotland. It is her ability to engage her young readers empathically with people whose experience is not their own that makes this book a powerful counter to the sustained and vitriolic tabloid campaign against asylum seekers. Gaye Hıçyılmaz's **Girl in Red** (Dolphin) and Bernard Ashley's **Little Soldier** (Orchard Books), which was shortlisted for last year's Carnegie Medal, are evidence of other children's writers' wish to get behind asylum seeker hysteria to our common humanity.

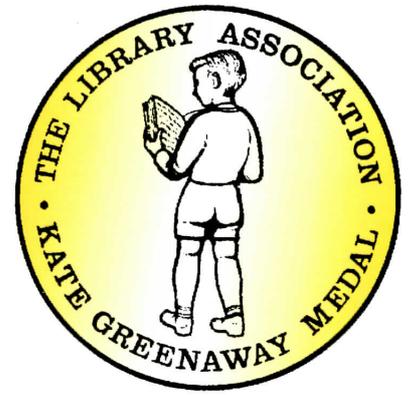
In this year's crowded Carnegie field, where there is no like to compare with like, it cannot be said that **The Other Side of Truth** is a greater literary work than the Pullman, Gavin or Geras. It is, however, a most deserving winner.

Of the remaining four shortlisted titles, Melvin Burgess's **The Ghost Behind the Wall** is a tedious story (endless climbing in and out of a ventilation shaft) featuring a troubled 12-year-old boy who thinks about stealing a woman neighbour's knickers and bra and spying on her with her boyfriend. This theme is not further explored. A therapist might speculate that David's anger with women could be linked to the fact that his mother has deserted him, but Burgess allows this unmediated anxiety to hang unsatisfactorily in the air.

In Sharon Creech's **The Wanderer**, 13-year-old Sophie sails across the Atlantic from Connecticut to Ireland with her uncles and cousins and the voyage affords a journey into her traumatic past which she has cut off from consciousness. This is an agreeable if not tremendously gripping novel – too much boat, perhaps. David



Greenaway Awards



The Kate Greenaway Medal winner and shortlist

I Will Not Ever Never Eat a Tomato by Lauren Child, Orchard Books
(1 84121 397 7, £10.99 hbk; 1 84121 602 X, £4.99 pbk)

Beware of the Storybook Wolves by Lauren Child, Hodder Children's Books
(0 340 77915 2, £9.99 hbk; 0 340 77916 0, £5.99 pbk)

Willy's Pictures by Anthony Browne, Walker Books
(0 7445 6165 5, £10.99 hbk; 0 7445 8240 7, £5.99 pbk)

Fairy Tales by Berlie Doherty, ill. Jane Ray, Walker Books (0 7445 6115 9, £14.99 hbk)

Crispin, the Pig Who Had it All by Ted Dewan, Doubleday
(0 385 41074 3, £9.99 hbk; 0 552 54627 5, £4.99 pbk)

Fox by Margaret Wild, ill. Ron Brooks, Cat's Whiskers (1 903012 13 9, £6.99 pbk)

Snail Trail by Ruth Brown, Andersen Press
(0 86264 949 8, £5.99 hbk)

Almond's **Heaven Eyes** is an intensely written novel in the magic realism style in which abandoned children set about finding their personal treasures. It is a touching book which suffers from some bathos at the end as though Almond had a failure of nerve and could not quite trust the reader. Gibbons' **Shadow of the Minotaur** is a pacily written drama with a subplot about bullying in which the hero's father devises a new computer game based on Greek legends but the legend begins to take over. It is well and grippingly done, but not, perhaps, original enough to stay long in the mind.

THE GREENAWAY

Seven books were shortlisted for the Greenaway Medal for illustration this year of which Lauren Child's **I Will Not Ever Never Eat a Tomato** was the clear winner and which, *mirabile dictu*, actually did win. Both author and illustrator, Child pitches her funny, unruly picture books at the very young whilst having tremendous fun with sophisticated jokes and dramatically zany illustration. Of her two books on the shortlist (the other was **Beware of the Storybook Wolves**), **Tomato** has the edge although **Storybook Wolves's** Cinderella with her yellow washing-up gloves is not to be missed.

No Greenaway shortlist would be complete, it seems, without an Anthony Browne. Librarians are rightly in love with his brilliance and originality but **Willy's Pictures** is less of an original picture book and more of a Glen Baxter for children with its jokes (not always successful) about (well selected) famous paintings. What children will make of it is not certain but Browne's comments about 'the pictures

that inspired Willy' at the back of the book (eg Winslow Homer's **The Herring Net** and Goya's **The Straw Mannequin**) are direct, friendly and informative – just the thing to inspire gallery visits.

Winges about the predominance of picture books on Greenaway shortlists usually result in the inclusion of a gift book of some kind to keep the critics at bay. This year it is Jane Ray's **Fairy Tales** in which many of the spreads with their gold leaf and decorative patterns, look like expensive wrapping paper. Perhaps Ray was overwhelmed by her task but there is a distinct lack of dramatic tension or wonder in these illustrations – it is rare for the lethargic characters to be looking at what is happening, let alone at you, the reader. Her silhouettes do have some spark to them – less is more, perhaps?

Ted Dewan's **Crispin, the Pig Who Had it All** is a delightfully told picture book story spoiled by the unevenness of his illustrative style – Dewan can draw very well (cf the sequence of pictures of Crispin in his cardboard box) but his palette swiftly becomes out of control leading to Wagnerian excesses with undifferentiated colour and tasteless characterisation that make it hard, on occasion, to see what is happening. This book is also not helped by its awful, insistent typography. Ron Brooks's **Fox**, on the other hand, is drowning in good taste, its poetic text vying with his poetic and painterly gouged out artworks in which the drama is not as intensely maintained as it could be. And why do publishers inflict lumberingly intrusive logos on illustrated books? The Cat's Whiskers logo on my paperback edition of **Fox** is ghastly.

Ruth Brown's **Snail Trail** with its stiff card pages is aimed at the very young with its story of a snail's journey with objects seen from the snail's eye view. It's a lovely idea but Brown's warm, earthy colours and consistently painterly textures confuse in relation to identifications in this story which perhaps require a clearer, simpler style.

THE BEST OF THE REST

This year's YLG Carnegie and Greenaway leaflets (ordering details in **BfK's** Briefing section) now include a 'The Best of the Rest' section which lists 27 and 26, respectively, titles which were also nominated for these Medals. What a very good idea. It is intriguing (and exasperating) to discover that, eg, Celia Rees's **Witch Child** and Kevin Crossley-Holland's **The Seeing Stone** did not make the Carnegie shortlist and that Emma Chichester Clark's **Where Are You, Blue Kangaroo?** and Neal Layton's **Nothing Scares Us** did not make the Greenaway shortlist. And what was missed altogether? Where are Emma Chichester Clark's **Elf Hill** (Frances Lincoln), Gaye Hıçılmaz's **Girl in Red** (Dolphin), John Burningham's **Husherbye** (Cape)? Was there really nothing from Angela Barrett? Why oh why oh why? The debate goes on... ■

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



Jack's First Books

Now eight months, **Jack McKeone** becomes a Bookstart baby. His father, **Gary McKeone**, explains.

It's the eight-month health check. A key moment for Jack and for us. Is he developing normally? Is he doing everything that a baby of his age should be doing? Are we doing everything that new parents should be doing? Will he let it out of the bag that I've been known to put a nappy on inside out? He doesn't. He passes.

The nurse is delighted with him and hands us a Booktrust Bookstart bag. If there is a more inspired or inspiring initiative in the arts I have yet to come across it. It is not just the two books by Janet and Allan Ahlberg (**Blue Pram** and **See the Rabbit**); nor is it the guide to babies' books for us. It is the fact that books, reading, libraries, literature, are seen as an intrinsic part of a baby's development. Not a luxury; not an optional extra; central. Reading is not just about pleasure, it is about progress. It is an activity, a skill that can improve Jack's grasp on the world he is mapping his way through.

Books with flaps and board books still work wonders. Eric Hill's **Where's Spot?** tempts him to use his fingers and to get a sense of questions and answers. Lucy Cousins' **Katy Cat and Beaky Boo**, on the other hand, with over forty fabulous flaps now has less than twenty fabulous flaps and Jack's diet has been supplemented by a nifty range of coloured paper. **Maisy Likes Driving**, also by Lucy Cousins, is a close friend. He's especially taken by the picture of Maisy flying her plane. Perhaps it's the colour blue or the small bird in Maisy's jet stream; he is surprisingly alert to birdsong. Or perhaps he remembers his journey to Derry when Jez Alborough's **Where's My Teddy?** steadied his first flight nerves.

In fact, there are quite a few bears in his library. The P.B. Bear books, **We're Going on a Bear Hunt** by Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury, and **The Very Small** by Joyce Dunbar and Debi Gliori.

He loves bears. How are we ever going to tell him that the real thing would take one look at him and have him as a starter?

Books are now a natural part of his day. They're in his room. They're in his toy-box. He'll reach for a book as quickly as for anything else. He has joined his local library where he sees other children enjoying books and sees books everywhere. It's still touch, feel, chew but we're getting there. Especially at bedtime. **Farmer Duck** by Martin Waddell and Helen Oxenbury is terrific; a lazy farmer ousted by his hardworking animals and never a mention of foot and mouth. He's taken too by Helen Cooper's **The Baby Who Wouldn't Go to Bed**. Are the stories starting to register? Is the idea of narrative beginning to fall into place? Of course not but the fuse has been lit and if it can stay lit then the landscape of his childhood should be bright with books.



Gary McKeone is Literature Director, Arts Council of England.

Books discussed:

- Blue Pram**, Janet and Allan Ahlberg, Viking, 0 670 87951 7, £3.99
See the Rabbit, Janet and Allan Ahlberg, Viking, 0 670 87952 5, £3.99
Where's Spot?, Eric Hill, Puffin, 0 14 050420 6, £4.99
Katy Cat and Beaky Boo, Lucy Cousins, Walker, 0 7445 8258 X, £5.99
Maisy Likes Driving, Lucy Cousins, Walker, 0 7445 8134 6, £2.99
Where's My Teddy?, Jez Alborough, Walker, 0 7445 3058 X, £4.99
P.B. Bear Fly Away Kite, Lee Davis, Dorling Kindersley, 0 7513 7060 6, £4.99
P.B. Bear The Marching Band, Lee Davis, Dorling Kindersley, 0 7513 7151 3, £4.99
We're Going on a Bear Hunt, Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury, Walker, 0 7445 2323 0, £4.99
The Very Small, Joyce Dunbar and Debi Gliori, Doubleday, 0 385 60000 3, £10.99
Farmer Duck, Martin Waddell and Helen Oxenbury, Walker, 0 7445 3660 X, £4.99
The Baby Who Wouldn't Go to Bed, Helen Cooper, Doubleday, 0 552 52838 2, £4.99

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Raymond Briggs and Allan Ahlberg's *The Adventures of Bert*: 'A creative dialogue'

*It is the summer of 2001.
Allan Ahlberg is phoning Raymond Briggs.*



Hallo!

Raymond, is that you? How are you?

Hang on, I'll just switch the radio off – Woman's Hour. Not bad – mustn't grumble.

Good. Listen, we've got trouble. It's this magazine, Books for Keeps. They want us to write something about *The Adventures of Bert* – the 'creative process' and all that.

Oh, yes – well that shouldn't take long. What does Bert think?

He says we should do it – good publicity.

Mrs Bert?

She says do it.

Baby Bert?

He says, 'Waaaa!'

Course he does, the little blighter. Hang on, I'll just answer the door.

(Five minutes later)

Milkman. Wanted money – *again!* So what do we tell them?

Well we can hardly tell them the truth.

You're right there ... Hm.

So, I was thinking, how about this. I'll say how I wrote these adventures and needed an illustrator, as usual, y'know, and anyway Quentin Blake was busy and Helen Oxenbury was busy, and Michael Foreman and Shirley Hughes, and I thought, well, there's poor old Raymond Briggs there, all on his own down in Sussex ...

Yeah – got it. And I'll say... let's see, I had a letter from a girl at Penguin asking if I'd illustrate a story by this new young author they'd got hold of, some foreign johnny, Allberk or something he was called – never heard of him.



Yes, that's –



Hang on, haven't finished yet. So anyway, turns out he's not so young after all – been around ages – done loads of books, mostly remaindered. So now this Penguin girl was thinking maybe if they teamed him up with somebody like me, somebody successful, well, it might give his career a boost – Ha! – keep him out of the gutter.

Splendid – that ought to do it. Then all the magazine people need do is stick a few pictures round the edges.

Yeah. Hang on, I'll just answer the door.

(Ten minutes later)

Jehovah's Witnesses. Well, that sounds all right. What does Bert say?

He says he's not bothered. He says as long as I know he wrote the words and you know he did the pictures and he and Mrs Bert get their fair share ...

And what does she say?

She's not bothered either.

Baby Bert? No, don't tell me.

Anyway, listen, the good news is – he's written the next one!

No!

Yes!

That's quick. What's it like?

Brilliant! Better than the first. He says he'll probably do the pictures next week.

Excellent – Ha! – the 'creative process', y'can't beat it. Hang on, I'll just answer the door.



Shh!



Hallo!



The Adventures of Bert is published by Viking (0 670 89329 3) at £9.99.

Authorgraph No.130

Aidan Chambers

Aidan Chambers interviewed by Geoff Fox

In June, 1975, Aidan Chambers was close to panic. He had a contract for a book to fulfil, a mortgage to pay on the cottage he and Nancy had just bought and they needed to eat. Day after day, the page remained blank. In the end, he made himself write down whatever came. What came first was "Literature is crap," said Morgan. Then a fair bit more for an hour and twenty minutes. What he had written had little coherence, but he had no other way to go. So he tried again another day. To his astonishment, he found he had written about a boy masturbating. He also found that he was shaking – as if, he says, he was suffering some kind of catatonic fit. He wanted to abandon the whole thing but Nancy, herself a publisher, wagged her finger at him ("for the only time in our lives together") and said, 'You will finish this book.'

That was the origin of *Breaktime*, accepted for The Bodley Head by those legendary editors, Judy Taylor and Margaret Clark. Morgan's concise assessment of literature is still there, no longer the book's opening line but moved at Margaret Clark's gentle insistence to page 2. (She pointed out that purchasing librarians would be so deterred by such a beginning that the book would lose sales, whereas they would never spot it on the second page.)

'That was the book that taught me what I am – I'd come home. It was the book I'd have written at 16 if I could have.' In fact, by the time he was 16, Aidan Chambers already knew he wanted to be a writer. Again, the revelation was almost apocalyptic. He was in his O-level year at Darlington Grammar School. The regular teacher was away and the class was covered by Jim Osborn, whose reputation preceded him – he could reduce grown boys to tears. He arrived, black gown swirling, said nothing, plugged in a gramophone, set a record on the turntable and lowered the needle: 'In Xanadu did Kubla Khan.' Just that – no more. 'Now repeat what you've heard,' demanded Osborn. No one could. 'Listen!' Again, the line and the question. And again. And then, he issued texts. 'And now listen!' After an open-ended exploration of what the boys saw in their minds' eyes, a final

reading, finishing dead on the bell. No further comment, no 'This is what it really means.' The text had been allowed to speak, and for the youthful Chambers, a lifetime's exploration had begun.

Books had not played much of a part in his early life. There were just five of them in his home, an artisan's house in Chester-le-Street, County Durham, where he was born in 1934. His father was a craftsman – a joiner who subsequently became an undertaker. Yet there were stories around; his father was a raconteur, and his grandfather told him 'The Lambton Worm' whose 'track' could be seen winding up a hill visible from the field where his grandfather told him the story. His mother took him to his first film at the age of three weeks; thereafter, it was twice a week to the flicks right up to the time he became a monk in his mid-twenties.

Primary school was bleak; he was caned for getting sums wrong. Hardly surprisingly, he failed the 11+. Secondary Modern was better, though 'it had a fully-stocked library but none of us ever went into it.' Then, at 13, his enlightened Headteacher saw his potential and engineered his transfer to the Grammar School.

Through a friend, he started visiting the local library every week (Biggles, William Brown and the rest). Then there was the Damascus Road meeting with Coleridge and Jim Osborn. 'It was the intensity of it – and Jim's intense expectation that we would reach up for it.'

Osborn became his 'intellectual father'. He saved him from probable expulsion when it emerged that Aidan had been in the library, where he was a Senior Librarian, when he should have been on the sports field, shivering among the 'reserves'. Osborn told him to join the Debating Society and to audition for the school play; both became fierce enthusiasms. Later, after a horrendous family row when Aidan's father had flatly refused to allow his son to apply to RADA ('he never came to see me because I always got female roles'), Osborn drove him home from school, swept into the house and told Mr and Mrs Chambers that their son was to become a teacher and was to go to Borough Road College, London.

And so he did, after two years in the Navy which he hated ('though I read all the time'). College was good. His first play was performed, he enjoyed his teaching practices and found himself head-hunted for a job in a selective boys' school in Essex. The Head wanted someone who would give the lower streams a better deal and who could also do the Drama. 'Right, lad, sit down. Now here are the questions the governors are going to ask you this afternoon...' According to Aidan, 'Everything that's happened to me in my life's gone through the back door, never the front.'

Three enjoyable years followed. Then, through the influence of some of his colleagues, Aidan became a lay brother in a newly founded monastery in Stroud, close to the village in which he lives to this day. His decision was prompted not so much through the acquisition of a personal faith but through a response to the disciplines, the language and the sense of theatre in the daily life of the order.

In Gloucestershire, after a year as a novice, Aidan took a post at Archway Secondary Modern School in the town. Here he taught English, ran the library, and directed school productions which attracted county-wide attention. Here also, he found some of his pupils calling in on the community for advice or refuge. The monk's habit and the 'safety' of his status meant, he thinks, that teenagers trusted him enough to dump on him at 2 o'clock in the morning. He learned much about teenage vulnerabilities and ambiguities and given his previously very male experience, something of the ways of adolescent girls.

At Archway too, he developed an increasing reputation as someone with new things to say about literature and teaching in classrooms outside the grammar schools. His pioneering *The Reluctant Reader*, the first of several books for teachers in which thoughtful practice was underpinned by theory, appeared in 1969. And before long, he originated the 'Topliner' series for Macmillan, commissioning texts likely to appeal to those reluctant readers. By 1968, Aidan had left the monastery to become a freelance writer and lecturer. He had also



The Books

(published by Red Fox in paperback)

Breaktime, 1978, 0 09 950281 X, £4.99 pbk

Seal Secret, 1980, 0 09 99915 0 0, £2.99 pbk

Dance on My Grave, 1982, 0 09 950291 7, £4.99 pbk

The Present Takers, 1983, 0 09 999160 8, £3.99 pbk (reissue February 2002)

Now I Know, 1987, 0 09 950301 8, £4.99 pbk

The Toll Bridge, 1992, 0 09 950311 5, £4.99 pbk

Postcards from No Man's Land, 1999, The Bodley Head, 0 370 32376 9, £10.99 hbk, 0 09 940862 7, £5.99 pbk (winner of Carnegie Medal, 2000)

area in himself. 'You have to risk dealing with the material inside yourself you'd rather not face or, certainly, not have other people face. Only in the act of writing do I declare myself to myself.' First drafting can be painful; there is still the fear of getting it wrong, the legacy of those canings for getting his sums wrong almost 60 years ago. Redrafting, however, is a consistent pleasure. He loves shaping and shifting the mosaic – his plots never follow a simple narrative time line. As writer, reader or theatregoer, he finds much of his satisfaction in the artful crafting of the piece.

We talk on – about the novel in progress with its female narrator ('It had to be – that's where the others are leading.'). And we talk about work he has done in Sweden, Holland and Belgium where three of the novels have been dramatised. With one small group of young Flemish actors, he developed an intensity of relationship which, at times, overwhelmed all of them; it's this kind of intensity which marks his characters, and despite his calmly reflective manner, the man. He loves the rehearsal room, the discovery, the probing, the passion between the actors, the interplay of risk and safety in the enclosed world of the theatre space. 'If I had my druthers, I'd write a novel every five years, a play every year, and sit in a rehearsal studio every day. That's how I would live.'

