

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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*the children's
book magazine*



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CoverStory

This issue's cover is from Andrew Matthews' and Angela Barrett's *The Orchard Book of Shakespeare Stories*. Angela Barrett is interviewed by Quentin Blake on page 14. Thanks to Orchard Books for their help with this November cover.



EDITORIAL

Is the repression of individual desires necessary for the individuation of the individual within society? One of the themes of Melvin Burgess's daring new novel, *Lady, My Life as a Bitch*, is the interplay between the internal life of a troubled, semi-delinquent 17-year-old, Sandra Francy, and societal demands.

The novel starts as Sandra gets off with new boyfriend, Wayne, and the feeling makes her 'shine'. The repetition of that thrilling moment is something she could do 'over and over again until the end of my life'. Sandra is, then, a female Don Juan, endlessly and compulsively replaying the thrill of connection with one new sexual partner after another. Wayne is not the 'first boy ever, or even the first boy that month'. The only problem is that Sandra is getting 'tired'. She sees conventional society as joyless drudgery stretching ahead: 'Nappies and shit and exams and tests and work and forever and ever and ever amen.'

A constant theme in Burgess's oeuvre is the reckless lengths that people will go to in the avoidance of pain. In *Junk*, his Carnegie Medal winning novel about drug taking, the world is blotted out by needles. In *Bloodtide*, it is safer to kill before you are yourself consumed. In *Lady*, we discover that Sandra's father left when she was nine and now has a new family. She tells us: 'if my rage had the ability to turn people into animals, half of Manchester would be on four legs by now.' For her then, sexuality is not a path to intimacy but a protection against real contact.

Transformed into a dog and thus freed from social constraints, Sandra (or Lady as she is now called), is reduced to basic biological instincts: 'We dogs, we just do what we want to do... I don't think. I just do.' Turning into a dog means that Sandra will remain forever under the dominance of what Freud called 'the pleasure principle'*.

Some commentators have found the depiction of sex in this novel shocking. In a society where so much is sexualised, this can seem a kneejerk reaction to a novel which appears to be a tongue in cheek metaphor for existential choice – and *Lady* does not conclude that the sole pursuit of biological drives leads to human growth and happiness. This is an edgy, original and challenging novel of ideas that is also unexpectedly poignant – not least when Sandra/Lady finally chooses to continue 'life as a bitch'. When pain and confusion cannot



Rosemary Stones

find a bearable and constructive path, it is an unsurprising outcome.

Plus ça change...

Commenting on the advance of corporate publishing in the 1980s and 1990s, an entry in the recently published *The Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English*, tells us that 'batches of children's books tended to be handed over for review not to a specialist, but to any willing parents on the staff.'

Fast forward to the *Bookseller* of 28 September '01, and you will find Sainsbury's Baby Book Award judge Caroline Sanderson in an article on the quality of the titles submitted blithely telling us that she is 'no child development expert, nor have I spent much time working in children's publishing. My qualification for judging the Baby Book Award stems almost entirely from the fact that I have two small children of my own, the younger a baby of three months. But this carries with it a pretty good idea of what works and what doesn't.'

Perhaps Ms Sanderson is being disingenuous. But is being a parent a qualification in itself for judging a children's book prize? Being a Spice Girl is good if you want to judge the Blue Peter Children's Book Awards but that's a show business award, as it were. It had appeared that the Sainsbury's Baby Book Award was aiming to pitch itself at a more serious level of debate.

* 'Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning' by Sigmund Freud, Penguin Freud Library, Vol. 11.

Lady, My Life as a Bitch by Melvin Burgess is published by Andersen Press (0 86264 770 3, £10.99).

The Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English, edited by Victor Watson, is published by Cambridge University Press (0 521 55064 5, £35.00).

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Treats at Christmas



Joanna Carey has sifted through the great pile of picture books and gift books published for the Christmas market. Here are her choices of the very best for Christmas giving.

Something I look out for every Christmas is a new Frog book from the Dutch author/artist Max Velthuijs. Every year, Velthuijs creates a new story about Frog and his group of friends – a charmingly odd assortment of animals who stick together through thick and thin. With gentle humour that eschews irony, and a graphic style that is eloquent in its simplicity, Velthuijs addresses matters that concern us all – from friendship, loyalty, and happiness, to loneliness, fear, discrimination, even death (that was in 1991, when Frog found a dead blackbird). His stories show the importance of respect within the community, and how mistakes and misunderstandings can usually be sorted out if we can communicate with one another. Although he is not the brainiest of creatures, Frog is an inspirational character who seems to lead from behind. He has no preconceptions and it is in a spirit of innocent enquiry that he uncovers the truth and brings out the best in everyone. In **Frog Finds a Friend**, although the artwork lacks some of its usual intensity, Velthuijs adds a powerful new dimension to the anthropomorphic magic when Frog finds a teddy bear. ‘He’s my new friend,’ says Frog. ‘He’s going to live with me.’ But the other animals are scornful. ‘It’s just a toy,’ says Hare. ‘It can’t even talk!’ ‘I’m going to teach him,’ says Frog. And, because he believes he can, he does. Then, when Frog has invested so much in his friendship with this newcomer, Bear suddenly develops a will of his own. And there is a shocking moment when, in a double page spread, Bear sits alone on a rock staring into the distance and you just know he is planning to leave, to go back where he came from. There are ten books in the Frog series now – so get

Frog Finds a Friend.



them all. The beauty of a series like this is that children get to understand the way the artist uses his graphic skills to tell the story, they learn to interpret the very subtle gestures, and the way colour is used to express emotion.



“Well, if Blue Kangaroo can’t behave he’ll have to sit by himself downstairs,” said Lily’s mother. And she put him on top of the bookcase, out of reach.

It Was You, Blue Kangaroo! is the third of Emma Chichester Clark’s stories about the relationship between a child and her favourite toy. Lily is going through a naughty phase, and blaming it all on Blue Kangaroo. Blue Kangaroo cannot speak up for himself but his frustration and his eye-swivelling anxiety is evident in eloquent close-ups. Eventually, one night while Lily is sleeping, he decides to do something about Lily’s behaviour. Like Velthuijs, Chichester Clark tells a complex story with subtle humour and insight. The drawing is deceptively simple, the timing is perfect and theatrical use of colour and lighting heralds the dramatic moment when the magic kicks in, and Blue Kangaroo flies into action, to put things right.



The Other Goose by Judith Kerr, creator of classics like **Mog** and **The Tiger Who Came to Tea**, comes from a different era and has a charming nostalgic atmosphere. It centres round Katerina, a goose who swims on the village pond. Katerina is lonely and longs to meet the goose she sees reflected in a car door. This is an ideal world of friendly neighbours, a kindly bank manager, an eccentric dancing teacher, a toy shop and a good old fashioned burglar with a swag bag. With a comical climax, when the goose gets the better of the burglar, this is a wonderfully reassuring Christmas story in which the gentle colours of the simple crayon drawings create a real sense of warmth and generosity.

Animal tales



Ruggles by Anne Fine and Ruth Brown is all about a dog for whom an unlatched gate is an irresistible invitation to take a day out. There are very few naturalistic illustrators around today but, like the wonderful Shirley Hughes, Ruth Brown really can summon up the lush green of the park in summer, the

colours and textures of an autumn day, the welcoming glow of a fireside at teatime in winter. Ruggles, a bearded collie, is a very real physical presence in these pages. You can feel that coarse floppy fur, that damp enquiring nose, and when he comes in from the garden you can almost hear his toenails clicking on the flagstones and when he dozes by the fire, you can smell the steam rising from his damp fur.

There are no children in this book – the focus is entirely on Ruggles. With these vigorous, very painterly, beautifully observed illustrations, full of detail and incident, and a lively, reflective text written from the dog's point of view, this is a picture book with wide appeal.

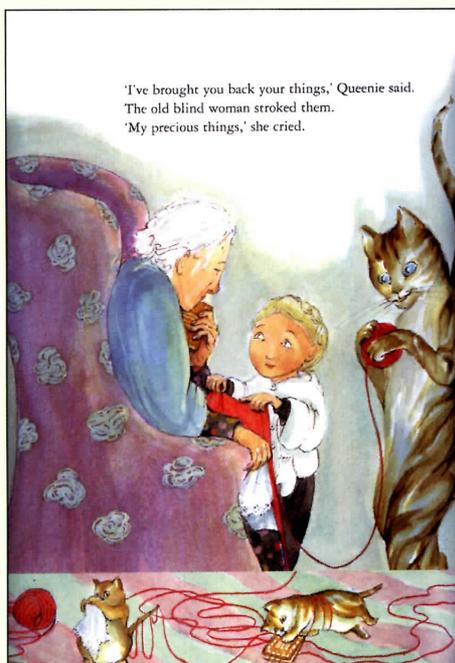


Never ask an older lady her age!

SSSnaarl!

Babette Cole has used her own dog, Lady Lupin (a deerhound the size of an ironing board), as a model for her new book. Cole, well known for a large number of 'improving' books such as **Dr Dog** (which gives health and hygiene tips on things like head lice and diarrhoea), **Hair in Funny Places** (about the onset of puberty) and **Mummy Laid an Egg** (about sex and reproduction), now explores the wilder shores of etiquette. Set in the splendour of an ancestral home Lady Lupin explains to her rowdy puppies how to behave 'like ladies and gentledogs, so that all will love you', how to deal correctly with oysters, lobsters and snails, how to leave the table without getting your foot caught in the table cloth, how to enjoy parties without resorting to showing off, how to write thank-you letters, and, importantly in their case, after the odd slip-up, how to write a decent letter of apology. **Lady Lupin's Book of Etiquette** could well be useful over the festive season.

Gillian McClure's new book **Tom Finger** takes you by surprise with its other worldliness, its un-Englishness. Queenie's cat has died of old age. Sadly, each day the little girl calls out for him, then one morning a strange, tall, blue-eyed cat appears, bringing gifts for Queenie. Queenie's little brother, the voice of reason, warns her that this is a witch's cat but Queenie takes no notice and follows a trail through the snowy woods. McClure's storytelling has a strange magical rhythm to it and her drawings, in line and wash, have a wistful delicacy reminiscent of Lisbeth Zwerger. Queenie is a quaintly proportioned, determined little character, totally absorbed in the magic and

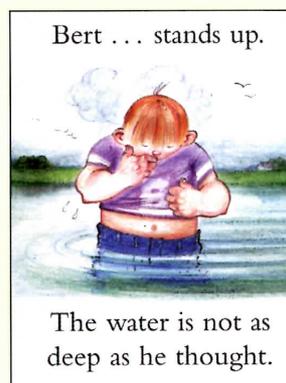


'I've brought you back your things,' Queenie said. The old blind woman stroked them. 'My precious things,' she cried.

her journey through this fairytale, which, with needles, thorns and a bright skein of red wool that snakes across the snow, is full of symbolism and is rewarding both for Queenie and the reader. Imaginative use of white space adds to the mysterious charm of this story – as do the pawprints that trail across the endpapers.

Glorious silliness

If you were to envisage a collaboration between Allan Ahlberg and Raymond Briggs you might imagine a densely populated book with every page bursting with jokes, bristling with extravagant detail, with words and pictures jostling for space: but **The Adventures of Bert** is an unexpected exercise in simplicity... skilfully boiling down the business of writing and illustrating to a minimum with cunning page design that hustles the story along. Bert is a bumbling accident prone buffoon with a long suffering wife (who doesn't get much of a look-in) and a baby. It is a gloriously silly book with huge grandiose chapter headings, minimal text

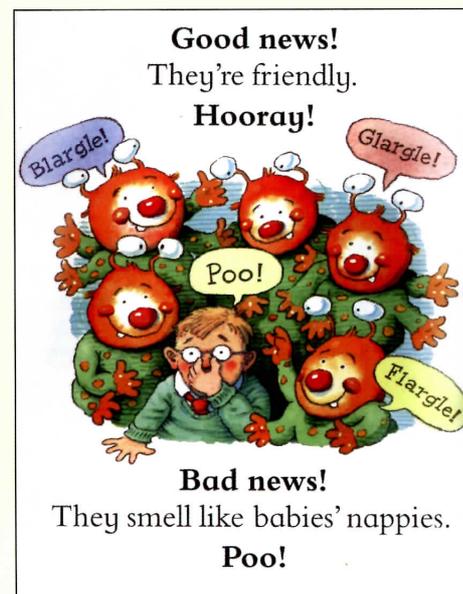


Bert ... stands up.

The water is not as deep as he thought.

and the occasional speech bubble. The story starts and finishes in Bert's bedroom (where there's a running gag about not waking the baby) and involves Bert in an unfortunate tumble down the stairs, an accidental trip to Scotland in a lorry, an adventure with a giant sausage and a

heroic plunge into a river to rescue a little puppy dog – all in fewer than 300 words – guaranteed to give tentative novice readers a real sense of achievement – and a good laugh.

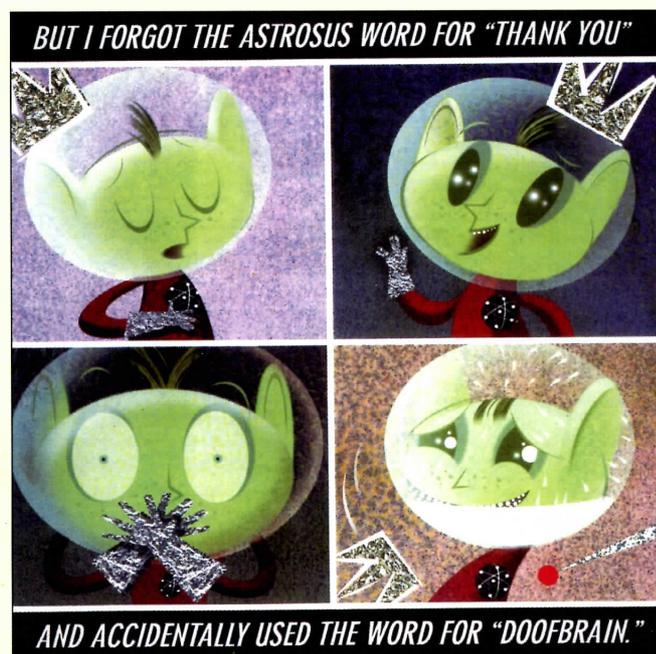


Good news!
They're friendly.
Hooray!

Bad news!
They smell like babies' nappies.
Poo!

In **Good News! Bad News!** Colin McNaughton uses the rowdy rhythm and repetition of this tried and tested formula to chronicle the ups and downs of the turbulent everyday life of a hapless schoolboy whose optimism and joie de vivre is constantly undermined by everyday fears. Not just imaginary fears of monsters and space aliens, but also very real fears of bullies, schoolwork and dental appointments. Brilliantly done! McNaughton's slapstick schoolboy humour merrily defies political correctness with some wonderful comic book stereotypes – beastly girls, a blowsy, busty mum, a warty old witch and wrinkly school marm with pebble specs and iron grey hair scraped back in a bun; and Count Dracula's cameo role as a dentist leaves our schoolboy hero well in charge of the situation, ready for another day...

Baloney (Henry P.) is a book about words. Recognizing the confusion and alienation



AND ACCIDENTALLY USED THE WORD FOR "DOOFBRAIN."

From **Baloney (Henry P.)**.

many children feel when they are expected to make sense of a row of incomprehensible words, Jon Scieszka tells the story of an imaginative schoolboy from outer space whose teacher is threatening him with detention for unpunctuality. Exuberantly illustrated with Lane Smith's kaleidoscopic space age collages, assembled from odd bits of machinery, computer graphics, optical illusions and newspaper cuttings, and urgently told in an extravagantly entertaining mixture of anagrams, spoonerisms and an expressive smattering of foreign words, including Latvian, Swahili, Melanesian pidgin and Esperanto, this is something new indeed. It all takes a bit of unravelling, but a decoder at the end of the book helps to explain why Baloney was so late for school. Words aren't so threatening after all.

Poetry by heart

When I was at school one of the worst punishments (in my case for bad behaviour on the school bus) was having to learn vast swathes of poetry, and then having to recite it word perfect standing on the punishment table. It was humiliating at the time but I am grateful now to have so many miles of poetry indelibly lodged in my head. Today poetry is FUN; there is a more humane approach to the learning thereof and an increasing number of wide ranging anthologies.

From
Poetry by
Heart.



But for anyone wanting to learn a poem for the first time, it is difficult to know where to start. **Poetry by Heart** is edited by Liz Attenborough who makes the poems easy to choose and easy to access by putting them in different categories with descriptive headings like 'Short and Sharp' – which includes this from Spike Milligan:

*Said the General of the army,
'I think war is barmy'
So he threw away his gun:
Now he's having much more fun.*

Under 'Fur and Feathers' you find Blake's 'The Tyger' with a glorious illustration by Steven Lambert; 'Stuff and Nonsense' has plenty of Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear and Charles Causley, and 'Love and Friendship' has work by Wendy Cope, Brian Patten and Kit Wright while 'Long and Lingering' has 'A Visit from St Nicholas' ('Twas the night

before Christmas.) by Clement Clarke Moore. BUT, surprisingly, although the Poet Laureate has written the foreword here, poetry-wise, this lively anthology is Motionless. Disappointing! Especially when you look at Adrian Mitchell's expansive and exuberant collection **A Poem a Day** (365 poems) in which Mitchell (self styled Shadow Poet Laureate) offers no fewer than eleven of his own poems, including 'The Greatest Poem in the World'. He has also chosen work by earlier poets Laureate (Hughes, Masefield, Tennyson and Words-

worth) and many more besides – Byron, Emily Dickinson, Walter de la Mare, Seamus Heaney, Russell Hoban, Mervyn Peake, Michael Rosen, Valerie Bloom... to name but a few, all lavishly illustrated. In full colour. But although the pictures are hugely entertaining, you cannot help wondering, SHOULD poetry be illustrated? Surely a poem's job is to create images in the mind of the reader, without the interpretation of a third party? For this reason Michael Morpurgo's collection **Because a Fire Was in My Head** is very satisfying – although it has got pictures. Quentin Blake's loose, grainy line drawings have an incidental quality – they do not beg for attention, they simply respond to the titles here and there with a casual spontaneity – like the scribbly toad that accompanies Norman MacCaig's poem of that name:

*Stop looking like a purse. How could a purse
squeeze under the rickety door and sit,
full of satisfaction, in a man's house?*

*You clamber towards me on your four corners –
right hand, left foot, left hand, right foot.*

*I love you for being a toad,
for crawling like a Japanese wrestler,
and for not being frightened.*



From the cover of **Because a Fire Was in My Head**.

It is inevitable in popular anthologies for children that there will be a certain amount of duplication – some poems crop up again and again – all three of the above collections feature 'The Owl and the Pussy-cat' by Edward Lear, and 'I Remember, I Remember' by Thomas Hood. But it is interesting to see how the different juxtapositions affect the reading of a poem. In Mitchell's collection Siegfried Sassoon's moving war poem 'Everyone Sang' shares a page with

*Ibbity, bibbity, sibbity, sab,
Ibbity, bibbity, canal boat.*

Dictionary;

Down the ferry;

Fun! Fun

American Gun

Eighteen hundred and sixty one! (anon)

Liz Attenborough puts 'Everyone Sang' together with Chief Dan George, while Morpurgo puts it face to face with John Lennon's inscrutable lines:

*I sat belonely down a tree,
humbled fat and small.
A little lady sing to me
I couldn't see at all.*



A treasure trail of poems...

From
Around the
World in
Eighty
Poems.

A liberating collection that really does break the mould by including lots of totally unfamiliar work is James Berry's **Around the World in Eighty Poems**. This is a glorious collection of poems from all along the way – from Alaska, Chile, Thailand, Iran, Russia (there's a magical Russian poem about dead bicycles), a short, happy Zulu poem:

'Lucky Lion!'

*It sleeps by day!
How blessed it is,
Lion.*

a heart rending Kenyan poem, a cry for a lost mother... an Estonian Chant for a child who is hurt, a Jamaican Song from Berry himself and from Germany a thought provoking poem about a hitch hiker by Bertolt Brecht...

'Travelling in a Comfortable Car'

*Travelling in a comfortable car
Down a rainy road in the country
We saw a ragged fellow at nightfall
Signal to us for a ride, with a low bow.
We had a roof and we had room and we drove on
And we heard me say, in a peevish voice: No
We can't take anyone with us.
We had gone on a long way, perhaps a day's march
When suddenly I was shocked by this voice of mine*

*This behaviour of mine and this
Whole world.*

And so on...

... this is indeed a real treasure trail of poems from which future anthologies will doubtless benefit. Katherine Lucas' decorative illustrations strike exactly the right note and she includes a map to show the path of Berry's poetical expedition which ends in England with Charles Causley's timeless anthem 'I am the Song'.

Shakespeare Stories

With Andrew Matthews' powerful retellings of eight of the Bard's plays, and Angela Barrett's showstopping illustrations, **The Orchard Book of Shakespeare Stories** is a beautifully produced volume. Barrett's illustrations have a visionary quality, an ethereal composure that keeps the real world at arm's length and intensifies the theatrical experience.



'Twelfth Night' from **The Orchard Book of Shakespeare Stories**.

One of the first delights here is the design of the endpapers, with exquisite miniatures symbolizing each play, and an additional bonus is the section where Angela Barrett talks about her work, and how she arrived at her own interpretations of these oft-illustrated stories, all so very different in atmosphere. Much of her inspiration comes from architecture and paintings contemporary with the plays' settings – Juliet's ball dress, for example, is an exact copy of a dress in a portrait by the Florentine painter Domenico Ghirlandaio. Barrett has extensive knowledge of shoe design through the ages – indeed her illustrations are full of historical footnotes – in *Twelfth Night* she focuses on Malvolio's extravagantly pointed yellow shoes with their comical cross gartering; in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, we see the lovers – from the knees down – scampering through a lyrical landscape in sandals copied from pictures on Greek vases; and in *Henry V* a tragic battle scene is zig zagged with the cruel diagonals of broken limbs and lances amongst which you can see the intricate construction of the armour that encases the foot of a dead soldier.

