

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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the children's
book magazine



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EDITORIAL



Rosemary Stones

Philip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass*, the final part of his powerful moral epic, 'His Dark Materials' which won the Whitbread Children's Book of the Year category, has gone on to win the Whitbread Book of the Year – beating the winners of the adult novel, first novel, poetry and biography sections. Philip Pullman is thus the first children's author to win this prestigious prize which only recently changed its rules (after lobbying by Pullman and others) to allow children's books to compete on equal terms with adult books. In this agreeable way, public recognition has at last been given to the fact that writers for children can and do produce demanding books of great literary quality.

This splendid win, together perhaps with the sight of adults on trains and buses engrossed in a Pullman novel or a Harry Potter, has even led to excited claims that such books blur the edges between publishing for adults and publishing for children. But do they really?

Pullman is quoted in *The Independent* (23 Jan. '02) just after his Whitbread triumph as saying: 'We don't know how to view children. For example, there was a terrible fuss when Melvin Burgess brought out a book about a teenage girl who turns into a dog that has sex*. He also wrote a book in which – horror of horrors – teenage kids take heroin and suffer the consequences of addiction**. The fuss arises because we believe this is something that children ought not to know about and be protected from. There is no realistic view of children which encompasses the fact that they don't know very much about the world and the fact that they're beset by all kinds of temptations and they're no better or worse than us... I know that they think deeply about things that they don't have the experience to cope with yet.'

Certainly literature provides us all with opportunities to place our individual experience into a wider social or emotional context. For children in particular, books can be safely distanced ways of learning about and/or reflecting on all kinds of experiences or feelings, whether difficult, worrying, painful or exciting. But should warnings be given about a possibly contentious content or approach when a book published on a children's list is under discussion? Can a blurring sometimes be inappropriate?

In BfK No.131 I reviewed Benjamin Lebert's *Crazy*, an autobiographical novel written when the author was 16. As I wrote about this gripping and melancholic book it did not occur to me to mention, so integral a part of the story did it seem, that the schoolboy hero has sex with a girl. I was then, reading this 'children's

book' as though it were for adults. The edges were very much blurred.

But BfK is, of course, a *children's* literature review journal and its readership is largely made up of those powerful gatekeepers and arbiters of 'suitable' reading matter for the young – librarians, teachers and parents. Three readers, who use our recommendations as a buying guide, have written to complain that I did not alert them to the sexual content in this book (see Letters to the Editor, page 15). I think I should have done and I apologise – BfK does aim to provide the information that our readership needs about the books discussed in our pages. I do not, however, agree at all with their view that the sexual content of the book is pornographic – I find the passage in question full of anguish and confusion in which peer pressure clearly plays a part. This is very far from titillation.

To my mind, if there is a difference between books for adults and books for children, it lies in the possibility/probability of an experience being conveyed for the first time to a young reader who may not have the cultural, emotional and other reference points that are part of what an adult reader can bring to text. An additional complication lies in what Philip Pullman describes as a 'realistic view' of children. There is no one child reader to whom we can refer and this is where the experience of the adult 'gatekeepers' is much needed in relation to the children they work with, as well as their respect for a 'realistic view'.

As Father Stephen Darlington points out in his helpful letter, the issue of 'suitability' versus censorship must be part of our concern about what is available to children. The easy way out for writers, not to speak of teachers, librarians and reviewers, is to avoid anything that might cause trouble. Young readers would not thank us for such fearfulness.

* Lady, My Life as a Bitch.

** Junk.

CoverStory

This issue's cover is from Celia Rees's *Sorceress*. Celia Rees is interviewed by Stephanie Nettell on page 10. Thanks to Bloomsbury Children's Books for their help with this March cover.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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Under Taliban Rule

With Afghanistan dominating the media, books for children about that benighted country are imperative. **The Breadwinner** is about an Afghan child and her family living under the Taliban regime. Young Parvana comes from an educated, middle class family impoverished by war. Under the Taliban, her teacher father, crippled by the bomb which destroyed his school, sells in the marketplace everything that the family can spare, as well as his ability to read and write for the illiterate. Her writer mother, like all women, is forbidden by the Taliban to work. Parvana and her female siblings are forbidden to attend school. Her mother and older sister are confined to the home because the Taliban has ordered women to remain indoors. They are required to wear an all-enveloping burqa and be male-escorted if they need to venture beyond their homes. The burqa makes it difficult for them to do outdoor chores, so Parvana has to do them. Only Parvana can safely help her father to and from the marketplace. When Parvana's father is arrested by the Taliban for being Western educated, the family faces starvation, so Parvana, disguised as a boy, has to take his place.

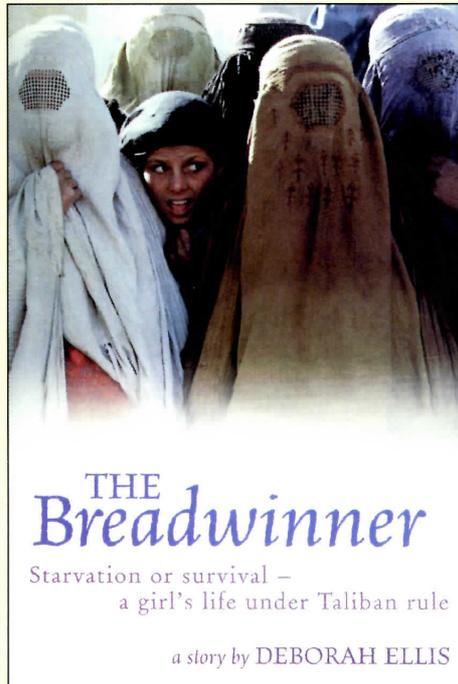
The story itself is straightforward and its theme – a child's courage and survival in difficult circumstances – is not new. **The Breadwinner** takes its place alongside such important novels for young people, about war, oppression, starvation, asylum-seeking, as all Beverley Naidoo's books, Adeline Yen Mah's **Chinese Cinderella**, Bernard Ashley's **Little Soldier**, Benjamin Zephaniah's **Refugee Boy** and Nancy Farmer's **A Girl Named Disaster**, to name but a few. What is new is its setting – Afghanistan – and its exposure of the horrors visited by the Taliban on the lives of Afghan people, especially the educated and women.

Inevitably political

With this central thrust, the novel is clearly political. Published as it is in the midst of a war by the most powerful nation in the world against this impoverished country, with intensive media coverage of that war, of Afghanistan and its recent history, in the midst too, of the rise of Islamophobia, it needs to be politically and historically balanced. That it is for children cannot absolve it from this. In fact it heightens the need.

It is here that I have some reservations about the book. There is some imbalance in the way it presents Afghanistan's past

After decades of indifference, the West's attention is now focusing on Afghanistan in an unprecedented way. Deborah Ellis's **The Breadwinner** is the first novel written for children set in that country and reflecting life under Taliban rule. How well and how accurately does it convey this experience? **Shereen Pandit** explores.



in relation to its present, and in the way in which it allocates responsibility for what has befallen ordinary families like Parvana's.

Afghanistan is presented as a country of fertile farms and modern infrastructure reduced to rubble by wars engendered first by the evil Soviets, then the evil Taliban. Before this, its people lived peacefully, prosperously and happily in the sunshine amidst all the mod-cons. Issues like the fact that Parvana's parents must have been educated under the Soviets (and indeed that Parvana went to school under them), that all who pay Parvana's father to read to them could not be illiterate only due to the Taliban's short rule, are glossed over. Such intrusions of the writer's hostility to both the Soviets and the Taliban endanger the credibility of the story.

US support for the Taliban?

My daughter read the book and asked

several questions – mainly how could a country have been taken over by a bunch of illiterate thugs, as Parvana's father calls the Taliban, if the majority of people were literate and living in the comfort which Parvana's family enjoyed before the wars and the Taliban. If Parvana's family's experiences were typical of most families in Afghanistan, then why could not the proud Afghan people, defeaters of so many oppressors and would-be oppressors, overthrow them. The book's explanation of the Taliban's rise is questionable: 'After the Soviets left, the people who had been shooting at the Soviets decided they wanted to keep shooting at something, so they shot at each other.' Thus, the Afghan people are responsible for the rise of the victors of this squabbling, the Taliban.

The Author's Note is unhelpful in restoring balance. In the body of the book, Afghan children aspire to escape to the West. In the Author's Note, the role of the West in the war against the 'pro-Soviet' government, in the rise of the Taliban, its failure to do anything about the plight of Afghan people, is briefly glossed over. My daughter asked why America let the Taliban take over? Why they fought against a Soviet-backed government, one at least under which Parvana's parents could live as they chose, could be educated, could work regardless of gender, and not against the Taliban?

For children, one cannot leave such questions unanswered in a book like this. Not today. If one does, then what purports to be a fictionalised account of the true sufferings of Afghans under the Taliban, comes over very much as a Westerner's view of how bad the Taliban was, how good life was without it. ■

The Breadwinner by Deborah Ellis is published by Oxford (0 19 275211 1) at £4.99.

Shereen Pandit was a lawyer, political activist and trade unionist in apartheid South Africa and came to Britain at the height of the uprisings in 1986 as a political exile. She has worked in anti-apartheid and amongst refugees for many years whilst reading for a PhD in Labour Law. For the past six years she has worked in London as a writer, and has also taught English and creative writing to refugees, mainly women, from many countries.

The Depiction of Arabs

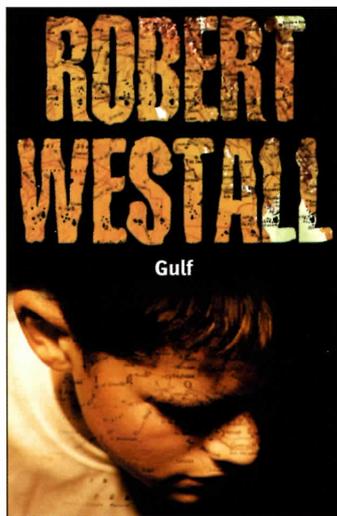
With Islamophobia on the increase, there has been concern about the negative stereotyping of Muslims in children's books and the relative lack of positive images. Are good titles available? Ann Lazim explores.

What picture of the conflict in the Middle East and the everyday lives of Arabs can children in this country gain from reading contemporary fiction or picture books? What books exist to help young people make sense of the situation and where can they find literature which portrays Arabs in a non-stereotypical way? Few books are available for children which feature Arab characters at all, and then rarely in a positive light. The present hostile climate towards Muslims has made this an even more crucial issue. Of course, not all Muslims are Arabs and equally, not all Arabs are Muslims, something which is often forgotten. However, I shall focus here on how Arabs are portrayed in children's books. It will be apparent that they are not all titles I am recommending but in some cases their widespread availability and the absence of more positive material means that it is important to be aware of them.

The Palestine question

Perhaps the best known and most readily available book set in the Middle East is **One More River** by Lynne Reid Banks, originally published in 1973 and substantially revised and reissued in 1992, prior to the publication of a sequel, **Broken Bridge**, in 1994. It describes the migration of a Jewish family from Canada to Israel during the period immediately before and after the Six Day War in 1967 during which the state of Israel annexed further land from the Palestinians. The story focuses on the character of Lesley who bitterly resents the move from Canada. Central to the plot are the encounters she has with an Arab boy, Mustapha, and although these may make the book appear to be giving both sides of the question with regard to this disputed land, the viewpoint is firmly that of the Israelis. Mustapha and, in the revised version, Akhmed the Arabic teacher, are the only 'good' Arabs. In the sequel, **Broken Bridge**, set twenty-five years later, Lesley's and Mustapha's paths cross again when her nephew is killed by an Arab. The political situation is shown to be complex but despite this, the Israelis are accorded the moral high ground in this story.

An interesting book to read alongside these is **Habibi** by Arab American author Naomi Shihab Nye which has many parallels with **One More River**. Both feature teenage girls moving to Palestine/Israel from North America. Both girls get to know boys from the 'other' cultural/religious group. However, Liyana's relationship with Omer in **Habibi** develops into a real friendship, whereas Mustapha remains a somewhat shadowy character. Another important difference is that Liyana's father is from Palestine and has family there whom his children get to know, especially their Sitti or grandmother. Lesley's family has no cultural roots in Israel in their immediate family history. Naomi Shihab Nye is well known as a poet in the USA and **Habibi**, her first novel, is semi-autobiographical. Her picture book, the moving **Sitti's Secrets** in which a young girl travels from the USA to visit her grandmother in the Middle East, was available briefly in this country as a hardback only. It would be wonderful to have this book with its insights into Palestinian culture and its strong peace message available now. You can still obtain **Sitti's Secrets** and Naomi Shihab Nye's other books via the internet*. They include a beautiful book of poems and paintings selected by her with young people in mind, **The Space Between Our Footsteps: Poems and Paintings from the Middle East**.