Photo courtesy of Random House Children's Books

married Nancy, who in 1970 began the invaluable journal about children's literature, **Signal**, which she still edits.

So to that cataclysmic day in 1975 and the first stirrings of **Breaktime**. There had been other published novels and several plays but **Breaktime** drew on deeper wellsprings and served different functions for a new readership and for its author. He knew quite early on that there would be a sequence of six novels, linked thematically around the question, 'What does love really mean?' and 'the discovery of your own desire to be what you wish to be'. They are linked too through their attention to language, which is particular to each individual book. They are concerned with the nature of consciousness – how do we know ourselves and each other? The sense of

place is always powerful and highly specific. There are 'baptismal' moments in each book. And literary references illuminate much of the action.

The novels have already spanned a quarter century of self exploration – Aidan is working on the sixth and final one now. 'I will not play lightly with any literary action. In the reality of our life within our culture, the exchange of writing is the closest you can get to another person. It is more intimate than the sex act. It's a religious matter – it is the experience which transcends the individual.'

Aidan writes slowly. He loves what he calls the 'wool-gathering' ('research' is too arid a term) and has come to trust the way in which each novel slowly reveals itself; and sometimes slowly reveals a dangerous

He talks with great clarity about his writing and himself, the seriousness punctuated by regular chuckles. The laughter is sometimes shared with me, sometimes with his memories, and sometimes in recognition of the irony within an anecdote. We finish on Lear and Cordelia, Japanese pillow books, Ted Hughes and Chekhov. For someone who sees himself as a loner ('I love certain people intensely, but more than five people together I do not like'), who enjoys no space better than the isolation of his writing room, he is a warm and generous communicator. ■

Geoff Fox edits the journal, **Children's Literature in Education**, and is an honorary Research Fellow at Exeter University School of Education.

HARRY POTTER'S *Power to Enchant*

What is it about the Harry Potter books that has such power to capture the imaginations of both child and adult readers? What is the nature of the extraordinary interest that these titles generate across the generations? Child psychotherapist, **Margaret Rustin**, explains their powerful resonance.

Just about a year ago, I was meeting for the first time a boy of fourteen, referred to the clinic where I work as a child psychotherapist. To his appointment he brought the fourth volume of Harry Potter's adventures, published only two days earlier – and he explained that he had already read the whole book. I soon learnt that this feat of concentrated reading was gripping significant numbers of young adolescents, and I was reminded of this when at a family wedding last week. My sixteen-year-old neighbour at the table – another boy – complained that it was too bad to be kept waiting for the next volume, which he had expected to be out by now. He went on to explain that Volume 4, brought home for him by his father, had been picked up by his younger brother and that such was the excitement that an additional copy had to be purchased immediately to resolve the fight over access.

• **A truly remarkable feat** •

What is going on when so many adolescents are desperate to get

their hands on a book, and in particular so many boys, often despaired of as readers? The marketing hype played its part, but I want to suggest that J.K. Rowling has pulled off a feat of writing which is truly remarkable. Her stories wittily combine elements of fantasy and fairy story, of the traditional school yarn, of the thriller, the gothic novel, and science fiction. She also manages to appeal to a very broad age group – younger children are charmed by the wands, cauldrons and magical sweets of the wizard children and delight in hating the horrible Dursley parents who remind one of Roald Dahl's caricatured adults. An older age-group responds to the intricacies of Quidditch, the consumer possibilities of broomsticks, the challenge to work out the unfolding mystery, the chronicle of friendships, gangs, bullies, et al. As Harry grows older, adolescent preoccupations also appear. Adults too find themselves delighted by the inventiveness of Rowling's imagination and happily read her for their own pleasure as well as for the benefit of child listeners.

• **Powerful themes** •

In the tradition of some earlier writers for children, Rowling is tackling big themes beneath all the fun, and it is this combination of up-to-the-minute social commentary, enjoyment of the fantastic, and exploration of the most powerful feelings of which human beings are capable which is so compelling.

She signals this from the start when we first meet Harry. He is the special child, the orphan so clearly out-of-place in the stiflingly ordinary suburban world of the Dursleys at number four, Privet Drive. He does not look right and he does not fit in, and he dreams of being rescued by some unknown relations. Freud wrote of what he called the 'family romance', his name for the childhood fantasy of really belonging to some other family than the one in which we find ourselves, a superior one in which we should feel more appreciated. Harry's gradual discovery of just how important he is in the Wizard world, in contrast to his very lowly position in the Dursley household, is a delightful representation of this common childhood dream.

The magic which effects Harry's deliverance is, of course, absolute anathema to Mr Dursley, who is utterly terrified of the unknown and unpredictable. Rowling offers us a sharply insightful account of Mr Dursley's obsessional efforts to disregard any happening which might disturb his certainties. How interesting to note that Harry and Dudley, his detestable cousin, are just waiting to go to secondary school, a time full of anxiety for most children. How neat to show quasi-eleven-year-old panic in an adult character. Harry is temporarily rescued from the terrors of this big transition when he is carried off to Hogwarts, but once he gets there he has to face on his own all the feelings evoked by new and very unexpected experiences. We see him move from a family atmosphere dominated by hatred, rivalry and desire for revenge to one modified by the availability of benign sibling relationships as exemplified by the Weasley family and Hermione. But although there are friendly external figures around, the fundamental anxiety being explored concerns Harry's worry about his own nature, his own qualities of mind and feeling. The magical 'sorting hat', which places pupils in houses according to their true natures, is a brilliant image of our access to unconscious knowledge which can render us uneasy.

J K Rowling

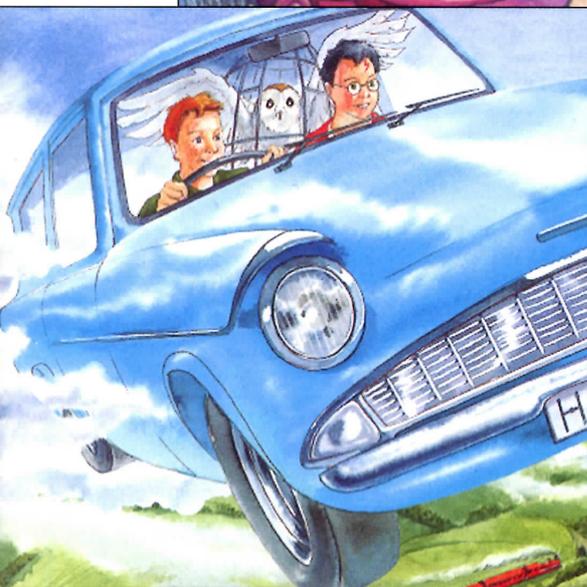
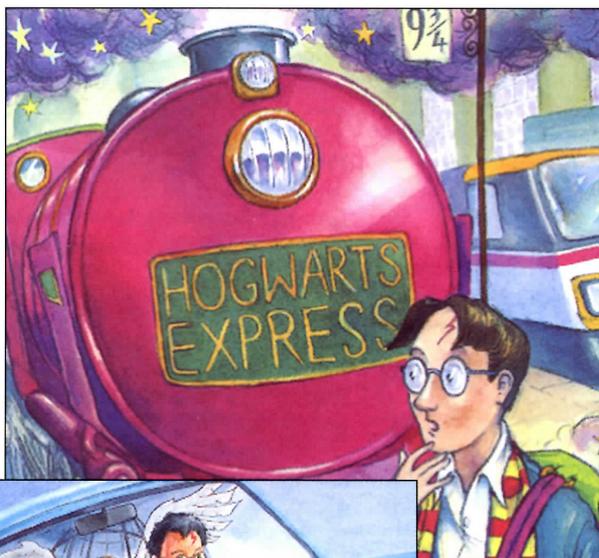


Once Harry has been provided with good substitute parents at Hogwarts (Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall, and Hagrid, the giant, and Hedwig, his owl, are two such pairs) his emotional development can begin. He is a boy whose anxieties about his own goodness have been intensified by his early losses. He has a tender conscience and is easily assailed by a sense of guilt and a conviction that there is something wrong which he has to put right. His character is therefore perfectly suited for the heroism which will be required of him.

• Facing the deepest human anxieties •

Harry's trials, a modern version of many a fairy-tale prince, involves his facing the deepest human anxieties. Death and fears of extinction have to be struggled with – in the Quidditch game, in the nightmare visit to the forest where he encounters the dying unicorn and repeatedly in the blinding pain of his scar, whose meaning he must come to grasp. Harry has survived Voldemort's attack because he was a loved child, he gradually learns, but in doing so he also takes on the mantle of having to protect something which will always be subject to further attack. Rowling is representing a deadly hatred of creative love which is powered by the unbearable pain of abandonment and deprivation of her anti-hero. Each volume so far published explores new elements in this life and death struggle. Harry's strength is shown to depend on the extent to which he can reconstruct and maintain imaginative contact with loved inner representations of his dead parents. The story of his many exciting adventures is underpinned by the story of what is happening in his mind in the process of his growing up and overcoming the tests of strength and courage that await him.

Harry's character seems to me a very important feature of the appeal of the books. Like William of the **Just William** books, the Katy of **What Katy Did**, Jo March in **Little Women**, Jennings and Derbyshire and a few others, Harry as hero evokes intense involvement in most readers. Here is a child set in a specific and finely wrought background whose details are fascinating – the food at Hogwarts, Hagrid's home, the dreadful Dursleys, the



school buildings and its arcane rituals, the extraordinary teachers, and most of all, the whole world of wizardry, especially in its school-syllabus form. But most crucial is the mix of characteristics with which Rowling has endowed Harry. He combines the very everyday and the magical – his bespectacled round face with its strange scar exactly catches this enticing mix of the familiar and the mysterious, and his personality offers numerous points of identification for child-readers. The bereft orphan is also the mischievous and clever boy who will triumph. Subject to the tribulations of school rules and piles of homework, he will nonetheless outshine all in his feats of wizardry.

• The struggle between good and bad •

At the deeper levels, Harry's capacity to engage children's imagination is to do with the mix of danger, excitement and his magical capacity to triumph against all odds and the more vulnerable side of his character consequent on his orphan status. He is a hero with toughness, bravery and a capacity for endurance, who can use his intelligence to the full, but also one who is driven by intense longings, half-understood feelings about what he has lost and painful anxieties about the burden laid on him. He has to explore in his adventures the struggle between the good and bad parts of his nature, and to learn to make judgments about the world he lives in. He is truly afraid that the sorting hat will put him in the Slytherin house, because Harry senses that he too has some of the nastiness that characterizes Slytherins. He is a boy who has to struggle with the whole range of human feelings. Jealousy, cowardice, greed, guilt and disloyalty all have their hold over Harry at different points as well as his many admirable qualities. In sum, he is a boy hero fit for today, in touch with both the traditional boyish virtues (and a sporting hero on top of it), and with the softer feelings often left to girls or subsidiary characters in the work of earlier writers. This mix of tough and tender is also explored in Philip Pullman's characterization of Lyra and Will in his trilogy (**His Dark Materials**), and both writers have clearly got hold of something vitally interesting to today's children in their engagement with the nature of character and of morality. Gloomy commentators on today's younger generation who feature individualism, materialism and mindlessness in their litany of complaint should be puzzled by the avid response to these deeply serious books. Rowling is passionate in her interest in the moral nature of her hero and his friends, and this is what underlies the most intense moments in her narratives, and their power to enchant. ■

Margareit Rustin works as a child psychotherapist at the Tavistock Clinic in London. A chapter on the Harry Potter books will be included in the revised edition of **Narratives of Love and Loss: Studies in modern children's fiction** by Margaret and Michael Rustin, to be published by Karnac Books in September 2001 (original publication Verso, 1987).

Children's Book Reviewing on the Web

The number of sites on the web to do with children's books is proliferating, but how useful are they?

Clive Barnes discusses sites that offer book reviews.

Type in 'Children's Literature' as a search on the web and the number and variety of sites that come up will convince you, if you needed convincing, of the range of interests and audiences for the subject. My intention here is to give an introduction to some of the most interesting general British children's book sites, concentrating on those that offer book reviews. There is no attempt to be comprehensive, but many of the sites mentioned have links to other sites that are worth exploring.

First, a word of warning: finding an out-of-date website is like chancing on a lost civilisation where time has stood still, the streets are empty, and the signposts point nowhere. Two of the sites I visited were so out of date that I will mention no names: one still had its Christmas 2000 book list up in May, and another was very enthusiastic about the forthcoming publication of *The Amber Spyglass*. But there are very few sites that do not suffer in some way. Even **ACHUKA**, the biggest star in the British children's book world galaxy, still had its diary of year 2000 events up in May and no sign of 2001 yet.

SITES AIMED AT ADULTS

ACHUKA (www.achuka.co.uk) is an attractive site, which seems, to a tyro like me, to be pretty much up-to-date with web technology. Its creator, Michael Thorn, is a deputy headteacher and, in his terrestrial life, is a book reviewer for the **TES** and other journals. At the heart of the site are sets of reviews of selected new books. But there is much more. There are about thirty of Thorn's excellent interviews with authors, illustrators and other children's book world luminaries. Thorn is a knowledgeable interviewer who is as likely to ask an author where she got her hat as to offer the insight that Michael Morpurgo's books are characterised by a 'benign moral authority'. Another strength of the site is its news section that is updated weekly, and Thorn has recruited correspondents who contribute regular updates from across the English speaking and writing world.

The reviews, like the site in general, are addressed to interested adults. They are primarily of new fiction and generally brief, categorised mainly by age group, although there are separate sections for poetry and information books. The favoured books in each section are marked Highly Recommended and Star Choice and these sometimes have more

extensive reviews by Thorn or his growing band of reviewers. However, Thorn assumes an interested audience and he may give short shrift to a book by an established author, even though he recommends it.

In common with many sites, most attention is given to older children's fiction and picture books. Younger children's fiction and information books are not dealt with so carefully or critically. Children's information books are generally badly served by reviewing on the web, just as they are in print reviewing. I found no site that gives new information books the attention they receive in **BfK**. Nor are there many sites yet that use a team of reviewers in the way that print journals do.

LINKS WITH BOOKSELLING

ACHUKA has links with **Amazon**, the Internet bookseller. **The Children's Book Company** (www.childrensbookcompany.com), based on a bookshop in west London, has its own on-line catalogue and launched its website in January. It aims to give help to parents in supporting their children's reading. Founded by an ex-teacher, Samantha Eels Taylor, it promises not only author interviews (only two so far), but articles on pressing topics like dyslexia and boys reading, a chat room and e-mail reading agony advice. There is a list of recommended children's books with reviews by the bookshop staff, with categories that include Multicultural Books, Reluctant Readers and Helpful Reads (books dealing with social or emotional situations like divorce or a new baby). Unfortunately, at the time I looked at it, some of the selections offered were disappointing. There were none at all in Reluctant Readers! And there were no cover images for many of the titles, a major drawback when considering whether to buy a book. This is a site with good intentions, which is still finding its feet.

FOR TEACHERS AND WRITERS

Steve and Diana Kimpton also reflect an awareness of wider literacy questions in their **Word Pool** website (www.wordpool.co.uk). This not a book shop, although, like **ACHUKA**, it is linked to **Amazon**. It is addressed to teachers and would-be children's writers as well as parents. The educational aspect is clear from the presence of Numeracy and Big Books among the headings on its front page, and it is unusual in devoting attention to information books. It's a site that is less flashy than many and, although the number of reviews is relatively small and mainly of established titles, the quality is good. Some of its review sections, of books about Christmas, for instance, are not likely to be easily found elsewhere. The only section that I had serious misgivings about was Books for Parents, where there were very few recommended books and most from a single small publisher. There is plenty of advice for would-be children's writers, stemming from Diana's experience as a writer. There are short author profiles, in question and answer form, which highlight those authors willing to visit schools. **Word**



Clive Barnes

Pool's sister site, **UK Children's Books Directory** (www.ukchildrensbooks.co.uk), offers links to a range of authors', illustrators' and publishers' sites, as well as other British children's books organisations.

ADVICE FOR PARENTS

For no nonsense excellence in short reviews of older fiction titles, there is no better place to go than **Book Trust** (www.booktrusted.com). There is plenty of excellent advice here for parents, the most comprehensive list of children's literature organisations, and a collection of basic fiction book lists for different age groups. They may date back to August 2000, boast no fancy graphics and no book buying facility, but in terms of number and variety of titles, they are outstanding. Nowhere else could you find such an extensive list of fiction titles dealing with dyslexia, nor lists of teenage titles with boys as main characters. It even has an up-to-date diary of coming events.

FOR CHILDREN TOO

None of the sites which we have looked at so far have children as their intended audience. **Mrs Mad's Book-A-Rama** (www.mrsmad.com) is aimed at children as well as parents, teachers and librarians. Run by another ex-teacher, whose initials are M.A.D., its main focus is book reviews, although it does offer games and some interesting links for children, including CIA maps of Europe. Once you've got past a front page that's as busy and dazzling as a pinball machine, the reviews themselves are thorough. They include a plot summary, an evaluation, an estimation of age level and gender appeal and, often, a personal response from the reviewer: 'parts of this story are so poignant that they made me want to weep.'

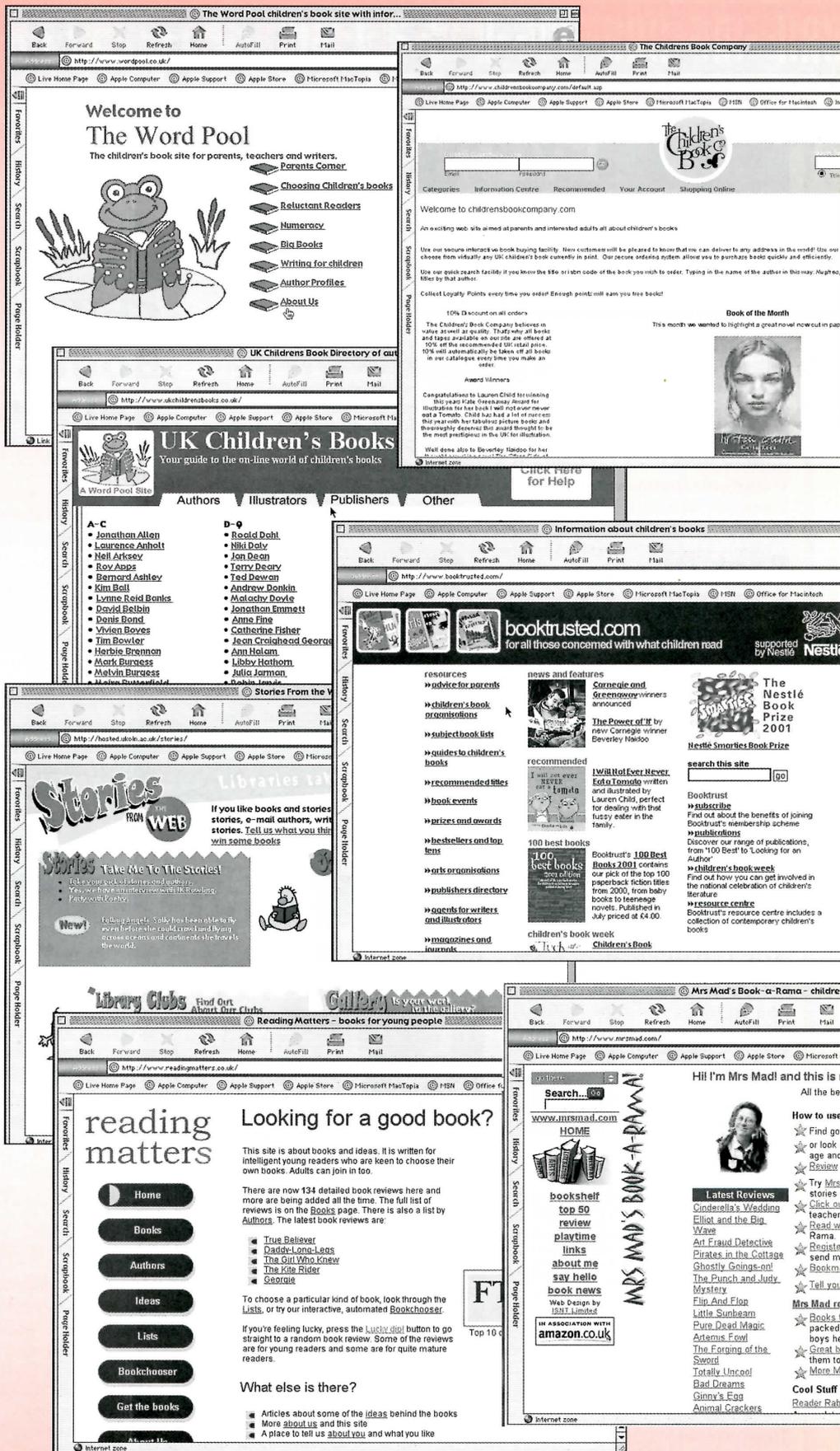
The reviews are a mix of old and new titles and the aim is to offer a range of reading choices. The real innovation is a Bookfinder facility. This allows you to enter a combination of factors, age range and genre, for instance, and the Bookfinder comes up with some suggested titles. There aren't perhaps enough reviews within the system yet to make it really impressive. But it could be interesting as it develops, and the whole site is great fun.