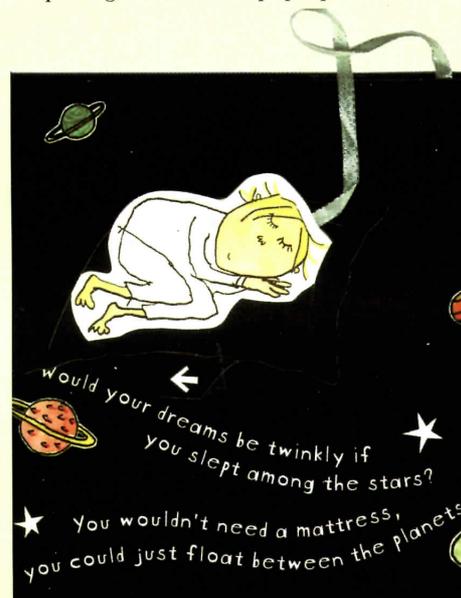
But although Barrett has an astonishing eye for detail, and the technical skill of a miniaturist in suggesting the feel of intricate embroidery and the subtle luminosity of the fabrics, she can also make eloquent use of understatement – as in *Romeo and Juliet* where, in an empty courtyard, just a red stain on the cobbles bears witness to the killing of Mercutio.

There are some ravishing – and romantic – images here; the principal characters tend to fix you with a very direct, penetrating gaze which, especially in the case of Hamlet, is hard to forget. And even Bottom, peering solemnly from behind a tree has an unexpected dignity.

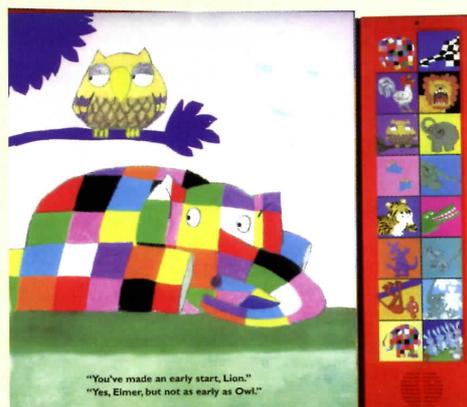
Novelty and quality

Novelty and quality do not always go hand in hand but here they do in three books that are every bit as visually rewarding as they are entertaining and inventive.

Lauren Child has an illustration style that relies on cut out shapes and extravagant, spontaneous outlines so her artwork lends itself perfectly to the demands of paper engineering. **My Dream Bed** is an engaging bedtime fantasy which, with a moveable sleeping figure, shows how elegant, surprising and robust a pop-up book can be.



In **Elmer's Concert** by David McKee the famous patchwork elephant gets all his noisy jungle friends to join in. With vibrant singing colours and a touch-sensitive panel to set off the soundbites, these are the best and loudest sound effects you could ever expect to find in a book.



There is no electronic sound in Jane Ray's **Noah's Ark** but the text, straight from the King James Bible, has a music all its own. And in this pop-up version of her 1990 picture book, there's an intricate 3-D tableau with lots of moving parts and a multitude of freestanding animals including a pair of dodos. ■

Joanna Carey is a writer and illustrator.

The Books

- Frog Finds a Friend**, Max Velthuis, Andersen Press, 1 84270 043 X, £9.99
- It Was You, Blue Kangaroo!**, Emma Chichester Clark, Andersen, 1 84270 023 5, £9.99
- The Other Goose**, Judith Kerr, Collins, 0 00 712119 9, £9.99
- Ruggles**, Anne Fine, ill. Ruth Brown, Andersen, 0 86264 895 5, £9.99
- Lady Lupin's Book of Etiquette**, Babette Cole, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 14096 X, £10.99
- Tom Finger**, Gillian McClure, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 5277 0, £10.99
- The Adventures of Bert**, Allan Ahlberg and Raymond Briggs, Viking, 0 670 89329 3, £9.99
- Baloney (Henry P.)**, Jon Scieska and Lane Smith, Viking, 0 670 91143 7, £12.99
- Good News! Bad News!**, Colin McNaughton, Collins, 0 00 198418 7, £9.99
- Poetry by Heart**, compiled by Liz Attenborough, various illustrators, Chicken House, 1 903434 27 0, £14.99
- A Poem a Day**, chosen by Adrian Mitchell, ill. Russell Ayto, Peter Bailey, Lauren Child and Guy Parker-Rees, Orchard, 1 84121 741 7, £14.99
- Because a Fire was in my Head – 101 poems to remember**, edited by Michael Morpurgo, ill. Quentin Blake, Faber, 0 571 20583 6, £12.99
- Around the World in Eighty Poems**, selected by James Berry, ill. Katherine Lucas, Macmillan, 0 333 90382 X, £12.99
- The Orchard Book of Shakespeare Stories**, retold by Andrew Matthews, ill. Angela Barrett, Orchard, 1 86039 161 3, £12.99
- My Dream Bed**, Lauren Child, Hodder, 0 340 77913 6, £12.99
- Elmer's Concert**, David McKee, Andersen/Red Fox, 0 09 950321 2, £9.99
- Noah's Ark**, Jane Ray, Orchard, 1 84121 504 X, £10.99



FINDING THE REAL

Shakespeare



Michael Rosen

How did the historical moment impinge upon, inform and preoccupy Shakespeare? **Michael Rosen's Shakespeare: His Work and His World** draws young readers into the world behind the plays. Here, he explains the impetus behind the book.

I wonder whether there are enough books about Shakespeare to fill the North Sea. I remember from when I did English at university that sometimes I felt as if it wasn't possible to read or see a Shakespeare play without reading a book about it first. So, I have to admit, it feels odd that I've joined the industry. It all began from reading a few of the recent biographies of Shakespeare, something I had never done before. For years I had allowed myself to live in that strange netherworld where the plays exist largely separate from the person and the era. Even so, you can't live for fifty years in this country without having some kind of awareness of both. Shut your eyes for a moment and conjure up images and phrases linked to Shakespeare the man and Elizabethan or Jacobean England.

If I allow memories from, say, primary school, to flood in, I'm filled up with explorers bravely sailing round the world, long elegant rooms in country mansions, the Spanish Armada seen off and a generalised boar's head, madrigal, velvety glow. Shakespeare is someone clever and jolly strutting about on the stage at the Globe, furiously scribbling plays, before retiring to Stratford to die.

DANGEROUS TIMES

The problem with all this is that it's very hard to make any kind of match between what you see unfold in front of you at the theatre and the historical myth you have in your head. Just consider the matter of plotting and danger. Almost all the plays involve these. Now you can take the attitude that this is because it's the stuff of drama, or you can ask the question, was Shakespeare's time particularly full of this kind of scheming and conspiracy? Is there a way of looking at **Hamlet**, **Coriolanus** and even comedies like **Twelfth Night** or **A Midsummer Night's Dream** and see them as normal? Full of people behaving as people would have behaved at this extraordinary time?

I think, looking back at the way I've seen the plays in the past, and yes, loved them, I had enjoyed them as incredible yarns, grand exaggerations of life. The more I read of Shakespeare's life and times, the more the plays started to feel real. Take **King Lear**. I had somehow grasped this play as an elongated and agonising parable about such matters as the arrogance of old age, forgiveness, redemption and all that. Even so, this left some awkward questions in my head about why Edmund is not only a Bastard but also a complete bastard, why Lear raves on about poverty and justice

when he's out on the heath and with 'poor Tom'. My new reading led me to realise, what had perhaps been obvious to many but not me, that it's not simply Lear who is old, but also Lear's social group, the old aristocratic class. Meanwhile, Edmund, who snarls at us: 'Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit' is part of some kind of new order.

STEALTHY RELOCATION...

Then again, I was discovering that when Shakespeare came to London, he was part of a company of players that crept out in the middle of the night, less than a mile from where I live, dismantled their theatre and trundled across the river, to re-erect it, with trimmings, on Bankside. At the very moment when Shakespeare was writing and acting, a new kind of spectacle was emerging in world culture, the renaissance play. It was, I felt, a bit like that moment a hundred years ago when cinema started to happen.

A DRAMATIC PROJECT

With my head buzzing with all these ideas, I approached Caroline Royds at Walker Books with an idea of making some of this accessible to young readers. I was asking the impossible both of her and me: that we could make a book that would convey the excitement and danger of Shakespeare's time, the wonder of the moment that a new kind of entertainment was emerging, a sense of Shakespeare's life going through rapid social mobility while all this raged about him. As it happens, Caroline wanted more! Couldn't I also give some sense of how the plays work on us as audiences? How does the language and the drama get to us? Yes, yes, of course I could.

Well, as writers love saying, yes of course every book tells a story, but there's also a story in how the book, **Shakespeare: His Work and His World**, came to be written. I was an editor's nightmare, offering up tantalising snippets, followed by long delays of nothing, mingled with slabs of incomprehensible prose as I struggled to say something quite complicated in as simple a language as I could find.

We found with Robert Ingpen someone who could capture the drama of the project and the always amazing Amelia Edwards who is not simply a designer but a maker of beautiful books. Now it's all done, I hope that it helps anyone of any age, but especially young people, to sit in a theatre and feel gripped by the deep realities of a Shakespeare play. ■



Shakespeare: His Work and His World by Michael Rosen, illustrated by Robert Ingpen, is published by Walker Books, 0 7445 5581 7, £12.99.

Michael Rosen is a writer, poet, and broadcaster. **BfK** readers voted him their 'outstanding' and 'favourite' poet of the last century.

— Fairy Tales — in the New Millennium

Write about fairy stories,' commanded BfK's editor – and what could I do but obey? She might have turned me into a tadpole. And the publisher threw in instructions of his own – wishing to know whether the delight of his childhood, a story about a magic wheelbarrow, author and title long forgotten, might perhaps be a fairy story.

It might not, I fancy, but the question at once demands the laying out of definitions, for 'fairy story' is a delusive term. It gained currency, usually as 'fairy tale', during the eighteenth century, thanks chiefly to the translations of the French '*contes de fées*'. But these were frippery things, which may indeed have been plentifully supplied with fairies but they were fairies of the courtly imagination whose activities were only distantly related to what went on in the 'fairy tale' proper.

One of the best descriptions of this last occurs in what happens to be the first known printed version of an English fairy tale: **The History of Tom Thumbe, the Little, for his small stature surnamed, King Arthur's Dwarfe**. Imprinted at London for Tho: Langley, 1621. This is presented to the public by R J (probably one Richard Johnson) and he numbers his text among 'ancient Tales ... the onely reuiuers of frouzy age at midnight'. These have 'compassed the Christmas fire-blocke, till the Curfew Bell rings candle out ... [and made] long nights seeme short, & heauy toyles easie.'

The phrasing suggests that 'folk tale' would be a more appropriate term, or, more graphically, a 'tale of Mother Goose', which also derives from the seventeenth century in the first great collection of such tales: the **Contes de ma Mère l'Oye** which were first published in Paris in 1697, although a heart-stoppingly wonderful manuscript – now in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York (well away from lower Manhattan) – is dated 1695.

Perrault's sensibility

The preparation of these tales for print is pretty certainly the work of Charles Perrault and his choice establishes as well as anything the difference between a folk tale and a *conte de fée*. There is nothing frippery about 'Red Riding Hood' (who is eaten by the wolf – *finis*), or the two-part 'Sleeping Beauty' (with the Queen ordering up her grand-daughter to be cooked for tomorrow's dinner, with a *sauce Robert* – the recipe is given), or the ogre in 'Hop o' my Thumb' cutting the throats of his children, or all the other jolly things that go on in 'Cinderella', and 'Puss-in-Boots', and 'Bluebeard', and 'Diamonds and Toads'. The stories are the

How are folk and fairy tales published today? Can authenticity and the art of the storyteller be preserved? **Brian Alderson** looks at the issues raised by current publishing practices.



The FAIRIES Dance.

A New SONG

COME, follow, follow me,
Ye Fairy Elves be;
Which circle on the Green.
Come follow M A B your Queen.

Hand in hand let's dance around,
For this place is Fairy Ground.

Above, early chapbook fairies; below, 1621 title page illustration of **The History of Tom Thumbe**.



A regularly used metal-cut doing duty for queens, princesses, etc. in London chapbooks.

foundation-stone of European folk tale and Perrault had the sensibility to set them down as though they were being told round 'the Christmas fire-block'. Indeed, his frontispiece shows Mother Goose doing just that.

Her absurd, but eternally-sanctioned, little narratives do not merely differ from those invented by Mme D'Aulnoy and her *consoeurs* (her de-dignification in England under the name of Mother Bunch was a commercial manoeuvre). They also differ from the surrounding popular narrative forms like myths, legends, romances, fables, ballads, and the like, but the distinctions are not always precise. 'The Lambton Worm', for instance, abuts a Wearside legend; 'The Babes in the Wood', as a prose tale, along with numerous others, is a reduction of an original ballad; the whole comical succession of tales told by Uncle Remus are a mélange of animal-fable, anecdote, and folk tale.

The brothers Grimm

The printed versions of stories like those are obviously much later than **Mother Goose** and their presence is less influenced by her than by the arrival in Berlin in 1812 of a modest little collection of **Kinder-und Hausmärchen** got together by Jacob Grimm and his brother Wilhelm. This book, extending eventually to contain some two hundred, fully annotated stories, is the model which (unlike Perrault) inspired explorers around the world to go forth and discover what kind of 'heritage of story' might still be preserved for them in the nurseries, the pubs, the spinning-rooms and the encampments where polite culture had no footing. And calling the stories 'Märchen' was a good move too – and one that we might all usefully adopt. For its origins and its precise meaning are matter for argument, even to Germans. It lacks the delimitations of 'fairy story' and 'folk tale' and more generously allows us to think of its narratives as the uninterpretable vestiges of what Kipling once jocularly called Big Medicine and Strong Magic.

As such these fragments are deserving of the most respectful attention from persons who think to turn them to their own advantage. Ancient and anonymous, they are unprotected by any laws of copyright. Dealing in names that are as familiar as clichés, they need no expensive introduction to a hoped-for audience. Questions relating to their provenance, their structure, the diction of their telling, are regarded as of only academic interest so it's open season all year round for those who hunt them out for profitable children's books.

Smacking of authenticity?

Given the almost total absence of print media where the serious reviewing of such things can be undertaken, it seems a bit pointless to argue for a critical assessment of folk-tale editions that will take into account how responsibly the producers have behaved towards their sources and how far the result of their labours measures up to alternative treatments of the same tale. Obviously we can't ask for anything normative, for there are no norms.

Judgement, properly done, is more like wine-tasting; you have to slosh the stuff round your palate, get the scent and the tang of it, to see how far it smacks of authenticity.

And that is a big word. In part it requires that the run of the story carries conviction in the teeth of whatever may seem incredible or inexplicable. Of far more importance however is the requirement that the tale represents the art of the storyteller rather than the literary artist. The strong magic, which is the essence of folk tale, is fundamentally an experience shared between *ma Mère l'Oye* at her distaff and those who listen to her, whether in cocked-hats or farmers' smocks or jeans and tee-shirts. When a printed text of her stories is plonked down in front of you, get the words of the pages and roll them round your palate and see how well they fare.

Judging translations

That too though is only a beginning, because their authenticity depends upon one set of circumstances if the stories are part of an English-language tradition, and a different set if, as is often the case, they are translations. In the first instance we have enough evidence, through the perceptive and self-effacing work of scholars from Joseph Jacobs in the nineteenth century to Neil Philip in our own day, to appreciate the right *timbre*, the right colloquiality, for the English folk tale. (Scottish and Anglo-Irish ones can often be even more illuminating when the local speech patterns are retained.)

But in the case of translated stories, your conscientious purveyor is in the double-bind of having to have some sense of a story's origins in its homeland and then having to make it sound like a folk tale that has successfully adapted itself as such in its new host-country. That is altogether more problematic, but a single example may help to show not only what is involved but also some of the pitfalls of messing about too freely with the merchandise. See what happens to the opening sentence of the Grimms' story 'Der Froschkönig, oder der eiserne Heinrich' (lit. 'King of the Frogs, or Iron Henry', but usually called 'The Frog Prince').

The story originates in an oral telling which was summarised by Wilhelm Grimm in a manuscript *aide-mémoire* with the heading 'The Princess and the Enchanted Prince. Frog-King', and it begins thus:

The king's youngest daughter went out into the forest and sat herself down beside a cool well.



Frontispiece for an English edition of Perrault (London, 1737).



A reworking, probably engraved on wood by Mary Byfleet, of 'Gammer Grethel' – Cruikshank's frontispiece for the second volume of *German Popular Stories* (1846).



Etching by George Cruikshank for 'Jorinda and Joringel' in a reprinted edition of *German Popular Stories* introduced by John Ruskin (1869).

*Limited space prevents citing the original German. I am responsible for the translations.

With the publication of the story in the 1812 collection we get:

Once upon a time there was a princess who went out into the forest and sat herself down beside a cool well.

But Wilhelm Grimm, who was the chief editor of later editions of the *Märchen*, doesn't seem to have been happy with that and the 'standard' version now found in most editions owes much to him:

In the old days when making wishes was still some use, there lived a king; and this king had three daughters ...

[and we then need several lines of text before we get Her Highness out to the well].

Now Wilhelm was a pretty crafty chap, with an experienced ear for folk tales, and much of his fussing with the texts (which rarely involved bowdlerization) exemplifies how the Authenticity of tale-telling need not be lost through editorial intrusion. But take a look at this version of the opening:

On a perfect day a beautiful young princess was playing in her rose garden with a golden ball.

Suddenly we have exchanged the emblematic forest and the cool well for a rose garden and we are offered the soggianness of 'a perfect day' and 'a beautiful young princess' against the directness of the original and some (unquoted) semi-comic hyperbole on her beauty from Wilhelm's version.

That painful enfeeblement of Mother Goose's sly or forceful tones is of particular interest because it comes not from some volume produced for sale at airports or corner-shops, but from a writer of repute in a volume recently short-listed for glory: Berlie Doherty and *Fairy Tales*, illustrated by Jane Ray in a sumptuous edition from Walker Books. And for fear that you should think me guilty of excoriating a single lapse I had better say that the book seems to me hopelessly misconceived from one end to the other.

What has gone wrong, and predictably so in the light of Ms Doherty's sentimental preface, is the intrusion of the writerly voice upon the diction of storytelling. 'Every time the stories are told,' says Ms Doherty, disregarding much of Tradition, 'the tellers add a little bit of themselves – a colour here, a jewel there [how do you do that?], a sigh or a secret laugh or a song that wasn't there before. But they must never, never change what actually happens ...': a philosophy which allows the look of the words on the page to replace the sound of them on the tongue. What storyteller would put up with (more or less at random) a sentence like: 'They would sit at their open window at the end of the day and breathe in all the perfumes of the flowers, and gaze at the misty colours, and say how lucky they were to live there.' Wow! 'Taint natural. (And, incidentally, if we 'must never, never change' things, how does Ms Doherty explain her wholesale traducing of that most wonderful of all stories, *The Snow Queen*, in her retelling for Scholastic?)

Lush illustrations...

The Walker **Fairy Tales** also, involuntarily, attracts attention to the market's desire for its folk tales to be ever more lushly illustrated. The amenity of artistic interpretation was not made available to the audience for **Tom Thumb** round the Christmas fire-block and they thus had the good fortune to be able to imagine for themselves our hero falling into the frumity and suchlike. And when illustration did first accompany printed versions it was in the form of woodcuts of such surpassing generality that you could reconstruct your own details on their outlines. Beyond that however, with the coming of ever more sophisticated illustrators and illustrative processes, it became open season for pictorial as well as literary interpretations. These tales of the earth earthy were deemed fit subjects for the Book Beautiful and we get, as **BfK's** editor has memorably said, illustrations that look like 'expensive wrapping paper'.

Old Wilhelm may have been right to say that wishing doesn't count for much these days, but a desire for less exhibitionism and more attention to Story need not go unfulfilled. The two volumes of the first English Grimm (1823 and 1826) still have much to commend them, and, indeed, were used for the first Puffin Grimm of 1948. Joseph Jacobs's sequence of fairy-tale books, authoritative texts with J D Batten's admirable drawings and decorations, are still the best of their kind. And in more recent times the editorial skills of Alan Garner and William Mayne show that great writers know how to serve the needs of tradition. Why such books as the Hamish Hamilton collections on **Goblins, Giants** and **Ghosts** – along with that enigmatic anthology **The Guizer** – are no longer in print will be hard to explain to anyone unfamiliar with today's be-wizarded book trade.

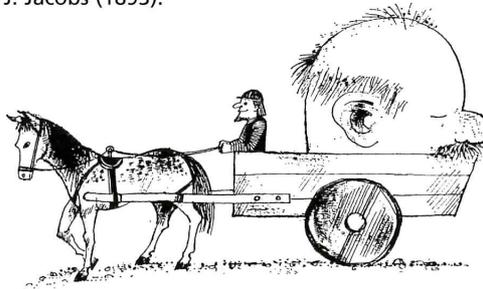
Within the folk-tale idiom

Good deeds do occur though amid much dross (like Franklin Watts's denatured 'Leapfrog' series, published with benefit of a Professor of English, no less) and amid overweight, overdone treasuries and bedtime books (Hutchinson's **Treasury of Fairy Tales** weighs in at 2½lb).

Kevin Crossley-Holland, for instance, has plundered his own **British Folk Tales** of 1987 to give us **Enchantment** (Orion), an aptly-titled selection of triple virtue. First of all he has chosen stories that are mostly out of the common run (even his 'Frog Prince' is worked over from a Scottish source). Second of all, everything is eminently tellable. He's a great intruder on his text ('King of the Cats' for instance is a total conversion-job), but like Old Wilhelm he works within the idiom of folk tale and doesn't fancy the sentences too much. And third of all, he has Emma Chichester Clark to accompany him. With watercolour designs on every page-opening you might expect an artistic takeover, but the pictures fit gracefully, rather like the hand-coloured illustrations of the early nineteenth century, and the Chichester



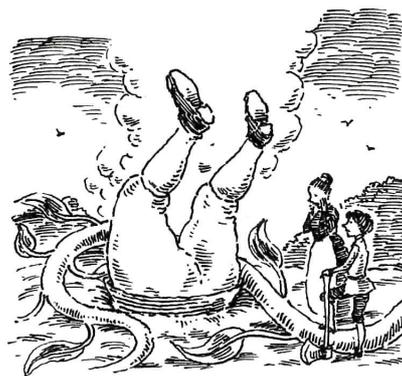
Illustration by John D. Batten for 'The Old Witch' in **More English Fairy Tales** edited by J. Jacobs (1893).



Raymond Briggs' illustration for 'Jack the Giant Killer' in **The Hamish Hamilton Book of Giants**, edited by William Mayne (1968).



From James Mayhew's cover for **Grey Wolf, Prince Jack and the Firebird**, retold by Alan Garner (Scholastic, 1998).