Safe themes only?

The question of which books make the journey from US to UK publication is an interesting one. **The Day of Ahmed's Secret** by Florence Parry Heide, Judith Heide Gilliland and Ted Lewin, set in the bustling streets of Cairo, is a fairly well known picture book in this country. However, another picture book by the same authors and illustrator, **Sami and the Time of Troubles**, is almost unknown, as it is only available as an import. The theme of **The Day of Ahmed's Secret** is a fairly 'safe' one, a young boy's acquisition of literacy while working to help support his family. Although this has its political side, it is not as potentially controversial as Sami's story where his family is shown hiding from bombs in his grandfather's basement, and he and his friends play at soldiers in the ruined buildings of Beirut.

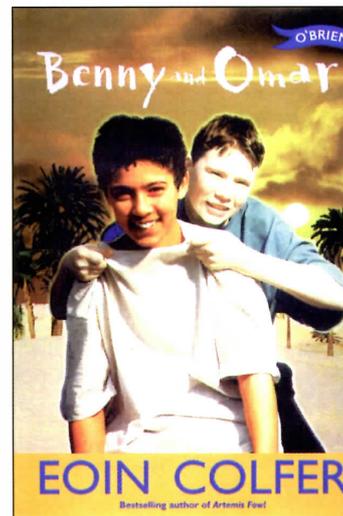
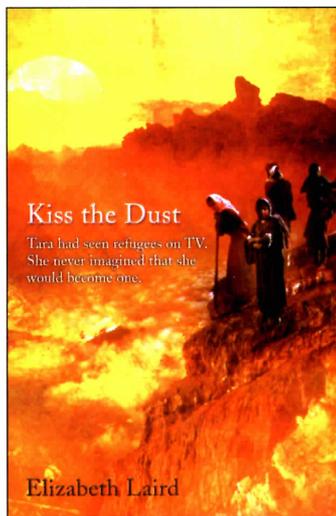
In the award-winning translation⁽¹⁾ from Hebrew of **Samir and Yonatan** by Daniella Carmi, an Arab boy Samir finds himself in a hospital ward with four Jewish children. The outside world intrudes – Samir fears that the brother of Tzahi may be the soldier who killed his younger brother, his parents are unable to visit him because the Palestinian territories are sealed off. The story is told from Samir's point of view and the personal stories of all five children raise questions for readers about the effect of the political situation on their emotional lives. Samir and Yonatan's story makes it possible to imagine oneself in another person's place. This is at the heart of encouraging understanding through literature.

In **Gulf** by Robert Westall, this sense of identification happens in a much more literal sense when Figgis, the narrator's brother, behaves as though he were an Iraqi boy soldier in the Gulf War. This story is a powerful indictment of war in general and this war in particular. In the closing chapters we gain some insight into how this conflict felt from the Iraqi soldiers' point of view, leaving us in no doubt that we are all human beings.

Also with an Iraqi setting, focusing on Kurdish refugees during the 1980s, is Elizabeth Laird's **Kiss the Dust**. This author has also written a novel set in North Africa, **Forbidden Ground**.

Stereotyped depictions

The Secret City by Carolyn Swift is one of those adventure stories where two plucky Western children on holiday in an Asian or African country solve a mystery or foil a crime with the aid of a local companion who knows the terrain. Kevin and Nuala travel from Ireland with their archaeologist mother who is working on a dig at the ancient city of Petra in Jordan. They befriend a Bedouin boy Ali and defy danger when the 'evil Hassan' (cover description), described several times as 'hawk-nosed', catches them trying to prevent his plan to sell some valuable Nabatean pottery to a representative of the German embassy (who is also portrayed in a stereotyped manner). This is a pity, as the descriptions of Petra are enticing and the brief depiction of Ali's family's life style make this one of the few children's books available with a Middle Eastern setting which features everyday life in an Arab country to some extent. This is as important as books which reflect the conflicts in the region.



in Children's Fiction

Moving to a North African setting, we encounter **Benny and Omar** in Eoin Colfer's first novel. Benny's family move from Ireland to Tunisia because of his father's work and he befriends local boy Omar. Although the focus is on Benny, Omar is no mere sidekick. The way the two boys communicate by means of slogans and catchphrases gleaned from satellite TV is very funny. The whole book displays a skilful mix of the boys' cultural backgrounds with modern mediaspeak.

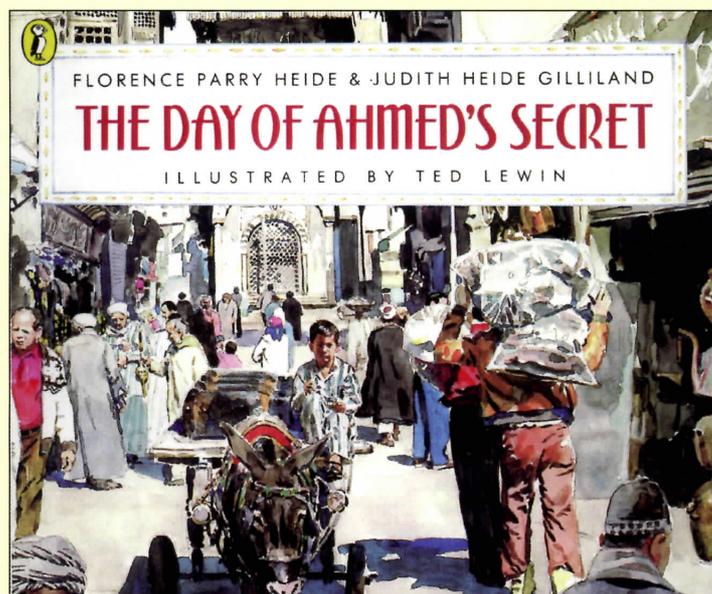
A tradition to draw on?

One difficulty in representing a multiplicity of voices from the Middle East and North Africa in children's literature is the lack of books available in English written by people who originated there. As Julinda Abu-Nasr says: 'there is almost no tradition of a special literature for children in the Arab World'⁽²⁾. Although her article reveals this is changing, there isn't a wealth of children's literature in Arabic waiting to be translated.

Children need to know about life in the Middle East and North Africa and what life is like for people who have migrated from there to Europe and North America. In France, there is now a new generation of writers whose families came from North Africa and Lebanon. Despite the racism experienced by many Arabs in France, there is an emerging migrant literature. Unlike in Britain where the only published Arab authors, such as Ahdaf Soueif (writing in English) and Hanan Al Shaykh (translated from Arabic), seem to write for adults, there are some children's authors writing in French whose origins are in the Arab world, such as Azouz Begag, whose family came from Algeria, and Brigitte Smadja and Nacer Khemir, who were born in Tunisia⁽³⁾. The Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris has a library with a children's section and a bookshop where children's books in Arabic can be found as well as relevant books in French. At the most recent Salon du Livre de Jeunesse⁽⁴⁾ in Montreuil, Paris, in December 2001, there was a special focus on books from and about the Arab world. An annotated booklist and a booklet giving details of publishers and contacts were produced⁽⁵⁾.

In Germany, Syrian Rafik Schami has been living and writing for some years. His novel **A Handful of Stars** was published in English but is now out of print, although some of his picture books are published by North-South. Schami is one of the migrant authors featured in an article in the latest issue of the IBBY journal **Bookbird** along with Palestinian Ghazi Abdel-Qadir⁽⁶⁾.

Searching out books which feature Arabs and Muslims positively is difficult but not impossible as I hope I've demonstrated here. However, cultural stereotypes still abound and I fear it will take some time to dispel those prevailing images of Arab men who are either terrorists or romantic Sheikhs (who turn out to be Europeans in disguise) and women who are either heavily veiled or scantily clad belly dancers. ■



Books discussed

One More River, Lynne Reid Banks, Puffin, 0 14 037021 8, £5.99 pbk

Broken Bridge, Lynne Reid Banks, Puffin, 0 14 036607 5, £5.99 pbk

Habibi, Naomi Shihab Nye, Simon & Schuster USA, 0 689 80149 1 or 0 689 82523 4

Sitti's Secrets, Naomi Shihab Nye, ill. Nancy Carpenter, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 00301 6, out of print, Simon & Schuster USA, 0 02 768460 1

The Space Between Our Footsteps. Poems and Paintings from the Middle East, selected by Naomi Shihab Nye, Simon & Schuster USA, 0 689 81233 7

The Day of Ahmed's Secret, Florence Parry Heide and Judith Heide Gilliland, ill. Ted Lewin, Puffin, 0 14 056353 9, £5.99 pbk

Sami and the Time of Troubles, Florence Parry Heide and Judith Heide Gilliland, ill. Ted Lewin, Clarion, 0 395 72085 0, out of print

Samir and Yonatan, Daniella Carmi, translated by Yael Lotan, Arthur A. Levine Books, an imprint of Scholastic Press USA, 0 439 13504 4

Gulf, Robert Westall, Heinemann New Windmill, 0 435 12414 5, £6.25 hbk, Egmont, 0 7947 1472 7, £3.99 pbk

Kiss the Dust, Elizabeth Laird, Egmont, 0 7497 4932 6, £4.99 pbk

Forbidden Ground, Elizabeth Laird, Hamish Hamilton/Puffin, out of print

The Secret City, Carolyn Swift, O'Brien Press, 0 86278 382 8, £3.99 (€ 5.07)

Benny and Omar, Eoin Colfer, O'Brien Press, 0 86278 567 7, £4.99 (€ 6.95)

A Handful of Stars by Rafik Schami, Gollancz, out of print

*Some of the US publications mentioned can be ordered from the Amazon website (www.amazon.com).

Books relating to Islam can be obtained from The Willesden Bookshop, Willesden Green Library Centre, 95 High Road, London NW10 4QU or ordered from their website (www.willesdenbookshop.co.uk). They can also supply books in print in the USA.

(1) **Samir and Yonatan** won the Mildred Batchelder award in the USA for a children's book in translation.

(2) Julinda Abu-Nasr: 'The Arab World' in **International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature**, ed. Peter Hunt, Routledge 1996, reissue May 2002, 0 415 28559 3, £19.99.

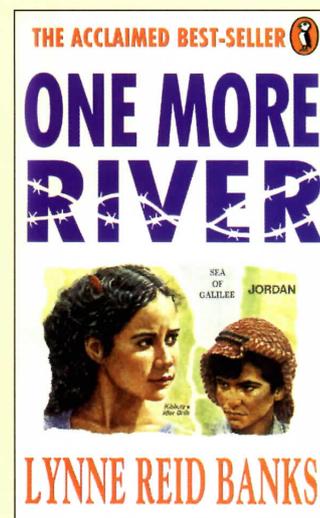
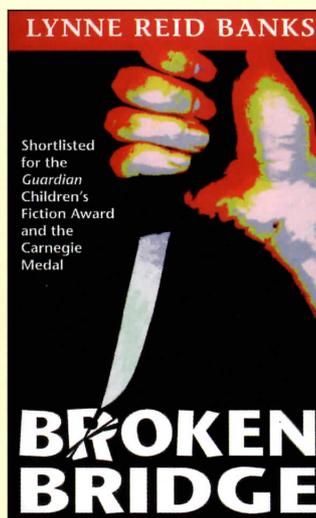
(3) Find out more about these authors from the French website www.ricochet-jeunes.org

(4) The Salon du Livre de Jeunesse in Montreuil is an enormous annual book fair where all the French publishers display and sell their books. There are discussions, exhibitions, author signings and each year a focus on children's literature from another country or region.

(5) The booklist can be accessed via www.imarabe.org the website of the Institut du Monde Arabe.

(6) Gina Weinkauff: *Between Village Mentality and Cultural Hybridity: Mapping the Immigrant Self in German Children's Literature*, **Bookbird** 39 (4) 2001.

Ann Lazim is Librarian at the Centre for Language in Primary Education in London and Chair of the British Section of IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People).