Reading Matters (www.readingmatters.co.uk) looked after by another husband and wife team, Jill and David Marshall, has a Bookchooser similar to Mrs Mad's Bookfinder. The Marshalls could never be accused of taking a less than serious approach to book reviewing. Jill reviews for 'intelligent young readers', and has no time for age ratings or marks out of ten. She reviews only fiction she's happy to recommend and only for able readers above the age of ten (though that's my estimation not hers!). She does it in some detail with few concessions in vocabulary to her audience. Some of her reviews can be pretty cerebral. This is the only site with an 'Ideas' section that draws out significant themes in modern children's fiction. But there will be keen readers who will respond to her approach, and to a choice of books that includes nineteenth- and twentieth-century classics, as well as the latest titles.

FOR AND BY CHILDREN

Keen readers Tim and Chris Cross, feel that **Reading Matters** is 'slightly boring to visit'. But then, Tim and Chris have a rival website, **Cool Reads** (www.coolreads.co.uk), so they have an axe to grind. Tim and Chris are 12 and 14 years old and they review books for their own age group. Their site's already attracted the endorsement of national newspapers, and the **Financial Times** has recently recruited the brothers as reviewers. There were around three hundred reviews on the site when I visited, all set out to answer five basic questions about character, storyline, how easy the book is to get into, and style. They are all straightforward and brief, using a star rating system ranging from a single star, 'read this book only if you've nothing better to do', to five stars for 'a cool read - get hold of this book'. Every review helpfully begins with the age of the reviewer at the time of reviewing. The Cross brothers have an eclectic taste in reading and include a number of older titles among the reviews. The categories which they use go beyond the usual Ghosts and Adventure to include 'Survival stories where kids manage on their own' and 'Animals tell the Story'. A look at the entries under some of the sections does reveal a masculine bias to the reviewing. War has a whole page of reviews but Love and Romance has only four reviews, all from guest reviewers.

Like Mrs Mad, Tim and Chris encourage guest reviewing and there are a large number of guest reviews from children on the **Cool Reads** site. The opportunity for children's participation is one of the attractive possibilities of the web, and the site that possibly carries this furthest is **Stories from the Web** (hosted.ukoln.ac.uk/stories/). This is produced by a consortium of library authorities and developed by The Centre for the Child in Birmingham. It's an ambitious site for children, with interviews with authors, book tasters, competitions, and stories and reviews submitted by children. As the children are mainly in the 8-11 year-old age range, unfortunately there often isn't enough of a review to form a recommendation for anyone else. The site is also poorly laid out, with a trace of trying too hard to be child friendly. Information for parents and teachers about the project hides behind a button labelled 'boring adult info', and every page is cluttered up with a small print list of all the partners in the project that uses up the bottom fifth of the page.



Nevertheless, it's a project that, through library based clubs, has drawn children into reviewing on the web, and is capable of further development.

AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR SITES

Author and illustrator sites are now plentiful and will be the subject of a future review article in **BfK**. Let **BfK** know about your site, if you would like it to be considered for review. ■

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

EVENTS

National Poetry Day

Now in its eighth year, National Poetry Day will take place on 4 October. This year's theme is Journeys. Encompassing travelogues, poetic postcards, voyages through the imagination and the odyssey through life itself, National Poetry Day will show that there is a world elsewhere, to which poetry can take you. Education packs will be sent to every primary and secondary school in the country, packed with suggestions for using poetry in the classroom, as well as to major public libraries. Look out for poetry performances, readings and poetry-related events at a bookshop, library, festival or arts centre near you on 4 October! For further information contact Truda Spruyt or Katherine Grimes, Colman Getty PR, 17 & 18 Margaret Street, London W1W 8RP. Telephone: 020 7631 2666. Fax: 020 7631 2699. E-mail: truda@colmangettypy

NATIONAL
Poetry
DAY

Book It!

As part of the Cheltenham Festival of Literature, **Book It!** will be held from 12–21 October – a 'book bonanza for children' of author sessions, workshops, storytelling, theatre performance, family events and school days. Visiting authors include Allan Ahlberg, Nina Bawden, Melvin Burgess, Aidan Chambers, Lauren Child, Adele Geras, Morris Gleitzman, Geraldine McCaughrean, Roger McGough, Colin McNaughton, Tony Ross, Martin Waddell, Jacqueline Wilson and Benjamin Zephaniah.

For further information or to book tickets, contact the Cheltenham Festival of Literature, Festival Box Office, Town Hall, Imperial Square, Cheltenham GL50 1QA. Tel: 01242 227979. Fax: 01242 573902. E-mail: GlynisP@cheltenham.gov.uk

Book it!

Useful
Organisations
No.17:Children's
Books
Ireland (CBI)

17 Lower Camden Street,
Dublin 2
E-mail:
childrensbooksire@eircom.net

CBI is a national, membership based organization dedicated to promoting excellence in all aspects of children's literature. Regular events include an annual Summer School, an autumn conference, and seminars and events, including events for children, in Dublin and other centres. CBI is also responsible for the annual children's Book Festival.

Each year CBI runs the Bisto Book Awards. These consist of awards for the Irish Children's

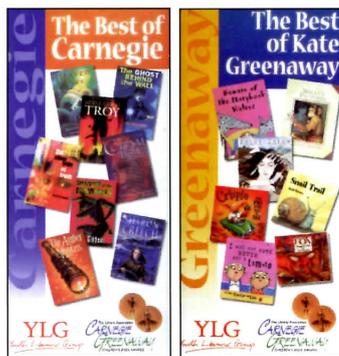
Books of the Year, the Eilís Dillon Award for a first children's book by an Irish writer, and three Merit awards. CBI's publications include the book guides **Best Books and Book Choice**, **The Big Guide to Irish Children's Books** and **The Big Guide 2: Irish Children's Books** (eds. Coghlan & Keenan), and **Children's Books in Ireland**, a magazine containing reviews and articles about the Irish children's book scene and children's authors, as well as articles and news about books for young people from outside Ireland. Members of CBI include teachers, academics, librarians, authors, illustrators, publishers and parents.

PRIZES

The Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medals

The winner of the Library Association's Carnegie Medal is Beverley Naidoo's **The Other Side of Truth** (Puffin), a novel that explores the impact on children of having politically active parents prepared to speak out against abuse of human rights – in this case by the Abacha regime in Nigeria. Chair of judges, Sarah Wilkie, said, 'It is an outstanding novel... it is never didactic yet it informs about the issues facing asylum seekers.' Adele Geras's **Troy** (Scholastic David Fickling Books) and Philip Pullman's **The Amber Spyglass** (Scholastic David Fickling Books) were Highly Commended and Mevin Burgess's **The Ghost Behind the Wall** (Andersen Press) was Commended.

The winner of the Library Association's Kate Greenaway Medal is Lauren Child's **I Will Not Ever Never Eat a Tomato** (Orchard Books), a conversational style picture book illustrated with cut-out figures imposed upon wild photographic montages. Chair of judges, Sarah Wilkie, said, 'Lauren Child has taken a classic picture book theme and interpreted it in a completely fresh, modern, edgy style...' Anthony Browne's **Willy's**



Pictures (Walker Books) was Highly Commended and Ted Dewan's **Crispin: The Pig Who Had It All** (Doubleday) was Commended.

Two attractive, full colour leaflets, **The Best of Carnegie** and **The Best of Kate Greenaway** which give details of all the titles are available at £5 for 50 leaflets for LA members (£6 for non-affiliate members) + p&p. Quantities over 500 attract discount. Available from the Norfolk Children's Book Centre, Alby, Norfolk NR11 7HB. Tel: 01263 761402; Fax: 01263 768167. Email: marilyn@ncbc.co.uk

The Signal Poetry Award 2001

The Signal Poetry Award has been won by Carol Ann Duffy's **The**

Oldest Girl in the World (Faber). The judges (Peter Hollindale and Margaret Meek) commented that 'if young readers become familiar with poems like these... they will have discovered poetry as a force to extend both understandings and feeling'.

The Children's Book Award

The Federation of Children's Book Groups' Children's Book Award has been won by Nick Sharratt and Kes Gray for **Eat Your Peas** (The Bodley Head). The award is judged by children from Federation groups.

The Branford Boase Award

The second Branford Boase Award for the most promising new children's writer and their editor, has been won by Marcus Sedgwick for **Floodland** (Orion Children's Books). Sedgwick's editor was deputy publisher at Orion, Fiona Kennedy.

Aventis Prize for Science Books

The Junior Aventis Prize (worth £10,000) has been won by Michael Allaby's **DK Guide to Weather** (Dorling Kindersley). The shortlisted books were David Lambert's **DK Guide to Dinosaurs** (Dorling Kindersley), Brian Ward's **Eyewitness Guides: Epidemics**

(Dorling Kindersley), Nick Arnold's **Suffering Scientists** (Scholastic), Janice Lobb and Peter Utton's **The At Home with Science Series** (Kingfisher) and John Farndon's **The Complete Book of the Brain** (Hodder Wayland). The judging panel which drew up the shortlist was chaired by Geraint Smith, Science Editor of the **Evening Standard**, and the winner was chosen by pupils from 25 schools.

REGIONAL PRIZE

Portsmouth Book Award

The Portsmouth Book Award 2001 has been won by William Nicholson for his book **The Wind Singer** – part of his 'The Wind on Fire' trilogy. A group of 100 Year 8 and 9 pupils from eight city secondary schools were given hundreds of titles for consideration last October at the start of an initiative run by the Portsmouth Library Service. Nicholson was chosen from a shortlist of eight titles with J.K. Rowling's **Harry Potter** and the **Prisoner of Azkaban** in second place. The eight secondary schools involved were Admiral Lord Nelson, Copnor; City of Portsmouth Boys, Hilsea; Springfield, Drayton; Mayfield, North End; Miltoncross, Milton; Priory; St Edmund's, Landport; St Luke's, Southsea.

PEOPLE

Congratulations to **Annie Everall**, Director of Young Readers UK, who earlier this year received an OBE for services to children's libraries in Birmingham and also was appointed to the post of Service Manager, Young People and Policy Development in Derbyshire where she will have responsibility for the school library service as well as children's services. Annie's pioneering work in Birmingham has seen the creation of The Centre for the Child, the Young Readers UK Festival and the creation of Stories from the Web. Her tireless and innovative approach to improving library services has been an inspiration to many librarians and the OBE is a very fitting reward for someone as committed as she is to providing the very best for children.

Congratulations to **Robert Dunbar** who has been awarded the Children's Books Ireland biannual award 'in recognition of outstanding service to Irish children's literature'. Dunbar is a founder member of CLAI (the Children's Literature Association of Ireland); he edited the first 15 issues of **Children's Books in Ireland**; he set up the Diploma in Children's Literature course of Trinity College, Dublin; he reviews children's books regularly in **The Irish Times**, in **BfK** and on RTE radio; and he teaches and lectures on children's literature at home and abroad.

Hodder Children's Books has appointed **Honor Wilson-Fletcher** marketing and publicity director.

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

Obituaries

Winifred Cawley 1915–2001

Winifred Cawley's **Gran at Coalgate** won the 1974 Guardian children's prize and was a runner-up for the Carnegie Medal. It broke new ground for its time with its depiction of a child from a poor family seen against the background of a coal mining village during the general strike. It was followed by the very autobiographical **Silver Everything** and **Many Mansions**.

Tove Jansson 1914–2001

Born in Helsinki, Tove Jansson's Moomin books first reached the UK in 1948 with the publication of **Finn Family Moomintroll**. Moomins are 'small and shy and hairy' and they love sunshine (unlike common trolls who 'pop up only when it's dark'). Owing less to Finnish folklore than to Jansson's acute observation of people and their ways, the Moomin books with their amiably eccentric characters and humorous twists have been enjoyed by a great many readers of different ages and translated into 35 languages.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BECOME A BOOKSTARTER!

Dear Editor

I am writing with regard to the national Bookstart programme and to congratulate you on your July edition of **Books for Keeps**. It was wonderful to see such in depth coverage of books for babies. This is a genre that needs to have more publicity if we are to encourage our babies towards a lifelong love of books. As you mentioned, Bookstart is leading the way and I thought it might be timely to bring you up to date with the progress of Bookstart across the UK.

In 1992 there were 300 Bookstart babies. In 2000 there were 675,000. 215 local authorities are taking part and 92% of the UK is now 'Bookstarted'. We have become the first national, baby book-gifting scheme in the world thanks to a major two year sponsorship by Sainsbury's PLC as part of their Millennium celebrations, the hard work and camaraderie of thousands of librarians and health visitors and, of course, the wonderful alacrity with which parents and carers have embraced the idea of sharing books with their babies. There is no doubt that Bookstart is an excellent example of a multi-agency working partnership.

Bookstart 1999-2000 has been researched by Professor Kim Reynolds at The University of Surrey, Roehampton. The findings are available from Booktrust.

Sainsbury's sponsorship ended earlier this year since when we've raised over half a million pounds from the Government and

charitable trusts, but we need to secure stable, long term funding to ensure a book bag reaches every baby born in the UK.

Thanks are due to the many children's publishers who have generously given donations of thousands of baby books to Booktrust in order that we can continue to offer free books to babies. Booktrust HQ at Book House in London is currently, literally bursting at the seams with thousands of baby books. However, publishers please note, we would welcome even more donations of suitable baby book titles. Provided that they could go to our warehouse instead of Book House, as there is no more room in the basement!

Bookstart has the potential to benefit babies in so very many ways. We need secure funding but finance is not the only way in which people can contribute. The help of all interested parties is needed to help to spread the word about this life enhancing, world class, scheme. I do hope the readers of **Books for Keeps** will consider themselves Bookstart supporters and help to raise awareness of Bookstart and the concept of sharing books with babies.

If you would like to become a Bookstarter, and/or want more information on Bookstart, please contact The Bookstart Team at Booktrust on 020 8516 2995. Our website address is www.booktrust.org.uk

Rosemary Clarke

Schemes & Partnerships Co-ordinator,
Booktrust, Book House, 45 East Hill,
London SW18 2QZ

THE UGLY DUCKLING

Dear Editor

I seldom comment on a review of my own writing but, for the record, my retelling of 'The Ugly Duckling' is not an abridgement of the Bodley Head translation as Elaine Moss suggests ('Picture Books for the Not So Very Young' in **BfK** No. 128). I consulted several translations, old and new, and worked directly from the Danish.

Kevin Crossley-Holland

Clare Cottage, Burnham Market, Norfolk
PE31 8HE

STARS

Dear Editor

I read with interest the letter from Philip Pullman about the word 'sad' (**BfK** No. 129, 'SAD' STARS) and your reply. I had always assumed that 'sad' was being used in its more traditional sense of 'causing sorrow', for it is a shame when a book for children that has been through the hands of so many adults on the way to publication, still manages not to turn out well. I find 'poor' harsher.

I don't know who has the final say in the awarding of stars, but I have certainly found them invaluable when choosing books for children. For this alone I would rate **BfK** 'Unmissable' and give it five stars!

Cynthia Dummett

3 Begonia Close, Kempshott, Basingstoke,
Hampshire RG22 5RA

'RELUCTANT' 25-YEAR-OLD

Dear Editor

As a teenager, reading books was never on my 25-year-old brother's list of things to do. And sadly, he had not read a book since leaving school.

But after a recent accident left him unable to work for a month, I gave him **Harry Potter and the**

Philosopher's Stone. Seeing the size of the book, he complained that it would probably take him a whole year to read. But in fact, he read it in five days. Then promptly phoned me asking for the next Harry Potter book – ASAP. Within another week he was onto the third book and is currently telling all his friends about Harry. So, thank you, J.K. Rowling. And long reign Harry Potter!

Tania Cox

PO Box 972, Ayr, Queensland 4807,
Australia

THE BRITISH COUNCIL

Dear Editor

Supporting your congratulations (**BfK** No. 128) to Grace Kempster, newly-appointed Director of Information Services Management with the British Council, it is a sad loss to 'children's library services in the UK' but not necessarily of the UK. Given the high quality of British children's books – something my students in a shadowing group for the LA Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Awards know only too well – the British Council may have a role in presenting the best of current children's literature and librarianship at the various centres (some of which include libraries) around the world. Although local factors apply so that this role is not always prioritised, it is hoped that such 'showcasing' may occur more often than not, especially given the Council's developing role in English language teaching – quality material with which English language skills may be used, as it were. Certainly, such support is helpful to those of us promoting quality English-language children's books in other countries.

Anthony Tilke (Librarian)

Yokohama International School, Japan

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 ★★
Poor ★

REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

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

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

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

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

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*.

Geoff Fox edits the journal, *Children's Literature in Education*, and is an honorary Research Fellow at Exeter University School of Education.

Nikki Gamble is a freelance education and children's book consultant, and project director of Live Writing:Online.

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 Education at the University of Edinburgh.

Adrian Jackson is General Adviser – English, West Sussex.

Andrew Kidd is Headteacher at Duke Street Primary School in Chorley, Lancs.

Errol Lloyd is an artist and writer.

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

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

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 Editor, English children's books, for gwales.com, The Welsh Books Council's website.

Rosemary Stones is Editor of *Books for Keeps*.

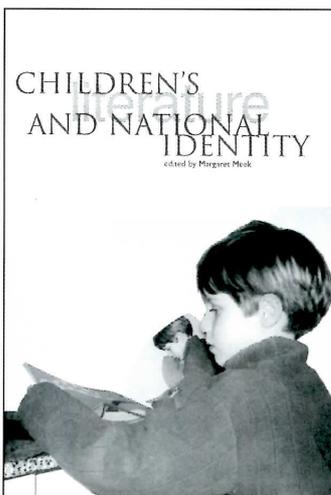
Helen Taylor teaches at Homerton College, Cambridge and is the director of The Voices Project – a literature in the community project and festival in Cambridgeshire.