Jack and the Beanstalk (Orchard Books, 2001) as pictured by Peter Bailey, told by Rose Impey.

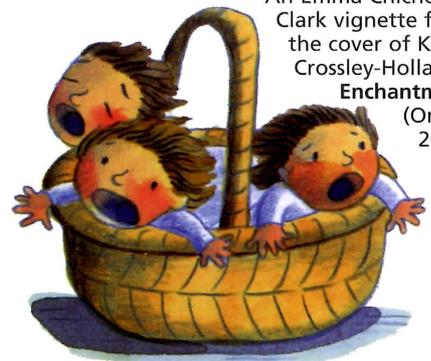
Clark characters, so familiar in their wide-eyed, vaguely androgynous way, are not unrelated to the denizens in the old chapbooks.

And talking of chapbooks we seem to have something very like in Scholastic's 'Stories to read or tell for just £1' (almost the equivalent of what you'd give for a penny merriment two hundred years ago). The series is uniform in design, with the boringly repetitive illustrations for which chapbooks were famous, but it differs from their series first in having texts of variable length (37 pages for **The Three Heads in the Well** and a quite unnecessary 83 for **Puss in Boots**) and second in employing posh authors to write 'em.

As I noted of Berlie Doherty's **Snow Queen** above, that doesn't guarantee success, but it does cast a fascinating sidelight on how sophisticated souls cope with fundamental techniques. As you might expect, Alan Garner (**Grey Wolf, Prince Jack and the Firebird**) and Philip Pullman shine (fascinating to compare the latter's **Mossycoat** with Kevin Crossley-Holland's version) and, as you might expect too, many others fail through being too determined to clothe their ancient, but beggarly, sources with unsuitable embellishments.

They could do worse than take some lessons from Rose Impey who has her own 'Orchard Fairy Tales' series – but at £3.99 a time it will hardly find favour with Autolycus even though there is a plethora of rough vernacular pictures by Peter Bailey. The stories (which were first published in **The Orchard Book of Fairy Tales** illustrated by Ian Beck) are offered two at a time in each 48-page book and the consequent need for brevity ensures that Ms Impey gets a proper momentum into her storytelling. It deserts her, alas, for 'The Princess and the Pea' but Andersen, who wrote the thing, would have enjoyed the way she has her prince hunt for his real princess among contenders taken straight from the **Kinder-und Hausmärchen**. She'll do alright with a distaff in front of a winter hearth when the TV fails.■

An Emma Chichester Clark vignette from the cover of Kevin Crossley-Holland's **Enchantment** (Orion, 2001)



Between 1975 and 1982 **Brian Alderson** re-edited five of Andrew Lang's 'Colour Fairy Books' with new illustrations by John Lawrence, Faith Jaques, Antony Maitland, Erik Blegvad and Colin McNaughton. He also translated stories from the Grimm collection: **Popular Folk Tales**, ill. Michael Foreman (Gollancz, 1978) and fashioned an edition of **The Arabian Nights** with the same illustrator.

BfK PROFILE

Boys and Their Feelings

Lynne Markham made a strong impression with her first book, *The Closing March* (1997). Set against a background of pit closures, it is a story with a powerful sense of place and the impact of individual and collective memories. Facing up to the death of his much-loved grandfather, present day Mick finds himself drawn into the miner's world that his grandfather experienced as a boy not much older than himself. Mick uses drawing as his medium of expressing the claustrophobia and terror of being down the mines. Through his art he can empathise with his grandfather and the lives of the two blend together when Mick takes up playing his grandfather's cornet and representing him in the colliery band when they leave the pit for the last time. Partly identifying with the old way of life and partly desperate to set out on his own path as an art student, Mick's understanding, not only of his own grandfather's past but of the community's past, is convincing as a portrait of how the history of a country as well as that of an individual family has changed. And Mick is not just a catalyst for understanding the passing of time. He is also a plausibly confused and angry adolescent struggling to forge good relationships with the adults – and especially the adult men – around him.

Markham uses the device of narratives from different times in subsequent novels, too. In *Finding Billy*, it is a domestic secret from the past which is unravelled as one generation discovers the secret that another has kept hidden. Here Markham shows great sensitivity in her understanding of how a family coped with a child with a disability at a time when there was little support and no understanding. Like

The Closing March, *Finding Billy* has a strong sense of place – this time it's the countryside – and a clear sense of how families carry their past with them.

In both of these early novels, Markham writes with passion but also cautiously. By pinning her stories closely to reality she gives the impression that she knows exactly where her characters are coming from and why they follow a particular trajectory. This makes for a robustness and credibility that is a strength but also keeps them tethered and lacking in excitement.

Published within a short space of time, her next three novels show a significant change. Still keeping to the idea of how the past plays a part in the present and retaining the twin narrative, but with only one as 'real' and the other as imaginary, Markham moves into fantasy and uses it as a metaphor. For younger readers than either *The Closing March* or *Finding Billy*, *Lionheart* is another story about a boy and his grandfather but here the link is a statue of a lion. Leo is small and easily bullied until, with the help of his grandfather and the statue of the lion, he unlocks the inner lion within himself and finds the courage that links him with his past and enables him to stand up to the bullies in the present. For the same age group, *Winter Wolf* covers similar ground, except that Josh needs strength to cope with his unsustaining and cool relationship with his father while his mum is away ill. Out of the snowy landscape comes a magical white wolf and the two roam the nights together allowing Josh to draw in courage and intelligence which enable him to rework his situation.

Markham is good at the difficulties that boys may have in their

Julia Eccleshare on the novels of LYNNE MARKHAM



relationships with their fathers, observing it as a failure of communication rather than one of animosity. It is taken to its most physical extreme in *Deep Trouble*. Jimmy's father is trapped, speechless and tearful, after a stroke that has shut him off from the rest of his family. On the same day that he has his stroke, a whale is trapped in the river, unable to get back to the sea. Jimmy's twin anxieties are about how the whale will escape and swim free and how his father will ever recover. Markham offsets the family tragedy well through the telling of the story of the whale's escape and Jimmy's identification with it. Vividly told, so that they solidly conjure up people, places and situations, Markham's books are also sensitive about families and their relationships and especially about boys and the scope they have to express their feelings honestly.

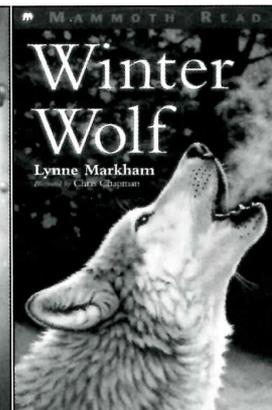
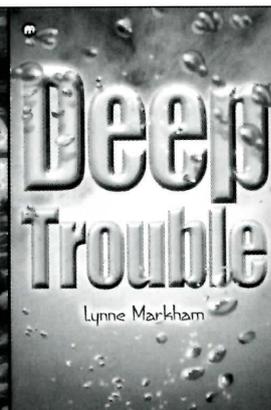
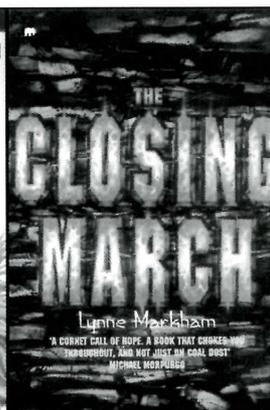
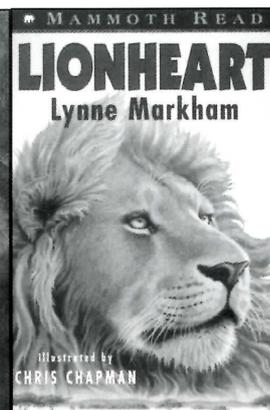
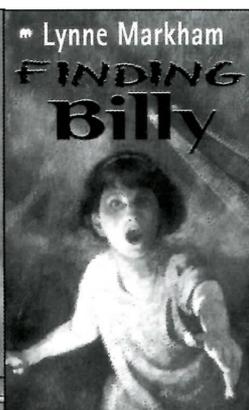
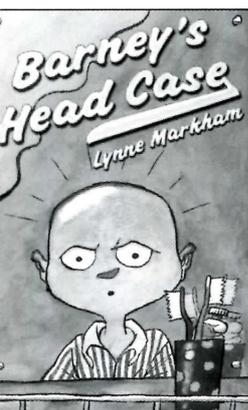
Surprisingly, after this run of titles which are so carefully wrought in both their content and the telling of it, Markham has taken a quite different turn for her most recent book.

Another younger title, *Barney's Head Case*, like all of Markham's others, certainly has a message – that the inner person is more important than the outer – and it picks up on earlier themes, especially father/son relationships. But this is a book that lacks Markham's characteristic depth and the twists and turns of her storytelling. Instead, it has an unleavened predictability which even the mild joke at the end fails to redeem. Markham needs more space than this to develop the intricacies of relationships and a convincing domestic background which have been her strengths. ■

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

The Books (published by Egmont Books)

<i>The Closing March</i> , 1997, 0 7497 2876 0, £4.99	<i>Deep Trouble</i> , 2000, 0 7497 4131 7, £4.99
<i>Finding Billy</i> , 1998, 0 7497 3094 3, £4.50	<i>Winter Wolf</i> , ill. Chris Chapman, 2000, 0 7497 3327 6, £3.99
<i>Lionheart</i> , ill. Chris Chapman, 1998, 0 7497 3405 1, £3.99	<i>Barney's Head Case</i> , ill. Chris Priestley, 2001, 0 7497 4700 5, £3.99



Inspiring 'Reluctant' Readers

Teacher Arthur Shenton on TV guides and the world of magic which have persuaded his reluctant reader son that reading is sometimes worth the effort.

Our youngest child, Tom, was diagnosed as dyslexic when he was eight. He was brought up in a household immersed in text with teacher parents and two elder sisters constantly involved in reading and writing activities with homework tasks and their own personal reading. We had also built up an extensive library of picture books and children's stories, which we regularly read with Tom. Just like his sisters Tom loved stories, loved being read to, loved listening to story tapes. He was articulate, could talk about the stories read to him but his own efforts to read were laboured and largely unsuccessful.

The intensive teaching and support he has received since being stated both in his primary and current secondary schools have resulted in impressive progress in the development of his literacy skills. He still loves fiction but his access to it is mainly through video because he remains a very reluctant reader. His schools have tried hard to encourage him, even buying in special sets of easy reader/high interest texts in genres which he likes – adventure, horror, science fiction. We have encouraged him to read them at home but



with little or no success. Can you blame him? Reading is and will continue to be hard work for him. He has been doing it and sometimes failing at it all day. He doesn't want another dose when he gets home.

However, we have noticed recently that Tom has started to build on his hard earned reading

skills without any prompting from his teachers or us. Not surprisingly, perhaps, it is non-fiction texts that have aroused his interest and he has discovered something very important about reading – that if you are reading for a purpose then it's worth the effort. We first noticed this when he took to skimming and scanning the week's TV guide so he could mark his favourite programmes. He further realised that if he read the writing underneath the programme titles he could find out about the contents of the programmes, whetting his appetite even more as he looked forward to watching his favourites.

He discovered an even more important purpose for reading on a recent school visit to London. During a long bus journey one of the boys performed card tricks to entertain Tom and his friends. He was hooked and over the next few days he insisted we visited all our local bookshops for books on magic. These he pored over only occasionally leaving his books to show us a trick he had learnt. There are two added dimensions from a teaching perspective; he does not want help with this reading because then we would know how the tricks were done, and assessment of how well he is reading is easy, as he demonstrates his understanding in his performance of, for us, mystifying magic.

Arthur Shenton is a part-time lecturer in Language and Literacy Studies at the University of Plymouth.

Jack's First Books

It's Jack's first birthday and reading has become 'a high octane activity'. His father, Gary McKeone, explains.

A week before his first birthday, the postman arrives at six-thirty each morning with little packages addressed to Master Jack McKeone. We decide not to open anything until the big day but if this keeps up we'll have to invite the postman to the party.

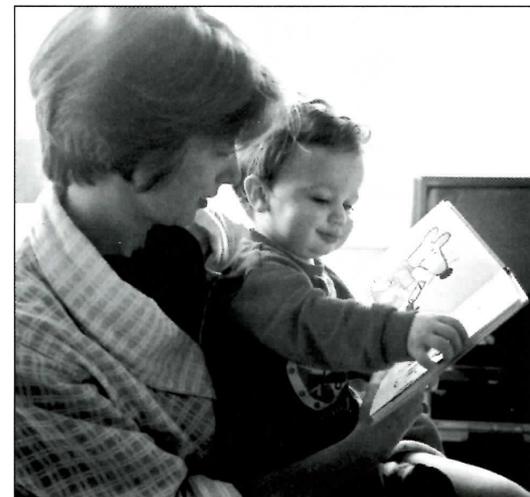
A few weeks earlier we headed off on holiday with some books for his holiday reading. Slim volumes take up the least space so into the case goes **We Like It – Poems for the Very Young**, a joint publication from the Royal Festival Hall and CfBT Lambeth Education Action Zone. Specially commissioned poems by Colette Bryce and Roddy Lumsden, Grace Nichols and Quentin Blake as well as poems by very young people themselves give us a chance to let Jack tune into rhythm and rhyme. The sounds work wonders and the lively illustrations, all blues and oranges, intrigue him.

Colour and sound are still the key stimuli so Eric Hill's **Spot's Noisy Walk** is just the business with its panoply of animals. Animals are all over **Maisy's Farm** by Lucy Cousins too, a pop-up book and, of course, Maisy's holiday pack comes complete with sunglasses which make him look like a junior mafia don. On holiday also are **Splash! Splash!** by Nicola Smee to encourage

him to sit down in the bath. Some chance. Words are all very well but what about numeracy? **Numbers – a first counting book** might help.

In Granada, after his first trip to the Alhambra, we wander through the narrow streets near the cathedral and come upon an old bookshop where we find some children's books in Spanish. **Hasta la tarde** by Jeanne Ashbé is irresistible. The Spanish words with their clear, crisp sounds catch his ear and he loves the pictures of babies. I start to dream of a bilingual child but realise I must have had too much sun.

The birthday arrives. Jack is not a neglected child. In the middle of the boxes and the chaos of wrapping paper, a cluster of books fights for space. There's too much excitement for him to concentrate on reading matters but we're looking forward to sending him off to dreamland with **The Adventures of Bert** by Allan Ahlberg and Raymond Briggs. The simple, uncluttered illustrations and the calamitous Bert make for great fun. In there too is **The House that Jack Built** by Elena Gomez. We read it to him that very night. He loves the rhyme and the repetition but instead of winding down, ready for sleep, the helterskelter of the rhythm has him bouncing around his cot. Which is as it should be. So he doesn't sleep for a while. No matter. At least books are fun. Reading can be a high-octane activity. It's just right that his first year should end and his second year begin in the company of a book.



Gary McKeone is Literature Director, Arts Council of England.

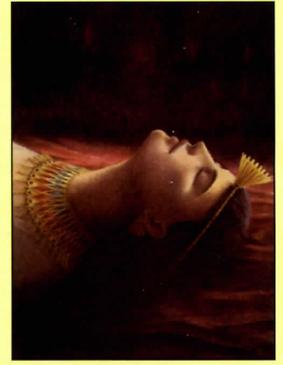
Books mentioned:

We Like It – Poems for the Very Young, Royal Festival Hall and CfBT Lambeth Education Action Zone, no SBN assigned, free from The Poetry Library, The Royal Festival Hall, Belvedere Road, London SE1.
Spot's Noisy Walk, Eric Hill, Penguin, 0 7232 4513 4, £9.99
Maisy's Farm, Lucy Cousins, Walker, 0 7445 7587 7, £12.99
Splash! Splash!, Nicola Smee, Campbell Books, 0 333 90270 X, £3.99
Numbers – a first counting book, Campbell Books, 0 333 71273 0, £3.99
The Adventures of Bert, Allan Ahlberg and Raymond Briggs, Viking, 0 670 89329 3, £9.99
The House that Jack Built, Elena Gomez, Scholastic, 0 439 99234 6, £9.99



Authorgraph No.131

Angela Barrett



Angela Barrett interviewed by Quentin Blake

I was a little surprised when Angela Barrett showed me her studio for the first time – it was perhaps simply because the studio-ness of it was so restrained. The place where illustration happens in her London mansion flat opens through an archway from the sitting-room, and there is little change of atmosphere – there are the same swagged velvet curtains, some pale, curved 19th-century furniture, a large mirror surrounded by photographs. In front of it, a large dark Victorian partners' desk where Angela sits to draw. For a moment I can't quite help being reminded of Jane Austen writing her novels under the guise of correspondence, though here the imposing desk gives a sense of authority to the activity, though not in quite the way one would generally expect.

And the sense of authority is there, too, in the images produced at the desk, as will be evident to anyone who picks up *Shakespeare Stories* or *Rocking Horse Land*. But what is the road like to these impressive destinations? How does it all start?

'I'm starting with a sketchbook right from the very beginning – from the moment somebody first mentions something to me, even before I get the text, I am thinking my first thoughts, and I open a sketchbook – it's very important to have a new sketchbook for every book. I usually get a commission to do something about a year and a half before I actually start – ideas come in odd places and often get written down in odd places, but they all get assembled in a sketchbook. When the time comes I start working on full-sized roughs. People are kind and don't require me to provide a complete set of roughs, because I don't like to commit myself to a set of ideas right at the beginning. Ideas for pictures develop as I go along. Then there's always a dull bit, and when I was at college I would have skipped that – but part of being grown-up and a proper illustrator is that you can't skip that. There's a spread with nothing on it and you trawl through it again until you find some nugget you can use.

For the roughs I work on – what's that thin paper called – layout paper. I assemble the composition, until I've got it approximately right. I've changed over the years; there was a time when I would try to get it as near as dammit the way it was going to look on the finished drawing on the layout paper and then transfer it – but now I think that wipes out too much spontaneity – so I leave the possibility for something else to happen. One of the funny things I do now is, when I have finished drawing out the picture on the watercolour paper I take it up to the photocopiers and have it photocopied – because I've often drawn it very precisely and I quite like it – and then I obliterate it with paint and can't find it again.'

How does it get from the layout paper to the final drawing?

'I haven't got a lightbox so I usually stick it to the window and trace it off like that.'

I was interested to know what it was traced off on to. Angela described it as some kind of smooth and silky Italian handmade paper – Fabriano Artistica Satinata.

One of the aspects of Angela Barrett's work that fascinates me is her seemingly endless capacity for getting better – I mean for



carrying off with conviction more complicated or difficult (and often moving) effects. Perhaps it was not the sort of question that can expect a detailed reply, and her response – to the effect that if something is all you've got, you have to do your very best by it – was I'm sure her modest way of indicating a toughness of commitment, one which the lack of a lightbox and suchlike might seem to belie.

In technical terms the advance in achievement may perhaps also be associated with the move from pen-and-ink to pencil – you can see what I mean if you compare *Stories from the Ballet*, 1994 with *Shakespeare Stories* in 2000. The first book is naturally decorative ('it called for pink'); in the second there is an enormous development not only in the draughtsmanship but in drama and realism.

That is, if realism is what I mean. This is one of the areas where



the available vocabulary seems not to give us a great deal of help: 'realistic', 'naturalistic', 'detailed' – they cover such a variety of appearances. Angela Barrett's people have normal proportions; they are three-dimensional and exist in three-dimensional space, they are depicted with detail. Are they realistic?

'When I first went to art school, if someone had let me be a Pre-Raphaelite painter, I'd have been a Pre-Raphaelite painter. But since then I've become less interested in them. Now, I'm pleased if I do something and can think, yes, that looks realistic. But of course, overall, they're not the least bit realistic. My figures are all sort of distorted. They're about trying to show heightened emotion. It's the same with perspective. When I start a book I try to work out vanishing points and so on, but I find it won't do for what I want to say. I take awful liberties with perspective, and then I comfort myself with the thought that they can do it in the theatre, so I can do it.'

Does she make use of photos in the preparatory work for her illustrations? The answer is No, because 'the people in photos don't look like my people.' At the same time she is emphatic about the importance to her of photography ('I take lots of photos') as well as of film and television – but it has more to do with the composition of her pictures, their viewpoint, the way that things are cropped away, the way we may see the back of one head and the full face of another. It must also, I'm sure, influence her choice of significant dramatic moments and the way she shows them.

And these moments, the choice of which are so important to an illustrator, really are significant moments – not just things suitable to draw. Think of Joan in the orchard, hearing her voices for the first time or the witch leaving Snow White stretched out on the floor as she makes her way to the woods.

I wanted to know more about **Snow White** which impresses me in its extraordinary ability to get away from other previous versions (including Disney) and achieve the experience as if for the first time. 'Actually I have got a book of Disney's **Snow White** that I rather like: the pictures are printed with black borders so that they look almost luminous. I think that if one says one is not going to do it like Walt Disney, one thing that strikes you is that those dwarfs should have more dignity. My editor had suggested I might do it medieval, but I wanted it so that the costumes were almost of no period.' There is no doubt about specific period

references in **The Emperor's New Clothes**, which Angela quotes as another favourite amongst her books – 'for once I was allowed to do something funny.'

For this book it was not a question of costumes of 'no period' but of a very specific one, and Angela has obviously had a great deal of pleasure with that aspect of the book, as well as with the almost exotic layout. Rather surprisingly she suggests that she set about it almost instinctively, in reaction to the repetitiveness of the story. It is after all, as she observes, a one-joke story, the joke being that the king was naked. Hence a preliminary enquiry: 'the first thing I said to David Lloyd (her editor at Walker Books) when I took on **The Emperor's New Clothes** was "can I show his penis?" and he said, "Do you want to?" I said "No, but in case I have a brilliant idea I like to know where I am right at the beginning."

Angela reckons not to think too much about her young audience, though she does think about herself as a girl, while recognising that childhood attitudes and reactions may have subsequently changed. Nor does she worry too much about sophistication ('only the best is good enough for them, after all'). The quality of her drawings, however, must be a sensitive matter – once you establish that degree of intensity and detail, you are playing for high stakes. It's a brave woman who does it. And perhaps it isn't altogether surprising that Angela Barrett expresses some trepidation in getting to grips with her work.

Her way of expressing it is characteristic. 'My unwillingness to do things constantly amazes me, and when people say to me, oh someone's offered me a project and I'm terribly excited, I have trouble connecting with it – I think, well, perhaps *I'm* excited, but mostly I just think it's more bloody work ... When you've gone today I shall probably do the washing and then I'll probably go out and wander about for a bit and I might get down to doing some work later.'