Standing Up to Protest

Two weeks after September 11th, one of my sons called from Washington again. None of his friends had been killed, but one had been on the ferry and seen the plane come over; another was starting work in the twin towers next month. We agreed that the world seemed too full of conversations like ours. He added that, well, if ever there was a time for my books to sell, sadly, it was now. I didn't understand. I don't write disaster books. 'But all your books are about the dangers of fundamentalism,' he said. I didn't reply. We never talk about the books in the family, other than to joke about my failure to produce a best seller. 'Well? Aren't they?' he persisted. I'd never thought about it like that, but when I did, I knew he was right.

Dissent as betrayal

My favourite protagonist is a kid who is a dissenter, one who interrupts the accepted flow with a tentative 'But...?' My villains are the loud mouths who shout them down and are unable to hear any words that are not copies of their own. They are the men and women without doubts, folks who never change their minds and who see dissent as a deeply personal betrayal. They are the bullies, with the critical powers of three year olds, who always believe what they're told. They never scratch their heads and ask the sorts of questions which begin: 'But what about...?' So yes, on reflection, the demons my gentle heroes and heroines must face are those who *know* they are *right*, even if they have to lie on the ground and scream it until they are purple in the face. They are as ubiquitous as measles and like that disease, their ravages are worst in those places where poverty has already worn people down. I learnt this when I lived on the edge of the shanty town outside Ankara, and my perception was not unique.

Even my then father-in-law agreed. No one had ever called him a 'kind' man and I never knew him do a kind thing. Cruelty was his habit and he kept it close to him like his pack of cigarettes. There were reasons, as there often are, but the upshot was that he'd constructed an unbreachable wall between himself and ordinary life. From his solitary position on its ramparts he scowled down on humanity before he blew another trail of smoke into the disappointing air. He did not care that the shadow of that wall fell dungeon dark on his family. His interest was to stay beyond their reach.

Fundamentalist cruelty

I was surprised, therefore, to hear him denounce the cruelty of the

The events of September 11th have dramatically focused our attention on the tragic consequences of a fundamentalist stance. Writer Gaye Hıçyılmaz explains how her experiences of the outlawing of dissent became a theme in her novels.



fundamentalists, and I've never forgotten what he said. It was one afternoon in the seventies. Erbakan and his right wing religious party were new players on the Turkish political scene. My ex-father-in-law was horrified. He recounted his own experiences as one of Ataturk's first teachers in the revolutionary and recently independent Republic of Turkey. He'd been promoting literacy with the new, Latinized alphabet and his was the eager and unwanted face of change and reform. In small village communities he'd met vicious opposition from some clerics and now he feared that such men were regaining their control.

'If you disagree with people like that, they won't even kill you quickly,' he'd growled, dropping down more ash. 'They'd cut you up with a saw!' In Turkish, those words rasp, and as he spoke I'd heard the sound of an old saw pushed to and fro through flesh.

He'd shrugged and I'd nodded.

For a moment, across the huge divide of our ages and genders, our different cultures and our mutual distrust, we two sceptics were united in our distrust of this flight from rational thought. We agreed about the dangers of not recognising dissent. In Ankara I watched our district decay as the funda-

mentalists moved in. He'd already seen the dried blood on the ground, so it was ironic and tragic that he never recognised that his own, terrorised family were also permanently infantilized by their inability to dissent from his views. Their fear was overwhelming. They never faced him or it; and I was a coward too. But, without realising it, I had uncovered the motif that has dominated the last ten years of my writing: the fatal consequences of fundamentalism and the endorsement of the value of dissent.

Cultural exclusivity?

It wasn't and isn't an exclusively cultural thing. Turkey, with its patriarchal traditions, its backward looking reverence of past glories and its acceptance of poverty as the inevitable destiny of so many of its citizens, may have been especially vulnerable, but it's not alone. I grew up in the south of England in prosperous, peaceful and very different times but this upbringing had also outlawed dissent. It was viewed as the worst thing we could do: a sort of matricide. We weren't punished for being untidy or messing up our clothes, and they didn't get particularly annoyed when we lost or broke stuff. The one, unforgivable crime of childhood was 'contradiction'. It brought instant exile from the kingdom of

the loved. There were related crimes, like showing off, or interrupting or answering back, but they weren't as frightful as 'bare-faced contradiction', as it was usually called. Contradicting a grown-up was judged as treacherous and malicious. It was personalised, and those we loved experienced it as the ultimate betrayal, the stab in the back, the Judas kiss of the ungrateful child. 'Don't you *ever* contradict me again!' was their response, in the angry, yet wounded tones of someone who has been deeply wronged. And: 'Don't answer back!' was their pre-emptive defence, if one showed the fateful signs of doubting what they'd said.

I tried not to contradict, unless it was under my breath, but I was silenced as effectively as if my tongue had been cut out, or even sawn off. It seemed a high price to pay for correcting someone's mistake, but I didn't understand then that the issues were those of control and authority. Sometimes, I don't think I understood much about anything until I became the silent observer of the customs and ways of another people in another land. It was anthropology by marriage, and the course was tough, but that's where most of my characters come from.

They are kids who are braver than I was and I like them a lot. Contradicting is what the 'good' characters in my books do. The first, Mehmet, in *Against the Storm*, published in 1990, doesn't exactly know how life should be, but he dares to say that it shouldn't be the way it is. Selma in *The Frozen Waterfall*, I see as a quiet, steady sort of girl, who will succeed, whereas Henry, in *Watching the Watcher*, prevaricates. In *Coming Home* the tragic consequences of a fundamentalist stance are most clear. Refik Bey, the nasty uncle, is a portrait of one of my neighbours. He's a man I still regard with loathing and contempt. He's a shouter and blusterer and like June in *Girl in Red*, he *knows* he's right. Sometimes I feel disheartened because I've failed to stand up and protest, but at least I've given my protagonists the courage to contradict and interrupt. And some like Emilia, in my next book, *Pictures from the Fire*, are very resolute indeed. ■

Against the Storm (0 571 19496 6), *The Frozen Waterfall* (0 571 19495 8), *Watching the Watcher* (0 571 17274 1) and *Coming Home* (0 571 19367 6) are published by Faber at £4.99 each pbk. *Girl in Red* is published by Dolphin (1 85881 490 1) and *Pictures from the Fire* (1 85881 896 6) is due in September 2002, at £4.99 each pbk.

PETER ON THE COUCH

In children's literature, Peter Pan is the best known example of the 'puer aeternus', the Eternal Boy, an archetype with an intensely fascinating quality, whose power is felt in both our inner and outer worlds. He can be a source of enrichment, carrying as he does the freshness and vitality of spring. But when an individual allows himself to become identified with the 'puer', serious problems can result. Jungian psychotherapist, **Rob Wood**, explains.

James Barrie's Peter Pan illustrates the nature of the puer aeternus problem in a poignant and interesting way. For Peter not only will not grow up; he cannot – and this means that he can never properly come to life.

Like other personifications of the archetype – Narcissus, Icarus, Eros, for example – Peter possesses qualities which are recognisably human. Like them, however, he represents something essentially impersonal, which we might call burgeoning new life, and which is more primitive, more powerful, and more profound than the human personality.

Eternal Latency: James Barrie

Under the sway of the Eternal Boy, a person can become arrested at various different stages of development: sometimes in adolescence, sometimes earlier, before puberty. In looking at Peter Pan – and at James Barrie, his creator – I want to focus on this earlier time, with the psyche held 'eternally' when sexuality is still latent. Barrie clarifies Peter's developmental stage in telling us that he still has baby teeth. He is also erotically impervious, as Wendy painfully discovers, and is very much an extrovert.

J M Barrie was born in 1860, the youngest of seven children, and died in 1937. He was a tremendously successful author and playwright, made a large amount of money, was created a baronet and was highly esteemed by contemporaries as diverse as Thomas Hardy, George Meredith, and Robert Louis Stevenson.



Barrie's father was a weaver and, though a good enough provider, seems to have been emotionally absent, at least for Barrie. The driving force in the family was his mother, Margaret, who had a big emotional investment in his older brother, David. David was her Golden Boy: bright, athletic, handsome, charming, and preparing to live out his mother's dream by becoming a Minister. At this stage, Barrie lived disregarded, 'the runt of the litter', in the shadow of his mother's love for David.

The genesis of Peter Pan

Suddenly, shockingly, David died in a skating accident on the eve of his fourteenth birthday. Barrie was six. His mother was inconsolable, and took to her bed for months in a darkened room. Poor Barrie felt this rejection very much, and made attempts to impersonate David in a desperate bid to revive his mother and get some attention. Eventually this succeeded, and after this he was very close to her for the remaining thirty years of her life.

In the course of this intimacy, Margaret shared with him her own girlhood experiences. In particular she told him how, when she was eight, her own mother had died, whereupon she had become, in Barrie's words, 'mistress of the house, and mother to her little brother'. We are left with the feeling that in place of having an experience of 'good-enough mothering', Barrie made do with the image of Margaret, the child mother, tending another boy long before he was born.

Certainly he never felt that he could get as close to her as David, who was always between them and who, as he said, for the rest of her life 'was not removed one day further from her. Many a time she fell asleep speaking to him, and even as she slept, her lips moved and she smiled as if he had come back to her.' He added, 'When I became a man, he was still a boy of 13.'

We can see Wendy and Peter germinating.

It is as though, in his effort to replace David, Barrie became him, so that his own development was arrested at 13; or perhaps we might say with greater accuracy, it was arrested as a child of six impersonating a boy of 13. Even as a man, he never grew above five foot in height, and he felt inadequate about his manhood. At the height of his success, he noted poignantly: 'Six foot three inches... If only I had grown to this. I would not have bothered turning out reels of printed matter... Read that with a bitter cry.'

Barrie was married for 15 years, but it ended in divorce, when his wife found sexual and emotional fulfilment with another man. She wrote of him later: 'JM's tragedy was that he knew that as a man he was a failure, and that love in its fullest sense could never be felt by him or experienced. One could almost hear him, like Peter Pan, crowing triumphantly, but his heart was sick all the time.'

The Llewelyn Davies boys

Barrie never had a child of his own, but he loved the company of children, and they, in turn, were fascinated by him. He would go to Kensington Gardens with his large dog, Porthos, and make friends with the children playing there with their nursemaids. It was in this way that he met the Llewelyn Davies boys, and then their parents Arthur and Sylvia, becoming deeply involved in their lives, into which he made what one critic has memorably called 'innocent but harmful trespass'.

First Arthur, and then Sylvia died before any of the boys – now five in number – reached adulthood. At the last, their mother wrote a note, asking that Jenny, the sister of the family nursemaid, should move into the house to help to look after them. Barrie, however, told the world that she had written 'Jimmy', his own

name, and in due course he became the boys' guardian, a role which, on some important levels such as practical provision – he discharged well.

The avoidance of death

Peter Pan did not actually appear in print until nearly 25 years after it had been first performed. In his Introduction, Barrie claims not to recall writing the play and, addressing the five Llewelyn Davies boys, says: 'I always knew that I made Peter by rubbing the five of you violently together, as savages with two sticks produce a flame. That is all he is, the spark I got from you.' There is a conscious recognition here that Peter's origins were collective rather than individual – though Barrie's brother, David, still eternally 13, was surely also involved.

It is striking here how Barrie addresses the five 'boys' as though they were all still there to read his words. There is no hint that two of them – his favourites – were already dead. It is almost as though death had not happened – or did not matter. Behind this is an attitude which involves living in a sort of limbo – or Neverland – as though death can be diminished or avoided by never really coming to life. I think that this is a central part of puer pathology.

The Mother in Peter Pan

While **Peter Pan** was gestating, Barrie played with different ideas for titles, one of which was 'The Boy Who Hated Mothers'. In the play itself, things are more ambivalent. Idealised and sentimental devotion to the mother was with violent hostility towards her. This conflict is highlighted early in the play when Wendy, flying to Neverland is mistaken for a bird. Encouraged by Tinker Bell, Tootles (one of the Lost Boys) shoots her down. The murderous feelings about the mother in Peter's shadow are split off into Tinker Bell and the Lost Boy. And Peter can feel completely self-righteous in condemning Tootles for what has happened.