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
Afterdark Princess, The	★★★	Life of Stephen Lawrence, The	★★★
Amber Spyglass, The (audio book)	★★★★★	Lion Children's Favourites	★★★
Artemis Fowl	★★★★	Little Mermaid, The	★★★
Back-to-Front Benjy	★★★	Lulu's Holiday	★★★
Backyard Science	★★★	Man Who Wore All His Clothes, The	★★★★
Bear's First Bible	★★★	Mary Queen of Scots and Her Hopeless Husbands	★★★
Beauty and the Beast	★★★	Merrymaid of Zennor, The	★★★★★
Beguilers, The	★★★★	Midnight Museum, The	★★★
Being Friends	★★★★	Monster Mission	★★★★
Black Dogs of Doom, The	★★★	Ms Wiz – Millionaire	★★★
Blitz	★★★	Musicians of Bremen, The	★★★
Brimstone Journals, The	★★★★	My Best Book of Big Cats	★★★
Captain Pugwash (audio book)	★★	My Best Book of Volcanoes	★★★
Charm School (audio book)	★★★★	My Cat Charlie	★★★★
Children's Literature and National Identity	★★★	Never Steal Wheels from a Dog	★★★
Cowboy Kid	★★★★	New Faber Book of Children's Verse, The	★★★★
Crazy Cow	★★★★★	Next Please	★★★★★
Crystal Palace, The	★★★	Night of the Haunted Trousers	★★★★
Deal With It!	★★★★★	Night You Were Born, The	★★★
Dinomania	★★★★	No Fire, No Candle	★★★
Dogs' Night	★★★★★	No Roof in Bosnia	★★★★
Dream Snatcher, The	★★★★	Nursery School with Teddy Bear	★★★
Ebb and Flo and the Baby Seal	★★★★	Out of Bounds	★★★★★
Face to Face	★★★	Pedlar of Swaffham, The	★★★
Facts About Asthma, The	★★★★	Pets' Corner with Teddy Bear	★★★
Facts About Epilepsy, The	★★★★	Playing Beatie Bow	★★★★
Feeling Angry	★★★★	Poets of the First World War	★★★
Feeling Shy	★★★★	Police Cat Fuzz Rides Again!	★★★
Frightening Fiction	★★★	Red Velvet	★★★
Ghost Bird	★★★	Rescuing Dad	★★★★
Glory Ashes, The	★★	Robert Louis Stevenson	★★
Going to Egypt	★★★	Roger McGough	★★
Great Blue Yonder, The	★★★★★	Rude Rabbit	★★★★★
Heathrow Nights	★★★★	Run, Rabbit, Run	★★★
Here Come Poppy and Max	★★★★	Seeing Stone, The	★★★★★
How Scary!	★★★★	Sleepovers	★★★★★
Hunger, The	★★★	Snail House, The	★★★★★
I am NOT sleepy and I WILL NOT go to bed	★★★	Spellfall	★★★★
I will not ever Never eat a tomato	★★★★	Stories of the Saints	★★
I'm not your Friend	★★★★	Storm Catchers	★★★
I'm Sorry	★★★★	Summertime Blues	★★★
Jamie	★★★	Telling the Truth	★★★★
Jen the Hen's Big Book	★★★	Today I Feel Silly and Other Moods That Make My Day	★★★
Jigsaw	★★★	Tribes	★★★
John Bunyon's A Pilgrim's Progress (audio book)	★★★★	Twist in the Tale, A	★★★★★
Journey to the River Sea	★★★★★	Ultraviolet	★★★
King Herla's Ride	★★★	Very Different	★★★★★
Kingdom by the Sea, The (audio book)	★★★	Voyage on the Great Titanic	★★★
Kingfisher Atlas of the World, The	★★	When Poppy and Max Grow Up	★★★★
Kitchen Science	★★★	Why Do People Join Gangs?	★★
Lettice, The Dancing Rabbit	★★★★		

Books About Children's Books



Children's Literature and National Identity

★★★

Edited by Margaret Meek,
Trentham Books, 152pp,
1 85856 204 X, £13.95 pbk

At a time when the English speaking

children's literature world seems to be particularly parochial, this collection of essays is welcome. Its title might be more accurate if the word European had been included in the title, for there is little consideration of children's literature and national identity beyond Europe's shores. A dozen contributors offer different views of how children's literature crosses frontiers; of how we depict our own and other nations to our children; and of what is distinctive and what is shared in the children's literature of Europe. Meek contributes a preface which stresses the need to diminish ethnocentrism and to celebrate translation as 'part of the art and craft of writing'. Without translators, as Anthea Bell reminds us, many of the finest works of literature would be unknown to the most of us who can read only English.

There are some topics which are not touched on here. There is the extent to which the U.S.A. and Australia, and, incidentally, the role of an international market and international publishing houses influence English language children's books. What is apparent from many

of these essays is how much we have in common across the continent and how much British readers are missing. While there is no shortage in other European countries of translations from English, and many British writers enjoy huge followings in Europe, our publishing industry remains resolutely insular. CB

Frightening Fiction

★★★

Kimberley Reynolds,
Geraldine Brennan and Kevin
McCarron, Continuum, 144pp,
0 8264 5310 4, £14.99 pbk

Despite some interesting observations and insights, this volume does not really live up to the claims of the 'Contemporary Classics' series to examine 'major works and great precursors' of the vogue for 'frightening fictions' for children.

Reynolds' introduction promises an examination of the characteristics of horror fiction for children, the nature of its appeal and its effects on its readers. In a short, but wide-ranging essay, she makes a brilliant start, including an account of Kristeva's

theories of the semiotic and symbolic realms and a discussion of the *X Files* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The three longer essays that follow, two by Kevin McCarron and one by Geraldine Brennan, interesting though they are, are essentially work-by-work analyses of six writers: R.L. Stine's and Caroline Cooney's work in the 'Point Horror' series, Robert Westall, and David Almond, Philip Gross and Lesley Howarth. Here the general points are more difficult to extract, and the wider horizons of the introduction close in on individual titles.

The notion of 'frightening fictions' does allow consideration of writers like Almond and Howarth, who are not necessarily working within the horror genre, but the opportunity to look at the relationship with adult literature and with other media, particularly film, is not taken up. Westall's young adult work, for instance, seems to have been strongly influenced by themes drawn from outside the world of children's literature, which he connects to more familiar children's themes. CB

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

A Twist in the Tale

MYTHS ★★★★★

Mary Hoffman, ill. Jan Ormerod, Frances Lincoln, 72pp, 0 7112 1833 1, £7.99

Reviewed *BfK* 113, November 1998:

'A handsomely published collection of ten traditional stories from various parts of the world. Hoffman's zappy, direct tellings respect the oral tradition from which they come and thus make for a pleasurable read aloud. Additional vibrancy is provided by Ormerod's bold and colourful illustrations.'

The Merrymaid of Zennor

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Charles Causley, ill. Michael Foreman, Orchard, 32pp, 1 84121 591 0, £5.99

Reviewed *BfK* 120, January 2000:

'This haunting and beautiful picture book retells a traditional Cornish folktale set in the clifftop village of Zennor in the days when the tin mines were still operating. Words and pictures weave a tale steeped in the Cornish landscape of greens and blues, sea and sky, twilight and mystery.'

I will not ever Never eat a tomato

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Lauren Child, Orchard, 32pp, 1 84121 602 X, £4.99

Reviewed *BfK* 124, September 2000:

'Charlie has the unenviable task of finding something that his very fussy little sister will eat. But he is up to it. Child dramatises the battle of wits with economy and skill, using a collage of drawn cutouts, photographs and fabric or paper backgrounds.'

I'm Sorry

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Sam McBratney, ill. Jennifer Eachus, Collins, 32pp, 0 00 664629 8, £4.99

Reviewed *BfK* 125, November 2000:

'In this lyrical love story, the little boy and girl, who love each other best of all, are sad until they learn to say I'm sorry when they shout at each other and fall out. An important lesson for adults too!'

5-8 INFANT/JUNIOR

My Cat Charlie

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Becky Edwards, ill. David Armitage, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 5018 2, £4.99

Reviewed *BfK* 123, July 2000:

'The little girl and Charlie, her black cat, are best friends. But now she must leave Charlie with her cousins so that he will have a garden. The vivid, impressionistic illustrations

support the emotions expressed so well in the text. The little girl knows that Charlie will always be special and she copes well with her sense of loss.'

Rude Rabbit

0 00 664722 7

Crazy Cow

0 00 664718 9

PICTURE BOOKS ★★★★★

Colin and Jacqui Hawkins, Collins, 24pp, £4.99 each

Reviewed *BfK* 125, November 2000:

'Six and seven year olds hugely enjoy Rabbit's blatant rudeness, graphically explicit, in *Rude Rabbit* as he burps, pulls faces, pushes and shoves, and makes the most appalling personal comments. The cow in *Crazy Cow* finds school work impossibly hard, but she is a talented gymnast who tightropes along the washing line. Full of energy and enthusiasm, these books' clear and detailed pictures tell lots of jokes.'

Dogs' Night

FACTION ★★★★★

Meredith Hooper, ill. Allan Curless and Mark Burgess, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 1461 1, £5.99

Reviewed *BfK* 123, July 2000:

'If you want to encourage children to enjoy a visit to an art gallery, this is the ideal picture book. Once each year when everybody has left the National Gallery, all the dogs climb out of their paintings. This time they create havoc when they climb back into the wrong ones after their revels. The illustrations are superb and are

supported by a well told story.'

8-10 JUNIOR/MIDDLE

The Seeing Stone

FICTION ★★★★★

Kevin Crossley-Holland, Orion, 360pp, 0 75284 429 6, £5.99

Reviewed *BfK* 125, November 2000:

'In one hundred short, glittering chapters, Crossley-Holland, a master of folklore and historic storytelling, provides an almost encyclopedic account of social life on the medieval manor, while at the same time weaving a narrative from personal, political and mythological threads. This is a tour de force of storytelling, and a treat for all ages.'

Being Friends

0 7136 6078 3

Feeling Shy

0 7136 6077 5

Telling the Truth

0 7136 6076 7

Feeling Angry

0 7136 6085 6

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Althea, ill. Conny Jude, photographs by Charlie Best, A & C Black 'Choices', 32pp, £3.99 each

Reviewed *BfK* 106, September 1997:

'Each book in this series focuses on one aspect of behaviour and explores its implications in an honest, if sometimes rather earnest way. They will make an excellent support for

circle time in school, for P.S.H.E. work or for discussion between children to help develop an honest and helpful debate on some tricky issues.'

12+ SECONDARY

No Roof in Bosnia

FICTION ★★★★★

Els de Groen, translated by

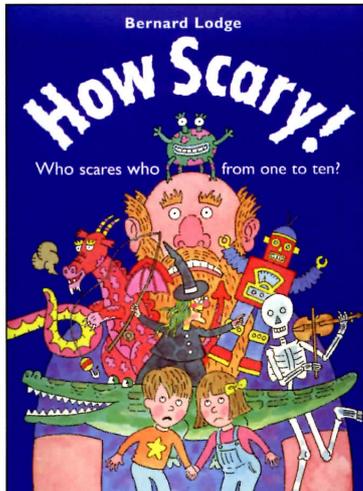
Patricia Crampton, Spindlewood, 192pp, 0 907349 22 6, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 109, March 1998:

'Five teenagers from four communities – Muslim, Serb, Croat and

Romany – hide out in the mountains to escape guerrilla warfare. As friendships develop their individual stories are revealed and we learn about the background to the conflict. Simply told, the portrayal of fear and hardship is convincing.'

REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant

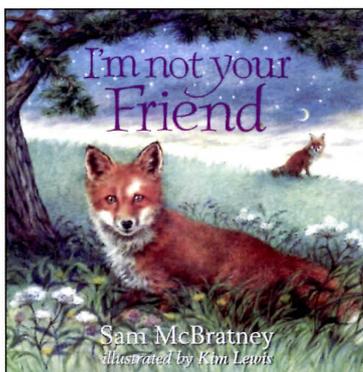
**How Scary!**

★★★★★

Bernard Lodge, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 1762 9, £10.99 hbk

It is the children who are in control in this cleverly conceived, chaining counting book as the reader discovers in the final spread. There it is revealed that the boy and girl being chased by one 'Growling Giant' are the animators of various play items – two 'Dreadful Dragons', three 'Snappy Sharks', right through to nine 'Angry Aliens' and ten 'Rattling Robots' – as the pursuers become the pursued.

The characters cavort in the brightly coloured illustrations outlined with fine black pen. The whole is an invitation to mathematical exploration and discussion, imaginative play, storytelling and language play. JB

**I'm not your Friend**

★★★★★

Sam McBratney, ill. Kim Lewis, Collins, 32pp, 0 00 198333 4, £9.99 hbk

At sunset, after a playful romp in the fields, an understanding mother fox converses with her recalcitrant cub while his resolve – 'I'm not going to be your friend ever again' – slowly dissipates as night, with its shadows

and strange shapes, begins to envelop him and he comes around to the idea of reconciliation. A deeply reassuring, multi-layered story told in finely crafted, tension-building prose and wonderfully lyrical, atmospheric pictures of the fauna and flora of a rural landscape. JB

Jamie

★★★★

Clare Jarrett, Collins, 32pp, 0 00 198414 4, £9.99 hbk

Jamie and his grandfather take in and care for a lanky, featherless bird, which arrives on their doorstep one stormy night. Thomas proves to be a bit of a handful in the house so grandfather builds him one of his own and when Jamie next comes to visit, a fully feathered and transformed Thomas shows his appreciation in an unsuspected way.

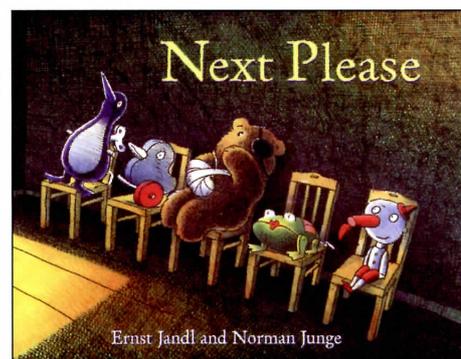
A gentle tale told mostly in dialogue with two or three ink-outlined colour pencil illustrations per double spread, rendered in a scribbly, freehand style. JB

Jen the Hen's Big Book

BIG BOOK ★★★★★

Colin and Jacqui Hawkins, Dorling Kindersley, 24pp, 0 7513 6198 4, £9.95 pbk

A big book version of a Hawkins 'flip-the-page' book re-issued with literacy strategy notes on the back cover. In my view this book works on the idea of rime analogy and onset/rime rather than the over-fragmented CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) approach advocated in the notes. JB

**Next Please**

★★★★★

Ernst Jandl and Norman Junge, Hutchinson, 40pp, 0 09 176958 2, £9.99 hbk

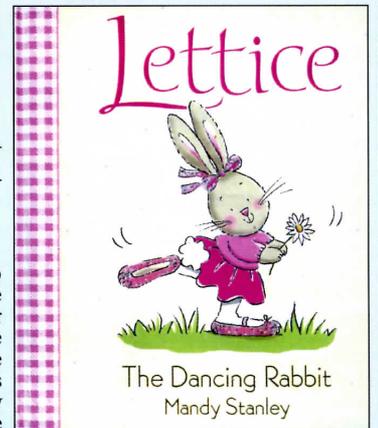
Five broken toys sit in the shadowy corridor outside a surgery. They enter one by one, and leave again restored to happy wholeness. Soon only the puppet with the broken nose is left, his anxiety rising with his loneliness until it is his turn at last. That is about it, yet with just fifteen subtly and

NEW Talent**Lettice, The Dancing Rabbit**

★★★★★

Mandy Stanley, Collins Children's Books, 32pp, 0 00 198422 5, £9.99 hbk

Lettice Rabbit decides she wants to be a dancer 'more than anything else in the world' and she leaves her comfortable hill top life with all the other bunnies for the town where she finds a ballet class. The teacher is amazed by Lettice's extraordinary jumps and she is chosen to star in the end of term show – but is she leaving ordinary rabbit life behind? This engaging debut picture book show a considerable flair for observation and characterisation – Lettice may be anthropomorphised but she is also very much a rabbit. Stanley makes versatile use of the page by including some delightful action sequences of Lettice dancing – there is a great feeling of vibrancy and joy in this little story. Events are also seen from



a rabbit eye view with humans sometimes daringly chopped off below the waist – a device which serves to emphasis Lettice's smallness and fragility. Stanley's delicate pinks, greys and greens are printed on cream paper and her mannered, rather '50s style gives a delicious flavour to this very 'girly' book with its pink gingham endpapers and spot glitter cover. RS

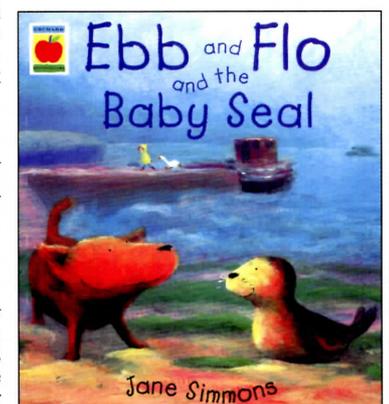
expressively cross-hatched paintings and a very minimal text, this splendid picture book reassuringly guides young readers through what will be a familiar ordeal for most of them. At the same time, it is a counting and subtraction game, and a rich source of conversation between children and their fellow readers about the backstories to all of these poor, semi-comical casualties. An excellent book for sharing at home or at school. GH

Lulu's Holiday

★★★★★

Caroline Uff, Orchard, 32pp, 1 84121 762 X, £9.99 hbk

We are never far away from Lulu's round, smiley, currant bun of a face as she goes on her seaside holiday. We watch her packing, travelling on the train to her holiday home with her sister and baby brother, making sand-castles, opening up the picnic hamper and so on. Mum and Dad are not too far away when it comes to paddling or time to go home. The illustrations are large scale, cheerfully painted with enough detail (and no more) to be pointed at and perhaps identified by the sharing listener. The words too are there to be shared. Sometimes the narrative voice chatters away to Lulu as she waves out of the page to us; and sometimes the voice talks to us about what Lulu is up to. The words may invite an answer or a comment, or beg to be sounded out by infant

**Ebb and Flo and the Baby Seal**

★★★★★

Jane Simmons, Orchard, 32pp, 1 84121 628 3, £4.99 pbk

The latest seaside adventure for the dog Ebb and his owner Flo concerns a lost seal pup who shows up on the beach outside the house on a rainy day when Ebb has been vainly seeking a playmate. The two creatures have a wonderful day of it, but when dinner time comes, Flo's mum has to help to reunite the seal with its mother. That is all there is to the story, but Jane Simmons' expressive paintings, soft focus and

muted, but sparked with vivid flourishes, make of it a real adventure and a fine book to read aloud, touched with pathos, joy, danger and resolution. GH

Here Come Poppy and Max

1 84121 600 3, £4.99 pbk

When Poppy and Max Grow Up

1 84121 699 2, £9.99 hbk

★★★★

Lindsey Gardiner, Orchard, 24pp

Mop-haired, spindly-legged Poppy and her black and white patched dog Max are the instantly loveable characters in these brightly coloured picture books. In *Here Come Poppy and Max*, Poppy grins from ear to ear as she and Max mimic their favourite creatures: tiger, giraffe, leopard, and penguin. Each spread has animated text and bold backgrounds whilst the characters leap and waddle about, Poppy's outfits matching the creature she is imitating. My five-year-old daughter was bouncing up and down on the bed as Poppy and Max became kangaroos.

When Poppy and Max Grow Up is a delightful follow up, dealing with a youngster's fantasy about what she will do in adulthood; be a popstar, go deep sea diving, be a ballet dancer, footballer or vet. The love between child and dog is evident in every vibrantly crafted illustration, culminating in the assertion that 'right now Poppy has the best job in the world ... looking after Max.' The use of rich oil pastels or acrylic paints is masterful. AK

Nursery School with Teddy Bear

1 85602 421 0

Pets' Corner with Teddy Bear

1 85602 420 2

★★★

Jacqueline McQuade, David Bennett Books, 32pp, £7.99 each hbk

These latest 'Teddy Bear' titles are sturdy hardbacks built to stand up to the wear and tear of a pre-school or nursery environment. They need to be – the textures in McQuade's oil on canvas illustrations demand to be fingered, stroked and patted, particularly in *Pets' Corner* wherein Teddy meets the likes of a fluffy-tailed rabbit, a ripply-shelled tortoise and a friendly llama.