However, elsewhere in our conversation, Angela Barrett has allowed herself to admit that while she is at work that excitement does develop; and looking at the results one can recognise the evidence of excitement, a controlled excitement of the most valuable kind.

Photographs by Martin Ellis.

Author and illustrator **Quentin Blake** was the first Children's Laureate.



Some of the many titles illustrated by Angela Barrett

The Orchard Book of Shakespeare Stories, retold by Andrew Matthews, 1 86039 161 3, £12.99 hbk (see page 7 and front cover of this issue of BfK)

The Orchard Book of Stories from the Ballet, retold by Geraldine McCaughrean, 1 85213 493 3, £12.99 hbk, 1 86039 776 X, £8.99 pbk

The Ice Palace, Angela McAllister, Red Fox, 0 09 922201 9, £4.99 pbk

Snow White, Josephine Poole, Red Fox, 0 09 918561 X, £4.50 pbk

Joan of Ark, Josephine Poole, Hutchinson, 0 09 176754 7, £9.99 hbk, Red Fox, 0 09 955361 9, £4.99 pbk

The Hidden House, Martin Waddell, Walker, 0 7445 1266 2, £9.99 hbk, 0 7445 1797 4, £4.99 pbk

The Walker Book of Ghost Stories, edited by Susan Hill, Walker, 0 7445 0766 9, £14.99 hbk

The Emperor's New Clothes, Hans Christian Andersen, trans. Naomi Lewis, Walker, 0 7445 7295 9, £4.99 pbk

Rocking Horse Land and Other Classic Tales of Dolls and Toys, compiled by Naomi Lewis, Walker, 0 7445 5566 3, £12.99 hbk

NEWS

Children And Literature in London

CALL is a new London-wide Children's Literature information point which provides information about Children's Literature festivals and author events in arts centres, libraries and schools across the capital. It also publicises and promotes events via a monthly calendar to children's literature professionals; this will be accessible online and also made available to schools, libraries and other interested parties. If you are planning a children's literature event in the coming months, or would like more details of what CALL can offer, write or e-mail Catherine Johnson at call@booktrust.org.uk

EVENTS

2nd Annual National Storytelling Week

The 2nd Annual National Storytelling Week will be held from 2-9 February 2002. As a result of the highly successful first National Festival, there has been a growing interest from members of the public, museums, schools and local radio stations in the events and workshops held by groups associated with The Society for Storytelling. For further information please call 0118 935 1381 or 020 8866 4232 (after 6pm), or Del Reid on 020 7492 8796 (day), or view the website on www.sfa.org.uk

PEOPLE

Congratulations to **Amelia Edwards**, this year's recipient of the Eleanor Farjeon Award for distinguished services to children's books. As a founder, and recently retired Art Director, of Walker Books, Amelia has worked with some of the greatest talents in illustration, many of whom she has nurtured since the beginning of their careers.

Jerry Hurst, formerly Head of the Young People's Library Service in Southwark, is now a freelance consultant, and working with Launchpad on reader development projects, specifically the 'Their Reading Futures' project with **Tricia Kings**.

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

PUBLICATIONS

100 Best Books 2001

Published by Booktrust, **100 Best Books 2001** (0 85353 489 6) is a selection of fiction titles published in paperback in the previous 12 months for all age groups. Each of the 100 entries includes a brief review, interest level indicator and reading-age code plus a colour image of the cover. There is a subject index which gives a guide to titles in categories such as Emotionally Moving, Reluctant Readers and Something a Bit Different. You can also select via Topics for Discussion. This gives a blueprint of each book's theme - for example, **Little Brother and the Cough** (jealousy, new baby, sibling rivalry) or **Lizzie Zipmouth** (stepfamilies). Available from **Booktrust**, **Book House**, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ at £4.00.

CORRECTION

In Clive Barnes' article, 'Children's Book Reviewing on the Web' (**BfK** No. 130), the Cool Reads website address was given incorrectly. It should have read www.cool-reads.co.uk

Useful Organisations No.18:

Contact: **Paul Johnson**, 11 Hill Top Avenue, Cheadle Hulme, Cheshire SK8 7HN

Tel: 0161 485 2174

E-mail:

pauljohnson@bookart.co.uk

The Book Art Project was inaugurated at the Manchester Metropolitan University (then Manchester Polytechnic) in 1986 by Paul Johnson with grants from the Crafts Council and the Gulbenkian Foundation.

The aim of the project is to encourage the teaching of writing through the discipline of the book arts. By writing and communicating graphically in simple fold and cut book forms (like the six-page origami book) children learn to think in a book oriented way just like professional writers and illustrators do. The technique is

The Book Art Project



as relevant to the emergent writer in the nursery as the secondary school pupil.

Since his early retirement from MMU, Paul Johnson continues to run the BAP in the private sector. For general information about courses, workshops and publications, log on to www.bookart.co.uk or send a SAE. For specific enquiries ring or e-mail.

COMPETITION

The Water Hole Illustration Competition

Teachers are invited to ask their pupils between 5 and 9 years old to draw or paint a water hole picturing the trees and wild animals that drink there. The competition will be judged by Graeme Base, author and illustrator of the counting picture book, **The Water Hole** (Abrams). First prize is a school class trip to Longleat Safari Park and the chance to adopt a pair of hippos for a year. Second prize is books from Abrams to the value of £70. All entries must be posted by 4 January 2002. Further details re. terms and conditions from **Rhian Gallagher**, Harry N Abrams Inc, 181A High Holborn, London WC1V 7QX.



FELLOWSHIP

Eileen Wallace Research Fellowship in Children's Literature

The Eileen Wallace Research Fellowship in Children's Literature, valued up to \$5,000 (CDN) per annum, invites proposals for research and scholarship using the resources of the University of New Brunswick's Eileen Wallace Children's Literature Collection. Proposals are welcomed from anyone who can provide evidence of competence and scholarly background and outline a practical

and worthwhile project using the resources of the Collection. Application forms are available from: **Office of the Dean of Education, University of New Brunswick, PO Box 4400, Fredericton, NB, E3B 5A3, Canada** (telephone (506) 453-4862) or on the website <http://www.lib.unb.ca/Collections/CLC/> Deadline for application is 1 March of any year, with fellowship to be awarded after 1 July of the same year.

AWARDS

NATIONAL AWARDS

The Guardian Children's Fiction Prize

Kevin Crossley-Holland's *The Seeing Stone* (Orion), the first part of his Arthurian trilogy, is the winner of this year's Guardian Children's Fiction Prize. Chair of judges, Julia Eccleshare, described it as 'an exuberantly literary novel which has captured the sought-after "cross-over" ground, appealing to both adults and children. The other books on the shortlist were Allan Ahlberg's *My Brother's Ghost* (Walker), Karen Wallace's *Raspberries on the Yangtze* (Simon & Schuster), Celia Rees's *Witch Child* (Bloomsbury) and Eva Ibbotson's *Journey to the River Sea* (Macmillan). The judges were Anne Fine, Philip Pullman and Jacqueline Wilson.

Sainsbury's Baby Book Award

The winner of this year's Sainsbury's Baby Book Award is Sandra Lousada's *Baby Faces* (Baby Campbell). The other books on the shortlist were Debi Gliori's *Where, Oh Where, is Baby Bear?*



Sainsbury's
baby book
award

Recognising the importance
of first books for babies

(Little Orchard), Annie Kubler's *If You're Happy and You Know It...* (Child's Play), Jo Lodge's *Baby's Very First Book - Farm* (Baby Campbell), Mandy Ross and Kate Merritt's *Peekaboo Baby!* (Ladybird Books) and Nicola Smee's *Sleepyhead* (Baby Campbell).

The Blue Peter Book Awards 2001

Chosen by a judging panel consisting of Blue Peter's editor, Steve Hocking, previous Blue Peter Book Award-winner Alan Gibbons, actress Imogen Stubbs and singer Mel B and chaired by journalist Ian Hislop, the following titles have been shortlisted (according to category) for this year's award:

The Best Book to Keep Forever category:

Allan Ahlberg's *My Brother's Ghost* (Puffin); Richard Platt and Chris Riddell's *Castle Diary* (Walker); Philip Pullman and Peter Bailey's *I Was a Rat* (Corgi); Geraldine McCaughrean's *The Kite Rider* (OUP); Odo Hirsch's *Bartlett and the Ice Voyage* (Bloomsbury).

The Book I Couldn't Put Down category:

Jamila Gavin's *Coram Boy* (Egmont); William Nicholson's *The Windsinger* (Egmont); Jacqueline Wilson's *The Dare Game* (Doubleday); Eva Ibbotson's *Monster Mission* (Macmillan); Neil Arksey's *Playing on the Edge* (Puffin).

The Best Book to Read Aloud category:

Laurence Anholt and Arthur Robins's *Eco-Wolf and the 3 Pigs* (Orchard); Allan Ahlberg and Paul Howard's *The Bravest Ever Bear* (Walker); Jean Ure

and Doffy Weir's *Monster in the Mirror* (Collins); Ian Whybrow and Russell Ayto's *Whiff* (Corgi); Colin McNaughton's *Wish You Were Here...* (Walker).

The Blue Peter Young Judges (chosen by a competition) will now meet to decide on the category winners, and the overall winner of the Blue Peter Book of the Year. These will be announced on a Blue Peter Book Awards Special to be broadcast on BBC1 in the late autumn.

Tir na n-Og Best English-language Book Award

The winner of this year's Tir na n-Og Best English-language Book presented annually by the Welsh Books Council is *The Seeing Stone* by Kevin Crossley-Holland (Orion Children's Books). 'We are extremely pleased to present the award for the Best English-language Book to such an acclaimed author,' said Menna Lloyd Williams, Head of Children's Books Department at the Welsh Books Council.

Simon Elvin Young Poets of the Year

Now in its third year, the Simon Elvin Award received almost 7,000 entries from young people aged 11-18, from all over the country, and also from overseas. From these entries 15 winners and 80 runners-up were chosen.

The winners are: Dylan Chaundy from Cardiff, Emma Gaen from Cardiff, Rebecca Hawkes from Bracknell in Berkshire, Vicky Hozaifeh from Oakwood in Lancashire, Judith Huang from Singapore, Caleb Klaces from Moseley in Birmingham, Pieter Koehorst from Bickerstaffe, Lancashire, Felicity Marks from Hazlemere, Buckinghamshire, Helen Mort from Chesterfield, Derbyshire, Qian Xi Teng from Singapore, Jen Wainwright from Axbridge, Somerset, Charlotte Wetton from Gribthorpe, near Goole, Luke Yates from Skelmersdale in Lancashire, Ruth Yates from Skelmersdale in Lancashire, Caleb Yong from Singapore. All the winners and runners-up receive book prizes donated by Faber & Faber and Anvil Press as well as Youth Membership of the Poetry Society for one year. In addition, the 15 overall winners are invited to attend a residential poetry course at the Arvon Centre, Lumb Bank, West Yorkshire, taught by judges Stephen Knight and Amanda Dalton.

REGIONAL AWARDS

Wirral Paperback of the Year

The seventh annual Wirral Paperback of the Year has been won jointly by Louis Sachar for his book *Holes* (Bloomsbury), and Sherryl Jordan for her book *The Raging Quiet* (Simon and Schuster). The winners were chosen by Year 8 and 9 pupils from 17 schools in Wirral. The other shortlisted title was Jacqueline Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum*.

• OBITUARY •

Richard Mewton 1949-2001

BfK publisher, Richard Hill, writes...

Richard Mewton, the BfK photographer, died tragically at his home in August 2001.

Richard was with the BfK team right from the beginning. His first assignment for us was to photograph Quentin Blake (Authorgraph 1); his last was in Sainsbury's for a series of pictures for an article about supermarkets and children's books in 1997.

Richard was always an integral part of the team and he was *Books for Keeps* - meaning he did the work more for love than money. A gifted portrait photographer and consummate photographic printer, his great asset was his ability, regardless of conditions or



environment, to come up with a picture we wanted to publish. His enthusiasm, energy, his funniness, his sense of the quirky or the daft, his generosity, kindness, idiosyncratic use of the English language, his love of Louie his cat, his endless cups of tea, his DIY ('I think I'll probably come back as a piece of sandpaper, Rich') - made him the very best of mates, one of mine at any rate. A man I loved, a sweet and very special guy.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SUCCESS IN FRANCE

Dear Editor

As an assiduous reader, user and enthusiastic promoter (worldwide) of BfK I should like to rectify one of your rare errors. I am delighted that you should report on the Tam-Tam Prize (BfK No. 127), indeed one of the very few French children's book awards, and extremely prestigious and influential. Nevertheless Geoffrey Malone is not the first British author to win this award, given by expert book critics and organised by the excellent children's magazines, *J'Aime Lire* and *Je Bouquine*, and a jury of 2 x 500 school children. Malone is the fifth British author to be thus rewarded: a previous winner (1999) was indeed J K Rowling with *Harry and the Philosopher's Stone*, a step which, in a similar way to the Smarties, helped propel her to dizzy heights in France also.

By a happy coincidence, just as I am writing this to you, I get a phone call from our Sales Director informing me that the 2001 *Prix Sorcières* has just been awarded to *Kensuke's Kingdom* (*Le Royaume de Kensuké*) by Michael Morpurgo (published by us). This is the prize awarded by the highly respected and feared Association of Specialist Children's Booksellers - as it happens the other of the two most important French children's literature prizes (with *Prix Tam-Tam*) and, I think it would be fair to say, the one that carries the most weight. This is another indication of great success in France for so many British authors - J K Rowling, Philip Pullman, Jacqueline Wilson and indeed Michael Morpurgo himself who is practically adopted as French in France, the ultimate accolade!

Christine Baker

Editor-in-Chief, Gallimard Jeunesse, Editions Gallimard, 5 Rue Sébastien-Bottin, 75328 Paris Cedex 07, France

DURMSTRANG STEREOTYPE cont.

Dear Editor

With reference to Theresa Heine's letter (BfK No. 128), when I ran a private children's library in the '50s-'70s, I had a large selection of World War II novels: a number from and about Poland, Holland, etc. but there were some good books from and about Germany.

The best author in my opinion was Margot Benary whose books were never published in paperback, and are almost certainly now out-of-print. They were much loved, and the only criticism I had of her first book, *The Ark* (1954), was that children might wonder why we fought such a lovely family. But she later published stories, especially *Dangerous Spring* (1961) and *A Time to Love* (Macmillan, 1963) which were semi-autobiographical, and clearly show the difficulties and dangers which anti-Nazi families faced in bringing up their children, and that they were genuinely unaware of the worst horrors of the holocaust until the end of the war. (These all translated from the German.)

More recent books with a German background include *No Shelter*, E Lutzeier (Blackie, 1984) and *Edge of War*, D Horgan (OUP, 1989), and of course there is *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*, Judith Kerr, and its sequels.

These books all show that not all Germans were Nazis, but also the difficulties faced by ordinary decent parents in bringing up their children who were influenced by their teachers and youth leaders. A charming little book for younger readers is *The Little Riders*, M Shemin (Reindeer Books, 1964) which shows that not all German soldiers were Nazi monsters!

Miss R M Jerram

3 Robartes Court, Redannick, Truro, Cornwall TR1 2XX

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.

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

Colin Chapman is a Youth Service Manager with the London Borough of Redbridge.

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.

Adrian Jackson is General Adviser – English, West Sussex.

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

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*.

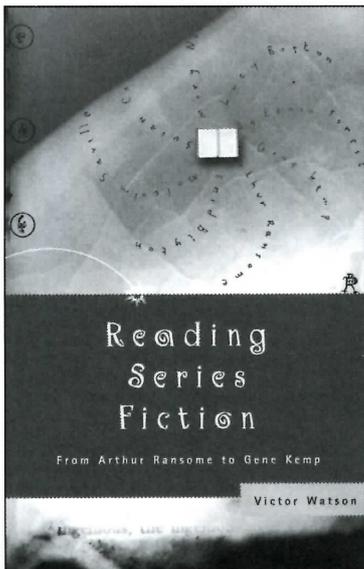
Helen Taylor teaches at Homerton College, Cambridge and is the director of The Voices Project – a literature in the community project and festival in Cambridgeshire.

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

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G.S.O.H.	★★★ 29	Three Billy Goats Gruff, The	★★★ 21
Genetics	★★★ 28	Three Little Kittens	★★★★ 23
Good Dog, Daisy	★★★★ 21	Time-Travelling Cat and the Roman Eagle, The	★★★ 27
Hiccup: The Viking who was Seasick	★★★★★ 23	Tom's Midnight Garden (audio book)	★★ 26
Humphrey's Garden	★★★ 21	Ug	★★★★★ 24
Humphrey's Playtime	★★★ 21	UNICEF	★★★ 28
If Game, The	★★★ 27	United Nations	★★★ 28
In Search of a Homeland	★★★★ 27	Usborne First Encyclopedia of Space, The	★★★ 27
Inside the Internet	★★ 29	What Does Teddy Like to Wear?	★★★ 21
Katje the Windmill Cat	★★★★★ 24	What Howls at the Moon in Frilly Knickers?	★★★ 25
Kevin and the Pirate Test	★★★★ 24	Where Are You, Blue Kangaroo?	★★★ 20
King Rollo and the New Stockings	★★★★★ 23	Witch Child	★★★★★ 21
Let's Go, Anna!	★★★ 21	Wolf Summer	★★★ 30
Life Finds its Feet*	★★★★ 26	Wonderful Thursday Club, The	★★ 25
Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, The (audio book)	★★★★ 24	Yellow House, The	★★★★ 26
Look at Me, Grandma!	★★★★ 23	Yikang's Day	★★★★ 25
Lost Thing, The	★★★★★ 25	You Can't Fancy Your Stepsister	★★ 28
Mog's Bad Thing	★★★★★ 23	Zoom!	★★★ 23
NATO	★★★★ 28		

Books About Children's Books



Reading Series Fiction: From Arthur Ransome to Gene Kemp

★★★

Victor Watson, Routledge Falmer, 240pp, 0 415 22702 X, £13.99 pbk

Familiarity with characters and situations enhances a child's reading and understanding of a story, argues Victor Watson, which is why series fiction, often neglected by reviewers and despised by teachers and parents as being a lightweight option, is so popular with children themselves.

Watson urges adults to listen to what children say about reading since it is from their observations that it is possible to get a feel for why they read and especially why they so enjoy reading series fiction. But it's not this thesis alone, though it's an interesting one, that makes this book such a valuable resource and such an interesting study.

To underpin his argument, Watson includes a number of critical readings of series. Through these he identifies both the particular qualities of each series as well as the general features of all series writing. Watson's range of examples is wide. He sets Arthur Ransome squarely within his period explaining, for example, that the omission of writing anything remotely touching on adolescent sexuality was a cultural truism and not limited to Ransome alone. His reading of the Ransome novels provides illuminating insights into how Ransome changed what he was doing in the different titles as well as illustrating what he was saying through different characters and how he was saying it. He also uses Ransome's writing as an illustration of the overall place of the adventure novel at the time.

Alongside, and not at all as a pejoratively viewed counterbalance, he includes popular series by Malcolm Saville and Enid Blyton, with a convincing explanation of why for so many children Blyton was the key author in turning them into readers, despite being despised by adult critics and, ultimately, giving adventure fiction a bad name.

Watson's readings of Mary Norton's 'The Borrowers' series are particularly rich – though here his arguments about what children say about them are insubstantial as the books lack much currency among today's readers. He expands from what he describes as the 'minimalist reading' of the stories with its emphasis on the completeness of the tiny world by understanding the more complex and subtle undercurrents of what Norton's stories are saying about human states of mind and social structures.

Other series such as Gene Kemp's 'Cricklepit' novels which he cites as an example of how well authenticity and first person child narrative can be achieved, the fantasies of Lucy Boston's 'Greene Knowe' stories and Susan Cooper's 'Dark is Rising' quintet are also all given serious and

enthusiastic attention. But nowhere is Watson more enthusiastic or attentive than for Antonia Forest's 'Marlow' novels. Firmly rooted in both the school story and family story tradition, Watson argues that the Marlow novels have been unjustly overlooked. Through copious quotation he illustrates what Antonia Forest achieved in her series and even though with much qualification and a certain amount of self-mockery, gives them some claims to comparison with Jane Austen.

In fact, where Watson could have scored mileage for Antonia Forest is in what may easily be seen as her influence on J K Rowling. Though mostly a family of boys where the Marlows are girls, the Weasleys bear a close resemblance and the stories contain parallels of school/family life. Instead, surprisingly for a book published at the end of 2000, the 'Harry Potter' novels, the children's book series which will effortlessly achieve the very thing that Watson is so cogently arguing for, is given only a few passing references.

Though apparently limited by its title, *Reading Series Fiction* provides not only good arguments for reconsidering this neglected area of children's reading but also a thought provoking view of how children read in general and therefore what effect different kinds of writing and story telling may have on them. JE

Creating Writers: a creative writing manual for schools

★★★★

James Carter, Routledge, 282pp, 0 415 21691 5, £25.00 pbk

How are writers made? In this companion to *Talking Books*, James Carter provides excellent guidance for teachers who are keen to support the developing authorship of their students. *Creating Writers* includes sections on writing workshops, poetry, fiction, non-fiction and making the most of author visits.

A great strength of this guide is the wisdom provided through authors' introspective accounts of creative processes, and the sample plans and manuscripts that exemplify ways of working. For example, on planning, Morris Gleitzman notes: 'I plan my books out on the computer and I write notes about each chapter of the novel. I do many drafts of that chapter plan.' While Philip Pullman says: 'I find that when I do plan a story it goes dead on me, so I have to keep some of it unknown. Otherwise I lose the curiosity that pulls me through.' On narration, Berlie Doherty explains that a first person narration helps her to get to know her characters, while Philip Pullman prefers the third person: 'because I like swooping in and drawing back, and giving a panoramic view – in the same way a film camera does.' These perspectives indicate that there is no single route to becoming a good writer, no routine or ritual that needs to be slavishly adhered to. Rather the apprentice learns from the master craftsman and through imitation, experimentation and reflection finds a distinctive voice and style. There are implications for teachers' engagement in creative writing; those who write alongside their pupils will be best placed to scaffold development.