There is, however, at least as much confusion about the mother as there is animosity. When

one of the pirates asks Captain Hook: 'What is a mother?' Hook is at a loss, and can only explain by pointing to a great bird floating by, who has not deserted her nest, even after it has fallen into the water.

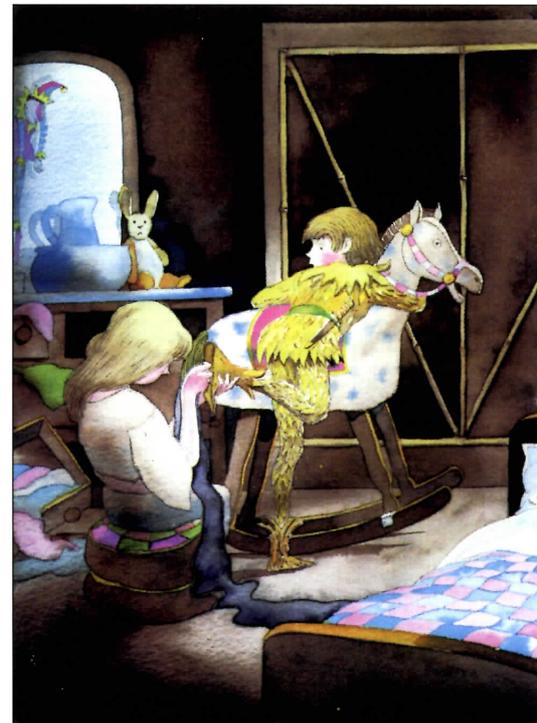
Wendy is a real child, who becomes a make-believe mother. She does this because the Lost Boys, and particularly Peter, seem to want it so much. She tells them that she is only a little girl with no real experience. But experience has little or no positive value for the Eternal Boy, so they reply that experience does not matter, and that what they need is a 'nice motherly person'.

Another exemplar of motherhood in the play is Mrs Darling, or perhaps Mrs Darling plus Nana, the dog. She is idealised, undoubtedly, but she does seem to know that children need to grow up, and that they can do so – even though Mr Darling clearly has not – and she is ready to facilitate this. It is not, however, what Peter wants – or rather it is not what Peter can manage. When Mrs Darling offers to adopt him at the end of the play, he tells her: 'No one is going to catch me lady, and make me a man.'

Maternal betrayal

Under this bravado there is trauma. At Peter's core there is a profound experience of maternal betrayal and rejection. A relationship which he was omnipotently confident would always be there, and which he simply wanted to postpone taking up for the moment, has suddenly and shockingly been denied to him for ever. Before the action of the play begins, Peter has flown away from home, on an adventure. When he comes back, entering through the window in his home, which he knows that his mother will have left open, he sees her asleep: beautiful, and sad with longing for him. He knows that he can wake her if he wishes, and he imagines her bliss if he should do so. She calls his name in her sleep, but he does not answer, telling himself that he will speak if she calls again. She does not.

He sees that her cheeks are streaked with tears, but instead of waking her, he plays a lullaby on his pipes, regretful only that since she is asleep,



she cannot praise the performance. Then he flies away. Barrie comments: 'You must not think that he meditated flying away and never coming back. He had quite decided to be his mother's boy, but hesitated about beginning tonight.'

Peter continues his aerial adventures, and puts off returning until he dreams of his mother crying and knows that all she needs is a hug from her splendid Peter to make her smile. This time, though, he finds the window closed and barred. He sees his mother inside, once again asleep, but with her arm around another little boy. He calls out and beats on the bars, but she does not hear, and he flies away, sobbing, never to see her again.

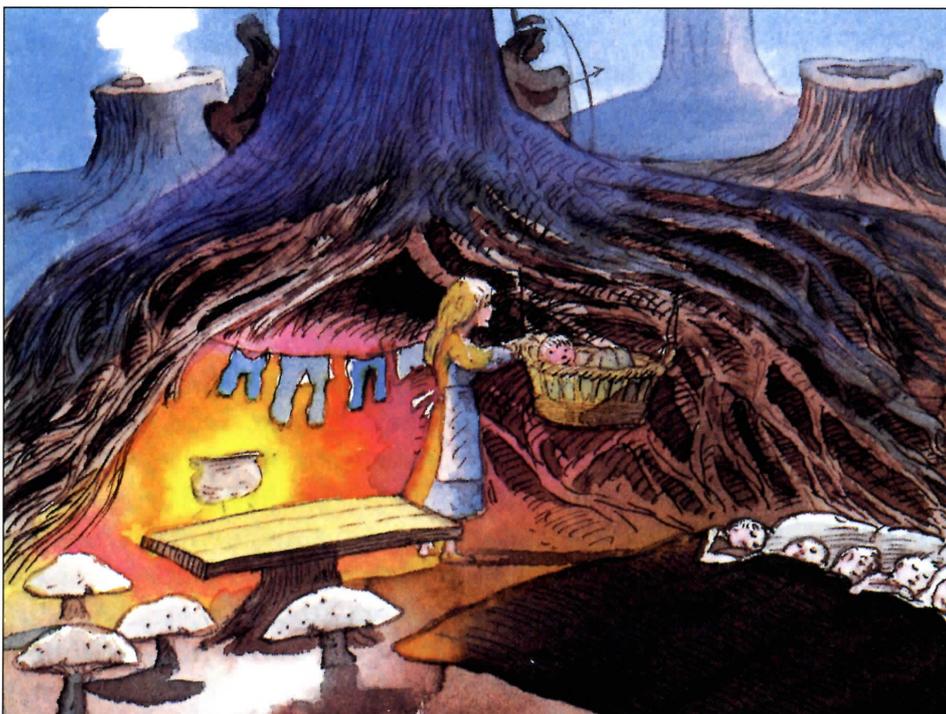
This is very poignant. It is also tinged with sado-masochism: Peter's enjoyment of his mother's suffering, and his decision to prolong it, express unconscious, uncomplicated sadism; his turning away, the spurned victim, the polar opposite.

A person in the grip of the Eternal Boy lives a provisional life, in which it is always, 'Not yet'. One of Barrie's firmest convictions was that there are no second chances in life, and we have in this harrowing story of Peter and his mother, a demonstration of 'Not yet' transforming into 'Never!'. I think that this is central to the tragedy. 'Not yet', if it goes on long enough, becomes the same as 'Never'. What happened to Peter here is, I think, like a death experience. I believe that many who are stuck in puer pathology have undergone such an experience psychologically, and are left with an intense desire not to do so again. In eternity there is no death, and identifying with the Eternal Boy is a way of trying to avoid it.

Cherchez le père

Ideas of motherhood in **Peter Pan** may be confused, but there is evidence that the positive and the negative are both present, albeit in rather extreme forms: idealised or terrible. The father, however, is wanting in almost all respects.

He is represented by Mr Darling, whose



personality is that of an attention-seeking child; full of envy, jealousy, and resentment, and a desire to offload his defects onto others. He demands, however, to be respected and admired, as though this were not so – he is as eager to deny his shadow as Peter. It is striking that he and Peter never meet, and that while the need for a mother is often mentioned in the play, the need for a father never is – as though such an idea never occurs to anyone. Mr Darling is in the grip of the Eternal Boy himself, and is no sort of father. I think that the curse of identification with the Eternal Boy can and does pass from father to son.

The Shadow

The Eternal Boy can be dangerous – especially when he takes the form of an extrovert, like Peter Pan, with all the concomitant aversion to exploring the inner world. For them the difficulties of engaging with what Jung called ‘the shadow’ are especially acute. Essentially the shadow refers to everything about ourselves that we do not wish to be; all those aspects of us that fill us with shame. People identifying with the Eternal Boy have an unusually acute problem with the shadow, and may utilise a powerful unconscious denial of all the ungenial aspects of their life and self. Peter Pan highlights the issue.

When the play opens Peter has come to the Darling home specifically to look for his shadow, which he has lost on a previous visit. But although he wants it back, he has no idea of what to do with it once it has been found, and he tries reattaching it with soap – as if that

might cleanse it, perhaps. Throughout the play he exhibits almost no awareness of it, and it is as though this denial is integral to his airborne nature; as though acknowledgement of the shadow might bring him tumbling down to earth.

A vivid portrayal of a bit of Peter’s shadow comes when the Darling children and the Lost Boys are on their way back from the Neverland to the Darling house. Peter arrives first, with Tinker Bell, and hears Mrs Darling tell her husband – who has been complaining of the draught – that the window must always remain open, so that the children can return. Peter’s response to this is immediate. He turns to Tinker Bell and tells her: ‘Quick, close the window; bar it! Now when Wendy comes she will think her mother has barred her out, and she will have to go back with me.’

The vengeful sadism here is palpable. The idea that Wendy and Mrs Darling might have something which he has been denied is intolerable, and he exults – out of Mrs Darling’s hearing: ‘You will never see Wendy again, lady, for the window is barred!’ In the end Peter relents and opens the window, though whether this is because of the ‘funny feeling’ he has when he hears Mrs Darling moaning for her daughter, or because he cannot find any other exit from the house, is moot: ‘Come on, Tink,’ he cries as they fly off, ‘we don’t want any silly mothers.’

Untouchability

Without a shadow there can be no substance, and so the Eternal Boy cannot be grasped, held,

or even touched; hence the elusiveness of those who identify with the archetype. Barrie’s stage directions make it clear that Peter is never to be touched at any time.

Barrie wrote a sort of coda to **Peter Pan** in which Wendy returns to Neverland after a year. She is surprised to find that Peter can no longer remember Captain Hook, or Tinker Bell. When it is time to leave, she tells him how much she would like to embrace him, but he draws back. Whereupon she says: ‘Yes, I know.’

Barrie comments: ‘In a sort of way he understands what she means by “Yes, I know,” but in most sorts of ways he doesn’t. It has something to do with the riddle of his being. If he could get the hang of the thing, his cry might become, “To live would be an awfully big adventure,” but he can never quite get the hang of it.’ This sounds like a cry from the author’s own heart. ■

Rob Wood is a psychotherapist and a member of the Foundation for Psychotherapy and Counselling (FPC). This article is an edited extract from a lecture given in November 2001 under the auspices of the FPC (www.psychotherapy.org).

The illustrations are taken from the Pavilion edition of **Peter Pan and Wendy**, illustrated by Michael Foreman (1 85145 179 X, £12.99 hbk).

Hal’s Reading Diary

Last year **BfK** featured **Jack McKeone’s** responses to books from the age of six months to his first birthday, as observed by his father, **Gary McKeone**. Now **BfK** has invited one-year-old **Hal Mills’** father, **Roger Mills**, to trace how Hal’s ‘reading’ interests develop until he reaches his second birthday.

One of the things about being one year old is that you can’t tell anyone what it’s like in words. So even if you were so inclined (which you wouldn’t be as you wouldn’t have the cognitive equipment to think such thoughts), you can’t tell anyone what you think of your books.

This poses an interesting problem for me, the father of a one-year-old called Hal, trying to write about his experience of books. And things get further complicated by the fact that my own feelings about books and reading are highly likely to get muddled up with whatever Hal’s experiences might be. People who have grown up thinking that books are something special, that there is something to be revered about the act of reading and learning, are going to have a particular way of contemplating their offspring’s first encounters with words and images on a page. And if you aren’t careful you are going to see what you want to see rather than what Hal might see.

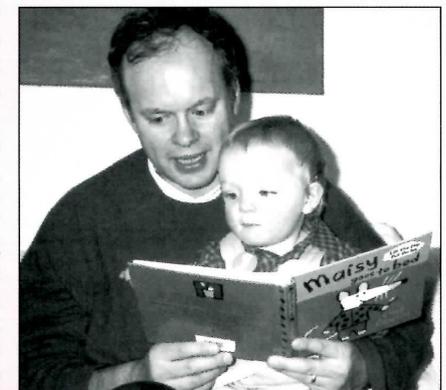
So what *does* Hal, already the possessor of quite a library, make of his books? Well, primarily books seem to be just another kind of toy for him at the moment. In our kitchen/living room there is a Hal-height shelf where we keep most of his books and he routinely hauls them out and plays with them. He clearly gets a lot of pleasure from his books and most days the bookshelf will get emptied out onto the floor. But the pleasure seems to be all to do with the book as a physical object. He loves turning pages backwards and forwards in exactly the same way that he loves opening and shutting the door of our washing machine. Lots of his books have flaps to lift up and tabs to pull – Lucy Cousins’ *Maisy* books

are a big favourite – and he always reaches immediately for the bit that moves when he gets to a fresh page.