We also share Teddy Bear's first day at nursery as he eats breakfast, meets the lollipop Teddy and shares the creative activities and routines with a new friend. Of the straightforward, present tense narratives, the language used in *Pets' Corner* is the more stimulating. The large, well-spaced text is inviting for early reading. JB

Cowboy Kid

★★★★

Max Eilenberg, ill. Sue Heap, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 8200 8, £4.99 pbk

Cowboy Baby (winner of the Smarties Book Prize Gold Award) has now grown into toddler *Cowboy Kid*. This

companion book, boldly illustrated in bright colours, deserves to be well received. *Cowboy Kid* does not feel like sleeping. No Sirree! Sheriff Pa wants C. Kid to settle down for the night, but Kid thinks of many reasons why sleep is not yet on his agenda. This will be such a familiar tale to parents, and maybe especially to Fathers with responsibility for the bedtime rituals. *Cowboy Kid's* three special toys all get the treatment, big hugs, sleeptight kisses, bedsocks, scarf or special blanket to make them warmer, whilst Pa frequently pops in asking why Kid is still awake. More hugs, more kisses, and more desperate procrastinating! *Cowboy Kid* is now over-tired, but Pa's solution to his reluctance to settle is tender and quiet, and, 'Yes, Sirree,' all fall asleep with smiles on their faces. GB

Bear's First Bible

★★★

Linda Parry, ill. Alan Parry, John Hunt Publishing, 16pp, 1 903019 85 0, £5.99 board

With teddy bear shaped die-cut pages and colourful nursery pictures of stuffed toys, this book tells a number of familiar stories from the Old and New Testaments. Each double page spread has a page of text facing a large illustration of Teddy, the storyteller, with his friends. The text is liberally interspersed with rebus (a picture representing a word) so there is lots of interaction for the child reading with an understanding adult. The stories tackled are The Creation, Noah's Ark, Joseph's New Coat, Daniel in the Lion's Den, The Annunciation and Nativity, Jesus Fishing with His Disciples, and finally, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, here called 'The Sad and Happy Story'. The text is rather more propagandist than most religious publishing for children these days: 'Jesus brought such happy news. All those who believe in Him will go to heaven, too, and live with Him forever! "We believe in Jesus," said Teddy. "Do you?" Thorny questions for the under-fives! GB

I am NOT sleepy and I WILL NOT go to bed

★★★

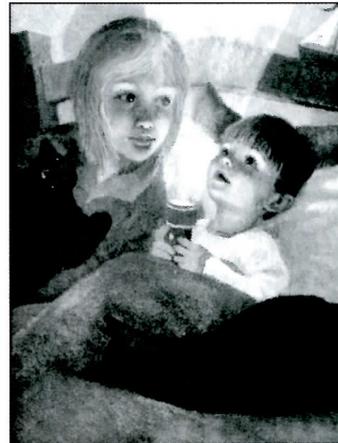
Lauren Child, Orchard, 32pp, 1 84121 821 9, £10.99 hbk

The long suffering Charlie and his hyperactive sister Lola, familiar from *I will not ever Never eat a tomato*, return in a new book celebrating Lola's extravagantly imaginative avoidance behaviour at bedtime. Before Lola can be cajoled into bed, Charlie has to negotiate with thirsty tigers, a hungry lion, whales in the bath and pyjama-pinching dancing dogs. This is a satisfying little story in large picture book format that should appeal to both sleep-defying toddlers and their baby-sitting siblings. The visual impact of the book is cheerfully garish. The characters are depicted in a lively scrawl against flat blocks of colour broken by scattered items of photomontage, the overall effect being as hectic as Lola's hallucinations. GH

The Night You Were Born

★★★

Wendy McCormick, ill. Sophy Williams, Orchard, 32pp, 1 84121 593 7, £4.99 pbk



A cuddle of a picture book for small people, especially if a new arrival is imminent. McCormick wrote the book 'to share the excitement and joy' of the nights when her twin sister's daughters were born, and there is indeed a sense of being invited into someone else's family, bringing with it a kind of sixties intimacy and optimism. As Jamie waits for news of the birth of his sister, his Aunt Isobel tells him about the night she waited for news of his birth – and the joy with which she and his uncle greeted the good news as they sang a welcome to him on a lonely seashore. The words – lyrical and poetic rather than the language of every day – are complemented by illustrations which themselves have a soft-focused warmth, somehow embracing the scenes, much as Jamie and his aunt snuggle together over the story, which of course ends in delight. GF

Run, Rabbit, Run

★★★

Christine Morton, ill. Eleanor Taylor, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 5095 6, £9.99 hbk

Rabbit is hiding from danger. He shelters in a tree, in a field, in a barn, meeting various farm animals and birds on the way. He gives his helpers clues, but it isn't until the final pages that his pursuer is revealed as a fox. Very young children will enjoy the build up of suspense, and guessing from what Rabbit is fleeing.

The prose builds tension nicely, and the watercolour illustrations have a suitably pastoral air. There is, however, a feeling that this book is going where others have gone before, not unusually at a time when there is a plethora of picture books on the market, and they can't all be highly original. VC

Today I Feel Silly and Other Moods That Make My Day

★★★

Jamie Lee Curtis, ill. Laura Cornell, Collins, 40pp, 0 00 198424 1, £9.99 hbk novelty

The primary function of this picture book is to say to children that it is normal and acceptable to have mood swings, to feel quiet, to feel excited, to feel happy, to feel discouraged, all in



relatively quick succession. That feelings may have underlying serious causes is also underlined: 'My best friend and I had a really big fight./She said that I tattled and I know that she's right.'

Told in rhyme by a bouncy little red haired girl, who is given plenty of spark and character in both text and illustrations, it is engaging and good natured without sounding at all worthy. It will provide opportunities to discuss emotions, both at home and in a classroom setting, aided by the 'Mood Wheel' at the back, which allows readers to indicate their own mood. VC

The Snail House

★★★★★

Allan Ahlberg, ill. Gillian Tyler, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 8231 8, £4.99 pbk

This is a story about a story; one which Grandma makes up for Michael and Hannah and Baby as they sit together looking out over a summer evening garden. She begins, as these kinds of stories do, in time-honoured fashion, 'Once upon a long long time ago there was a boy and his sister and their little baby brother who all of a sudden got so very very small that they could leave that house of theirs by a crack under the door – and *no one notice*.' So long ago that a seed packet, we notice, costs only 1d and the boy's shirt – though exactly the same colour as Michael's T-shirt – has long sleeves and a collar at the neck. Once again, more or less, we are back in the time of Ahlberg's childhood, yet also still in the present.

So the boy and his sister and their baby brother have all sorts of magical adventures, living as they do in a little house, fully and charmingly furnished, on a friendly snail's back. They suffer an earthquake (a falling apple) and an attack by a thrush (which, as Michael points out, likes to crack snail shells to get at the occupant); and baby goes off and gets lost, eventually reappearing using a dandelion clock as a parachute.

All the time the text never forgets that this is Grandma telling stories in a real garden, with the children chipping in here and there, maybe even shaping the story as they do so. Tyler's illustrations catch the scale of things precisely; both in the sense of taking us down deep into the undergrowth of the flowerbeds, teeming with insects often larger than the shrunken children, and in conjuring up the security of the garden and Grandma's 'mighty arms'. The mood is deeply rural, tranquil and secure, with the colours gently pastoral to match the mood – almost those of a herbaceous border at dusk. The delight is in the detail, the connections between page and page, between words and image. There is a lot to be learned (well, enjoyed) here about the nature of reading, for in this kind of poetic text, narrative is anything but linear. GF

REVIEWS 5-8 Infant/Junior

Police Cat Fuzz Rides Again!

★★★

Karen Wallace, ill. Trevor Duntun, Colour Young Puffin, 32pp, 0 14 130891 5, £3.99 pbk



A follow up to *Police Cat Fuzz*, this is a fast moving, light-hearted and amusing story, targeted at developing readers. Police Cat Fuzz and Sergeant Malcolm are partners, though many in the force believed wrongly that the partnership would not last. Fuzz is a smart cat who, together with Sgt Malcolm, seeks to track down the town's villainous diamond thieves Rat

and Wrestler – criminals who are clueless when it comes to perfecting the art of disguise. With the help of a fake set of the famous Stars of Hendon diamonds and a formidable opera diva in Gwendoline Surge, the baddies get their just desserts. The colourful half page illustrations on each page are well suited to a tale which doesn't take itself too seriously and so consequently is very successful in entertaining young readers. AK

Lion Children's Favourites: 30 Bible Stories and Prayers

★★★

Lion, 96pp, 0 7459 4711 5, £9.99 hbk

The tradition of sharing Bible stories with children is well served by this collection which also contains poems and prayers. Each bible story is retold by a different author and the book features a number of different illustrators with an appealing variety of style and colours. 'Silent Night' (with piano music), nestles between 'The First Christmas' and 'The Animals' Christmas'. There are lots of old favourites, but new surprises too. I loved the first poem in the book which tells the creation story in a delightfully simple and direct way: 'God said SKIN/ and the man breathed air/ God said BONE/ and

the girl stood there.' The publisher, Lion, is celebrating its 30th anniversary by offering this book at £7.99 until the end of September. GB

The Musicians of Bremen

Ann Jungman, ill. James Marsh, 48pp, 0 439 99757 7

King Herla's Ride

Jan Mark, ill. Jac Jones, 48pp, 0 439 99611 2



The Pedlar of Swaffham

Philippa Pearce, ill. Rosamund Fowler, 48pp, 0 439 99923 5

Beauty and the Beast

Tessa Krailing, ill. Diana Mayo, 64pp, 0 439 99751 8

The Little Mermaid

Linda Newbery, ill. Bee Willey, 64pp, 0 439 99758 5

★★★

Scholastic, £1.00 each pbk

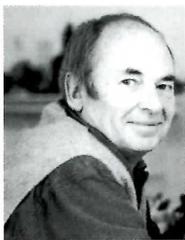
These five are from a series of over twenty titles, written by established children's authors. All the books are well-known or lesser known traditional tales retold in a fresh way.

Children will know *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast*, not least because of the Disney versions. Linda Newbery and Tessa Krailing certainly bring a refreshing look at these two tales. Ann Jungman's contribution is *The Musicians of Bremen* which is about an ageing donkey who runs away from home whilst Philippa Pearce has written a version of *The Pedlar of Swaffham*, a story of a man who has a mysterious dream telling him to go to London. When he eventually arrives he meets a butcher who has had a dream that a pot of treasure is buried under an oak tree in the pedlar's garden. *King Herla's Ride* is a less well-known story. It tells the mysterious tale of an early King of the Britons, who lived on a hill and a sinister cloven-hoofed king who lived under a hill.

The books all have different illustrators although the common feature of the drawings is that they are set out as borders at the top and bottom of each page.

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This year Children's Book Week runs from October 1st 2001. Many schools use it as an opportunity to focus on books, authors and reading. Some schools will hold Book Weeks at other times of the year.

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1

2

3

At £1 per book they are a real bargain. Other titles in the series are **Hansel and Gretel** by Henrietta Branford, **Rapunzel** by Jacqueline Wilson, **Aesop's Fables** by Malorie Blackman and **Cockadoodle-Do, Mr Sultana** by Michael Morpurgo. **AK**

Ms Wiz – Millionaire

★★★

Terence Blacker, ill. Tony Ross, Macmillan, 64pp, 0 333 94794 0, £9.99 hbk

A new Ms Wiz book is certainly something to look forward to, and the fifteenth book in the series definitely lives up to its name. This time, St Barnabas School is being plagued by theft and the police are unable to help. Enter Ms Wiz, who not only solves the crime, but lands up being a millionaire en route. However, the consequences of this are not as expected, and it takes some clever planning from Jack and Lizzie to put things right again. Filled with the usual magic and mayhem, this book will be enjoyed by all Ms Wiz fans. **RL**

The Man Who Wore All His Clothes

★★★★

Allan Ahlberg, ill. Katharine McEwen, Walker, 80pp, 0 7445 5955 3, £9.99 hbk

Ahlberg's late wife and artistic partner, Janet, died in 1994. In his memoir of her, **Janet's Last Book**, published in 1996, Ahlberg wrote: 'The Gaskitts, had they come off, would have been a set of easy readers with titles like *The Man Who Wore All His Clothes ...* We had in mind a sort of family soap set in a universe where pets could talk and everything was animated.' Well, now the Gaskitts have come off. Their new illustrator, Katharine McEwen, is an excellent choice. Her style is not at all like Janet Ahlberg's – much bolder, brighter, and less detailed – but she is fully attuned to the wit, fun and domestic affection of familiar Ahlberg texts from other times. The result is something old, something new, and altogether engaging.

The main story is a high-speed chase in which the Gaskitt family – father, mother, and twins – scattered across three separate vehicles, are all pursuing a bank robber, while the family cat observes their exploits on TV. As events unfold, small hints predict the Christmassy conclusion. And over all is the sense of humorous warmth which brings the Gaskitts to

life as a happy if slightly eccentric family. The book is a delightful blend of farce and just slightly over-the-top normality. We should all be happy that the Gaskitts have finally come off, and the last page gives a welcome hint that we shall meet them again. **PH**

Ghost Bird

★★★★

Mary Arrigan, Red Fox, 80pp, 0 09 940287 4, £3.99 pbk

I warmed to this rather unusual ghost story as its setting is very much in the mundane everyday world, but with the unknown and mysterious creeping in naturally as it were. Pete and his friends have always been warned off the deserted house, but once they summon up the courage to investigate matters they find out more than they bargained for. The illustrations lend to the general atmosphere and Arrigan's perceptions of children's feelings are well expressed, although at times I wondered if it was Pete or Arrigan who was telling the story. **RL**

Captain Pugwash

AUDIO BOOK

★★

John Ryan, read by Peter Hawkins, Cover to Cover, 50 mins unabridged, 1 85549 129 X, £3.99

Captain Pugwash, who has continued to sail the seas in many different formats over the last fifty years, is finally and fatally shipwrecked in this audio version. All augers well: there is some rousing and suitably salty music to begin but, without the pictures, the contrived escapades of Pugwash and his crew in these four short stories become laboured, especially as getting drunk is central to many of the rituals. Peter Hawkins reads the pirates as if they were all J.M. Barrie's Eton-educated Captain Hook – gentlemen touched with bravado. It palls. **JE**

Back-to-Front Benji

★★★★

Dick King-Smith, ill. Judy Brown, Young Puffin, 96pp, 0 14 131077 4, £3.99 pbk

This is a collection of four short stories of varying length by the creator of **The Hodgeheg** and most recently, **Lady Lollipop** (reviewed in **BK 128**). The longest, and by far the best of the stories, which are all about very odd children, is the title story

which, predictably, is about a baby who does everything backwards – crawling, walking and eventually talking, much to the consternation of his parents and later on, his teachers. The children I read this to became very adept at interpreting some fairly long sentences uttered completely back-to-front. Fortunately their imitating Benji's backward walking was short-lived! Less likeable are the central characters in 'Brown's Bones' and 'Little Liar'. Both get their comeuppance in unexpected ways. Brown, a nasty wizard, with an ability to turn people into animals using powdered bones gets fed to the cat by his girlfriend, whilst a habitual liar called Lionel gorges himself on cake to the point of being sick. 'The Hitmus-Potmus' also has a less than loveable central character in the form of the very bad-mannered Bartholomew Bean, whose favourite word is 'shan't'.

A mixed bag but well worth it for the main story, which comprises over half the book. Simple occasional sketches accompany the stories, which are aimed at confident young readers. **AK**

Never Steal Wheels from a Dog

★★★★

David Henry Wilson, ill. Axel Scheffler, Macmillan, 112pp, 0 333 90425 7, £9.99 hbk

Jeremy James is back again with some new adventures in the latest book in the series. Here he befriends a large friendly dog, starts swimming lessons, runs a car boot sale, as well as involving himself in various other new happenings. Told with gentle humour, this book is good not only for reading aloud to young children, but also for slightly older ones to read on their own. Those already familiar with Jeremy James will welcome the latest book; those who meet him for the first time will not be disappointed. Confusingly, the illustration on page 9 shows Jeremy James with his left hand stuck to his head, whereas the story tells us that it is his right hand that gets stuck. **RL**

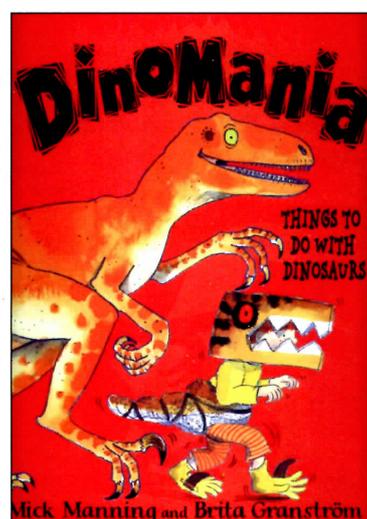
Dinomania: Things to do with Dinosaurs

NON-FICTION

★★★★

Mick Manning and Brita Granström, Franklin Watts, 48pp, 0 7496 3873 7, £9.99 hbk

This lively, activity based book will appeal to young dinosaur enthusiasts



of up to about eight years. Prehistoric animals make a strong appeal to the imagination and this is why there are so many dinosaur books on the market.

This one has an energy about it – Manning and Granström know exactly how to present information through written text and illustration in a way that will interest and inspire young readers. The activities encourage children to reflect on and apply the information they have acquired. They include making a time chart, constructing habitats for different kinds of dinosaur, creating costumes for dinosaur dramas and, finally, producing a dinosaur video bringing all the knowledge and previous activities together. The book demonstrates a number of different kinds of writing which could be exploited in the literacy hour. There are good examples of procedural writing as each activity has a list of resources needed and numbered instructions. Children often find writing much more worthwhile if it is embedded in enjoyable practical activity. As well as making an exciting array of models and costumes, there are suggestions for writing playscripts and stories for radio.

Some adult mediation is likely to be needed. Whether in a home or a school setting, help will be needed in assembling the resources and materials. Teachers would find the book a good starting point for work on dinosaurs spanning the curriculum and linking writing, science, technology and drama. **MM**

REVIEWS 8–10 Junior/Middle

Stories of the Saints

★★

Joyce Denham, ill. Judy Stevens, Lion, 48pp, 0 7459 4165 6, £9.99 hbk

This handsome book would make a good present or be a welcome addition to a school library. Various saints have their stories re-told clearly, with the stylised illustrations lending well to the text. However there are weaknesses. Thus with the story of St Peter, part of the interpretation departs from mainline understanding, and there is one noticeable omission in the story of St

John. Furthermore, the role of saints as intercessors throughout history and also nowadays is omitted. This is a pity, as the book has much otherwise to recommend itself. **RL**

Sleepovers

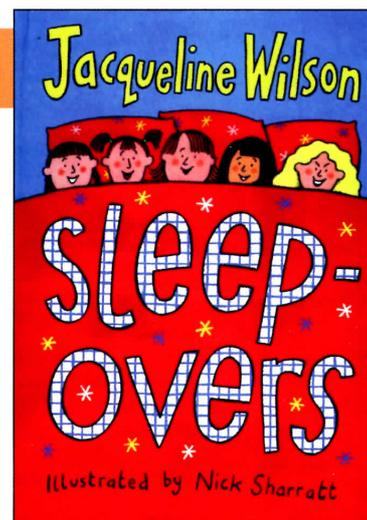
★★★★★

Jacqueline Wilson, ill. Nick Sharratt, Doubleday, 112pp, 0 385 60181 6, £10.99 hbk

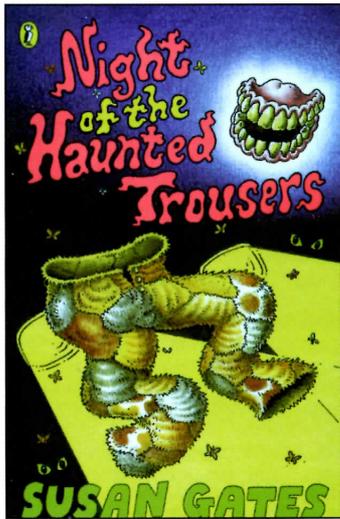
Daisy is the new girl at school and desperate to make friends. The story revolves around the relationships which emerge between the 'Alphabet Girls': Amy, Bella, Chloe, Daisy and

Emily. Wilson is, as ever, spot on with her characterisation as the five girls, in turn, arrange 'sleepovers' for their birthdays.

As each sleepover takes place, Daisy becomes more and more anxious about her 'family secret' – she has an older sister, Lily, who was brain-damaged at birth and is wheelchair bound. Daisy hasn't told anyone at her new school about Lily. She is particularly worried about how Chloe will react and hopes to arrange a sleepover without inviting her. Unfortunately, Daisy's mum has already invited Chloe. The reader cannot fail to share Daisy's anxiety, so expertly is this theme developed and



given an unexpected twist. This is a sensitively written and simply but effectively illustrated book from the author who has had outstanding success with *Double Act*, *The Illustrated Mum* and *The Bed and Breakfast Star*. AK



Night of the Haunted Trousers

★★★★

Susan Gates, ill. Tony Blundell, Puffin, 176pp, 0 14 130826 5, £3.99 pbk

Liam's granddad owns a tacky seaside tourist attraction called Nursery Rhyme Land, which campaigners, led by the formidable Mrs Porteous, want to close down because it has stuffed animals dressed up as nursery rhyme characters. In the space available here, I cannot do justice to the pacy plot and humorous characters. Suffice to say that the story centres on a pair of cat-skin trousers which, when worn by an individual who also happens to be wearing a pair of ancient false teeth, makes that individual turn into Nursery Rhyme Land's original creator's apprentice! Throw in a precocious journalist (granddaughter of Mrs Porteous), a workaholic geneticist (mother of Liam) and a freaky fainting goat and you have the framework of a most entertaining read.