Technical aspects of language are important in that they serve the writer's intentions and the desire to create meaning. The authors profiled in this book discuss the importance of developing a personal vocabulary and highlight the need for effective punctuation. Each section concludes with a collection of workshop starters. Many of these exercises are thoughtfully designed to help young writers explicitly examine the effects created by particular uses of language. They will be most effective if adapted and embedded in a well-planned writing curriculum rather than used as quick fillers. Overall an invaluable guide that will inspire students, teachers and also those interested in writing for children. I for one couldn't wait to pick up my pen! NG

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

Where Are You, Blue Kangaroo?

PICTURE BOOK ★★★

Emma Chichester Clark, Collins, 32pp, 0 00 710996 2, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 125, November 2000:

'Blue Kangaroo keeps getting left in unusual places by Lily in this second book about the pair, but is safely restored to her one way or another. At last he takes matters into his own paws and shows Lily that a pouch for her to carry him in might be a good idea. Chichester Clark's familiar palette of pinks, yellows and clear turquoise blues is used – along with her trademark wide-brimmed hat.'

Frog and a Very Special Day

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Max Velthuijs, Andersen, 32pp, 1 84270 050 2, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 123, July 2000:

'In this latest tale about Frog and his friends, Frog awakes, recalling that Hare has told him today is special. Forgetting HOW it is special, he asks each friend in turn, but no-one gives a satisfactory answer... Once again, Velthuijs tackles sensitive topics with gentle humour.'

Billy Bean's Dream

FACTION ★★★★★

Simone Lia, David & Charles, 32pp, 1 86233 335 1, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 123, July 2000:

'Billy Bean builds a rocket with the help of some jellybean friends and their pets – young children learn about colours and numbers. There are so many things to count: the jellybeans, their pets, the work tools, the rocket seats, the sandwiches and the stars as the rocket finally zooms into the sky. Simple but effective language links perfectly with the strong illustrations.'

A New Room for William

PICTURE BOOK ★★★

Sally Grindley, ill. Carol Thompson, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 5048 4, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 125, November 2000:

'William has moved house; he and mum are decorating his new room,

which gradually feels more like home to him. He begins to make friends with the boy next door and to notice the good things about his new home. The final page has William asking Mum "Will Dad let me choose the paper for my room at his new house?" There is no discussion of this beyond his mother's reassuring answer.'

Nothing Scares Us

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Frieda Wishinsky, ill. Neal Layton, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 5043 3, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 125, November 2000:

"'Nothing and no one scares us' sing best friends Lucy and Lenny, 'the Fearless Two'. But Lucy is terrified of the slimy green Creature on television and Lenny is petrified by a

little spider on his bowl of popcorn. A warm-hearted tale of fears overcome and supportive friendship.'

Once Upon an Everyday

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Toby Forward, ill. Sophy Williams, Picture Corgi, 32pp, 0 552 54621 6, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 126, January 2001:

'This exquisitely designed picture book contrasts dreamworlds and real life. "I have never gone to sea in a pirate ship" is the opening of the first double-spread, to be followed on the next spread with "But I once went fishing with a net". Thus the author unfolds a series of delicious fantasy scenes.'

Flora the Frog

PICTURE BOOK ★★★

Shirley Isherwood, ill. Anna C. Leplar, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 5053 0, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 127, March 2001:

'When Flora is asked to play the part of a frog in the school play, she is not happy... But when Flora comes face to face with real frogs in a pond, she realises their beauty. A story to touch the hearts of all parents, teachers and child performers.'

5-8 INFANT/JUNIOR

Sausage and the Little Visitor

0 7136 5472 4

Sausage in Trouble

0 7136 5476 7

School for Sausage

0 7136 5474 0

Sausage and the Spooks

0 7136 5470 8

FICTION ★★★★★

Michaela Morgan, ill. Dee Shulman, A & C Black, 48pp, £3.99 each pbk

Reviewed BfK 128, May 2001:

'The "Silly Sausage" series, for novice readers, features an endearing sausage dog and two snooty cats who provide a commentary on his activities. The stories are told in short sentences with a fair bit of repetition. Despite this, a good range of vocabulary and some useful spelling patterns are introduced. Situations of the "everyone's scared sometimes" type are addressed, and the books all give a gently affirming message, not least to the young learner.'

8-10 JUNIOR/MIDDLE

Points of View with Professor Peekaboo

John Agard, ill. Satoshi Kitamura, Red Fox, 64pp, 0 09 941326 4, £4.99

POETRY ★★★

Reviewed BfK 127, March 2001:

'Questions about rhyme and rhythm crop up for me throughout this book, though not on every page, not in a nice pair of bathroom poems, or the fine poem about trees. But does this book need Peekaboo? Do writers need so firmly theming?'

10-12 MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Secret Heart

FICTION ★★★★★

David Almond, Hodder, 208pp, 0 340 74369 7, £5.99

Reviewed BfK 128, May 2001:

'Joe Maloney sees a tiger in Helmouth, a neglected city estate. The tiger has come with the circus, or at least its spectre has, for the circus no longer boasts wild animal acts. This is the story of a friendship between

outsiders: Joe, the fatherless, stuttering truant, and Corinna, the orphan girl on the flying trapeze. Almond transforms a threadbare, despairing, and often violent reality into a visionary landscape that offers a new beginning to his characters and a powerful experience to his readers.'

Witch Child

FICTION ★★★★★

Celia Rees, Bloomsbury, 240pp, 0 7475 5009 3, £5.99

Reviewed BfK 128, May 2001:

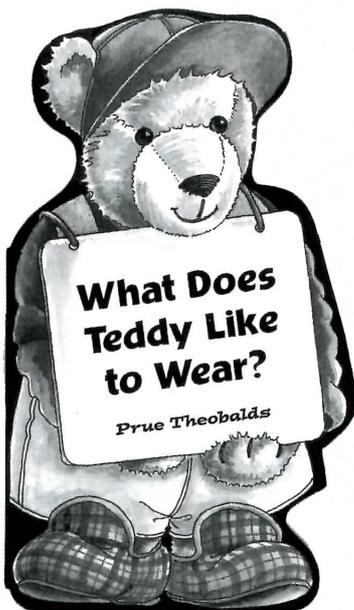
'Mary is a witch - or, as she says, "so some would call me". Her narrative, told in the form of a diary, begins in 1659 with the torture and hanging for witchcraft of the woman she has always thought of as her grandmother. How, then, is Mary to be saved? Mary joins those who are emigrating to America in the hope of a better life, free from persecution. But fear of witches travels with her... Rees's outstanding fiction carries both historical and psychological conviction.'

REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant

What Does Teddy Like to Wear?

★★★

Prue Theobalds, Uplands Books, 12pp, 1 897951 51 5, £3.99 novelty board



This bold, die-cut board book shaped like a teddy is appealing to the eye. Its rhyming text bounces along: 'What does Teddy like to wear? He doesn't like to go out bare.' The visual clues will help the youngest child predict the rhyming words on subsequent reads. At last, Teddy is ready for bed, snuggled in his red dressing gown and it is time to say goodnight. But on the final page, he smilingly reveals his

brand new pyjamas, blue and white. The book is comfortable for tiny hands, there is lots to look at and talk about, including something new perhaps - Teddy wearing a kilt! GB

Let's Go, Anna!

★★★

Vivian French, ill. Alex Ayliffe, David & Charles, 24pp, 1 86233 284 3, £4.99 pbk novelty

This bright picture book with flaps turns a shopping expedition into a counting adventure. Dad attempts to supervise helpful toddler Anna as the numbers 1 to 5 appear in descending order, with Anna's reward of 1 ice-cream at the end. When a two-year-old Anna tested this book for me, she loved exploring the pictures and opening the flaps, although she was slightly bothered by Anna's ever increasing disasters... 'Oops, Anna!' This child found several ways of counting the shopping items, listed together at the back of the book. Certainly there is lots of fun and the pictures are vibrant in pinks, purples, oranges and reds. This would be a good addition to a nursery library, and the tough flaps should withstand eager fingers. GB

Humphrey's Playtime

0 14 056746 1

Humphrey's Garden

0 14 056745 3

★★★

Sally Hunter, Puffin, 24pp, £3.99 each pbk

A pair of gentle perambulations each comprising just two sentences (punctuated by minibeasts and toy

vehicles) telling of a small toy elephant's favourite occupations indoors and out. The grey hand-written text and pictures in soft grey outline and misty watercolours evoke a sense of security and tranquillity as Humphrey begins to explore the world.

Printed on cream coloured card, these books are designed for very young hands and can serve as invitations for adult/toddler dialogue and for 'just beginning' readers. JB

Squeak! Squeak!

Siobhan Dodds, 0 340 79943 9

One Too Many Tigers

Cressida Cowell, ill. Andy Ellis, 0 340 79214 0

★★★

Hodder Toddler, 24pp, £3.99 each pbk

Here are two picture books from the 'Hodder Toddler' series. In *Squeak! Squeak!* Grandad, Grandma, Mummy and Daddy all join toddler Nelly as she marches and makes monster steps and bunny hops in her smart new shoes. However, a curious squeak, squeak follows the family around. There is a well-constructed pause as each adult whispers to Nelly what they think the squeak might be, whilst the reader is introduced to the concept of the think bubble in the illustrations. The resolution is beautifully handled in text and pictures.

One Too Many Tigers is a wonderful little counting book which will demand to be read again and again! It has an exciting climax with a twist. Tootle the baby tiger sleeps lazily with his parents in the Tiger Tree. When Cockatoo brings Titbit, the

new tiger baby, in a tiny basket, the branches snap and all fall to the ground. 'Leaping leopards!' 'Jumping jaguars!' cry the parent tigers. 'WHATEVER SHALL WE DO?' With cockatoo's help, they find the answer, and all seems fine ... but is it? Lots of fun. GB

The Three Billy Goats Gruff

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★

Henriette Barkow, ill. Richard Johnson, Mantra, 24pp, English/Chinese, 1 85269 614 1, £6.99 pbk

This picture book is a pleasant retelling of this well known tale in a dual text version. The text (Chinese printed directly above the English version) is superimposed on full page illustrations which are quite striking in both form and colour. Johnson's sophisticated style may not appeal to everyone - his vision of the troll is quite unusual, but that is part of the appeal of this book, and even if you do not immediately warm to the illustrative style, you will find the pictures do grow on you. Available in 17 other dual language editions. UC

Good Dog, Daisy

★★★★

Lisa Kopper, Hamish Hamilton, 32pp, 0 241 14128 1, £10.99 hbk

Baby's efforts at training one of Daisy's three puppies to sit, lie and speak prove more successful than Mum's with Daisy herself in Kopper's latest picture book featuring the lovable bull terrier. The effectively controlled vocabulary and patterned structure of the text make for a

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OUT NOW FOR CHRISTMAS

simple but satisfying read which the pencil crayon and watercolour illustrations extend and embellish with humorous action and the interaction of the Mum, Baby, dog and puppies. **JB**

Three Little Kittens

★★★★

Tanya Linch, Gullane, 32pp, 1 86233 204 5, £9.99 hbk

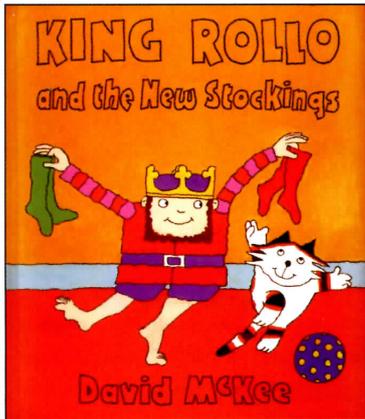
This well known rhyme is given a fresh look in this picture book version with its large, colourful and imaginative pictures. Each double spread is striking on first view, and there is much to discover and talk about in subsequent readings. Early on, one of the lost mittens can be spotted stuck in a tree, and some of the pages have a decorative border with household items relating to the pie-making. The text is extra bold and clear, and the 'Mee-ows' are satisfyingly phonetic for early readers. There is enough to entice very young children to return to the book by themselves. **GB**

Zoom!

★★★★

Trish Cooke, ill. Alex Ayliffe, Collins, 32pp, 0 00 664621 2, £4.99 pbk

Hurricane Kieron and Rush Around Ria are siblings whose names suggest their characters and main preoccupation. As ultimately the interest lies in what they do rather than who they are, this has probably influenced the style of the illustrations which consist of somewhat stylised cartoon-like figures with a busy, flat background in a 'graphic art' style. The result is really a delightful book for infants with fresh and delicious illustrations in various shades of pastel. **EL**



King Rollo and the New Stockings

★★★★★

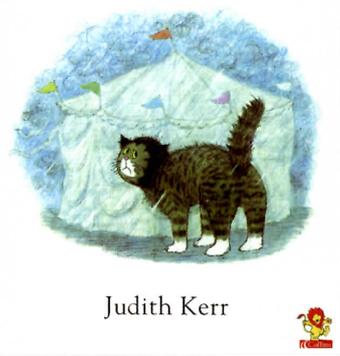
David McKee, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 953 6, £9.99 hbk

In this delightful, humorous tale, King Rollo has new stockings, one red pair, one green. We meet old friends, the magician, Cook, Queen Gwen and the cat. King Rollo is to deliver a pie to old Mrs Harris. Cook patiently gives directions, '...second on the left, first house on the right,' but Rollo has problems distinguishing left from right. How will he cope?

McKee's characters are drawn with familiarity in both text and pictures, and this new story may well

introduce King Rollo to a fresh audience, who would have great fun discovering all his other adventures. And what a useful teaching tool in the KS1 classroom! **GB**

Mog's Bad Thing



Judith Kerr

Mog's Bad Thing

★★★★★

Judith Kerr, Collins, 32pp, 0 00 198385 7, £9.99 hbk

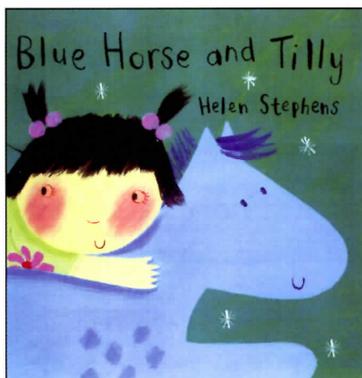
After thirty years, Mog (of Forgetful Cat fame) continues to delight young (and not so young) readers and listeners with her inevitable misunderstandings and misdeeds. In this latest escapade, having discovered a huge 'flappy-floppy thing' in the back garden where her lavatory should be, Mog does the unspeakable on Mr Thomas' favourite armchair. But, as ever, she emerges in a star role - in this instance as winner of the cat show held in the big tent in the garden and normality is restored. **JB**

Blue Horse and Tilly

★★★★★

Helen Stephens, Doubleday, 32pp, 0 385 60234 0, £9.99 hbk

Lonely children and their imaginary friends are the subjects of a number of books, speaking of the need for stories which convey empathy with those who may be lonely or who feel left out. This picture book will provide opportunities for parents and teachers to talk about loneliness and friendship, and an opportunity for children in this situation to empathise with Tilly who is new in town and finds it difficult to make friends. Her toy blue horse comes to the rescue. Together they play games and eventually blue horse encourages Tilly to speak to another little girl in the playground.



Stephens' flat, stylish paintings and her use of purple, blue and turquoise

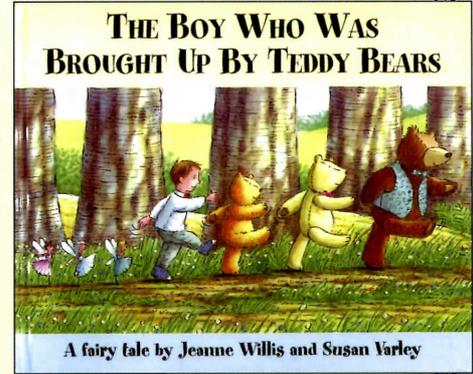
Editor's Choice

The Boy Who Was Brought Up by Teddy Bears

★★★★

Jeanne Willis, ill. Susan Varley, Andersen Press, 32pp, 1 84270 018 9, £9.99 hbk

Believing him to be 'all alone in the world', three teddy bears adopt a baby they find in the woods and bring him up. In the tradition of feral children of legend, the baby grows up believing himself to be a teddy bear (he walks like one and growls like one although he can't quite manage the leg swivelling) and he is reluctant, when reclaimed by his mother on his fourth birthday, to become a boy - until she gives him 'the biggest bear hug he'd ever had'. Being lost and then found has great meaning for



A fairy tale by Jeanne Willis and Susan Varley

younger readers and this is an amusingly original picture book take on this powerful theme. All ends well when we discover that the mother has long been searching for her lost son and that she is prepared to extend her maternal affections to include the three kindly bears who have nurtured her son. Varley's sketchy, unpretentious line and wash illustrations complement the story with warmth. **RS**

help to create a feeling of space and an atmosphere of being apart for Tilly, who, while she may be lonely, is certainly not without sparkiness. **VC**

Look at Me, Grandma!

★★★★

Valerie Mendes, ill. Claire Fletcher, The Chicken House, 32pp, 1 9034 3410 6, £9.99 hbk

Jamie's Grandma comes to stay while Mum is having a baby, and she brings her photo album. In it, Jamie discovers Callum, a red-haired, green-eyed uncle he never knew. Callum comes to Jamie in dreams and helps him overcome fears - of swimming, of riding his bike and driving the dodgem cars - and when Mum brings home green-eyed, red-haired Sara, Jamie is thrilled with this new sister so like Callum.

There is a feeling throughout the story of waiting - waiting for the baby, waiting for Jamie to outgrow his fears, waiting for Mum's return - and this is enhanced by the liquid movement and texture of the predominately green and blue illustrations. There is poetry in the text ('white sheets of rain sweep from the midnight sky') which matches the beauty of the pictures, and both combine to show us Jamie's growing self-confidence and his awareness of the importance of family relationships. **ES**

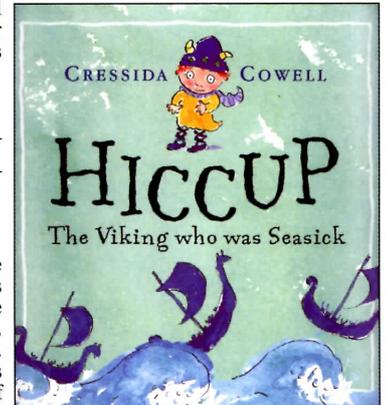
Hiccup: The Viking who was Seasick

★★★★★

Cressida Cowell, Hodder, 32pp, 0 340 75722 1, £4.99 pbk

Hiccup is a small and gentle Viking who is frightened of many things, including going to sea. His dad, Stoick the Vast, has little sympathy, but his granddad, Old Wrinkly, is more understanding: 'The sea is full of trials and terrors. But it is also full of marvels and miracles.' Just like life, we might add.

Sure enough, Hiccup comes through his trial with flying colours. This is a tale that would be enjoyed even by those children who have no idea about the Viking reputation for



brainless machismo. Cowell's pictures are full of fun and her text is full of invention and wit. It is an exuberant performance, through which the sea, in its 'ancient prawn-y green-ness', rolls and blusters to the very edge of the page. Stoick's Viking song is a delight. **CB**

Farmer George and the New Piglet

1 86205 521 1

Farmer George and the Snowstorm

1 86205 516 5

★★

Nick Ward, Pavilion, 32pp, £7.99 each hbk

Two of a series of six titles featuring Farmer George, his wife Dotty and their animals. In *Snowstorm*, Farmer George rescues a frozen Larry (lamb) with the help of Tam (sheepdog) and Sidney (carthorse) and nurses him back to health while in *Piglet*, the said animal's fear of the dark leads to sleepless nights until Perry discovers the joys of mud.

Designed for adult/nursery infant sharing, these books with their well-drawn and painted, unsophisticated illustrations (drawn with TV in mind?) and the final activity spread in each title offer a mildly diverting but untaxing read. **JB**

Nursery Tales**AUDIO BOOK** ★★☆☆

Retold by Jonathan Langley, read by Victoria Wood, Collins, 60 mins unabridged, 0 00 101767 5, £3.99 tape

Backed by some jaunty music and sound effects (some of which occasionally intrude) these plainly written retellings, warmly read by

Victoria Wood, make a perfect introduction to old favourites such as 'Little Red Riding Hood', 'The Three Billy Goats Gruff' and 'The Ugly Duckling'. Six stories in all, this is good quality, easy listening for the very young. JE

Sophie's Snail**AUDIO BOOK** ★★☆☆

Dick King-Smith, read by Bernard Cribbins, BBC Cover to Cover, 50 mins unabridged, 1 85549 676 3, £8.99 CD

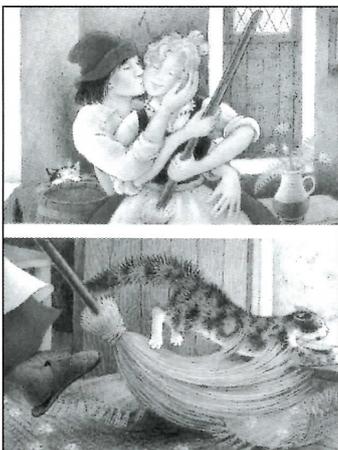
Surprisingly, Bernard Cribbins fails to capture the humour that lies at the heart of these stories about a four-year-old with attitude – much in the

vein of *My Naughty Little Sister*. Sophie already knows that she wants to be a lady farmer with a cow called Blossom and two hens and nothing is going to stop her. Each of these seven brief and neatly shaped stories reveal Sophie's tenderness towards different animals – woodlice and snails to begin with – and her contempt for a pink toy pony called Twinkletoes. JE

REVIEWS 5–8 Infant/Junior**That's My Mum****DUAL LANGUAGE** ★★☆☆

Henriette Barkow, ill. Derek Brazell, Mantra, 24pp, English/Bengali, 1 85269 597 8, £6.99 pbk

An excellent book based on the personal experiences of the author and her daughter, who is of mixed heritage; because they have a different skin colour, people assume they are not mother and daughter. Mia has a friend who faces similar reactions and together they share their frustrations: 'People think my mum isn't my mum.' Together they come up with some ideas and finally hit upon a way of asserting who their mum is, clearly and positively – no question. A true story wonderfully enhanced by Brazell's warm, realistic illustrations which both support the text and add to it. Available in 17 other dual language editions. UC



then by his new baby. Yet the friendship between cat and baby grows, and proves crucial when a great storm breaches the dikes, floods the windmill and carries baby and cat away in the cradle. Bayley's illustrations are both sumptuous and delicate, deliberately recalling Dutch domestic and fine art. Miniature Delft-like tiles decorate each of the pages in pale blue and white, while the main plates, in the manner of Flemish masters, use rich colours and brilliant lighting. She is equally at home portraying the nuances of emotion between the characters and the dramatic sweep of the storm. Her pictures tell the story and ravish the eye. Walker's editing and design team have presented the book with the skill and care which it deserves. CB

The Sorcerer's Apprentice

★★☆☆

Sally Grindley, ill. Thomas Taylor, Gullane, 32pp, 1 86233 330 0, £10.99 hbk

You may recognise the style of these illustrations, because Thomas Taylor was cover illustrator for the first Harry Potter. Perhaps that may have suggested him as suitable for this earlier tale of magic and mayhem. But neither author nor illustrator makes the most of the possibilities in the story.