But surely a book is more for Hal than just an object with bits that are fun to move around? Well is it? When I sit Hal on my knee and ‘read’ a book with him I can’t help but notice that it is me, not him, who is interested in getting to the end. Hal is just as likely to start turning the pages back towards the beginning as he is to want to go in a nice sequence from beginning to end. And what does he make of the schematised drawings in a *Maisy* book? Realising that *Maisy* is a mouse might be beyond him anyway as he hasn’t ever seen a mouse, but what of the more familiar objects that he does know like tables and chairs, houses and cars?

For Hal to realise that a drawing of a table or chair in a *Maisy* book stands for an object in the real world is actually quite a step. He’d have to know that two different chairs were nevertheless the same kind of thing. And even more dramatically he’d have to connect a representation of chair with real chairs. At one year old, that is probably beyond him, and will be till he starts using language – another crucial form of symbols. So at the moment the *Maisy* pictures may just be coloured shapes to him, and, being coloured shapes, he is just as happy looking at a book upside down as he is if it is the right way up.

But Hal seems to value his books, and I’m sure that’s not just paternal wishful thinking. Alongside the books in the kitchen is a big basket of toys waiting for Hal’s attention. But on arrival in the kitchen is it the toys or the books that he heads for first? It’s the books every time. Perhaps he senses there’s more in them than has yet met his eye. ■



Roger Mills is a Psychodynamic Counsellor.

Authorgraph No.133

Celia Rees interviewed by Stephanie Nettell

All teachers learn from their students, and it was teaching 14-year-olds to write that honed Celia Rees's own skills, and taught her just what would enrapture them. 'I'm not the sort who began writing when they were very young.'

Teaching and books were in the blood. With a mother determined her daughter should love reading, a father the head of a junior school, and both aunt and uncle teachers, the real surprise was her fireman brother. After a miserable half-term at Manchester University at 18, she took a gap year, went to Warwick for a History and Politics degree, then trained as a teacher in Walsall.

At first English was subsidiary to history, but she found that, much as she'd loved studying history, teaching it was another matter. 'I couldn't stand it – galloping through the Reformation with third years who weren't interested in anything that interested me.' But the English department had an inspirational head, and in those days you could do pretty much what you liked. 'You didn't use specifically children's books, but people like Stan Barstow were writing about real children in Britain, and Americans like Steinbeck had young central characters.' So she gradually switched to teaching English.

Children's books were part of her job, but they quickly became her own preferred reading. 'Garner, Cormier, Le Guin... fantastic. Better stories, better characters, more exciting.' And when she studied them as literary texts, during a 1983 sabbatical at Birmingham for an M.Ed in teaching English, they seemed the essence of what a writer should do. 'You're telling a story that kids will love, but behind it is a weight of thought, even scholarship. It was very, very impressive. Then the guy running the creative writing unit said you couldn't judge what children write without realising the problems they face. He encouraged us to write *with* the children, to *be* children and go away and write about it. And for the first time someone told me what I'd written was actually publishable – and I thought "Wow, I can really do this! There's something going on here I want to be part of."

Back at school, where GCE and CSE classes were building folders on challenging themes like homelessness or prejudice, she put the theory to the test. She wrote three versions of a time when she'd felt coldly treated by a Welsh doctor because she was English (banal, factual, first person; more richly detailed first person; third person narrative – a story), and read them aloud to demonstrate the difference. Or, on a rite-of-passage moment, she wrote about her first kiss. 'I was told they'd just blow me out, fall about laughing, but in fact you could have heard a pin drop. I got some amazing work out of them: they trusted me with their lives, and it was fantastically fulfilling.'

She had noted what happened to the book box: 'A sorry

thing that started each year full of wonderful books and ended with the core books no one wanted to read, slung back with a "Yi-errgh, boring". So we discussed what they *really* liked – exciting stories about teenagers like themselves, but who date and have exciting things happen. I was impressed by the authors they loved (and didn't bring back to the book box), like Judy Blume or Cynthia Voigt. So I said, OK, maybe I could have a go at that. But set in this country – I was sick of their stories always modelled on American books and set in high schools.' From a friend she heard about an 'unbelievable' school trip that offered the perfect thriller plot, developed a background, characters, sub-plots (borrowed the sad little love story of one pupil on a skiing trip), and there was her first book, *Every Step You Take*, published by Macmillan in 1993.

A few years earlier she had stopped full-time teaching in order to write, and has now chalked up 18 titles with different publishers – 13 in two astonishing peaks around



'95 and '99. Mean-minded critics like me might find echoes of herself in the occasional plot or image, but 'before anyone starts going on about being too prolific, have they tried paying the bills on the money most children's authors make?' In fact, her imagination prowls ravenously through the centuries, and her fans remain hungry for more.

She has stayed with Macmillan, who published **The Bailey Game** (1994) and **Truth or Dare** (2000), with **The Wish House** ('a modern **Turn of the Screw** set in the west of Ireland') coming next year. She never intended to write horror, but seeing a Dracula film brought back the night when a 17-year-old Celia, her mother away, had been so gripped by Bram Stoker that the thought of her mirror failing to reflect a vampire behind her was scarier than biking off alone at midnight to sleep at a friend's house. When Macmillan recoiled from her urge to tackle a 'Victorian full-on vampire book', she turned to Scholastic, who were then launching Point Horror Unleashed for British writers. They published **Blood Sinister**, **The Vanished** (1997), with its typically Rees view of ancient terrors lurking beneath our cities' streets, and **The Cunning Man** (2000), a tale of malevolence in a Welsh fishing village that pounces heart-thuddingly on the reader. One of her Scholastic editors moved to Hodder Headline and asked for something supernatural, resulting in **Soul Taker** and **Ghost Chamber** (1997), and a series for younger children based on a ghost city paralleling a modern one, now attractively repackaged as a trilogy with new titles: **City of Shadows**, **A Trap in Time** and, soon, **The Host Rides Out**. Meanwhile her duo from Bloomsbury, **Witch Child** (2000) and now **Sorceress**, which recreate life in the superstitious seventeenth century for America's European settlers and the natives they callously displaced, has brought transatlantic success and a place on award short lists.

Celia Rees was born in Solihull and that whole area has remained her home patch: she met her Welsh husband, Terry, at Warwick, went with him to Manchester where they both taught at Stratford College, and, 'as you do', back with him to Coventry, where she taught for the rest of her career. They moved to Leamington Spa in 1984, to a family-sized terrace house where she bagged the biggest, lightest room for a study adorned with reminders of her books – a fisherman's blue rope, Native American pictures, dowsing forks, watercolours of Welsh fishing villages – and a bed-sized couch. Despite 21-year-old Catrin, a law student, about to be articulated away in London, dreams of uninterrupted writing have ironically been foiled by Terry taking early retirement: 'I like to get up and walk around, but now I'm bumping into someone else and having cups of coffee and realising two hours later nothing's been done... I don't write regularly – it has to cook, and then I write in bursts, all night if necessary.'

She is a petite and I suspect, in spite of her easy chat, a rather reserved woman. Her father died when she was 12 and beginning grammar school, after her mother being seriously ill for a year. Her brother, at 21, had to take on the family responsibilities, and Celia herself realised in retrospect that all the school subjects she couldn't manage were those she'd just met at that time. While she was planning **Truth or Dare** she happened to visit Solihull and sat in the park where their gang had played, and she remembered that hot summer of '59 before she started school, and the day it had rained and the summer and her childhood were over. But when I ask if she would write about the death of a parent, her answer suggests a protective rationalisation. 'You write what you enjoy reading and I dislike books that seem to be "turning a trick", *issue* books. Story should be all important.'

Yet **Truth or Dare** and **The Bailey Game**, her most personal novels (and two of her finest – 'Yeah, "proper books"! Well, they're harder to write than thrillers or ghost stories...'), are the best kind of 'issue books', the former a delicate portrayal of Asperger's Syndrome and the destructive power of family secrets, the latter a stark picture of classroom bullying. And it was 11-year-old Catrin who, when her mum asked what she should write about, had replied, 'Bullies.' Celia, teacher and mother, knew of recent incidents, but she also exorcised her adult shame of her own childhood fear that if you didn't join in you would be the next victim. 'That you don't have to, that you can be strong enough to stand up to it, is an important message for children.' Anti-issue?

Truth or Dare, filled with the detail and atmosphere of her own childhood and with Joanna, writer and mother, almost an incarnation of herself, is even more personal, but it was only after publication that she had any contact with families affected by Asperger's. It was, like the supernatural, simply a subject that interested her. Yet while she's had no premonitions or sightings herself, the supernatural hooks her as firmly as her readers. She has no time, however, for Satanic possession of **The Exorcist** kind, 'a construct of the Catholic church, where the girl is merely a vessel to be filled with this male Satanic force, fought over by male priests', whereas her girls play the major role in defeating supernatural powers, and she's never met fundamentalist opposition.

In **Witch Child**, her biggest seller, 'I'm positing a pagan belief that has nothing to do with Christianity. It's about someone who has special powers but has to curb them in the society they live in.' She wrote it and **Sorceress** as one book (which explains an ending that enrages some frustrated youngsters), where the later historical adventure, with the poignancy of the Native Americans' fate, would have contrasted the Salem-like persecution of Mary with her revered status in another society. Its air of research and inviting email address has brought hundreds of messages from readers seeking Mary's reality as much as the suspense and mysticism of the story.

To an ex-historian, research is part of the fun, especially when new discoveries reshape an idea, as they already have for a tale about a girl pirate, which is hatching alongside an ambitious fantasy trilogy that reinterprets history over 12,000 years, ending, for the first time in her career, slightly in the future. From the supernatural to SF is just a hop, Celia, and somehow I don't really believe it's only the mortgage that keeps these ideas coming. ■

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

The Books

The Bailey Game, Macmillan, 0 330 33326 7, £4.99 pbk

Truth or Dare, Macmillan, 0 330 36875 3, £4.99 pbk

The Wish House, Macmillan, 0 333 94739 8, £10.99 hbk (early 2003)

The Vanished, Scholastic, 0 590 19535 2, £3.99 pbk

The Cunning Man, Scholastic, 0 439 01186 8, £5.99 pbk, 0 439 99942 1, £3.99 pbk

Soul Taker, Hodder, 0 340 68652 9, £3.99 pbk

City of Shadows, Hodder, 0 340 81800 X, £5.99 pbk

A Trap in Time, Hodder, 0 340 81801 8, £5.99 pbk

The Host Rides Out, Hodder, 0 340 81802 6, £5.99 pbk

Witch Child, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 4639 8, £10.99 hbk, 0 7475 5009 3, £5.99 pbk

Sorceress, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 5036 0, £10.99 hbk

Everyone's Home Library

Every child, from no matter what background, should have at least some books of their own. Children's Laureate, **Anne Fine**, explains her imaginative, yet gloriously simple proposal for how this could happen.

Show me the young reader who's never laboriously penned it all in the front of a favourite book: their full name, street, city, country, then, with gathering megalomania, 'World, Solar System, Universe'. When I was eight, we moved to a tumbledown house. My father finally got round to prising the lock off the door to the cellar, and down there we found a trunk stuffed with mildewed London Illustrated Magazines and novels by Thackeray. In the front of each was a personalised book plate for Viscount Molesworth. Oh, how I envied *him*.

Envy and eavesdropping

But I'd never have guessed it would be a combination of this failing – envy – and yet another – eavesdropping – that would lead to my project as Children's Laureate. I first heard the expression 'home library' in a bar during a Children's Literature conference at Keene State University. A writer famous for his African tales was talking about visits he still made to schools in the poorest area of New York City, where he'd been raised.

'Each sort of library serves a special purpose,' I recall him saying. 'National, state, city, street, school and class. But it's so important not to stop there. Everyone needs at least some books of their own. I tell the children, "Don't matter how poor you are. Always be looking out for something you'd like in your home library."'

Over the years, his words came back to me each time I met a child from a bookless home, or a teacher or librarian who spoke of the pleasure so many children take in being offered their first ever 'book for keeps'. With so many gloriously attractive books around, I couldn't help thinking: what would it *take* to make sure all our young people could lift something they might want to read off a shelf in their own bedroom?