There are tiny illustrations in the top right-hand corner of each spread which form a 'flicker book' about a goat which leaps up and then lies on its back in a faint every time it hears a loud noise. The sleeve notes inform the reader that such goats actually exist and originate from Tennessee! AK

The Glory Ashes

★★

Bob Cattell, ill. David Kearney, Red Fox, 176pp, 0 09 940904 6, £3.99 pbk

The eighth in a series of cricket novels, *The Glory Ashes* tells the story of a top notch junior cricket team from England who throw out a world wide challenge on the internet to other junior teams. Naturally an Aussie junior team travels over to take up the challenge and a mini series of one-day-matches follows with a three-day match to end the tour. Predictably, the Australians win the one-day events 2-1 only to be beaten in the three-day match after seemingly having the match in the bag. The book fails to live up to its

billing as an action-packed story. It is simply a written commentary on the series of matches with scorecards, batting and bowling averages thrown in for good measure. The characters are too dull to make the book remotely interesting to all but the most die-hard cricket anorak. Even the existence of an Australian in the English team fails to give the storyline a lift. The diagrams and 'handy cricket tips' do not make up for the fact that this is a dull read. Cricket enthusiasts may find this book appealing and the English Schools Cricket Association recommends it but it won't bowl over the uninitiated. AK

Charm School

AUDIO BOOK ★★★★★

Anne Fine, read by Prunella Scales, Cover to Cover, 2hrs 50mins unabridged, 1 85549 343 8, £8.99

Anne Fine's sharply observed moral tale about what should really matter in a girl's life is cunningly read by Prunella Scales who first milks it for every poisonous nuance and then brings off the more sympathetic resolution. When, by some hideous mistake, Bonny Bramble finds herself at Charm School where every girl's ambition is to be crowned Miss Glistening Tiara she finds herself trapped in a world where naked ambition is masked by glossy presentation and good manners. Bonny's own awakening to what really matters is an interesting journey of discovery. JE

John Bunyon's A Pilgrim's Progress

AUDIO BOOK ★★★★★

Retold by Geraldine McCaughrean, read by Stephen Tompkinson, Hodder, 3hrs abridged, 1 84032 617 4, £7.99

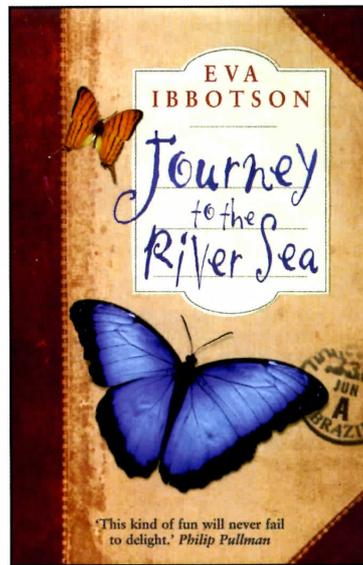
Christian's journey to the City of Gold and redemption has been superbly abridged by Geraldine McCaughrean making it a gripping and compassionate adventure story for children. Stephen Tompkinson's unsensational reading keeps the pace alive without ever labouring the allegory. He captures Christian's wonder as he travels on his bizarre journey surviving temptations and monsters and out-performing others, such as Mrs Smug, who might think to take short cuts. For those who will never read *A Pilgrim's Progress* this is the perfect way to get to the heart of it without ever bothering to. JE

Journey to the River Sea

★★★★★

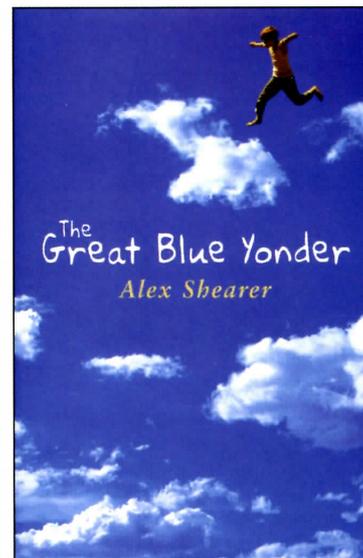
Eva Ibbotson, Macmillan, 304pp, 0 333 94740 1, £9.99 hbk

Maia, a gifted, modest and courageous orphan, is taken from her English boarding school one day to be sent off to a new life with unknown relatives who live in Manaus, an exotic city on the Amazon. She is accompanied by Miss Minton, a dauntingly fierce, learned and mysterious governess, who soon spots that the Carters have thoroughly nasty motives for claiming Maia. In attempting to escape from this badly damaged family, the couple become embroiled in a wild saga involving criminalistic strolling players, a steamboat journey



into the territory of a lost tribe, and an attempt by inept detectives to return a feral youth to his dreaded English inheritance.

This is a thoroughly enjoyable yarn, veering between farce and tragedy, and peopled with highly quixotic but believable characters. It revels in the joy and the danger of exploration, and its core message is contained in the remark made in the final chapter: 'children must lead big lives ... if it is in them to do so.' Very highly recommended for romantics of all ages, and all others in need of a good story. GH



The Great Blue Yonder

★★★★★

Alex Shearer, Macmillan, 192pp, 0 333 96006 8, £9.99 hbk

Harry, a bright and vivacious eleven-year-old, having died beneath the wheels of a lorry, is disappointed to find that 'being dead is mainly paperwork'. But having cleared the grumpy clerk manning the dodgy computer at the reception desk, Harry becomes preoccupied with a deeper concern: the wounding words he left with his sister before embarking on his final bike ride. This humorous and deeply moving book tells of Harry's attempts to resolve this unfinished business, a task he must complete if he is ever to enter the creative oblivion of the wide blue yonder.

This blunt summary might give an impression of morbidity or mawkishness, but the book is neither. Spoken by Harry himself in the sort of naive but heartfelt, jokey but deeply serious monologue that you might find in a Morris Gleitzman novel, this story explores bereavement, transience and healing in a way which is both entertaining and reassuring. GH

Roger McGough

Chris Powling, 0 237 52291 8

Robert Louis Stevenson

John Malam, 0 237 52215 2

NON-FICTION ★★

Evans 'Tell Me About Writers and Illustrators', 24pp, £7.99 each hbk

Both these hardback books are part of a biography series 'which tells the stories of famous people'. There are photographs, paintings, dates, anecdotes, memories and observations of the writer accompanied by a rather patronising narrator's voice which damps down most of the inspiring elements of the writer in question. In Roger McGough's case, it becomes an extremely good piece of publicity for his books. There is also not enough of the poetry and writing to give a flavour of the writer. If you are looking for a book of dates with some illustrations for a project, then these books are helpful - but overall too simplistic with not enough substance and magic. HT

The Hunger: The Diary of Phyllis McCormack, Ireland 1845-1847

Carol Drinkwater, 208pp, 0 439 99740 2

★★★

The Crystal Palace: The Diary of Lily Hicks, London 1850-1851

Frances Mary Hendry, 192pp, 0 439 99739 9

★★★★

Voyage on the Great Titanic: The Diary of Margaret Anne Brady, 1912

Ellen Emerson White, 192pp, 0 439 99742 9

★★★★

Blitz: The Diary of Edie Benson, London 1940-1941

Vince Cross, 160pp, 0 439 99741 0

★★★

Scholastic 'My Story', £4.99 each pbk

By using the genre of the fictionalised diary, these books strive to represent historical periods and events from the perspectives of young, female 'ordinary people' who were involved in them: a peasant farmer's daughter during the potato famine in Ireland; a maid in the London household of the architect who designed the Crystal Palace; an orphanage child acting as a rich lady's 'companion' aboard the Titanic; a Lewisham schoolgirl dreading evacuation more than she fears the Blitz.

In all of the books, the diary format does give a sense of immediate witness to the unfolding of events. However, there are irksome, triangular tensions between the clear pedagogical intent of the series, the demands of storytelling, and the struggle for authenticity in following both the genre features of the diary and the characteristics of contemporary speech.

The books handle these tensions with different degrees of success. I found the romantic, Mills-and-Boonian subplots to the Titanic and Famine books both trite and trivialising, but no doubt many members of their younger target audience would disagree with me. Subplots in the Crystal Palace and Blitz books are more deft and historically contingent: in the former there is an account of the struggle between the staff of the house and its diabolically spoiled 'young master'; in the latter Edie describes how the blitz and evacuation change the personality of her younger brother. In all but the Crystal Palace book, there are jarring intrusions of modern diction, and little of the inconsequential rambling fragments that characterise real diaries. The Crystal Palace book is quite a gem: laconically humorous, authentically voiced, and unsensationally tough. It also has some fascinating architectural details on the building of the palace.

I would recommend all of the books for relaxed, historical reading. They come with very useful appendices of facts, dates and pictures. GH

The Kingfisher Atlas of the World

NON-FICTION ★★

Philip Steele, Kingfisher, 96pp, 0 7534 0275 0, £9.99 pbk

How recently have you replaced an atlas in your household – or classroom, or library? Mountains and coastlines may be as fixed as the rock of ages, but flags, borders and capital cities in certain parts of the world have an annoying habit of changing all too frequently, as publishers are well aware. So the decision to buy a primary atlas in paperback and replace it regularly is probably a wise one, and for a general purpose atlas this paperback edition from Kingfisher will provide adequate support for homework. Originally published in hardback in 1997, this edition has been updated in 2001, offering straightforward, descriptive coverage of major countries of the world and including facts and figures about each continent. The maps are clear enough, but not particularly detailed or attractive. An introductory page includes a simple key and basic guidance on how to read maps, but there is no information given about the projection used. Photographs of physical features and cities are supplemented by some patchy artwork (traditional costumes and local delicacies make frequent appearances). Reasonable value at £9.99, there are better offerings elsewhere from the main cartographic publishing houses. SU

The Facts About Asthma

1 84138 313 9

The Facts About Epilepsy

1 84138 315 5

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Claire Llewellyn, Belitha Press, 32pp, £9.99 each hbk

These two books from a new series on medical conditions give large amounts of information in a very readable format. A combination of text, photographs, graphics, and information boxes make the facts accessible. While one finds information of the kind one would expect about causes, equipment, treatments, etc., there are also unusual sections, such as a history of each of the disorders, information on specialist nurses, and answers to commonly asked questions. A glossary, an index, and a list of some useful organisations add to the impact of the books, and these will be welcome on children's wards and in homes where asthma and epilepsy are all too common problems. Two other books in the series – *Arthritis* and *Diabetes* – are likely to be equally thorough and positive. While aimed at the upper primary/lower secondary age range, they could be used with younger children with assistance. ES

My Best Book of Volcanoes

Simon Adams, ill. Rob Jakeway and Bill Donohoe, 0 7534 0550 4

My Best Book of Big Cats

Christiane Gunzi, ill. Martin Knowlton and Mick Loates, 0 7534 0542 3

NON-FICTION ★★

Kingfisher, 32pp, £7.99 each hbk

These two new titles from Kingfisher's 'Best Book' series are pitched at the 8+ audience with just the right amount of information to satisfy those in need of material for projects and homework. All the essentials are here – properly laid out contents, glossary and index, accessible text, consultants with the right credentials, pronunciation guide for difficult words, historical background, explanatory diagrams etc. At £7.99 they are good value, and yet ... one longs for some spark to really ignite the curious child, to inspire a passion in their chosen subject, to lift them above the workaday. *Big Cats* is marginally more successful in this respect – perhaps due to the subject matter or the stronger illustrators – where the artwork is used to compare the different markings of the tiger or the ways in which cats communicate. However both are sound reference tools and would prove useful additions to a class library. SU

REVIEWS 10–12 Middle/Secondary

Jigsaw

★★★

Carol Hedges, Oxford, 128pp, 0 19 271848 7, £6.99 pbk

Annie (Agnetha) endures her isolation at her English school, missing Norway and taunted for being different by people such as Grant Penney. But when he commits suicide, Annie finds herself drawn into discovering why it happened and what, finally, linked the two of them. This alone would be exciting but there is also a detailed sense of school and even a First World War injustice as just one of the other themes. The book could seem overlaid by the character of Annie carries it all very successfully. She suffers her difference but also revels in it and it is sad and extravagant if she is all used up in this one book. AJ

Tribes

★★★

Catherine MacPhail, Puffin, 144pp, 0 14 130882 6, £4.99 pbk

Tribes is a strongly plotted argument against the gang mentality. Kevin is drawn into The Tribe, a gang under the sway of the charismatic Salom. Seduced by the excitement and camaraderie of the in-crowd, Kevin undergoes a dangerous initiation ritual in which he puts his life at risk. Only gradually does he realise how much truth there is in the warning graffiti on the street corners: SALOM IS EVIL.

There is plenty of tension and incident, and the story would read aloud well to nine- or ten-year-olds.

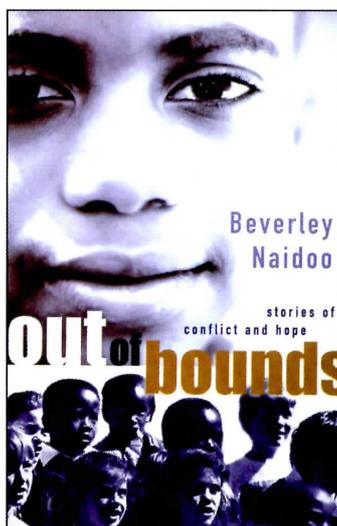
However, its grasp of character and setting is not so sure. The age of the main figures in the novel and their social background is vague. They appear to have the freedom and daring of 13- and 14-year-olds but the interests and emotions of younger children. The child depicted on the cover looks younger than eleven. This lack of clarity may mean that the story lacks the punch that it ought to deliver. CB

Red Velvet

★★★

Carol Hedges, Oxford, 160pp, 0 19 271864 9, £6.99 pbk

Elly has never heard of Aunt Rose, recently taken into hospital, before she goes with her mother to stay at the aunt's house. This and the absence of photos at the house seem not to matter as much as the snatches of the seventeenth-century past that Elly stumbles into. Gradually, the story of the twins, Arbella and Hugh, and the local girl Eleanor, in love with Hugh, is revealed and with it the awful mystery of the old skeleton discovered recently trapped in a trunk. There are also secrets from the more recent past to be uncovered as well as the relentless bullying that Elly has suffered at her school. It is all woven together into an exciting story which takes its unhappy heroine to a position where kindness and an understanding of the past give her confidence to face the future. AJ



Out of Bounds

★★★★★

Beverley Naidoo, Puffin, 160pp, 0 14 130969 5, £4.99 pbk

This collection of stories about South Africa contains one for each of the last seven decades of the twentieth century. This is an absorbing and varied collection, given added poignancy by the historical timeline at the end, relating actual events to the actions and attitudes in individual tales. The tales are deceptively simple and seem to be about mundane lives, but the conscience of an entire nation lies below the surface, waiting for young readers to explore and consider what the apartheid regime actually meant

to ordinary folk of whatever colour.

Good for sharing, this book will make a thought-provoking read for any classroom and a good extension to Naidoo's *Journey to Jo'burg*. DB

Face to Face

★★★

Sandra Glover, Andersen, 160pp, 1 84270 012 X, £9.99 hbk

While *Face to Face* comes with a note at the back advising on stress-induced disorders, and in particular on eating disorders, Glover raises her narrative to more than that of a 'problem novel'. It is a gripping story. Adelle, 15, is facing a number of stressful and emotionally devastating situations. Her successful politician father is in disgrace following incidents in which he was caught shoplifting women's underwear. The deaths of both of her much-loved grandparents and her mother's efforts to establish a new life for herself and Adelle, and her own adolescent concerns about self-image all combine to create a situation in which Adelle feels she is 'out of control'. Adelle is, however, fortunate that classmate Naomi befriends her, and is there to intervene and to summon help at a critical time for Adelle, and to support her on the way to recovery.

Glover nicely layers the build-up of tension, leading the reader to believe, with Adelle, that she is seeing in the mirror bequeathed to her by her grandmother the ghost of sad, long-dead Lucy, a young housemaid who died a horrible death in the attic of Adelle's gran's house while pregnant

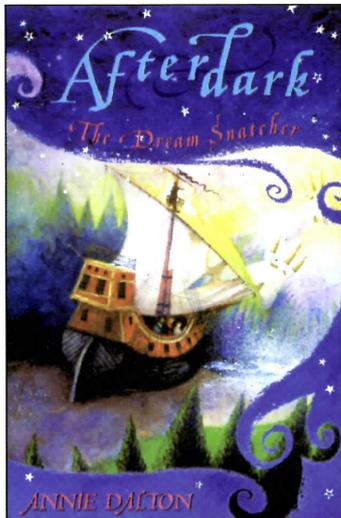
with the child of the master of the house. Glover then peels back the layers to reveal in the end that it is her own anorexic image that haunts Adelle, and it is only through confronting this that she can be cured. VC

The Afterdark series:

The Afterdark Princess

★★★★

128pp, 0 7497 4600 9



The Dream Snatcher

★★★★

192pp, 0 7497 4601 7

The Midnight Museum

★★★★

192pp, 0 7497 4624 6

Annie Dalton, Mammoth, £4.99 each pbk

The first of this series appeared more than ten years ago as an exciting adventure in a fantasy world to which an apparently ordinary teenage babysitter could take her young charges 'afterdark'. It has the magical comfort of a fairy tale, dream world where plain Alice becomes the princess of Afterdark and the terribly fearful Joe can become a hero. The second title, published eight years later, has a more complex and dangerous mission for these same characters. Alongside this there is a wonderful density now to the fantasy both in the plot and the telling – the children have to move well beyond Alice in solving the mystery. The story of the journey through islands and fields of dream for the key to the Dream Snatcher's motives is stunningly done and the sharply realised texture of dreams, the exotic locations and rich characterisation make this my favourite. In the latest addition to the series there is a clear continuation in the characterisation, the magical stealing of children in their dreams and the fantastic landscape. But it has darker tones, appealing to an older readership and a greater use of dialogue and comment to create effects rather than the magical descriptions of the second book. The sequence offers an intriguing view of story and characters 'growing up' and growing out of and into styles of fantasy. AJ

Summertime Blues

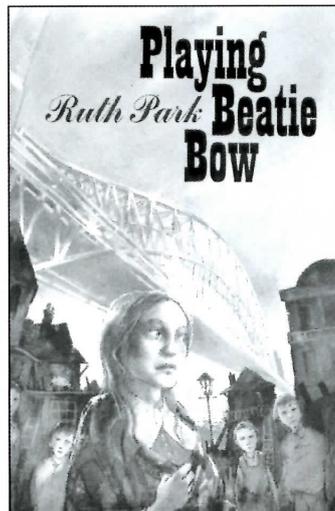
★★★★

Julia Clarke, Oxford, 192pp, 0 19 271871 1, £6.99 pbk

A novel that centres on the agonies suffered and inflicted by teenage Alex when his parents split up. His mum drags him up into rural Yorkshire to live in bucolic strife with her lover. He also has to put up with Faye, the lover's beautiful and insufferably pleasant daughter. His own father stays to putrefy in London with his impregnated young secretary, a fading beauty for whom Alex nurtures a complex passion.

Alex projects his misery onto all around him, except for the doughty young eco-warrior who inducts him into caring for stray animals. A romance seems about to blossom, until Alex realises that he is in fact in love with Faye. Then Dad's secretary goes into perilously early labour and calls on Alex for succour. He rushes down to London to help, and after naming the fragile neonate, is promptly mugged by two female thugs. A day later, he finds himself on a ferry to France, trying to get away from it all...