Grindley's retelling is straightforward without aiming for any distinctiveness. Often, the illustrations merely repeat the details of her text, without extending it in any way, or adequately conveying its meaning and drama. Although the shadow of Disney is everywhere, Taylor's realisation of the setting and characters is imprecise. The relationship between apprentice and sorcerer, essential to the story, is barely established. Best to go back to Disney, or, for a new angle, try Ted Dewan's brilliantly updated robot version. CB

Katje the Windmill Cat

★★★★☆

Gretchen Woelfle, ill. Nicola Bayley, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 8016 1, £10.99 hbk

This is a perfect match of words and pictures. Woelfle's text is conversational and understated, just right for a domestic tale which turns into high drama. Katje the cat feels displaced from the young miller's affections and her comfortable life in the home, first by his new wife and

Ug's Dad, Dug, is puzzled by his son's outlandish questions, but mostly patient in his responses. Ug's bare-bosomed Mum, Dugs, isn't patient at all ('Mark my words – he'll end up painting animals on the walls' – which he does, of course, dipping into his anachronistic paint-pot). Dug tries to defend Ug (to Dugs) as the parents lie beneath their stone duvet fretting over their offspring: 'It's called "Youth Culture", Dugs.'



So Ug goes on his musing way, suggesting that hot dead animal bits might taste better than cold ones, pondering on 'bending' streams to bring water conveniently closer, proposing that stone (for Stone Age cricket, tennis and soccer) cannot be the best material for the ball. Eventually, Ug persuades his dad to see things his way and they cut out a couple of trouser shapes from a baby woolly mammoth skin the lad has found. Triumph! Until – deep frustration – how do you join them together?

Vintage Briggs. Christmas cartoon material surely – though a film-maker might choose to introduce a more visible narrative line for the medium. GF

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe**AUDIO BOOK** ★★☆☆

C S Lewis, read by Sir Michael Hordern, Collins, 2hrs 11mins abridged, 0 00 101611 3, £8.99 tape

Thank goodness Collins has had the wisdom to reissue these tapes of the 'Chronicles of Narnia' and not to record. (All seven titles in the sequence are newly available.) Marisa Robles' atmospheric harp music which she plays herself sets up the magical background while Michael Hordern's fast reading with its emphasis on the drama and not the weighty overtones of the story leads the listener unresistingly from

reality to Narnia. In Hordern's reading the child characters have suitably dated accents which makes the delivery of their old-fashioned sentiments – lines about trying not to cry and the rest – seem quaint but fitting. JE

One Hot Penguin

★★☆☆

Jamie Rix, ill. Neal Layton, Young Corgi, 80pp, 0 552 54737 9, £3.99 pbk



In the middle of a very hot summer, Phelan goes with his mother to the zoo wearing a new green anorak. While he shares ice cream with the animals there, a quick-witted penguin sees this anorak as a chance to escape from the zoo and go to the South Pole. What ensues is a highly amusing tale with plenty of mishaps en route; children will identify with much of what happens, and adults should take note that telling tall stories to children can sometimes have unexpected consequences! RL

Kevin and the Pirate Test

0 7136 5459 7

Smudger and the Smelly Fish

0 7136 5460 0

Doris's Brilliant Birthday

0 7136 5461 9

Captain Motley and the Pirate's Gold

0 7136 5458 9

★★★★☆

Margaret Ryan, ill. Margaret Chamberlain, A & C Black 'Rockets', 48pp, £3.99 each pbk

These four 'Motley Crew' books in the 'Rocket' series, intended for children who have just started reading independently, are tremendous fun. Forget Captain Pugwash, here we have the crew of the *Hesmerelda*, led

by Captain Motley with Squawk, his rhyme-speaking parrot, eager cabin boy Kevin, scruffy first mate Smudger and the hopeless cook Doris McNorris. Each story sees the crew of the *Hesmerelda* coming up against their arch enemy Horatio Thunderguts, a maritime Dick Dastardly if ever there was one! Thunderguts rightly gets his comeuppance with Captain Motley and his crew earning brownie points from the Chief Pirate who always seems to arrive at the right moment.

Each of the *Hesmerelda's* four crew members gets a share of the spotlight. The cabin boy is the main focus in *Kevin and the Pirate Test*, which sees Kevin attempting to pass his GPSE (Good Pirate Skills Exam). There is hard work for the crew when the fastidious mother of the first mate comes on board in *Smudger and the Smelly Fish*. The ship's cook Doris, who is hopeless at making porridge, is upset when she thinks everyone has forgotten her birthday in *Doris's Brilliant Birthday*, but as the title suggests, it all ends happily, though the surprise party organised by the crew doesn't exactly go as

planned! In *Captain Motley and the Pirate's Gold* the crew of the *Hesmerelda* win a huge bag of gold doubloons by being judged the smartest ship in the Pirate Fleet by the Chief Pirate, despite the concerted efforts of the nasty but completely incompetent Horatio Thunderguts.

All four stories are well written with an underlying cheeky sense of humour pervading. This is especially evident in Squawk's rhyming couplets. A successful mix of speech bubbles and traditional text is used in all four books. The cartoon illustrations work well. **AK**

Nii Kwei's Day

Francis Provençal and Catherine McNamara, 0 7112 1769 6

Cássio's Day

Maria de Fatima Campos, 0 7112 1770 X

Yikang's Day

Sungwan So, 0 7112 1771 8

Polina's Day

Andrey Ilyin, 0 7112 1809 9

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Frances Lincoln 'Child's Day', 32pp, £10.99 each pbk

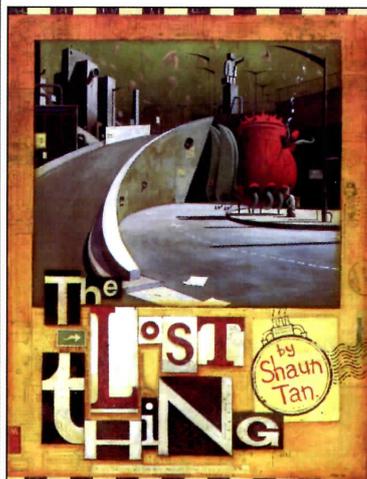
The structuring of an information book round a child's day or week has long been a favourite device to help children gain a foothold in the social and cultural life in a particular country. In this new series we meet each child in the family setting, joining them at breakfast and then following them through the rhythm of the school day. Some things happen everywhere – food is prepared, work carried out and leisure activities enjoyed when school or work is finished. But there are interesting differences – in religious observance, language and in the formality of relationships.

The books begin with a map of the country with the region or town from which the child comes marked, and end with detailed and very helpful notes, a glossary and an index. This is all sensible and useful but a series format held to strictly can become

tediously predictable. However, these books achieve individuality through the excellent photographs which communicate the texture of the children's lives – we see Nii Kwei and his friends in Ghana eating waakye and kenkey at break and Cássio in Brazil having lessons outside on a hot day. The photographs sometimes suggest what is not made explicit in the written text: the photograph of Polina and her class in *Polina's Day* shows that learning is a serious business in Russia.

Sensitive issues like the one-child per family rule in China (*Yikang's Day*) are mentioned or implied but not considered in depth and nor would we expect this for the six- or seven-year-olds the books are intended for. It is up to the adult, at home or in school, how much of the information in the 'More About' sections at the end of the books is shared with young children. **MM**

REVIEWS 8–10 Junior/Middle



The Lost Thing

★★★★★

Shaun Tan, Lothian, 32pp, 0 7344 0074 8, £9.99 hbk

Shaun Tan's hero is, mostly, a bottle-top collector. Once, however, when he was out down by the beach collecting bottle-tops, he found a Lost Thing. It was friendly enough, though melancholy. So our hero took it home, and then to the Federal Department of Odds and Ends, where he was given several reams of forms to fill in.

All of which gives no sense at all of the visual and mental excitement, not to say challenge, of this picture book. The city surrounding the bottle-top hunter is a maelstrom of steaming, rusting plumbing, of Lowryesque citizens hurrying about their gloomy business through grey canyons of conformity and bureaucracy. Tan's reader-viewers (from older children to adults) need to look closely – and then to look again. Here and there, painted on a road surface or a wall, usually pointing away from where our hero is headed, is a tiny white arrowhead with a wavy tail. And that symbol is also on a card which an anonymous little cleaning machine hands to the

collector as he clutches the mountain of forms in the Department.

The arrow trail leads him and the Lost Thing through the city to a doorway, beyond which lies a Dali-esque, blue-skied SOMEWHERE populated by other Things which don't fit in. The collector goes back to his bottle-tops, leaving his friend behind since it seemed to like it there. Every now and again, the storyteller thinks he sees something else which looks a bit lost; but less and less often as he grows older. 'Too busy doing other stuff, I guess.'

The visual techniques of this book are constantly exciting, making us work (and play) and smile as we explore. Images appear as collages, mounted against the grinding, age-browned pages of 'Dad's old physics and engineering text books' (it says, squeezed in sideways in minute letters, on the sort-of title page). A puzzle of a text which the reader versed in the games of some contemporary illustrators, would surely take away for close, reflective and satisfying perusal. **GF**

Polly's Running Away Book

★★★

Frances Thomas, ill. Sally Gardner, Bloomsbury, 96pp, 0 7475 5089 1, £4.99 pbk

Presented in diary form, Polly's monologue charts the period leading up to the birth of a new baby in the family. She is sharp, caustic at times, providing a commentary on her family, teacher, friends (and ex-friend) and the subjects studied in school – she displays a keen interest in the Tudors' practice of throwing their poo out the window. The central theme of the diary is Polly's plan to run away in protest at the awfulness of her life, and entries contain accounts of her 'savings' in the form of food and cash. There is something of an embryonic Bridget Jones here, and indeed Polly's tone is reminiscent of that of Ms J.

The diary entries on each page are

framed by black and white sketches and collages, somewhat in the style of a Victorian scrapbook. **VC**

The Wonderful Thursday Club: Animal Poems

POETRY ★★

Gordon Snell, ill. Anthony Flintoft, Orion Dolphin, 96pp, 1 84255 030 6, £3.99 pbk

Ant eaters, goats, rattlesnakes and woodpeckers – there's a poem for every animal in this lively collection of word play poems. Unfortunately the rhymes and the subject matter just go on and on with little respite or variation. After a while, it's hard to concentrate and the verses just become background noise. **HT**

Pony in the Dark

★★★

K. M. Peyton, ill. Robin Lawrie, Young Corgi, 112pp, 0 552 54745 X, £3.99 pbk

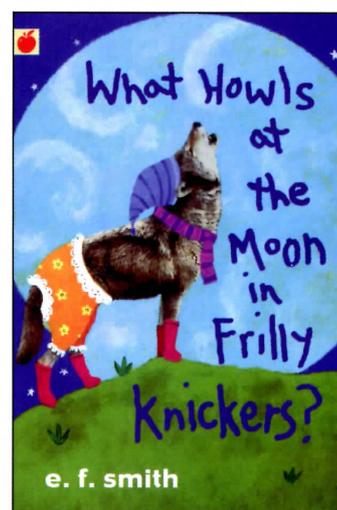
In the latter part of Queen Victoria's reign, Tom has to choose between a life of fishing or mining. He is not attracted to either job, and it is through his love for a pony that the story develops and comes to a surprising but rewarding ending. There is plenty of period detail in the book, which will help readers to understand what life was like in those days. As one would expect, Peyton tells the story well and sympathetically without ever descending into being sentimental. Schools teaching the Victorian Era would do well to have this book to hand. **RL**

What Howls at the Moon in Frilly Knickers?

★★★

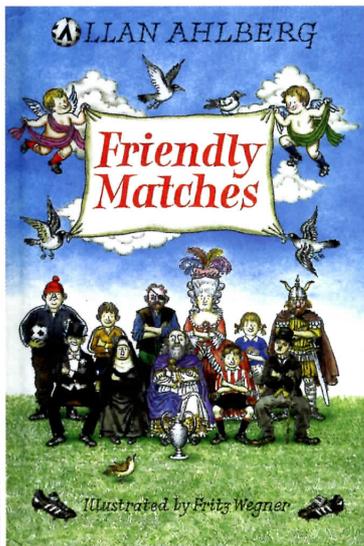
e.f. smith, Orchard, 128pp, 1 84121 808 1, £4.99 pbk

This is the story of how Julian and his friends, Gary and Ed, set out to write



and publish a joke book. The jokes are gathered, argued over and there is much discussion of what makes a good joke. Language and its shifting nature is at the core of the research for the book and there is plenty of potential for discussion in English classes here.

Julian is keen on the idea of the joke book to take his mind off the impending death from cancer of Mim, his beloved granny. Mim lives with Julian and his parents, and her illness and death at the end of the book are handled with sensitivity despite the overall lighthearted tone of the book. Equally, while not such a major part of the narrative, the tension and eventual divorce between Gary's parents is in counterpoint to the boys' undertaking, during which they learn quite a bit about themselves and other people. Sheila Moxley's striking cover adds to the fun and is likely to attract readers. If you don't appreciate silly jokes don't read this book, but most kids will love it. And if you must know, it's an underwear-wolf! **VC**



Friendly Matches

POETRY ★★★★★

Allan Ahlberg, ill. Fritz Wegner, Viking, 96pp, 0 670 88993 8, £8.99 hbk

The latest collection from the premier team that gave us *Please Mrs Butler* and *Heard it in the Playground* is again based around a single subject, but it is football this time rather than school life. As in the previous collections, Ahlberg plays variations in verse on jokes, stock situations, comic heroes and songs. There is the subtle modulation of point of view and address which moves cunningly between child and adult, and a characteristic nostalgic tone which makes us always aware of Ahlberg's own childhood.

The subject offers limited scope. Girls put in only a token appearance, and it is slightly disappointing to find Ahlberg so often reworking ideas from film or television comedy. But this is balanced by the poems which link football and childhood more profoundly and by a tour de force like 'The Goals of Bingo Boot'. This takes the career of a working class footballer in the twentieth century beyond death to a crucial role in a local derby between Heaven and Hell, which involves Attila the Hun, Good King Wenceslas and Fred Astaire, among others. Wegner's cover is a team photo that features some of this crew, and his illustrations once again bring out the best in the poems, although, in one instance at least, what is shown in the illustration does not agree precisely with what is described in the text. CB

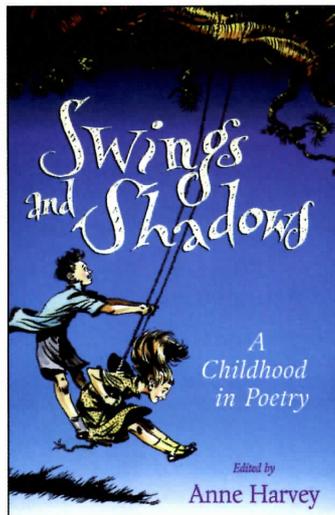
Tom's Midnight Garden

AUDIO BOOK ★★

Philippa Pearce, read by Jan Francis, Cavalcade, 5 hrs 45 mins unabridged, 0 7540 7115 4, £9.99 tape

Who should read the narrative voice of a young boy? A man's voice is too low but the use of a woman's voice often jars, too. Here Jan Francis's voice – inevitably – sounds womanly and instantly the intensity of Tom's magical adventure, much of which comes from the reader's complete identification with Tom, is lost. In this reading it is a told not felt story and in the transition it becomes more dated. But nothing can completely detract from the poignancy of Tom's meeting

with Hatty and their happiness in the shared time of the Midnight Garden. JE



Swings and Shadows: A Childhood in Poetry

POETRY ★★★★★

Edited by Anne Harvey, ill. David Frankland, Red Fox, 208pp, 0 09 964681 1, £5.99 pbk

'Who is that child I see wandering, wandering...' Harvey has captured the childhood Charles Causley's poem 'Who?' remembers and celebrates all aspects of childhood in this anthology of poems. She has brought together poems old and new by poets traditional and contemporary to mark the many experiences, moods and memories of childhood. Each section begins with a prose extract from writers as various as Edward Thomas, Dickens, Ellen Terry and Rumer Godden and covers a myriad of moments from dressing up, shadows and the seaside to school days, families and growing up. This anthology is inspiring and a pure delight to read for all ages. HT

Brooksie

224pp, 0 440 86481 X

Sudden Death

208pp, 0 440 86446 1

★★★

Neil Arksey, Corgi Yearling, £4.99 each pbk

Of these two above average football yarns, *Brooksie* is a reissue from 1998. Lee Brooks is a talented footballer whose internationally capped father, 'Brooksie', has lost form, gone off the rails and become the butt of the nation's jokes. Lee moves into a down-market home without his dad and hates it. Then Lee pals up with Dent and his mates but with no pitch to play on, there is a major problem. The father of the housing estate's resident bully, Tyler, is a shifty councillor who is determined to stop Lee from reclaiming some council owned wasteland for their pitch. As with many football stories, the end is a bit predictable, with a triumph for Lee and a remarkable return to form for his dad.

Sudden Death is also about a soccer mad teenager, Flint, who lives in a children's home after his dad is jailed. (The first book, simply titled *Flint*, deals with incidents leading up to Flint going into the home.) At the start of *Sudden Death*, Flint meets potential foster parents, Jim and

Janet. Jim, coach to the outstanding local youth team Welbeck FC, introduces Flint to the team, but there is instant friction. Aldo, the spoiled rotten son of Welbeck's chairman, goes out of his way to make life difficult for Flint and provokes an on pitch fight with him which results in Flint storming off. With Jim suffering a heart attack, life has just about hit rock bottom but Flint is a resilient lad, who teams up with some of life's less fortunate boys and girls, with whom he had had an earlier association. They get together, form a team, The Assassins, and enter a sudden death tournament, the winner of which would play Welbeck for a large cash prize.

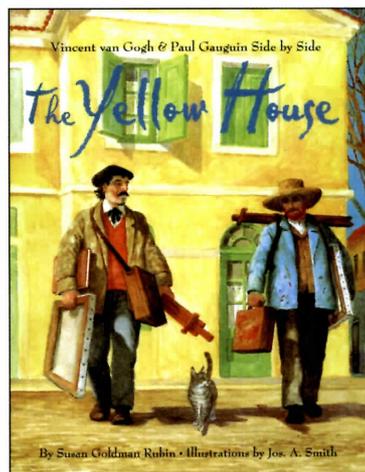
There is plenty in both books in terms of conflict and dramatic matchplay moments to keep future Nick Hornby readers entertained. AK

The Yellow House

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

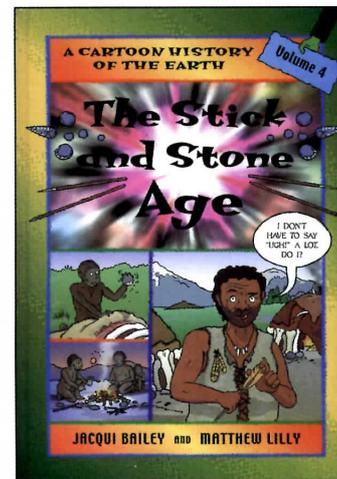
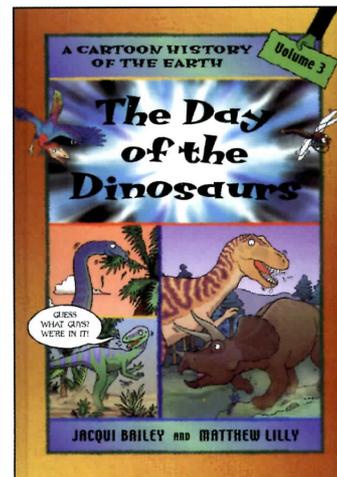
Susan Goldman Rubin, ill. Jos. A. Smith, Harry N Abrams with The Art Institute of Chicago, 32pp, 0 8109 4588 6, £11.95 hbk

How would two very different artists get on if they lived and worked side by side for two months? This vividly illustrated book, published in association with The Art Institute of Chicago, tells the story of the time Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin spent together in the Yellow House in Arles. Vincent painted what he saw while Gauguin drew on his imagination and dreams in his work. Van Gogh was irritatingly messy and when it was his turn to cook made inedible soup while Gauguin was organised and tidy. Paul left after the famous fight in which Vincent cut off part of his own ear. But much of their time together was life enhancing and the book shows how the two artists inspired and encouraged each other, and how they produced some of their best work during this period.



The book could be read to children from about seven or eight while nine- to eleven-year-olds would enjoy reading it themselves. It would prove a useful and interesting classroom resource as it goes far beyond the superficial and provides genuine insight into form, composition and, especially here, colour. As well as including pictures by van Gogh and Gauguin, the illustrator brings the story alive with his own paintings of the two artists in exterior and interior scenes. Both author and illustrator have researched their subjects with great commitment. The extended biographies of the two artists, the author's and illustrator's notes and

the selected bibliography add to the worth of the book. MM



The Birth of the Earth

0 7136 5373 6

Life Finds its Feet

0 7136 5372 8

The Day of the Dinosaurs

0 7136 5450 3

The Stick and Stone Age

0 7136 5452 X

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Jacqui Bailey, ill. Matthew Lilly, A & C Black 'A Cartoon History of the Earth', 32pp, £9.99 each hbk

Non-fiction presented in cartoon format tends to divide readers into two camps – you either love it or hate it. If you veer towards the latter, this lively and engaging series from A & C Black may well convert you. The journey from Big Bang to primeval soup is presented in a chatty informal style that tackles both straightforward description and tricky concepts with equal ease. Bailey and Lilly make a great partnership, text and pictures woven seamlessly together, spritzed with witty speech bubbles and asides that hit just the right mark for the readership. These are deceptively simple books with a huge amount of information presented in a fresh and imaginative way. Dino fans will enjoy the volume on 'monster meat-munchers and gigantic leaf-eaters' and find bang up-to-date information from a palaeontological viewpoint. The most enjoyable

volume is undoubtedly the final one, *The Stick and Stone Age*, in which humans first appear and the jokes get better. Watch out for more titles in this impressive series. **SU**

Acid Rain

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Sally Morgan, Franklin Watts
'Earth Watch', 32pp,
0 7496 3595 9, £6.99 pbk

Here we discover the causes and formation of acid rain, how it gets to where it does damage, what that damage is, and what we are doing about it. This is a fine example of a book that teaches as it goes, first establishing basic information and then building upon it. Text and pictures are brilliantly clear, making the book's message available to a wide range of ability and age, and throughout its development the text is reinforced by 'Taking part' things to do and 'Eco-thoughts' to provoke curiosity and further action.