But 'Books in the Home!' seemed such a dangerous rallying cry during the eighties and nineties, when public libraries seemed so much under threat.

Book ownership

Times have changed. Not only can we now be confident that essentially free access to libraries will remain an integral part of our culture, but librarians themselves have come to recognise that book ownership and book borrowing support one another. And other attitudes have shifted too.



Twenty years ago, one astute bookseller pointed out that whereas American parents thought books for their children were a grand idea, and so were willing to make sacrifices to buy them, the equivalent British parent was frequently of the opinion that, if books were so important, then someone else should be providing them.

For better or worse, this belief's long gone, along with the patterns of life and work that made the library so accessible to people of my age in childhood. We heard it all the time. 'If you want something to read, go along to the library.' As young as seven, I used to step out confidently with last week's two issues tucked under my arm, to wait at the crossing till the traffic stopped, change my books, and come home again safely.

Now, with high speed roads, police car chases, closing branch libraries, and fears about child molestation, this picture has become as old-fashioned and unlikely as an illustration from an early Ladybird reader.

But someone like me, who feels she owes pretty well everything to the reading on offer through childhood, can't help but fret about those growing up without that basic bridge to self-development. For years I've thought there had to be some way of getting children to think in terms of sagging bookshelves as well as bulging clothes closets and overflowing toy chests.

Bookplates

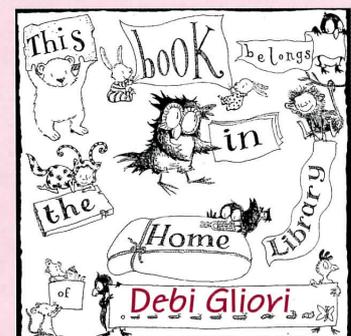
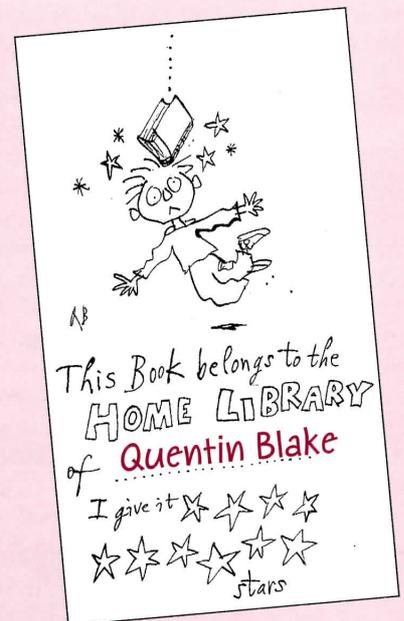
Then, one day, staring at one of Molesworth's enviable book plates, everything fell in place. Why not cash in on every child's desire to choose their favourite, stick a label on something, write their name in a possession?

Bookplates! Fresh, modern bookplates. Free. Accessible through schools and reading groups and shops and off the web. After all, if you print off a bookplate by Korky Paul and another by Nick Sharratt, and you only have one book, what are you going to do?

Find another book, quickly.

And it needn't be expensive. Most schools have jumble sales. Most children walk past charity shops. (Last year, Oxfam alone sold four million pounds worth of second hand children's books.) And the less privileged the area, the more charity shops there usually are. It was this final thought that clinched the matter for me. This could be made to work.

So that's the plan. For starters, we asked twenty-one of our finest (and busiest) line illustrators to design us a black and white bookplate, free. They have all been





astonishingly generous. First in were plates from Quentin Blake, Shirley Hughes, Debi Gliori, Posy Simmonds and Philippe Dupasquier. Then Tony de Saulles' and Raymond Briggs' designs arrived. And it's gone on and on.

We have book plates of all sorts, to appeal to all ages. We have cosy, funny, sporty, magical, weird, disturbing, fantastical, moody – even downright unpleasant. We chose black and white for these first plates because it's cheaper to copy and download. Soon every school in the country will have a starter template for free photocopying (for all except commercial purposes). And it's a roll call of names that will make everyone take notice.

The idea is that, once the old passion for bookplates has been rekindled, everyone will pitch in. Think of it. Authors and illustrators with bookplates featuring their own characters and styles on their own websites as well as on ours (www.myhomelibrary.org). Football clubs with bookplates in their colours. Schools holding bookplate design competitions. (We have teachers already pouncing on this idea.) Irresistibly glossy plates bearing the name of the bookshops that offer them. Bookplates for bribes and rewards in school. Some black and white, some in full colour, but as many as possible bearing the words:

This book belongs in the Home Library of

because what underlies the scheme remains the hope that every child, from no matter what background, would have at least some books of their own, be it the publisher's son with his fitted hand-tooled bookcase filled with signed first editions, or the child in care lugging her cardboard box decorated with used wrapping paper from one temporary home to another.

Something for your home library...

I'd hope the expression would become part of the language, with Granny handing over a novel, 'Here's something I thought you might like for your home library,' and teachers saying, 'And the winner gets a book for their home library.' Books can be swapped and passed on. All it will take to make a book new to its next owner is a freshly chosen book plate. The plan meshes easily with the work of all the people and organisations already committed to bringing books to children. And anyone is free to pick up the idea and use it any way they choose.

Will it lead to more reading? I hope so. And to encourage that, a lot of the plates have been designed so the child can award the book marks out of ten. (Hey! Before you shudder, remember: whatever works!)

If I'm quite honest, I was really relieved when, first time around, it was Quentin Blake who was chosen as Laureate. I had books in mind – now written. At the end of a long two-year work haul – *All Bones and Lies, Up on Cloud Nine, Notso Hotso and Stories of Angus and Jamie* – I felt like a piece of chewed string. This time, when Lois Beeson, administrator to the Children's Laureate, phoned to ask, 'Are you in or out?', it took only a moment. 'I'm in.' For, as it happens, I'd just been reading Charles Dickens' passage from *Hard Times*:

The poor you will always have with you. Cultivate in them, while there is yet time, the utmost graces of the fancies and affections to adorn their lives, so much in need of ornament. Or, in the day of your triumph, when romance is utterly driven out of their souls, and they and a bare existence stand face to face, reality will take a wolfish turn, and make an end of you.

There's more than one way of being impoverished. More books for all. That's the idea of the Home Library. Please help it happen. ■

Anne Fine is the Children's Laureate. Further information on downloading bookplates is available on www.myhomelibrary.org

NEWS**Harry Potter and Coca Cola**

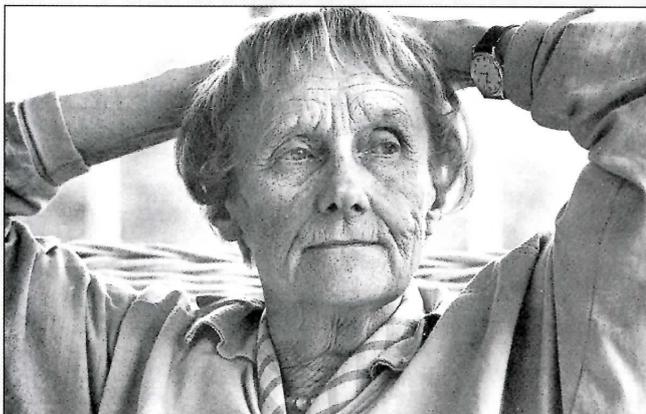
Disquiet amongst Harry fans about author JK Rowling's deal with Coca Cola which grants exclusive rights to market her creation across the globe has led to the setting up of a website called SaveHarry.com. The campaigners argue that, just when children have become, thanks to Harry, so enthusiastic about reading, they are now being bombarded with a junk food tie-in promotion. In February 2001 Coca Cola announced a £100million exclusive marketing agreement with Warner Brothers, the studio releasing *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* in Britain and the US. Rowling's personal stake in the deal could be £10million.

Wilson and Stine Most Borrowed

Figures released by the Public Lending Right Office reveal that R L Stine of the 'Goosebumps' series is still the UK's most borrowed children's author, closely followed by Jacqueline Wilson. Both authors are in the more than a million loans band (together with adult author, Catherine Cookson).

EVENTS**The Roald Dahl Foundation Children's Laureate Platform Debates**

The Children's Laureate Anne Fine is fronting a national series of discussions about the impact and significance of children's literature. The debates (the first was at the Bath Literary Festival) are funded by The Roald Dahl Foundation. Forthcoming debates will take place at Brighton Festival on 4 May (Theme: 'Absent parents in children's and adult fiction.' Speakers: Nina Bawden, Anne Fine, Beverley Naidoo and Nick Tucker.) and at the Edinburgh Festival on 11 August (Speakers: Julia Eccleshare, Anne Fine, Philip Pullman and Francis Spufford.). Further information from www.childrenslaureate.org or from 020 7247 9695.

OBITUARY**Astrid Lindgren 1907-2002**

Astrid Lindgren, creator of Pippi Longstocking (from 1945), has died at the age of 94 in Stockholm. The unruly Pippi, the strongest girl in the world, challenged the didactic Swedish literature for children of the time with her independent adventures. Other Lindgren novels (*The Brothers Lionheart* and *Ronia, the Robber's Daughter*) were adventures of a more allegorical kind. Astrid Lindgren was the most widely read Swedish author of her time and her books have been translated into more than 60 languages.

Useful Organisations No.20:**REALBOOK NEWS**

Published twice yearly, **REALBOOK NEWS** aims to help adults select suitable picture books for children beginning to learn English as a foreign or additional language.

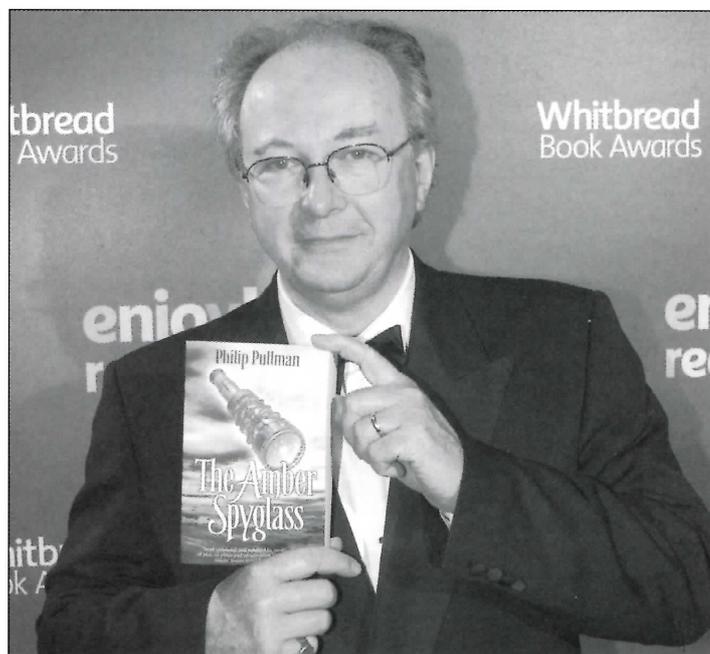
REALBOOK NEWS grew out of the Editor, Opal Dunn's, work as a consultant for the Council of Europe on early foreign language learning. Teachers and parents wanted to include **REAL-picture-BOOKS** as part of their language activities, but found it difficult to find what suitable books were available.

Each issue introduces over 20 books suitable for children learning to read in English. A regular feature article discusses

relevant topics of interest like Reading in a foreign language, Emotional Literacy – reading about feelings, and Developing Visual Literacy.

Issue 10, November 2001, celebrating five years of publication, included a special Nursery Supplement for the increasing number of very young children beginning English worldwide.

REALBOOK NEWS is free. Copies can be obtained from the Editor by contacting Opald@realbooks.co.uk, fax 020 7704 6686 or downloading issues from the website www.realbooks.co.uk

NATIONAL PRIZES**Pullman wins the Whitbread**

Many congratulations to Philip Pullman whose *The Amber Spyglass* (Scholastic) is the first Children's Book of the Year category winner to go on to win the Whitbread Book of the Year (above the winners of the adult novel, first novel, poetry and biography sections).

Macmillan Writer's Prize for Africa

The first ever Children's Literature Awards have been won by Rosina Umelo of Nigeria (Junior category), Osman Pius Conteh of Sierra Leone (Senior Category) and Susan Mugizi Kajura of Uganda (Special Award). The stories will be published in August.