This is the proverbial emotional roller coaster, but it's written with such pace, humour and believable, adolescent angst that I found it both moving and compelling. Anybody who has ever found it difficult to recognise what is going on inside their own head and heart will probably enjoy this. GH



Playing Beatie Bow

★★★★

Ruth Park, Barn Owl Books, 192pp, 1 903015 11 1, £5.99 pbk

Abigail has learned to live as a child of separated parents, so when her father and mother express a wish to live together again it is just too much for the 14-year-old girl. Then, a children's ghost game, 'Beatie Bow', and a piece of 19th-century lace which Abigail is wearing combine to bring her from late 20th-century Sydney back to New South Wales in 1873 and into the family of Beatie Bow. Abigail finds herself deeply involved with the Bow family, for whom she appears to have some prophetic significance. The sights, sounds and appalling stench of The Rocks area of Sydney are evoked with vividness. The streets are mean and narrow; sanitation and anything near adequate housing are non-existent for many, but it is

against this background that Abigail finds herself learning a great deal about human nature. When she eventually returns to her own time, older and more mature, these lessons stand her in good stead as she begins to cope with her separated parents' wish to live together again.

Since *Playing Beatie Bow* was first published in 1980 The Rocks has been redeveloped as a tourist attraction and it is possible to go on a 'Beatie Bow' trail. This is an engrossing read, and it is good to see it back in print again, but it deserves a more attractive cover. VC

Storm Catchers

★★★★

Tim Bowler, Oxford, 192pp, 0 19 271880 0, £6.99 pbk

As he showed in *River Boy*, Bowler's particular gift is to normalise the supernatural in his treatment of family relationships, making the ghosts of dead relatives or past selves a believable presence in his characters' lives. *Storm Catchers* develops into another such story. To begin with it seems to be a conventional thriller based on kidnapping and extortion, in the hackneyed setting of the Cornish coast, with smugglers' caves, cliffs, lighthouses, and storm-washed islands. Gradually, however, it becomes clear that the kidnapping of 13-year-old Ella is not a money-motivated crime but an act of domestic revenge for earlier tragic events in her family history. The intermediary between everyday reality and the supernatural is Ella's three-year-old brother Sam, whose gifts of telepathy and second sight are matched by his skill in using a dowsing device, the magic pendulum, which can find the whereabouts of missing people. A living avenger and a restless spirit combine to drag past secrets into the light of day. As a thriller, the book is certainly a highly readable page-turner, but its idea of justice and retribution may seem strange to a present-day reader. The 'villain', Ella and Sam's father, is just a fallible human being, and unlucky in his self-righteous family, with whom our sympathies are supposed to lie. Bowler invokes the Greek Furies, but the reader may not share his apparent taste for them as a model of justice. PH

No Fire, No Candle

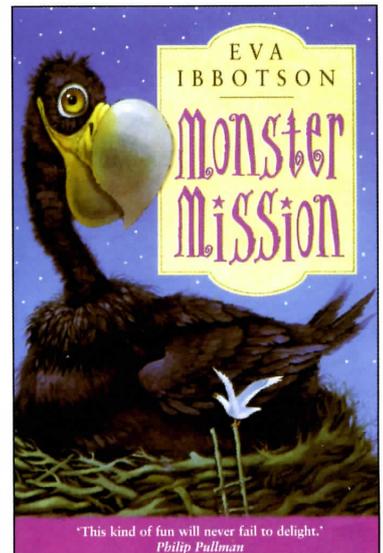
★★★★

Mary Oldham, Pont, 224pp, 1 85902 945 0, £4.95 pbk

When Heledd's father, a revered Welsh nationalist poet, dies she has to move to Oxford to live with her mother and stepfamily. The transition is painful; Heledd is still grieving for her father and is thrust into a new environment that she finds culturally strange and isolating. She yearns to return to Craig Wen.

Heledd's thoughts and feelings focalise the narrative and she strives to understand her father's advice: 'lose your life in order to gain it.' What does this mean? Is it possible to embrace the future but remain in touch with the past? *No Fire, No Candle* provides a perspective on political as well as personal struggle, suggesting that heroism may be motivated by individual need and desire. In his last poem Heledd's father quotes from T E Lawrence: 'I

loved you, so I drew these tides of men into my hands and wrote my will across the sky in stars.' In this reflective novel the central character is complex and well-rounded but it is difficult to sustain interest in the many supporting characters. NG



Monster Mission

★★★★

Eva Ibbotson, Macmillan, 240pp, 0 330 37262 9, £4.99 pbk

Unusual Aunts need young blood to help them run their unusually stocked secret island. Kidnapping seems to be the unorthodox answer, but maybe the three young people who get tangled up in this escapade, are more *chosen* than abducted; for so begins a magical, fantastical adventure.

Filled with humour and colourful eccentrics (both human and beast), this is a delightful read, not without environmentally sound seriousness. So what if there is a bit of stereotyping, especially the villains, the whole is worth any imaginative young reader's time. DB

Spellfall

★★★★

Katherine Roberts, The Chicken House, 240pp, 1 903434 17 3, £5.99 pbk

A vivid fantasy world made even more compelling by the intercutting of narrative strands within and between fantasy and real worlds. Natalie knows that what seems like a crumpled sweet wrapper is a discarded spell but not that it is a bait to trap her, part of the Spellmage's attempt to trick his way back into Earthhaven. Natalie's kidnapping causes her drunken father (who use to be a 'travelling salesman' for recycled spells) and her aggressive stepbrother to change their ways and try to rescue her. Meanwhile the Spellmage's son (poorly able to work magic and ironically named Merlin) works against his father to help Natalie and uses his derided knowledge of computers against the 'virus' attacking Earthhaven. With the addition of unicorns and magehounds, casters and spell trees, gangs, police and battles, this has everything for all kinds of readers. AJ

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The Black Dogs of Doom

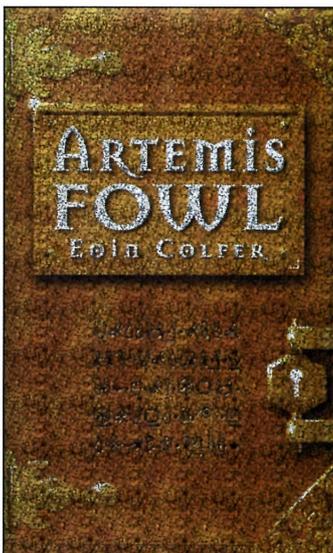
★★★

Anthony Masters, Bloomsbury, 272pp, 0 7475 5081 6, £5.99 pbk

The Ness - 605. The menacing Dogs of Doom threaten Corrie's peaceful life. What are their intentions? Sinister changes in weather patterns warn of impending disaster. The Calibans are advancing.

Brixton, London, 2005. Elderly Mrs Prend is burgled. Mysteriously, the only thing stolen is an old book that she calls The Spellbinder. Si, a distant relative, finds himself drawn into the mystery when his dreams start to converge with unfolding events.

Masters skilfully weaves together the two narrative strands in this magical thriller. An archetypal battle of good and evil ensues and each side seeks to employ the Maverick Magic, which refuses to submit to the will of either side only allowing itself to be temporarily harnessed. Set on the bleak Kent coast by Dungeness, the story arises out of the spirit of place, which Masters is renowned for evoking. In part 1, the threat is rendered through powerful prose: 'One of the black dogs lifted a leg and ejected a steady stream of urine on to the sea cabbage that grew out of the pebbles. Slowly the plant began to turn an acid green, its brittle leaves scattering in the salt breeze.' The suspense is palpable. So it is disappointing that the writing is less arresting in part 2 and some of the encounters with the dark side do not live up to the promise created in the earlier chapters. Nevertheless, this is an exciting and satisfying story. NG



Artemis Fowl

★★★★

Eoin Colfer, Viking, 296pp, 0 670 89962 3, £12.99 hbk

'Leprechaun' is a corruption by the Mud People (human beings) of LEPrecon, an elite arm of the Lower Elements Police, the force responsible for internal and external security in the fairy world. The joke sums up neatly the special nature of this comic fantasy, which combines the ancient characters of myth and legend with a hi-tech James Bond clash between good and evil in the upper and nether worlds. Its fairy heroine is Captain Holly Short, an engaging LEPrecon operative whose courage and resource go with scant respect for the rule-book. Holly is abducted by hi-tech archcriminal Artemis Fowl, a Goldfinger of the human world, whose ambition is to finger some fairy gold. Artemis is just twelve years old, but his father's loss and his mother's breakdown have given him the chance to exercise his criminal genius before the Social Services find out about him. This precocious mastermind penetrates the hitherto unbroken secrets of the fairy world, and is able to use his ill-gotten expertise for kidnapping and extortion. The combined forces of leprechauns, sprites, dwarves, a super-scientific centaur

called Foaly, and (very riskily) a troll, engage in a titanic battle of arms and wits with Artemis and his over-muscled bodyguard, one Butler. The book is simultaneously thriller, comedy and satire, intercut with some effective passing attacks on human eco-crimes such as pollution, which show why the fairies are wise to keep to themselves. The novel's success (like Harry Potter's) comes from cleverly mixing genres, and it provides a very entertaining read for Artemis's age-group, whether criminals or not. PH

The Kingdom by the Sea

AUDIO BOOK

★★★

Robert Westall, read by Steven Mackintosh, HarperCollins, 3hrs abridged, 0 00 711774 4, £8.99

Robert Westall's prize-winning novel of Harry's survival after the presumed death of his parents in an air raid is sympathetically read by Steven Mackintosh who gives it a strong sense of place with his use of mild Tyneside accents. Harry's first instinct is to run away, just to ensure that he is not sent to live with disagreeable relatives. Teaming up with Don, a dog he finds abandoned on the beach, Harry travels further and further from home both physically and metaphorically. It is a journey of personal exploration for Harry; a rite of passage from child to adult, as he learns to survive in his own kingdom. The ending raises interesting points about the freedom of children to make their own choices. JE

The New Faber Book of Children's Verse

POETRY

★★★★

Edited by Matthew Sweeney, ill. Sara Fanelli, Faber, 304pp, 0 571 19532 6, £16.99 hbk

It is fifty years since the first edition of this anthology. Sweeney has made a new selection, aimed at 9-15 year-olds, with the emphasis on quality. He mixes the expected with less familiar work, both classic and modern, and, if anything, favours the classic. De la Mare, for instance, who has not been much in favour with recent anthologists, is well represented.

There are only a few poets in translation and, of the wider English speaking world, the Americans make the best showing. Sweeney's personal preferences are exercised here, with Miroslav Holub, Emily Dickinson and Theodore Roethke given prominence. Nor does the collection stray much into the world of performance poetry, although Roger McGough and Benjamin Zephaniah are included. There are, inevitably, some popular writers of children's verse, like Allan Ahlberg, who do not find a place.

Fanelli's black and white illustrations are clever doodles in the margins of the pages and do not add a great deal to the enjoyment of the poems, serving mainly to confirm Faber's sophisticated house style. As usual, Faber make no concessions to child appeal in the presentation.

The great pleasure of the collection, apart from the poems that are not so well known, is in Sweeney's arrangement. He makes subtle connections, sometimes by theme and sometimes by style, that lead intriguingly from poem to poem. Anthologist and poet seem to be in a conversation with the reader that, whether joking or deadly serious, is always respectful. This is an anthology that carries its readers gently out into poetry's deeper waters. CB

Poets of the First World War

NON-FICTION

★★★

Nicola Barber and Patrick Lee-Browne, Evans 'Writers in Britain', 32pp, 0 237 52239 X, £10.99 hbk

The blurb describes this as a book which 'examines the experiences of soldiers who found artistic expression in their poetry for the horrors of warfare, and looks at the historical, political and social background which shaped the poetry of the war.' Unfortunately, this book cannot decide whether it is a history book or a book about war poets with an historical perspective.

The background history is excellent, the photographs, paintings and primary sources are interesting. Disappointingly, the history and the poets remain separate. There is not enough of the poetry and not enough about the poets themselves. The reader is left feeling detached, with only a superficial taste of this great war poetry and the poets who tried to describe and make sense of the situation they were in. They deserve more of a response from us – as the poet Keith Douglas says ‘... my object ... is to write true things, significant things, in words each of which works for its place in the line ...’ HT

Backyard Science

0 7513 6252 2

Kitchen Science

0 7513 6253 0

NON-FICTION ★★★

Chris Maynard, Dorling Kindersley, 48pp, £7.99 each hbk

As countless other author/publisher partnerships, and Gregor Mendel, have found, the Kitchen and Garden make good laboratories. This cannot just be because, there, splashes and messes are more easily forgiven and cleared up than in the parlour (where Victorians used to show off *their* experiments), but ‘take it outside’ or ‘do it over the sink’ are still useful precautionary instructions when anyone starts messing about investigatively.

So in ‘Backyard’ we find plenty of investigations that have little to do with horticulture. The addition of astronomy, cardiovascular physiology, solar clock and the Doppler effect to more familiar plant and soil-based experiments extends the scientific range of the book and makes more of it accessible to those without lawns and flowerbeds. ‘Kitchen’ is more completely culinary, though. We can make butter, blow soap bubbles, discover that skinned lemons sink and discover that toasters make toast, ice melts in the hand and oven-racks make a nice twanging sound when played with a wooden spoon.

In each volume the ‘Science’ contribution is lightly stated and

sufficient only to the needs of the ‘fantastic experiments’ (over 50 in each book) so these are not science books first and foremost but fun things to do, with, as Duke Ellington didn’t quite say, ‘Science in the background’. But they are undeniably friendly, safe and, in the main, sound (although don’t try the ‘heart’ experiment on p.45 of ‘Backyard’ without much bigger washing-up bowls than those pictured; small dustbins would be better, as the experiment involves five gallons of water).

Not essential for a school library, these books would nonetheless make a pleasant addition and their production suggests that they will last until next summer’s holidays, when they will be at their most useful. TP

Why do People Join Gangs?

NON-FICTION ★★

Julie Johnson, Wayland, 48pp, 0 7502 2761 3, £10.99 hbk

Johnson is a consultant in education for personal and social development, and this is a title in a new series which seeks to answer why people do potentially anti-social things like drink alcohol, take drugs and gamble. I can see this book having a place as an aid to discussions with young adults in schools or youth clubs. However, the question is a difficult one to answer simply. Part of the difficulty comes from Johnson’s wide definition of gangs, which includes playground bullies, the Mafia and the Ku Klux Klan.

Johnson is properly concerned with what they have in common, particularly the use of violence and intimidation, but perhaps does not distinguish clearly enough between informal patterns of everyday bullying and gangs organised with criminal or political intentions. The connections that she makes, between what her readers will have seen on the news and in films, and what they will have experienced in their own lives, would perhaps work better in open discussion. This is a well-organised and produced book but it doesn’t quite come together. The

photographs of Los Angeles street gangs, Neo-Nazi thugs and scenes from *The Godfather* contrast sharply with the posed scenes of teenage actors illustrating the more mundane reality of bullying. It includes a helpful list of organisations, further reading and resources. CB

The Life of Stephen Lawrence

NON-FICTION ★★★

Verna Allette Wilkins, Tamarind, 48pp, 1 870516 58 3, £10.99 hbk

It may seem brutal, but nonetheless true, to observe that it is Stephen Lawrence’s death rather than his life that has made his name famous. It is also true that it was the very ordinariness of his short life that underscored the tragedy of his death.

To write a book dealing with his life therefore presents a special challenge to any author. Yet to prevent his name from being soon forgotten, it is necessary for young persons to be able to identify with him as a person rather than as a name associated with a series of remote Public Inquiry recommendations. Wilkins rises to the challenge by lovingly recounting the principal incidents of Stephen’s life from birth to starting school, school trips, family and friends, sporting activities, secondary school, hobbies etc. culminating with his untimely death. The text is supported by attractive colour illustrations (roughly one for each of the twelve chapters) which underpin the warmth of the text. The print size and general layout should make it very user friendly for 10 to 12 year-olds.

It is already eight years since Stephen Lawrence’s murder and one weakness of the book is that it is based on the assumption that the reader will already know something about either Stephen Lawrence or the significance of the events following his murder. Apart from a brief postscript mentioning the setting up of the Public Inquiry following his death, there is no real attempt to put things into perspective. The only reference to the Inquiry’s findings (p38) are: ‘The Inquiry recommended that, “Consideration be given to

amendment of the National Curriculum aimed at valuing cultural diversity and preventing racism.” – nowhere as important in my opinion as the far reaching recommendations relating to the investigation of racist incidents, police recruitment, training, institutional racism and dozens of other police matters which dominate the report.

However useful guides are added for further information and this subject lends itself to classroom discussion or a special project involving some adult guidance. EL

Mary Queen of Scots and her Hopeless Husbands

NON-FICTION ★★★

Margaret Simpson, ill. Philip Reeve, Hippo ‘Dead Famous’, 208pp, 0 439 99926 X, £3.99 pbk

Mary Queen of Scots was Queen of Scotland at 6 days old, Queen of France at 17, and a widow a year later. After two more husbands, one of whom died in spectacular and mysterious fashion, she was executed at the age of 45. She spent most of her adult life under one sort of house arrest or another, and much of the rest at the mercy of other people’s ambitions.

This is a shamelessly anachronistic biography, of the ‘Horrible History’ lineage, mixing narrative, comic strip, fake tabloid reportage, personal correspondence and ‘secret diaries’. Well supported by the comic costume drama of Reeves’s illustrations, it relies on humour and gore to keep its audience’s attention. Simpson uses it all to great effect for 8-12 year-olds raising interesting questions about Mary’s life and her place in British history. Most telling is Simpson’s implicit comparison with Mary’s cousin and eventual executioner Elizabeth I, another woman whose descent gave her power, but whose sex made her vulnerable. CB

REVIEWS 12+ Secondary

The Brimstone Journals

★★★★

Ron Koertge, Walker, 128pp, 0 7445 8521 X, £4.99 pbk

Page by page, fifteen American high school students share their hang-ups, loves and hates, and the pressures of parents and peers. This is a terse, raw, dark novel, informed by the news stories of teenagers with guns slaughtering their classmates. Presented like free verse, each voice confides in the reader as if to a private diary, without inhibition or mitigation. It begins powerfully, with explicit connections between sexuality and violence. As each witness pours out their anxiety, guilt and anger, they reveal a divided society, whose conflicting demands are experienced with full force by these vulnerable young people. Koertge hasn’t given himself enough space to explore or resolve the

tensions that he ruthlessly discovers. In the end, the situation is too easily contained, and, although Lester, the class fat boy, serves as a focus, the cast of characters is perhaps too large to deploy effectively without the benefit of a conventional narrative. Still, it’s a disturbing read, which raises interesting questions and connections, and will invite horror, sympathy and recognition from older teenagers on this side of the Atlantic. CB

Going to Egypt

★★★

Helen Dunmore, Red Fox ‘Definitions’, 144pp, 0 09 941195 4, £4.99 pbk

For 13-year-old Colette the notion of ‘going to Egypt’ will for some time remain a dream. A seaside holiday with her father may seem a poor substitute, but it allows for a different journey, one which takes her towards

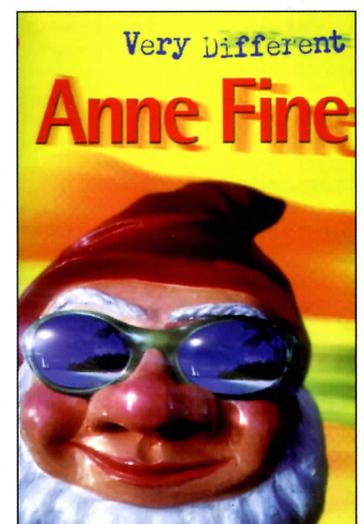
some initial insights into adolescent hurt and love. This illumination results, in particular, from her meeting Caz, whose handsome looks hide a personal story of loss, sadness and anger: it is during a dramatic caving expedition with him that Colette begins to understand these emotions and to relate them to her own situation. Although rather slow-moving to begin with, this variation on the themes of summer romance and first love has considerable subtlety and should be especially popular with young teenage girls. RD

Very Different

★★★★★

Anne Fine, Mammoth, 160pp, 0 7497 4370 0, £4.99 pbk

These nine short stories snugly fit the collection’s title. They range from the bizarre – a homecoming party for a garden gnome, to the compassionate – a gay teenager finding the courage



to tell his family, the humorous – a dour Scotsman who finds to his

Editor's Choice

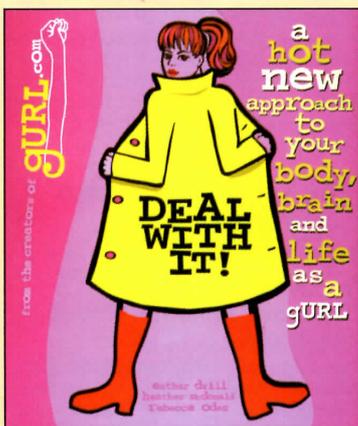
Deal With It!