As brave new concepts become household words, their original significance may often be lost. So it is with the idea of Acid Rain, and the re-appearance of this excellent primer will be a great help not only to those to whom the idea is new, but to those who know the phrase but not its meaning. **TP**

Favourite Writers

NON-FICTION ★★★

Kate Jones, Hodder Wayland,
32pp, 0 7502 2790 7, £4.99 pbk

A useful resource for libraries and schools, this is one of two books (the other is about poets) which introduce children to the creators of well known books. Each spread has one page of background information about the writer in question, quotes from one of their books, a photograph of a front cover, a selected bibliography as well as suggestions of other authors to sample. The second page has a photograph of the author with 'Your questions' covering obvious areas such as how they got into writing, inspiration for writing, ambitions, favourite books which they have written and other comments. Writers included are David Almond, Malorie Blackman, Children's Laureate, Anne Fine and former Laureate, Quentin Blake, Phillip Pullman, Terry Pratchett.

Obviously, everyone's favourite writer is different but there are notable omissions, such as Jenny Nimmo and Lesley Howarth. Writers for younger children such as Martin Waddell and Shirley Hughes are overlooked, whilst other well-liked authors such as Jill Murphy, Gillian Cross, Jill Paton Walsh and Michael Foreman get only the briefest of mentions. **AK**

All About Bullying

NON-FICTION ★★★

Lesley Ely, ill. Mike Phillips,
Hodder 'Little Wise Guides',
64pp, 0 340 77901 2, £3.50 pbk

This 'Little Wise Guide', written by a primary headteacher with 30 years' experience of helping troubled children, will support 7-year-olds and upwards in dealing not only with bullying, but also with the wider issue of misunderstanding due to lack of communication. 'Bully' and 'victim' are emotive labels that help no one, and much emphasis is given to a simple but effective concept of 'pats and zaps' – positive and negative supporters of self-esteem. The importance of communication gives rise to the memorable (if twee) phrase 'Pats and chats stop zaps'. An interesting 'woolly ball' image is used to indicate that bullying is a complex situation in which people and their emotions become tangled and muddled – like wool after a kitten has played with it. Some of the stories used to illustrate these muddles become a little tangled themselves, but emotional conflict within groups is like that. A 10-point plan for parents and black and white illustrations that make plain the feelings involved add to the usefulness of the book. **ES**

The Usborne First Encyclopedia of Space

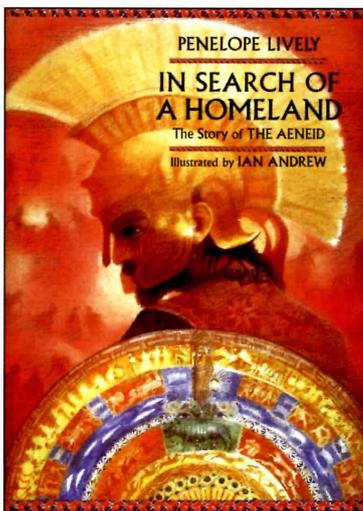
NON-FICTION ★★★

Paul Dowswell, ill. Gary Bines
and David Hancock, Usborne,
64pp, 0 7460 4186 1, £8.99 hbk

This is a bargain bumper assortment of space facts whose main selling point seems to be the 'over 40 web sites' whose addresses it provides. Now I am well over 40 and the website dimension thrills me not one whit, so I am happy to be able to read 'Computer not essential' – this book is a complete, superb self-contained information book by itself.

And 'by itself' is probably right, because although the doubtless admirable Paul Dowswell is credited as its author, so much of the book's make-up is provided by a galaxy of consultants, designers and 'digital manipulators' that it has the look of something auto-assembled. It does, however, provide good entertainment for space-ignorant or space-obsessed readers – a good picture of a space-toilet for instance – and a keyhole through which to unlock all that web information (which may be really good). So for those whose idea of fun is digital manipulation of their keyboards, this should be a good one to share at school or have on your own at home. It's a case of log-on or bog-off according to inclination. **TP**

REVIEWS 10–12 Middle/Secondary



In Search of a Homeland: The Story of the Aeneid

★★★★★

Penelope Lively, ill. Ian Andrew,
Frances Lincoln, 120pp,
0 7112 1728 9, £14.99 hbk

After 10 years of siege, Troy falls, and Aeneas begins his long journey in search of a new home. His travels lead him through danger, temptation and bloody conflict before he fulfils his part in the eventual founding of Rome.

Lively's retelling is densely-peopled and moves at breath-taking speed, bewildering on first encounter but repaying closer, more measured reading. My 11-year-old, steeped in Greek mythology this year, revelled in it, wisely skipping the parts where too

many new characters are named. Andrew illustrates the story beautifully, his coloured pencil drawings varying in mood and depth of colour to suit the action.

I used the map of Aeneas's voyage often: I would have been grateful for an explanatory 'cast list' as well as the pronunciation guide to Greek names given. Not an easy introduction to the epic, then, but a good resource for teachers, or families willing to disentangle a complex tale. **AG**

Sebastian's Quest

★★★★

C A Jefferies, *The Chicken House*, 160pp, 1 903434 24 6,
£4.99 pbk

In this inventive story 11-year-old Sebastian travels into various past times in order to restore the lost grave goods of his Stone Age ancestor. Well supported by his friends Joss and Emily, Sebastian addresses several issues pertinent to his age-group, from the difficulty of changing school, to a growing understanding of an individual's small place in the vast continuum of time. Though the more complex themes are not fully worked out, there are some thought-provoking and realistically poignant moments, particularly in the weaving in and out of past and present.

I was surprised, however, even in a book where both parents are writers (even their rented holiday house boasts a study) that the new school Sebastian's worried about is a boarding school where there will be 'loads more things to do than at the comprehensive school'. Comments like this, demeaning to most of the potential readership, seem unnecessary – though used to make a point about bravery, surely any similar

situation of change would have done?

My tester galloped enthusiastically through the story without commenting on this – but in an age when an ever-wider range of children is reading, class-bound settings become less and less excusable. **AG**

The Time-Travelling Cat and the Roman Eagle

★★★

Julia Jarman, Andersen, 160pp,
0 86264 861 0, £9.99 hbk

This, the third adventure of Topher and his time-travelling cat, starts with many changes in the young boy's life – new home, new school and the establishing of new friendships. The last of these proves the most problematic as Topher combats a mysterious bout of bullying. Suddenly he is transported to AD 79, where he helps forge peace between the Romans and his British tribe, his own relationship with a Roman boy providing the key.

There is a curious change of style halfway through the book, the first part rather pedantically explaining events and how Topher feels, often in short, abrupt sentences. This contrasts sharply with the vividness and ease with which Jarman recreates life in Roman Britain. Particularly striking is the way Topher instantly becomes a Romano-Briton, as though living a completely parallel life. Jarman makes only a tenuous connection between Topher's experiences in each century, and occasionally hits an oddly inappropriate note (how often do you hear the expression 'he's a good cove' nowadays?) but has created an enjoyable story nevertheless. **AG**

Christina's Face

★★★

Penny Kendal, Andersen,
176pp, 0 86264 757 6, £4.99 pbk

Rachel remarks that 'families can be a mess'. Too true in this pinch of salt tale about our heroine's trip to Rhodes with father and new girlfriend, plus brother and new girlfriend's son. As coincidence would have it, maternal grandmother played away from home on the same Greek island, in her teens, resulting in Rachel's mother, and so now our Rachel bears a striking resemblance to a girl (Christina), who disappeared two years ago, understandably leaving her own family an emotional mess.

There is enough suspense to keep the pages turning as Rachel comes to her realisation about her own family relationships and her requirement to solve the question of just what happened to her look-alike. A quick read for early secondary, most likely girls. **DB**

The If Game

★★★

Catherine Storr, Oxford, 160pp,
0 19 271873 8, £6.99 pbk

Catherine Storr died in January 2001 aged eighty-seven, and this posthumous children's novel is published over sixty years after her first. Like her most famous book, *Marianne Dreams*, it blends the supernatural with social and psychological realism. Stephen, aged twelve, lives with his caring but uncommunicative father, but knows nothing of his absent mother, not even whether she is alive or dead. Aided by old keys he has discovered, Stephen finds he can open doors into another life he might be living, *if* it

had been nudged in a slightly different direction. Suppose that instead of staying with his father, he had emigrated to Australia with his mother's family, as they wanted him to... In consequence of these experiences, he finds out the truth about his mother. She is not dead, but in prison for the manslaughter of his abusive stepfather at a time when he had begun to threaten Stephen himself, as an infant. Stephen's own reactions to this traumatic discovery are entirely convincing, and the book ends well with their first and critical reunion after her release.

But the attitude of adults to his mother's crime, if such it is, reflects a public severity and family shame which nowadays seem inappropriately harsh, and perhaps Catherine Storr, still at her great age so alert to modern times, was in this respect a bit behind them. The story is intriguing, the writing a little flat and dull, though there are many reminders of Storr at her distinguished best. PH

The Skin I'm In

★★★

Sharon G Flake, Corgi, 192pp, 0 552 54763 8, £4.99 pbk

It is depressing to think after all the campaigns to raise awareness on this issue of race and colour in America, especially during the civil rights movement in the 1960s, that this issue won't go away. But that is why novels on the subject are still relevant.

Set in an American inner city area, *The Skin I'm In* explores the issue of skin colour and peer pressure. Maleeka is taunted at school by her fellow pupils about her dark, black skin, though ironically many of her tormentors are themselves black or of mixed parentage. A new teacher arrives in the school – a successful business woman on temporary secondment to the school – whose face is disfigured by a white blotch. Her self confidence and willingness to tackle the problems posed by petty discrimination based on disability, colour or class make an impact on Maleeka and change her life but not before a good deal of conflict.

The Skin I'm In is written in the racy authentic language of the streets and mirrors the fraught, dysfunctional relationships that seem to permeate all segments of inner-city school society, and further afield. Maleeka's English project on a slave girl's experiences on the Atlantic crossing is a useful ploy to provide, obliquely, some attempt at an historical backdrop, but could, I think, have been pursued in greater depth. This is however a fine first novel by a promising young writer which will no doubt strike some chords on this side of the Atlantic. EL

One Mum Too Many! (Step-Chain 1)

★★★

0 7497 4322 0

You Can't Fancy Your Stepsister (Step-Chain 2)

★★

0 7497 4323 9

Ann Bryant, Mammoth, 192pp, £3.99 each pbk

These two volumes are the first in a series of six about the perils and

pleasures of step-families. Each has a chapter-length extract from the next book in the series as an addition to the main narrative and a rather complicated family tree at the beginning, thus leading readers through the series.

One Mum Too Many! brilliantly evokes the horrors of children visiting their father's new home. His new family are almost clinically saintly but his daughter Sarah is an utterly convincing teenager, truculent and troubled.

Book 2 is less successful – though to be applauded for tackling the emotional turmoil of the teenage male. Events are too plot-driven with characters often hollowly stereotypical in the face of a relentless barrage of disastrous events.

This series can be seen as a cynical exploitation of a growing market or as a genuine sounding board for young readers adrift in fractured families. The sympathetic treatment of characters at risk suggests that it will be the latter. VR

The Adventures of Jimmy Scar

★★★

Jeanne Willis, Andersen, 208pp, 0 86264 277 9, £9.99 hbk

Gemma lives in a close, protective relationship with her dad since her mother died when she was a baby. Through a series of somewhat unlikely circumstances her dad is goaled for a robbery which he didn't commit. Gemma, or Jimmy, runs away and meets Monti, an old woman who has evolved an extraordinary self-sufficient way of life for herself deep in woodlands. Gemma lives with Monti, learning how to survive only on the bounty of nature, until the old woman is struck by lightning and is hospitalised. This event leads to the climax of the novel, when much is revealed and loose ends in the lives of Gemma, her dad, and Monti are neatly sewn up.

Part family story, part thriller and part survival novel, *Jimmy Scar* is an unusual book. Not least because its protagonist is 10, which tends to imply a younger readership (and indeed the cover might suggest this). However, some of the scenes in its pages suggest a reader of 12+. At times the writing is awkward, and the denouement must strain the suspension of disbelief in even the most credulous of readers. Yet, Gemma/Jimmy is a strong, likeable character and I found myself engrossed in her exploits. VC

The Bottle-top King

★★★

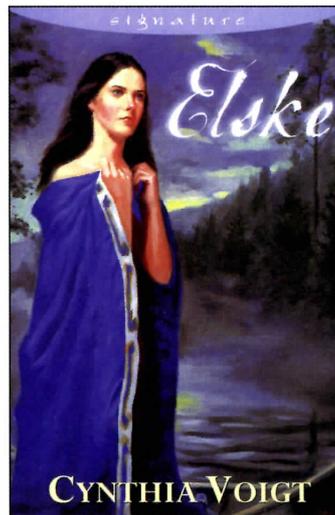
Jonathan Kebbe, Corgi Yearling, 208pp, 0 440 86467 4, £4.99 pbk

Stammering Lewis, bullied, struggling to be noticed, longing to prove that he really can do what his mind tells him he can, is hampered by an ambitious mother, overly anxious about his academic achievement and the social status of his friends. Not allowed to develop his self-confidence on the football pitch or in the drama club, he resorts to fantasy footy with his teams of bottle-tops. Reduced to lying to his mother, and encouraged by misfit friends, he finally plays for the school and scores the winning goal in an important game.

A range of themes is tackled here, not

always convincingly – I found the relationship counsellor mother (with no time to sort out relationships in her own family) and the self-obsessed actor father who does not support his son's own interest in drama too extreme for example. Parts of the book are over-analytical and expressed in more adult terms than seem likely for the young people concerned, though this may serve to give readers a vocabulary for their own situations. Lewis's self-awareness and inner strength seem unlikely too – however, their eventual triumph gives readers a good example to follow.

An enjoyable and very readable story with likeable characters, humorously told. AG



Elske

★★★★★

Cynthia Voigt, Hodder Signature, 320pp, 0 340 78775 9, £4.99 pbk

A powerful fantasy which draws the reader into the harsh medieval world of the 'Kingdom' for a fourth and final time. *Elske* escapes brutal death at the hands of the wolf people who have brought her up and makes her way out into a new life, with nothing but her character. When she is made handmaiden to Beriel, an exiled princess whose right to be queen has been usurped by her brother, we have two strong women fighting together for justice. The contrast between them provides shades of meaning for the exploration of right and wrong, of wilful and necessary violence, of the just balance between all people and especially between the sexes. The physicality and detail feed the imagination and *Elske's* character in particular feeds our thoughts and feelings. She is wonderfully strong, finding her way, finding herself partly in resistance to those she rejects, and partly through a strong sense of human value, honesty and rightness. It is a marvellous piece of storytelling in which our understandings grow alongside those of *Elske*. AJ

Genetics

Robert Snedden, 0 7496 3752 8

Racism

Adam Hibbert, 0 7496 4023 5

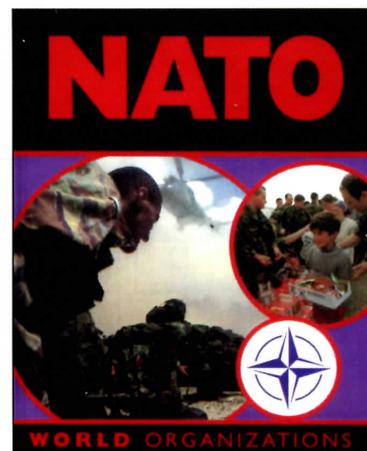
NON-FICTION ★★★

Franklin Watts 'Read All About It!', 32pp, £11.99 each hbk

Here are two books, part of a previously seen series, which warn us (on the back cover, to protect the sensitive) that they are 'newspapers'.

Now, newspapers hide their best bits for days – weeks even – revealing them only when they're being used for their secondary purpose of cleaning windows, covering the carpet or travelling to the paper-bank. It is then that the truly engrossing and informative paragraphs leap out and stop you in your tracks. So, for me at least, the idea (not at all new) of dressing up a book as a newspaper and using the tabloid's blunt instrument technique to hammer home facts and evoke opinions is to induce a punch-drunk apathy. In these days when every information-orifice emits 'news' at a virtually inassimilable rate, surely the bandwagon is full to bursting.

So the way to get the best out of this couple is *not* to sit down and read them end to end – that's a total turn-off – but to leave them lying about available for occasional dipping-in, when the true value (often very high) of the facts and comment will hit home. TP



United Nations

NON-FICTION ★★★

Linda Melvern, 0 7496 3693 9

UNICEF

NON-FICTION ★★★

Katherine Prior, 0 7496 4020 0

NATO

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Reg Grant, 0 7496 4018 9

Franklin Watts 'World Organizations', 32pp, £12.99 each hbk

These are three of the seven titles in Watts' new series 'World Organizations'. They are organised in chapter form but with generous space given to colour photographs and topic boxes. Each title pays attention to the history of its subject and the way that the organisations are run and funded. Yet there are differences of treatment. Prior's book concentrates on specific problems of disease and poverty and the solutions that UNICEF offers to alleviate them. Grant's is a rather more straightforward historical narrative which pays attention to the political dynamics and conflicts which have shaped NATO. Melvern's study is largely concerned with the current political and administrative organisation of the United Nations and its role in international relations.

Grant's is the easiest text to read and once more demonstrates his considerable skill in organising and conveying information for this age group. It is certainly less disrupted by the intrusion of paragraph headings, topic boxes and photographs, which

often seem to be dispersed with more of an eye to the look of the page than the sense that can be made of it. Nevertheless, all of the titles are attractively laid out, and the photographs are well chosen, emphasising the difficult and frequently dangerous work that each of the agencies carry out. Each title has a glossary and a 'Useful Information' section, although only Melvern's includes books beside the web sites and addresses. CB

Dinosaurs

Éric Buffetaut, 1 84202 120 6

Inside the Internet

Sandra Muller and Jeff Queneau, 1 84202 128 1

NON-FICTION ★★

Cassell 'Beacons', 128pp, £5.99 each pbk

A new series from Cassell that promises to build into an encyclopedic resource for both adults and children. Closer inspection reveals that these compact little books were originally produced in France. Their creator is Pierre Marchand, once joint publisher of the Eyewitness Guides while at Gallimard, and now publisher at Hachette. The books' French origins are clear in their stylish presentation and eclectic mixture of fact and fiction. As a pictorial resource, *Dinosaurs* may

prove useful to 10+ readers, but one wonders whether an audience raised on amazingly realistic animatronic beasts on film and TV will be as impressed by hand-coloured engravings. Listings of websites and a glossary will prove useful, but maddeningly there is no index. *Inside the Internet* is even more quirky, with pages of full-bleed photographs of a spider's web, mouse (furry variety), mailbox, surfers etc offering a bizarre magazine-style photo essay. It is hard to imagine quite for whom this book is intended. SU

Crusades: The Struggle for the Holy Lands

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Melanie and Christopher Rice and Christopher Gravett, ill. Peter Dennis, 0 7513 5894 0

Cleopatra: The Queen of Kings

NON-FICTION ★★★

Fiona MacDonald, ill. Chris Molan, 0 7513 1391 2

Dorling Kindersley, 48pp, £9.99 each hbk

While these titles in a new DK series continue to trade under the 'Eyewitness' brand, they look like a move back towards more conventional information book presentation, particularly in their use of commissioned illustrations.



From *Crusades*.

Crusades favours small, intricate scenes in which a huge cast is deployed like figures in war gaming, each appearing on their own base like pieces of landscape. In this way, Dennis conveys both the numerous battle scenes and the notion of the Crusades as a momentous clash of historical and cultural forces. In *Cleopatra*, by contrast, Molan's illustrations depict the epic conflict of powerful personalities as representatives of Roman and Egyptian civilisation: big in scale and atmosphere, and good at suggesting how the story has continued to inspire dramatists and film makers.

I like this sensitivity to the subject matter but, alongside it, there are too many of DK's bag of design tricks: vertical double pages, and varying fonts, including the amazing dwindling font size of the subject

paragraph on each double page spread. It starts to detract from what the book has to say. The fold-out pages may catch the eye in the bookshop but, on library shelves, they soon crease up and rip.

The texts themselves are authoritative and informative, both in broad sweep and detail. Perhaps *Crusades* has the edge in scholarship and detail, but it could have given more attention to the Muslim viewpoint; and *Cleopatra* might have made more use of historical artefacts where it touches on social history. The indexes are inadequate and some subjects (What is the difference between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims?) are mentioned but not explained. The continuing strengths of the DK titles are their appeal to teenagers and adults, their careful use of artefacts and historical accounts, and their encouragement of their readers to find out more. It is my continual complaint that they do not include suggested books or web sites to help their readers take that interest further. CB

REVIEWS 12+ Secondary

G.S.O.H.

★★★★

Andrew Matthews, Red Fox, 144pp, 0 09 941389 2, £3.99 pbk
15-year-old Katie, in search of a new partner for her widowed mother, tries her hand at matchmaking, only to be out-manoeuvred when her mum gets off with the new English teacher at Katie's school. This felt like an update of Beverly Cleary's *Fifteen* to me – all cappuccinos and clubbing, slang and snogging but no alcohol ('s-o-o twentieth century') and no drugs, smoking or spiked drinks either. A rash of widowed parents avoids the complications of divorce and the resulting mixed emotions of the young people.

Other aspects of teen concern are introduced – parental attitudes; the hard work expected in top sets at school – but not developed, though the enthusiasm of the English teacher presents a very positive picture of school as it can be.

It is good to find a male author sensitive to girl-feelings at this age while also putting a boy point-of-view: I enjoyed the ironic touches and generally light-hearted tone. The cover, by Nick Sharratt, will undoubtedly add to the appeal. AG

Bad Company

★★★★

Catherine MacPhail, Bloomsbury, 144pp, 0 7475 5076 X, £4.99 pbk

Lissa's father is in jail and her comfortable life has been turned upside down. Hurt and angry, she rejects her closest friends and forms a collusive alliance with Diane, a new

girl at school. Diane is used to having her own way and enjoys goading Lissa into persecuting her vulnerable classmates.