REGIONAL PRIZES



North East Book Award 2001

Jeanne Willis's *The Hard Man of the Swings* (Faber) has won the North East Book Award which is judged by Year 10 students from participating High Schools. Rosie Rushton's *Tell Me I'm OK, Really* (Piccadilly) was Highly Recommended and Bali Rai's *(Un)arranged Marriage* (Transworld) was recommended.



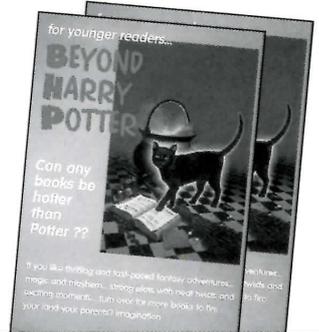
Sheffield Children's Book Award

The Overall Winner of the Sheffield Children's Book Award is Kes Gray's *Eat Your Peas* (Random House) which also won the Picture Book Category. Jeremy Strong's *Living with Vampires* (Barrington Stoke) won the Shorter Novel Category and Louis Sachar's *Holes* (Bloomsbury) won the Longer Novel Category. The winners were voted for by some 3,000 Sheffield school children from a short list drawn up by librarians and teachers.

PUBLICATIONS

Beyond Harry Potter

Beyond Harry Potter leaflets with suggested titles to 'fill the gap until Autumn and the publication of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*' are available free from Anne Williams, The County Library HQ, The Annexe, Shirehall, Shrewsbury SY2 6ND; e-mail: childrenslibrary@shropshire-cc.gov.uk



PEOPLE

Sarah Odedina, Editorial Director of Bloomsbury Children's Books, has been appointed to the Bloomsbury board.

Ann-Janine Murtagh has been appointed Publishing director at Orchard Books. She was previously Publishing Director at Kingfisher.

Piccadilly Press have appointed **Yasemin Uçar** as Editor. She was previously an assistant editor at Scholastic Canada.

Mary Byrne has been named as Achuka Publicist of the Year. Achuka's website citation tells us she 'worked with energy and imagination on a number of very different campaigns, the most noteworthy being the promotion for *Lady, My Life As A Bitch...* the discussion about the book on Newsnight Review was a major coup, negotiated directly by Byrne herself.' Byrne is a freelance publicist who previously worked at Penguin Children's Books.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Warning about sexual content

Dear Editor

I write on behalf of myself and our school librarian concerning the book *Crazy* by Benjamin Lebert and with particular reference to your review (BfK No. 131).

I will start off by saying that I have not had a chance to read the book fully and would not dream of offering you a view of its overall literary quality. My only concern is that there is a section of the book, particularly pages 76-81, which most of my staff and the parents of the boys in my school would probably consider to be pornographic. The sexual acts are described in a way which can only be called graphic and even disturbing. That having been said, I do not even want to offer you a view about the appropriateness of sex descriptions in books intended for children.

I do feel it is appropriate, however, for your reviewer to warn parents and librarians of the presence of such a scene, which many, at least, would find offensive and inappropriate. I am sure you understand it is not possible for our librarians to read all books that they buy, and they rely very strongly on the recommendations of magazines such as yours, which I know

holds a very high reputation. It was by chance that these particular pages were discovered before the book went on loan to boys and taken home. Perhaps some of your book reviews should come with coded warnings about contents, such as is now normal on videos. Once informed, it would of course be up to us to decide whether or not to make the book available to our pupils.

Once again I hope I am clear about my concern. I would not want to be thought either amateur book critic or censor. I simply believe that the nature of that particular scene is such that a warning by your reviewer would have been appropriate. I wonder if you would care to comment?

With every good wish to you and your editorial team upon the work that you do in presenting books for children. This matter aside, I know that your recommendations and advice are much valued here.

Dom Stephen Darlington, OSB
St Columba's College, St Albans, Herts.
AL3 4AW

BfK received two more letters on this topic which is discussed in the Editorial on page 2 of this issue.

Top heavy reviewers?

Dear Editor

I was very impressed with the January edition of *Books for Keeps*, which seemed to have several articles particularly relevant to the

interests of a school librarian: Julia Eccleshare (as ever); Jane Gardiner's 'Reluctant Readers' and Jan Mark's thought provoking comments; not to mention the sharp critical analysis of Margaret Meek. However, what did surprise me was the spread of professions of your reviewers – all extremely well qualified to be reviewers of children's books, no doubt – but not one person from the shelf face – no practising school librarian. Surely *the children's book magazine* should be represented by at least one person who knows what children actually choose to read rather than the somewhat top heavy list of people who write or lecture about what children read?

Gaynor Cooper
gaynor.cooper@abingdon.org.uk

The Quentin Blake Europe School

Dear Editor

The English/German State Europe School in Berlin has been looking for a new name. Many schools in Berlin are named after writers, and we thought it would be appropriate to choose an English writer, and one concerned with children. Quentin Blake was put on a short list of three and the children of the school then voted. Quentin's name won, and after lengthy consideration by the Berlin school authority, we are now

officially, and with his kind permission, the Quentin Blake Europe School!

Quentin is keen to be involved with the school and hopes to visit us soon. The children are delighted and we look forward to a bright future with such an esteemed person as our 'figurehead'.

Theresa Heine
Althoff Strasse 3, 12169 Berlin, Germany

Big Books

Dear Editor

Unless I've missed something, you do not have a Review category for Big Books of the sort much used at Key Stage 1 in the Literacy Hour in schools. Occasionally I have some money to spend in this area for my Teaching Practice Library and some guidance from your excellent review panel would be very helpful.

John Makin
Faculty Liaison Officer, Education,
Nottingham Trent University, LJS,
Clifton, Nottingham NG11 8NS

*Big Books have not been reviewed in BfK for some time as we have not received new titles for review. When we do discuss them, we flag up that they are Big Books in the bibliographical information that we provide – see, eg, the discussion of *Owl Babies* in our January issue. Ed.*

BfKREVIEWS

Reviews (of both hardback and paperback fiction and non-fiction) are grouped for convenience into both age categories and under teaching range. Within each section, you will find reviews for younger children at the beginning. Books and children being varied and adaptable, we suggest that you look either side of your area. More detailed recommendations for use can often be found within the review.

RATING

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

Unmissable ★★★★★
Very Good ★★★★★
Good ★★★★★
Fair ★★★★★
Poor ★★★★★

REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

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

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

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

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

Valerie Coghlan is Librarian at the Church of Ireland College of Education, Dublin.

Robert Dunbar lectures in English and children's literature at the Church of Ireland College of Education, Dublin.

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

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

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

Ralph Gower is a Baptist minister and a former Local Authority and OFSTED inspector of Religious Education.

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

Robert Hull is a poet and anthologist.

George Hunt is lecturer in Education at the University of Edinburgh.

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

Errol Lloyd is an artist and writer.

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.

Felix Pirani is Emeritus Professor of Rational Mechanics in the University of London.

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

Andrea Reece worked for children's publishers for 16 years and is now a freelance marketing consultant.

Rosemary Stones is Editor of *Books for Keeps*.

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

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

TITLES REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE

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Books About Children's Books

Chewing the Cud

★★★

Dick King-Smith, ill. Harry Horse, Viking, 208pp, 0 670 89964 X, £12.99 hbk

Adult fans of Dick King-Smith's animal stories will derive much pleasure from this memoir. It is, in essence, a chronicle of a Gloucestershire man's farming life, dominated by his obsession with, and love for, the numerous animals which he and his family kept over the years at Woodlands Farm. 'All of these mooing, grunting, bleating, squawking, quacking things,' he writes, 'were of surpassing interest to us, characters, with names and personalities.' It is part of King-Smith's gift to be able to convey so entertainingly and unsentimentally the idiosyncrasies of these creatures, not least their frequently vigorous mating practices! The tone is light-hearted, modest and nostalgic; the overall picture is of someone thoroughly at ease with life, someone who (even after more than a hundred



Four generations in 1997: Dick King-Smith with daughter, grandson and great-granddaughter.

children's books) remains slightly bemused by his success. RD

Reading Talk

★★★★

Aidan Chambers, Thimble Press, 176pp, 0 903355 50 7, £14.50 pbk

In the last decade or so, children's literature has been the target of a formal academic takeover, with results both good and bad. Teachers, librarians and other professionals who have taken academic courses in children's literature sometimes claim when they graduate that their studies did not bear closely enough on their daily work with young readers. This is the audience for whom Aidan Chambers is a uniquely helpful critical voice. He is not an academic, but is at home with critical theory and literary history, using them as tools to illuminate and foster the process of reading. He has worked with the young and knows the teacher's job. He is chiefly a practising novelist, interested above all in books as living transactions between writer and reader. And he believes infectiously in the value and importance of experiencing literature. This diverse collection of

lectures and essays is both readable and rigorous, but it could do with a long preface or introductory essay to announce its major themes. These include the nature of successful reading, and the way we learn to do it; the differences between 'pastime fiction' and the real thing; the challenge of new times, new media, new technologies, and historical change; the young adult novel; and issues of language and translation. Three of the seven chapters are about translation, and English speakers' resistance to it. Chambers's chapters on Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* and the Swedish writer Peter Pohl show what we lose by this linguistic and cultural insularity, which only the occasional novel such as *I Am David* manages to overcome. Chambers wants young readers to be imaginatively at home in our close European neighbourhood, and this is one of several topics on which the book has an agenda and a mission. So this is not just criticism. It is a 'mission statement', gathered from long practical experience, offering thoughtful encouragement to everyone concerned with adolescent readers. PH

Now Out in Paperback

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

5-8 INFANT/JUNIOR

Moon Tales

MYTHS ★★★★★

Rina Singh, ill. Debbie Lush, Bloomsbury, 80pp, 0 7475 4795 5, £8.99

Reviewed BfK 122, May 2000:

'A fascinating collection of themed stories, gathering ten moon myths from Chinese, Jewish, West African, Polynesian, Siberian, Canadian, Indian, English, Japanese and Australian traditions. The illustrations are rich and colourful, blending the crepuscular hues of night with the brightness of dramatic episodes and characters.'

Elf Hill:

Tales from Hans Christian Andersen

ANTHOLOGY ★★★★★

Naomi Lewis, ill. Emma Chichester Clark, Frances Lincoln, 72pp, 0 7112 1830 7, £7.99

Reviewed BfK 120, January 2000:

'Lewis's retelling of classic stories is

justifiably well-regarded, and this latest Andersen collection, on whose work she is an expert, can only add to her reputation. There are nine stories in this volume. Chichester Clark's line is assured and her palette rich. Her vision of the Little Match Girl huddled in a doorway and the dying Emperor in "The Nightingale" are but two images which bring freshness to the familiar.'

8-10 JUNIOR/MIDDLE

The Roundhill

FICTION ★★★★★

Dick King-Smith, ill. Sian Bailey, Puffin, 96pp, 0 14 130376 X, £3.99

Reviewed BfK 122, May 2000:

'Evan is a quiet, ordinarily quirky teenager growing up in a bourgeois family in the 1920s. The roundhill is his refuge, an isolated tree-capped hill, due east of his bedroom window, which he can behold at a distance or retreat to for solitary meditation. But one summer day he meets a mysterious child there. This is an excellent, supernatural detective story that culturally aware readers will solve much more quickly than Evan does. Highly recommended for

reading aloud to the class, or for independent readers to read alone.'

10-12 MIDDLE/SECONDARY

The Walker Book of Classic Poetry and Poets

POETRY ★★★★★

Selected by Michael Rosen, ill. Paul Howard, Walker, 160pp, 0 7445 8264 4, £9.99

Reviewed BfK 114, January 1999:

'It is Rosen's intention to introduce older children, say 10-14 year olds, to the range of outstanding English language poetry, written for adults, since Shakespeare. Many of the poets and poems you would expect are here. There are choices, too, that reflect Rosen's political and social preoccupations. In his illustrations, Howard captures a variety of moods and demonstrates an awareness of artistic sensibilities in particular periods: so that his pictures both mirror and comment on the poems. Altogether, this is a striking production.'