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Esther Drill, Heather McDonald and Rebecca Odes, Pocket Books (Simon & Schuster), 320pp, 0 7434 0397 5, £12.99 pbk

Subtitled 'a hot new approach to your body, brain and life as a girl' this large format paperback with its shocking pink, die cut double cover that opens to reveal a girl flashing you (although modestly wearing bra and pants), breaks new ground with its stunning, in your face design, and in its generous coverage of every aspect of female adolescence – from body changes and sexuality to issues of individuation and difference. Along the way, the book also takes in relationships, self destructive behaviours, drugs, family conflicts, depression and more. Neat design devices throughout the book help to make information accessible while the tone is direct, sensitive, unpatronising and often humorous.

This book has its genesis in the authors' website (gURL.com) which they began as a school project in



1996. Perhaps this helps to explain the directness and modernity of their approach. They include commentary from teenage girls on their site and this serves to normalise the diversity of experience girls have – the chat room comes to life on the page! American in origin, the book has been prepared for the UK market with listings of UK organisations and resources for further help. This is mostly well done if a bit thin in some sections. All in all, this is an excellent users' manual and one that is so invitingly put together I can even imagine girls buying it for themselves... RS

despair that his firstborn son excels at intricate embroidery, and the wittily clever – a philosopher outwitted intellectually by his two daughters.

Apart from representing excellent value for money and providing a rich source for classrooms these stories offer a new perspective on familiar themes. They were first published from 1992-2001 with the strongest in the collection written most recently: 'The Ship of Theseus' is superb. VR

The Beguilers

★★★★★

Kate Thompson, Bodley Head, 160pp, 0 370 32573 7, £10.99 hbk

Fourteen-year-old Rilka is an outsider, unsure of her future in a tribe afraid of the unconventional or daring. At her village meeting she announces her Great Intention – to catch one of the 'beguilers' who haunt and terrify her people. With the help of new friends, she succeeds in her task, discovering much else on the way.

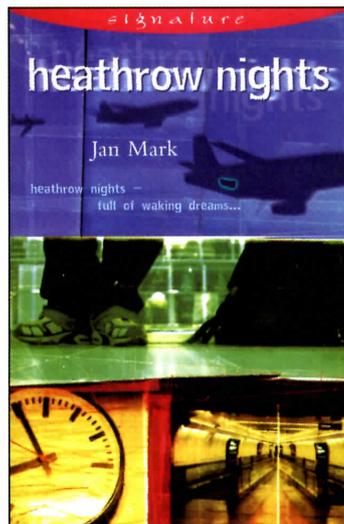
My tester found this harder-going than I did, perhaps because the first-person narrative is introspective and rather dense. Much about the imaginary tribal culture, set in an unspecified time, is left unexplained, but a very vivid picture is created nevertheless, and Thompson's empathy with young teenagers going out into the world, a recurring theme of her books, is evident. AG

Heathrow Nights

★★★★★

Jan Mark, Hodder 'Signature', 192pp, 0 340 77411 8, £4.99 pbk

When they are excluded from a half-term trip as a school punishment, Russell and his two friends decide to delay the inevitable consequences at home by taking a trip of their own. Nothing goes right and without a



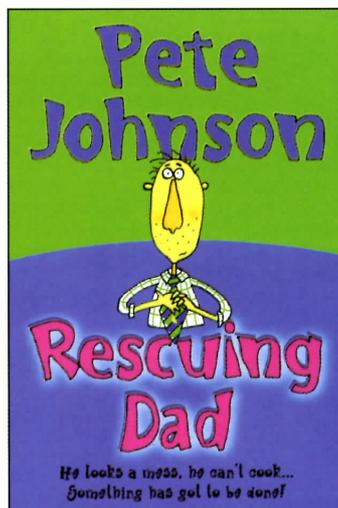
place to stay they eventually 'settle' at Heathrow. Here the strange dislocations of their lives are echoed and Russell, light-headed from sleeplessness, muses on the story of Hamlet and its parallels with his own life: dead father, mother recently remarried and his uneasy relationship with his own 'Claudius'. A flight of fancy in a strange twilight existence from which Russell is finally brought to earth by his stepfather and they talk and drink their way into some kind of understanding. The book has a fine madness to it. AJ

Rescuing Dad

★★★★★

Pete Johnson, Corgi Yearling, 208pp, 0 440 86457 7, £4.99 pbk

Children are often the victims when a marriage falters or fails and in *Rescuing Dad* Pete Johnson illuminates this distressing reality with the perceptive humour which is a trademark of his work.



When Claire and Joe's parents decide to separate the children are determined that the reconciliation must be effected as soon as possible. The object of their campaign – Dad Mark 2 – is to correct their father's failings and render him once again irresistible to their mother. They pursue their goal with vigour – discouraging a potential boyfriend from wooing their mother and embarking on a fitness campaign and a strict programme of domestication with their father. The results are by turn hilarious, thought provoking and shot through with a strong bolt of realism: the events of Joe's birthday are as fine a piece of slapstick comedy as I have read. Their parents are finally distracted from their own concerns and focused on the feelings and needs of their children – no watertight happy ending here but a clear indication of hope for the future – and, perhaps a sequel? VR

His Dark Materials: The Amber Spyglass

AUDIO BOOK ★★★★★

Philip Pullman, read by Philip Pullman and full cast, Cavalcade, 14hrs 55mins unabridged, 0 7540 7153 7, £29.99

Whoever made the decision to go for a full cast reading of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* took a bold gamble which has paid off handsomely. Against the trend of the time which was clearly in favour of narration, a full cast reading is more challenging to listen to but, for a work as complex as this, much more rewarding, too. Pullman's own narration gives a clear framework for all the stories. In *The Amber Spyglass*, as with the others, he reads at a brisk pace, setting the scenes for the extensive cast to carry out their cleverly interwoven roles. All three books have characters whom it is hard to imagine realised but *The Amber Spyglass* has the particular difficulties of the angels Baruch and Balthamos and the extraordinary and tiny Gallivespian to carry off. Suffice to say all works perfectly with every nuance of pathos, wit and humanity extracted from this magnificent book. JE

Ultraviolet

★★★

Lesley Howarth, Puffin, 256pp, 0 14 131078 2, £4.99 pbk

'We're supposed to care about the



story, but it's just a string of events, not much character development, no humour in it or anything' says Vi, the heroine, on the penultimate page. Or is it her father, Nick, who says that? You can't tell the difference since there is no distinction between their voices.

For more than two hundred pages, I'd been mulling almost those exact words for this review – and only then did I realise I'd fallen into Howarth's trap. Possibly. This dystopia is set in 2020 (perfect vision, maybe?) when the ozone layer has gone and it is almost impossible to live 'outside'. The plot – apparently – sets daughter against father who works for BluShield, a profit-hungry company with a monopoly grip on their product which nullifies the UV effects of the Sun. The narrative careers confusingly (but now I see why) between the Questworld of a huge computer game and the scorching territory outside the almost subterranean city of Condorcut.

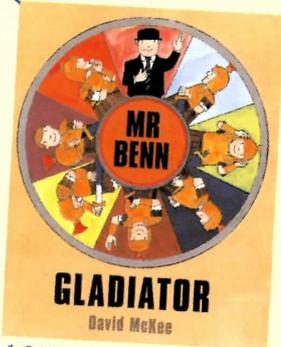
But which bits of the story are virtual and which actual? And do we care about characters who seem so two dimensional and humourless? (Just like characters in a computer game, in fact.) At the end of the book, Vi and her father Nick take off their headsets, and one or other of them utters the words at the head of this review; in the computer's printer lies a manuscript entitled 'UltraViolet'. It is the 'book of the game' they have been playing. 'Who needs reality when you can read?' asks Nick. 'Or Quest,' replies his daughter. It's certainly a very clever game that Lesley Howarth is playing with her readers – there is a kind of 1984 appeal in the setting and the language and also a sense that there is possibly a moral message somewhere. It's clever, but it is also exasperating. I came to the end and immediately wanted to go back to the beginning to work the whole thing out to see just which game the author was playing with me, and when, and had she played fair? I suspect gaming and problem solving early adolescent readers will have a similar reaction (unless they crack it first time around, of course). And can she really get away with 2D characters, no humour and just a string of events...? GF

Picture books reviewed in this issue relevant to older readers:

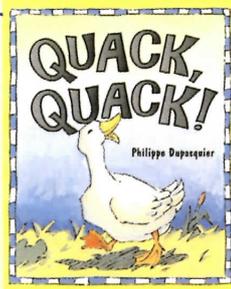
The Snail House (see p22)

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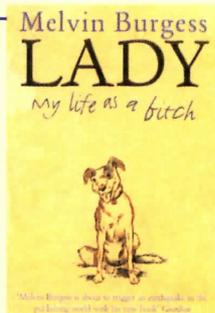
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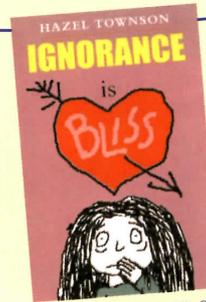
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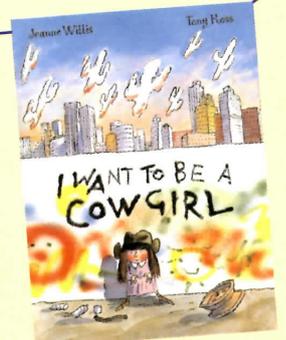
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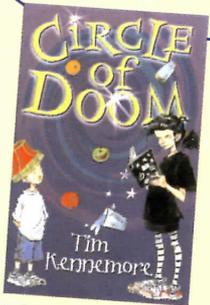
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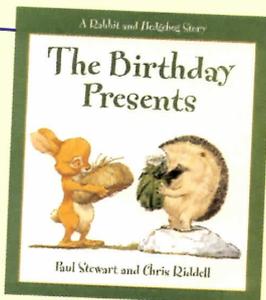
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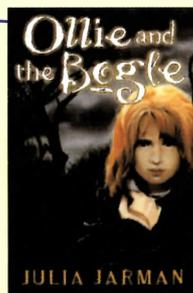
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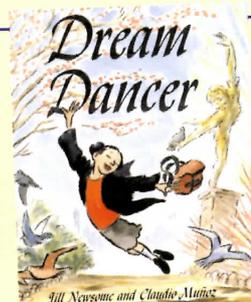
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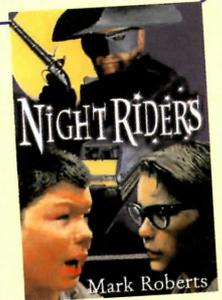
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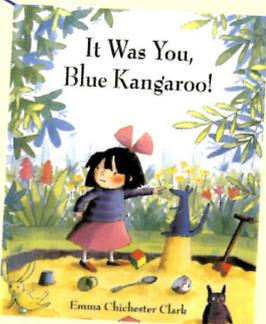
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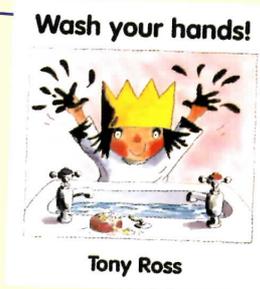
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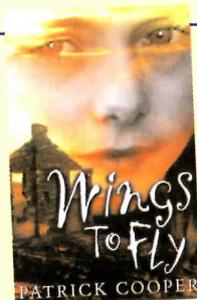
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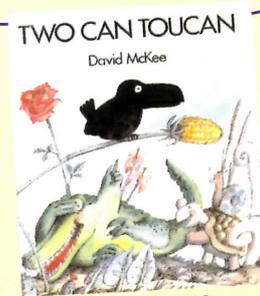
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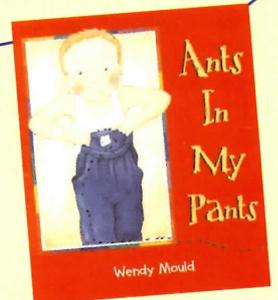
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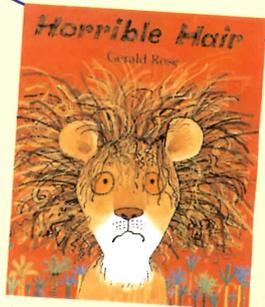
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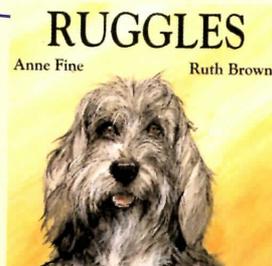
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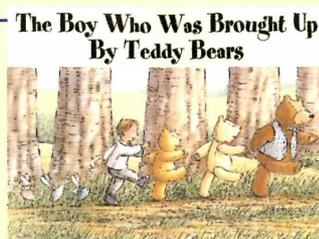
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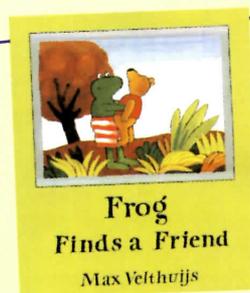
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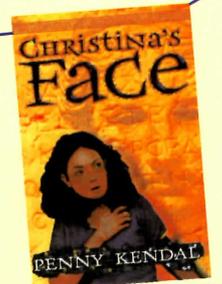
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25
YEARS

CLASSICS IN SHORT No. 29

Brian Alderson

In which an exploitation is made from 100 Aker Wood to Holly Wood; or, isn't it funny how merchandise makes money? Boo, hoo, hoo, poor old ...

There was a sound of revelry by night.

Nothing to do with Waterloo – although it did occur on the sports ground of the Honourable Artillery Company. Rather it was members of the Garrick Club, in their jolly ties, enjoying a little smackerel of something by way of celebration.

The immediate sponsor

of the jollifications was the Walt Disney Corporation who had recently handed over many millions of pounds to the Club, as also to the Royal Literary Fund and to Westminster School. The true founder of the feast though was A A Milne, whose happy legatees which had also included his son, Christopher Robin, were here receiving a modest competence for the sale of some merchandising rights.

And that meant Pooh.

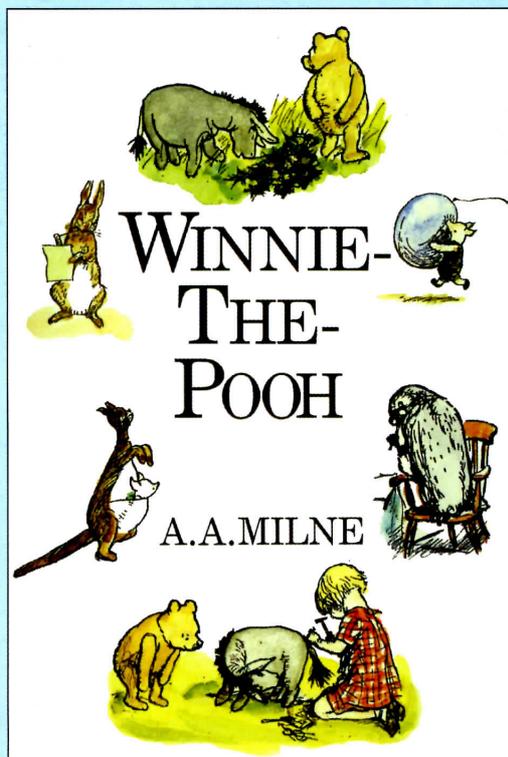
It meant other things as well, of course, but the origin of the wealth lay in Milne's four famous books and Winnie-the-Pooh is the outstanding emblem of their presence. In fact, he made an appearance, as Mr Edward Bear, in a Bellocian ballad, in the first of them, **When We Were Very Young** (1924), and since he was clearly a notable resident in the Milne nursery it is unsurprising to find him becoming the hero of a bedtime story as well.

Winnie-the-Pooh: 'a new story for children'

was printed as a Christmas Eve treat in the **Evening News** in 1925, and next day figured among the festive wireless programmes. It was the tale of the bear and the bees, cast in the awkward narrative frame of a dialogue between teller and listener that was retained for the first chapter of the book 'in which we are introduced ...' Although no further instalments were envisaged, the success of that story (as concept and in its execution) inspired Milne to sequels, seven of which were printed in the **Royal Magazine** before the book itself was published in October 1926. (This year's 75th anniversary is deemed by the publishers to be fit occasion for some commercial junketing.) The ten tales of **Winnie-the-Pooh** were followed by the ten of **The House at Pooh Corner** in 1928 and the total amounts to the Pooh Bear Canon.

His name

has been the subject of near-metaphysical debate, not greatly helped by the author's Introduction to the first book (the second one, on advice from



Owl, had a 'Contradiction'). Apparently 'Winnie' comes from a brown bear deposited at the London Zoo during the First World War by a Canadian soldier who had called it after his home-state, Winnipeg. As for 'Pooh', said implausibly to have been borrowed from a swan, that's anyone's guess, although cloacal explanations are barred as anachronistic. Christopher Robin himself insisted on the masculinity of the name: *recte* Winnie-ther-Pooh. 'You know what "ther" means?'

His adventures

have also been the subject of critical debate, most memorably by Dorothy Parker, as 'Constant Reader' in the **New Yorker**: 'it is that word "hummy", my darlings, that marks the first place at which Tonstant Weader throws up'. Any assessment more objective than that runs serious risk of being idiotic – as demonstrated in Frederick Crews's **Pooh Perplex** of 1963 which used the text to guy the language and critical dispositions of contemporary academics. (Alas, it came too soon to deal with Deconstruction, Post-modernism, Post-colonialism, and Gender Studies. The thought of what it might have done for them should deter the editor of **BfK** from any ambitious plans for a competition to bring **Winnie-the-Pooh** up to date. Useless to hazard a female support-group for single-parent Kanga, or a full clarification of the relationship between Pooh and Piglet, or a transfer of the whole shebang to Finsbury Park.)

The only Rissolution

for critical doubts seems to me to lie in an assertion of the Absolute Integrity of the texts as originally published by Messrs Methuen. Those chaste octavos make no extravagant claims for themselves. Take the authorial voice or leave it as you choose, but accept (even without the help of Alan Bennett) that this urbane storytelling is not subject to modification. The word-play, the self-reflexiveness, the jokes that fly over the heads of a nursery audience are (*pace* Tonstant Weader) a necessary defence against an incipient banality. Furthermore, you find in those early printings the one, true, authentic manifestation of the work of Pooh's other creator: E H Shepard. The perfection of his visualisations and of their sequencing through the text stand among the triumphs of English book illustration.

Which is to bewail the merchandisers.

Like Peter Rabbit and Babar and other nursery heroes, Winnie-the-Pooh early fell victim to the exploiters of his popularity, and the integrity of those early printings has been compromised more damagingly than most. Shepard himself was responsible for colouring-up the drawings, thus obliterating much of their expressive line, and the publishers have compounded matters with their tumult of excerpts, adaptations, novelties, and fatuous cook-books, work-out books etc. Disney accelerated the band-wagon over thirty years ago, sullyng what was left of the Enchanted Places, and on the evidence of seven pages of 'character marketing' in Egmont's latest catalogue the welcome 'Special Facsimile Editions' of the original books are hopelessly outweighed by the kitsch. But the Garrick chaps did have a sportive evening on the dodgems. ■

Ann Thwaite's definitive biography, **A A Milne: His Life**, is still in print (Faber, 0 571 16168 5, £14.99), but not her lively study of **The Brilliant Career of Winnie-the-Pooh** (Methuen, 1992) nor yet Brian Sibley's account of Shepard's drawings in **The Pooh Sketchbook** (Methuen, 1982).

The cover shown is from the Classic Hardback Colour Edition (Egmont, 0 416 16860 4, £11.99).

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