Bad Company is similar to Anne Fine's *The Tulip Touch* in its depiction of a destructive friendship but in contrast MacPhail suggests that over-indulgence potentially may be as damaging as poverty, physical abuse and neglect. In this engaging story the true nature of friendship and loyalty are explored as Lissa achieves a new self-awareness and understanding of her father's actions. Eventually she comes to recognise the wisdom in her teacher's words: 'the only way you can feel important is to belittle other people. And I am telling you now... that true greatness comes from recognising other people's worth. Maybe then you can find your own.' NG

Oranges and Murder

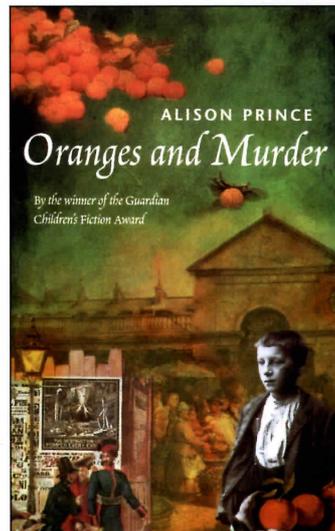
★★★★

Alison Prince, Oxford, 160pp, 0 19 271825 8, £6.99 pbk

Joey is a London costermonger, selling fruit and vegetables to make a meagre living. His ambitions are simple – a home of his own with his beloved Rose and enough money to start his own business.

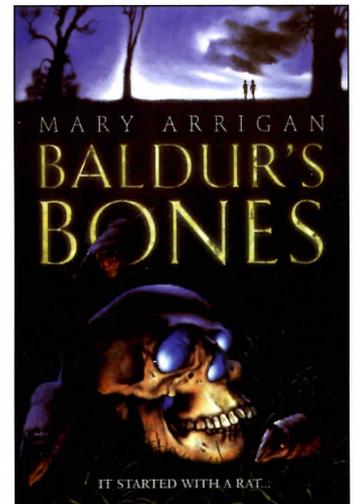
However, there are complications – a mystery surrounds his birth as it is rumoured that he is the illegitimate offspring of Lord Rivers' daughter. Then Quill Quennell, the screever who has been teaching him to read and write, is found murdered and the peelers have marked Joey for the crime.

Prince's London is alive with colour, in both character and setting, vividly



recreating the cramped living conditions of the costers and their unflinching brotherhood. Period detail abounds and as the mystery of Quennell's death unfolds it becomes clear that it is very much a product of the times. He was just as much at the mercy of the upper classes as the illiterate Joey – snared by his addiction to opium and betrayed by his own kind.

The plot twists and turns with absolute veracity and the seductively neat fairy tale ending is carefully avoided to give a conclusion far more rooted in the gritty realism which pervades the narrative. VR



Baldur's Bones

★★★★

Mary Arrigan, Collins, 192pp, 0 00 711154 1, £3.99 pbk

When 14-year-old Finn, recently orphaned, goes to stay with some distant cousins in the Irish countryside, one of his first encounters is with Tara, a sparky and self-assured girl just slightly younger than himself. Her influence on him is to be profound. She introduces him to her 'secret place', a patch of wasteland on her father's farm, which turns out to have been used as a graveyard for Viking warriors who, a thousand years earlier, had come there on a raiding mission. One of these, however, is not completely at rest and it is his dramatic resurrection which serves as starting point for this skilfully structured and

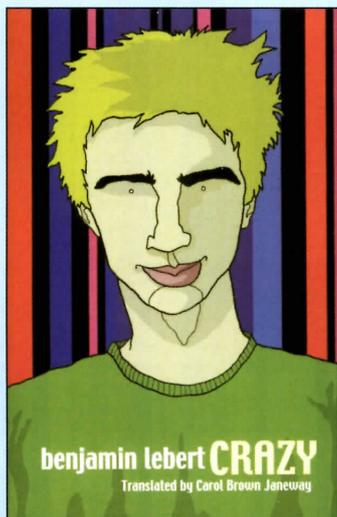
NEW Talent

Crazy

★★★★★

Benjamin Lebert, trans. Carol Brown Janeway, Puffin, 176pp, 0 14 130741 2, £4.99 pbk

An autobiographical novel by the then 16-year-old Lebert, *Crazy* opens with his arrival at Castle Neuseelen boarding school, his fifth school and one on which his parents are pinning hopes for improved grades. Benjamin introduces himself as a 'cripple' – he has partial paralysis of his left side which limits the functioning of his left arm and leg but the focus of the story is not on this difference but rather on the 'weirdness' and intensity of the experiences and comradeship he and his group of friends recklessly throw themselves into (climbing up to the girls' dormitories, running away to Munich and so forth). This narrative theme is interwoven with concerned thoughts of Benjamin's parents who are at war with each other and of his much loved older sister. Written in a taut, colloquial yet poetic prose, this extraordinary novel from 'inside' the



world of the adolescent has a documentary quality that is both gripping and melancholic. It puts to shame much of the clichéd writing from adult writers about contemporary youth and their preoccupations. Published here in translation from the German, *Crazy* was an understandable literary sensation in Germany. RS

extremely atmospheric novel. Arrigan conveys, often with a welcome touch of humour, her understanding of how past destinies and present circumstances are inextricably linked and in doing so creates a story of considerable power and interest. RD

Wolf Summer

★★★★

Andrew Matthews, Orchard, 192pp, 1 84121 758 1, £4.99 pbk

Traditionally, the wolf has been the victim of a bad press but more recently writers like Janni Howker with *Walk with a Wolf*, have challenged the Big Bad Wolf image of folk and fairy stories.

In *Wolf Summer* Anna is sent to stay with her grandmother in an attempt to stop her seeing her boyfriend. Her disappointment fades when she becomes absorbed by voluntary work at the local wolf sanctuary. Anna's fascination with the alpha male, Manitou, develops into an intense spiritual relationship. She strikes up an unexpected friendship with fellow volunteer Pete, which contrasts with the superficial physical clinches she had shared with Matt. But the public fear of wolves is strong and threatens to destroy the progress made by the sanctuary.

Wolf Summer is a celebration of the wolf with a simmering love interest. A story to educate and entertain. NG

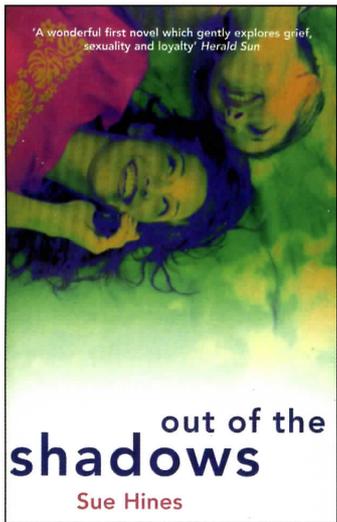
Out of the Shadows

★★★★★

Sue Hines, Women's Press, 224pp, 0 7043 4975 2, £4.99 pbk

'If you're gay, people think that's all you are as though there aren't any other dimensions to your personality. They think all you do is have sex.'

Out of the Shadows is a story of love and friendship, which illustrates with remarkable simplicity and clarity the distinction between sexuality and sex. Hines challenges stereotypical constructions of lesbianism avoiding



sensationalism and heavy didacticism. Ro, Mark and Jodie are independent, intelligent teenagers whose lives are restricted by the personal secrets they are struggling to keep. Ro's mother was killed in a tragic accident and now she lives with her mother's partner Deb. Mark is the only friend she can trust with her secret. Jodie is attracted to Ro but is afraid to openly admit that she is gay. The friends realise that they can only start to lead satisfying lives by being true to themselves and honest with each other. They bravely decide to step out of the shadows. This sensitive and well-written novel is wholly convincing in tackling this important issue. NG

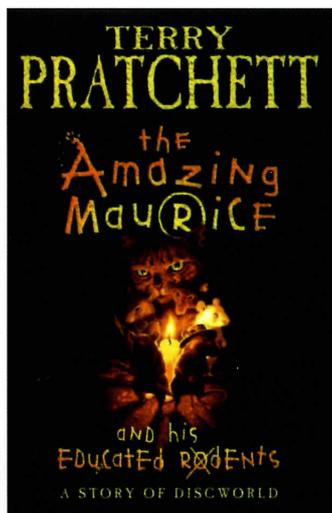
The Amazing Maurice and his Educated Rodents

★★★★★

Terry Pratchett, ill. David Wyatt, Doubleday, 272pp, 0 385 60123 9, £12.99 hbk

This is the first of Terry Pratchett's 'Discworld' novels to be written for

young readers, and it is a postmodern children's book, which will not deter its intended audience but will give extra pleasure to their elders. Maurice, a wonderful creation who is both cat and con-man, says 'it is just a story about people and rats', with the slight complication that it becomes harder and harder to tell which is which. For Malicia Grim (the Mayor's daughter, and grandchild of two great story-tellers, the sisters Grim) it is 'a story about stories'. Both are right. The book is a reworking of 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin', and shot through with glimpses of Peter Rabbit, Rupert Bear, Ratty in the Wild Wood, the Famous Five and Cinderella, giving plenty of intertextual fun. But it also repeatedly raises the question: Where does fiction end and reality begin? Malicia, a story-addict, has a lot of trouble here.



Yet Maurice, the streetwise feline realist, is correct. This is a story about people and rats. It's just that these rats, having eaten discarded rubbish at a wizards' university, have learned to think and talk, and Maurice, having eaten one of the rats (with the inspired name of Additives) has gained the same powers by genetic ingestion. Helped by a human piper, Maurice and the rats have developed a profiteering Hamelin scam, and all is well until they come to the town of Bad Blintz. Here they encounter evil, in both human and rat forms, and only after a very dark and exciting comedy in the cellars and tunnels of Bad Blintz do they emerge, scarred but victorious. Just how such a claustrophobic, menacing thriller can be so consistently light and funny is Pratchett's secret. Children, and very old children indeed, will enjoy being admitted to it in this original (and traditional) story. PH

Fiesta

★★★

Kate Cann, Scholastic Point, 320pp, 0 439 99389 X, £4.99 pbk

The post A level gap year and Laura is going to explore the 'real' Spain with her friends Yaz and Ruth and Ruth's boyfriend Tom – in his car. The book starts with the tensions: Tom and Ruth shut out the others: they only have eyes for each other and it is not the real Spain that he is after. He is a real pain and a sex-obsessed, male chauvinist. The tensions erupt when they are asked by chance to house-sit in a beautiful rural setting. Tom and Ruth depart leaving Yaz and Laura to see who gets the beautiful Spanish

boyfriend. It's unfair when Yaz flirtatiously apparently catches him and fair when Laura, with her quiet charm, really wins him. While there are attempts to deal with areas of feeling honestly and openly, this is set in swathes of caricature and simplification. Juan is the antithesis of Tom. Tom's character and views are part of his slobbishness. Juan is the real thing, the romantic hero, all the way to his 'powerful eyebrows'. AJ

Drugs

NON-FICTION

★★★

Emma Houghton and Jon Rees, Franklin Watts 'Read All About It!', 32pp, 0 7496 3753 6, £11.99 hbk

'Read All About It' *Drugs* is in the Franklin Watts series on social issues and is a move away from the Just say no approach to drugs.

Described as a newspaper-book, this title will appeal to younger teenagers. It covers a well-selected spread of issues through the medium of tabloid style journalism. The tone is sometimes sensational and readers are advised to look at the articles critically. The news stories cover actual events supported by relevant photographs and the occasional cartoon. Historical events include coverage of the opium wars with a striking drawing depicting a dingy smoke-filled opium den in London's East End. The articles cover what you might expect in a popular newspaper with home and foreign news and sections on education, popular music, sport and fashion.

Although material would have been gathered in 1999, the value of the publication is not diminished. Drug issues are perennial and the content feels contemporary. There is an agony aunt but did she have to be a member of the blue rinse brigade? To be fair, sensible advice is dispensed. Young people are asked about their opinions on drug education. One 16-year-old puts his finger on the problem by wondering what a teacher really knows about drugs. 'I can't really see the point of banging on about it so much,' he complains. There is useful advice too about travelling abroad and an interview with *Junk* author Melvin Burgess who argues for the decriminalisation of drugs.

A piece on *Drugs in Clubs* demonstrates the realities of the attitudes of some club goers. In a response to being told about the dangers of ecstasy, one 21-year-old user is quoted as saying 'you're always reading about this sort of stuff in the papers. I've never had any problems, and nor have my friends.' The writers are careful to qualify that opinion with the perspective of a woman user who stopped because of 'bad reactions to drugs'.

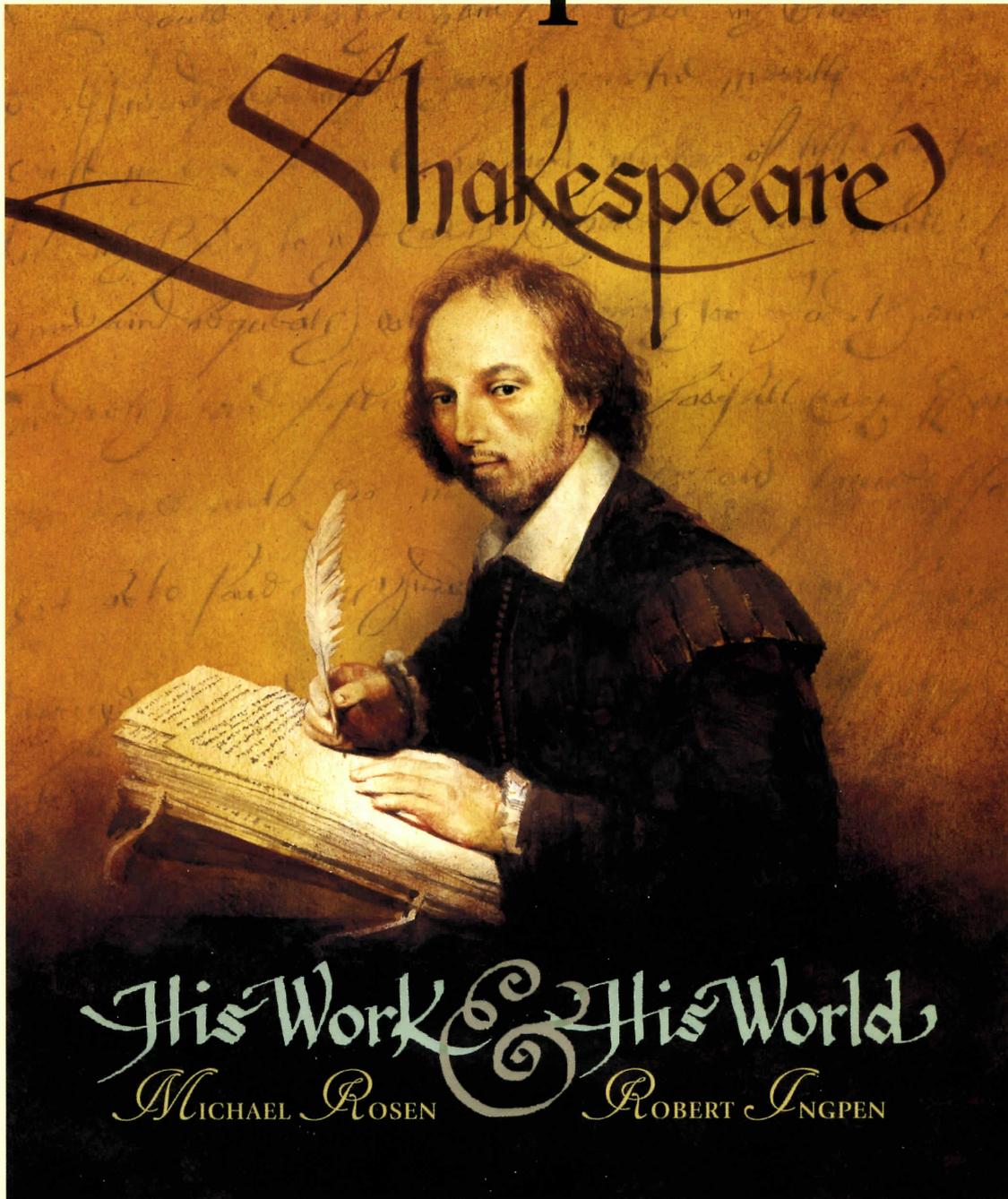
This book is relevant and it does not offer an uncompromising message. Drugs and drug use is examined as an everyday matter that affects all us. CC

PICTURE BOOKS REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE RELEVANT TO OLDER READERS:

Ug (see p24)

The Lost Thing (see p25)

What's so special about Shakespeare?



Lifelong Shakespeare fan Michael Rosen reveals all in this appealing and accessible study of the life, times and works of the Bard. Vividly written and stunningly illustrated, this is a book in which Shakespeare lives!

November 2001 • 0-7445-5581-7 • 96 pages • £12.99

WALKER  BOOKS



CLASSICS IN SHORT No. 30

Brian Alderson



Christmas Bargain! Not one classic but one hundred and fifty (more or less) and all by Hans Christian Andersen, if not in one volume. One example ...

Raison d'être:

Despite all the guff about folk tales on pages 9-11 we never got round to talking about the magic wheelbarrow story. If that is a folk tale then it is perhaps one only known to the community of wheelbarrows; it is much more likely to belong to that baggy collection of fantastic tales which the Germans call *Kunstmärchen* – a word for which we need some phrase like 'invented fairy tale'. That indeed is what a lot of the *contes de fées* were but the genre was immeasurably extended and brought to a pitch of perfection with the stories of Hans Christian Andersen.

Libellus rarissimus

is the only fit description for the fragile little paper-covered booklet through which Andersen introduced his stories to the city and the people: *Eventyr fortalte for Børn*, Copenhagen, 1835 (and 'Eventyr' is almost as tricky a word as 'Märchen' so 'Tales Told to Children' will have to do as a translation). There were only four of them, but they straightway established the character of *Kunstmärchen* as close, but rather more fastidious, neighbours to the lively, raggedy folk tales down the street.

But weren't they folk tales too?

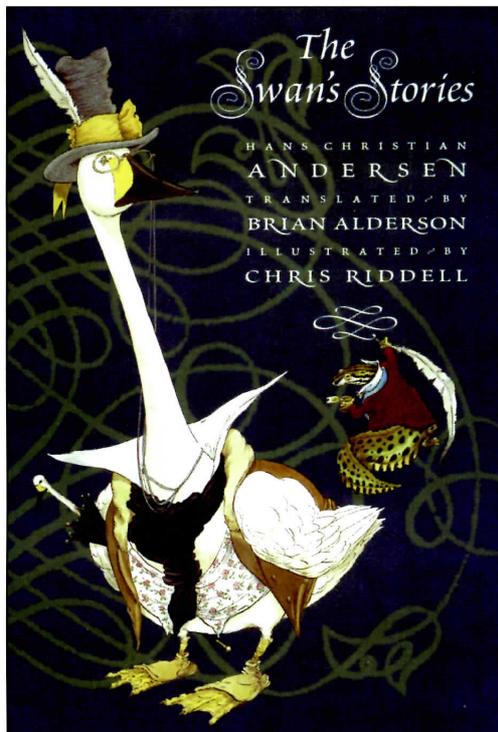
Well – yes and no. The first three stories were 'The Tinderbox', 'Little Claus and Big Claus', and 'The Princess on the Pea', and Andersen claimed that he'd heard them as a child among women in the spinning-room or people harvesting the hops. But the fourth story, 'Little Ida's Flowers', is pure invention, made up (like *Alice*) to amuse a little girl of the same name and featuring Andersen himself as the student who could tell wonderful stories and do complicated scissor-cuts at one and the same time.

But the provenance is not important.

'The Tinderbox' certainly has motifs that can be found in the *Arabian Nights* and in Grimm; 'Little Claus' too has motifs found in several European storytelling traditions; and 'The Princess on the Pea' is said to have parallels in Sweden. What matters in them though is what also matters in 'Little Ida', a tale that is saved from utter goofiness by the personality of the author. Andersen claimed of his little book that he was trying to sustain in print the living presence of the storyteller ('spoken language was the thing') so – unlike the traditional traditional-tale – his version was sacrosanct as to both form and diction.

Andersen's 'very self and voice'

is indeed a living presence – observe, say, the snappy exchange between the



soldier and the old witch in 'The Tinderbox', or the old king going down to open the door to the princess, or the satiric digs at the old chancellor and the graceful description of the funeral procession in 'Little Ida'. Here are narrative ideas and figures of speech that are Andersen's alone and his discovery of his gift was to lead him



From *The Fir Tree*.

into a forty year exploration of its potential. Occasionally some direct influence from folk tale can be traced but, for the most part, the 152 stories that followed his first booklet are a virtuoso display of narrative invention: histories and travelogues, nursery tales and satires, psychological dramas verging on the surreal ... he mastered the lot and sustained throughout the register of his own voice.

Translating that voice

brought many disappointments. Even more than with folk tales the timbre was essential but, as with so many of the folk tale re-tellers, there was a horror of abandoning polite literary phraseology in favour of the salty tones of the original storyteller. (What's more some of the most frequently reprinted versions in English were made from German rather than Danish.) Expostulations were made as early as 1893, but it was not until the 1930s that a more consistent respect was paid to 'Andersen's colloquial style' which one fine translator – the actor Paul Leyssac – said 'has never been brought out vividly enough in English'.

Nobody really bothers much though, do they?

Along with Leyssac, authority and an alert ear for the right phrasing have come to the fore in modern translations by R P Keigwin, Reginald Spink, L W Kingsland, and by Andersen's most sympathetic advocate: Naomi Lewis. Erik Haugaard has been the first to give us an acceptable **Complete Fairy Tales**, with translations of some of Andersen's own notes (Gollancz, 1974). But today's adaptors, publishers and reviewers have little care for the nuances of the argument just so long as texts of some sort are attached to the well-known titles. Our author would have met them with equanimity though. He recognised more than once that even the best of literature is likely to end up in the grocer's barrel waiting to wrap a hunk of cheese. ■

Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales are published, singly or in collections, in many different versions. Shown here is Brian Alderson's *The Swan's Stories* (Walker, 0 7445 3298 1, £12.99) with illustrations by Chris Riddell. Riddell's swan turns up at the start of each tale, preoccupied in some way with an object that will feature in the narrative.

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