12+ SECONDARY

Deathscent

FICTION ★★★★★

Robin Jarvis, Collins, 512pp, 0 00 711815 5, £9.99

Reviewed BfK 129, July 2001:

'178 years into the reign of Elizabeth Tudor, animals have been replaced by automata and the sky by a glass "firmament" over each of the many islands of the realm. When an alien craft crashes through the glass, the people are at first fascinated by the strange, many-nostrilled man, Brindle, found in the wreckage and help him recover. But he then goes on the rampage through London, wielding his two-bladed reaping hook in an orgy of carnage. Jarvis builds up the picture of his world well, with many imaginative details and some good characterisation but the bleak inevitability of the ending made Brindle's moral tussle ultimately unconvincing.'

REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant

Noisy Dog

★★★

Selina Young, Scholastic 'Storyboards', 16pp, 0 439 99914 6, £4.99 board

Noisy dog spends a day by the sea

barking at anyone he meets. Young's lively illustrations bring the seaside to life, much as Noisy Dog's appearance seems to bring bustle and excitement wherever he goes. This is another in Scholastic's 'Storyboards', the board books for toddlers. It has plenty of colour,

movement and character. With the opportunity to 'Woof' along with Noisy Dog, it should not only amuse a parent and child together, but be attractive and memorable enough for a child to return to on their own. CB

Small

★★★★

Clara Vulliamy, HarperCollins, 32pp, 0 00 198420 9, £9.99 hbk

Tom is going to stay at Granny's. He takes his most precious belongings

and has such fun until Granny reads the last story and it is time for sleep. But where is Small, his bedtime toy! Fortunately, Small, after battling against many a danger, eventually reaches Granny's house, quite exhausted. Vulliamy is Shirley Hughes's daughter and there is a similarity in style. However, this artwork as well as the text has a freshness that promises well for the future. **GB**

Bathtime Piggy Wiggy

★★★

Christyan and Diane Fox, Little Tiger Press 'A pull-the-page book', 20pp, 1 85430 746 0, £8.99 hbk novelty



Handling this expansively extending book with its concertina pages may be a challenge to small people on their own. If they want to read the book again, or even move on to the next page, grown-up fingers will be needed to refold the pages, once they have been explored and chuckled over. As PW dreams his (or her?) way through bath time, the reader must unfold the right-hand pages to see where the bath time flights of fancy take him. When PW becomes a deep-sea diver, for instance, the page folds down, and down again, to the ocean floor and a chest of treasure. PW the water-skier flies high into the sky as you 'pull-the-pages' (or, to be more accurate, unfold and lift the flaps on the differently shaped and cut pages).

It's good fun. PW is full of life – maybe a cousin of Colin McNaughton's Preston Pig. Numerous cheerful bath time friends join him in his adventures which are revealed on bright, bold and shiny pages which might not withstand being opened up in the bath itself, but could certainly manage a cloth wiping them clean of sticky finger marks ready for the next time. **GF**

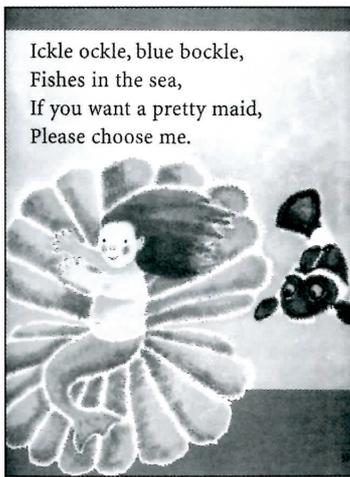
The Rainbow Book of Nursery Rhymes

★★★★

Sam Childs, Hutchinson, 224pp, 0 09 176936 1, £19.99 hbk

Childs has illustrated 151 of her favourite nursery rhymes in this large format, bumper collection. It is arranged thematically under the headings Little Ones, Fun and Games, Food, Nature, Travelling, Funny People, and Bedtime. The nursery rhyme animals and characters executed in bright pastels have all the appeal of soft toys so that spiders and sheep, bees and beavers, crabs and crocodiles are all equally cuddlesome.

Each rhyme has a whole page or double spread with the print size and leading adjusted to make it fit. As a consequence the shorter rhymes have print large enough to be used to show children the link between the



Ickle ockle, blue bockle,
Fishes in the sea,
If you want a pretty maid,
Please choose me.

words they know in their heads and the words on the page, and later for them to read for themselves. This gives the book a longer 'off-the-shelf' life than your average nursery rhyme collection. An excellent book: every nursery at home, or at school, should have one. **JB**

Who's Poorly Too?

★★★★

Kes Gray, ill. Mary McQuillan, Red Fox, 32pp, 0 09 940778 7, £4.99 pbk

This is a comforting and amusing book for a sick child. Each spread features a character who is not well, including Hamish Hamster, Mohammed Mole and Pedro Penguin. Thus, 'Mohammed the mole is poorly. He tunneled straight into a well' while 'Delia the dragon is poorly. She sneezed and set fire to her jumper.' Every tale of woe is illustrated with feeling but with a twist of humour, and sub-text is there to find and delight in. The repetitive text will allow a young child to gain reading independence quickly, and then predict each creature's situation. **GB**

Something Wonderful

★★★

Jenny Nimmo, ill. Debbie Boon, HarperCollins, 32pp, 0 00 198403 9, £9.99 hbk

In reassuring, simple language, this author's message is that everyone is special. The story is set amongst hens, and the colourful Rhode Island Red, White Leghorn, Black Rock and Silver Lace have all won first prizes. Arrogantly they tell Little Hen she can't win prizes – she is too small. Then Little Hen disappears. The boastful hens are amazed when she eventually returns, bringing with her a wonderful family of chicks. This picture book works at various levels, with the bold, painterly illustrations lending it a memorable distinction. **GB**

Saving Sinbad!

★★★★

Michael Foreman, Andersen, 32pp, 1 84270 008 1, £9.99 hbk

Foreman's latest picture book is dedicated to the crew of the St Ives lifeboat, and tells a story of wreck and rescue. The charming twist is that it is told from the point of view of a builder's dog, who rescues another dog after the lifeboat is launched. Much of the action is observed from the church roof which the builder is

restoring, or from the vantage points of the steep streets and coastal slopes of the town, affording us blue-drenched sea and sky vistas, and a sense of the beauty and vulnerability of the place. This is a visually pleasing book that tells a good story, as well as incorporating a little joke on the penultimate page. **GH**

I Want to be a Cowgirl

★★★★

Jeanne Willis, ill. Tony Ross, Andersen, 32pp, 1 84270 007 3, £9.99 hbk



I don't want to be a girly girl
Who likes to sit and chat ...

It is hard to be a cowgirl if you live in a 20-storey flat, but not if you have the imagination of this urban cowgirl or, Tony Ross. After all you can wander past graffiti-daubed cliffs riding your piebald dog, play your guitar in front of a campfire leaning up against dustbin boulders, wear hairy chaps cut from dad's shag pile carpet or hold up iron-toting Dad with a pair of six-shooting bananas. Ross has tremendous fun with Willis's rollicking rhyme about a little girl who doesn't want to be a good girl, a girly girl or a schoolgirl but a Wild West heroine. Especially recommended for feisty females of all ages. **JB**

Shaggy Dog and the Terrible Itch

★★★

David Bedford, ill. Gwyneth Williamson, Little Tiger Press, 32pp, 1 85430 737 1, £4.99 pbk

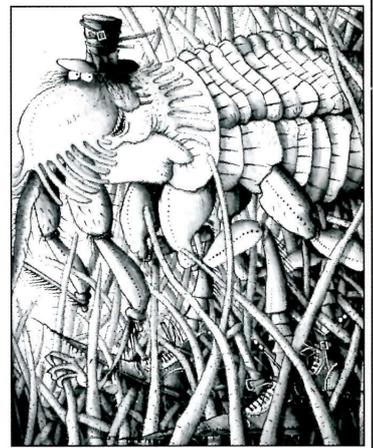
Words and pictures are well matched in this humorous, modern-day fable. A six-legged visitor hops onto the back of Shaggy Dog. He begs Mimi the proud poodle, a shepherd, Merv from the café and Mary Lou from the Poodle Parlour to relieve his itching by giving him a jolly good scratch in return for a favour. Only Mimi refuses but the final illustration shows that she receives her just deserts! **GB**

Tiny

★★★★

Paul Rogers, ill. Korky Paul, Bodley Head, 32pp, 0 370 32632 6, £9.99 hbk

The endpapers offer a dark night, with the planets and moon sailing by. At the bottom of the page, there is Something Hairy, with a tiny white insecty Thing lodged among the furry undergrowth – a spider, maybe? On



the title page, we see the Thing in gruesome close-up – it has a curious pink proboscis, a toothy grin, and a battered Sam Weller hat at a rakish angle. The next opening reveals all. The Thing is wearing four blue pointy boots which might be some kind of limited edition from Doc. Martens. In very large and irregular lettering, the story begins, 'Once upon a time there was a flea called Tiny'. From then on, through the remaining eleven double page openings, Rogers and Paul play the kind of game children love. It's like the one where you write your name and address in the front of a book and keep on going through to The World, The Galaxy, The Universe ... and probably nowadays into Cyberspace and beyond. Here, the 'camera' draws back, and back, and back from the body of Tiny's host, the Something Hairy of the endpapers, a cartoon mongrel called Cleopatra. We zoom out to an aerial view of Cleopatra's house, to the neighbourhood, the town, the island, the planet, and right out into the solar system. There's a neat twist and a good joke in the ending and, heaven help us, someone might want to argue that it's educational too. Paul's illustrations, as always, have enormous energy and wit in their spiky, wacky fashion and there is also the comforting, and highly relevant notion for very young readers, that 'Perhaps it doesn't matter that I'm so small after all'. **GF**

The Little Penguin

NON-FICTION ★★★

A J Wood, ill. Stephanie Boey, Templar, 24pp, 1 84011 205 0, £7.99 hbk

This appealing information story helps young children imagine life in an arctic environment where great plains of ice give way to a cold, blue sea. The exceptionally fine illustrations, printed on embossed card pages, show the different kinds of penguin, Adelies, Chinstraps, Gentoos, Rockhoppers and great Emperor penguins which are like Little Penguin's father and mother. Children learn that the male Emperor penguin nurtures the egg and then, with the other penguins, takes his chick across the ice plains to swim in the sea. They see that the young birds lose their first downy feathers, just as we lose our first teeth, to gain stronger sleeker ones like their parents. Under-fives would enjoy having the book read aloud and talking about the illustrations, while the over-sixes might start to read for themselves. The text has the rhythm of a story with direct speech, questions and exclamations. Large print often signals an important

event or comment. But this inviting picture book goes beyond sharing interesting information and tells us

about the universal pains and pleasures of growing up. The confusions and worries of the little

penguin, not least about losing his baby feathers, give way to the delight of exploring the underwater world

with the mature birds.

MM

REVIEWS 5-8 Infant/Junior

How the Camel got his Hump

★★★

Rudyard Kipling, ill. Lisbeth Zwerger, North-South Books, 24pp, 0 7358 1482 1, £9.99 hbk



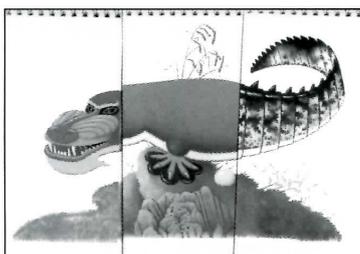
The *Just So Stories* are a century old this year, and Zwerger's large format picture book is an apt celebration of one of the best known of them. Kipling's account of how the camel's arrogant 'humph!' when asked to share the work of the horse, ox and dog is transformed by a djinn into a physical attribute is told in a jolly archaic dialect that children might savour, and though the didactic little ditty that Kipling wrote to go with the story is omitted, they might care to share their own interpretations of the moral of the tale. Zwerger's whole page paintings are spare and spacious, facing a clear, large print text embellished with fabric-based motifs. GH

Remarkable Animals

★★★★

Tony Meeuwissen, Frances Lincoln, 24pp, 0 7112 1890 0, £5.99 pbk novelty

Remarkable Animals offers '1000 Amazing Amalgamations'. This 'paperback' edition is in fact spiral-bound and printed on thin card. It needs to be sturdy to withstand repeated use. The author is working within an old tradition of dissolving pictures - medical students in the fifteenth century had textbooks which involved volvelles and lifting flaps. The design of this book is relatively simple compared, for example, to the cunning creations of the publishing house of Nister in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.



The book needs to be placed horizontally and consists of three sets of 'pages' side by side, which can be lifted separately (thanks to the spiral binding) to create new images. The

lower three pages together create a picture of a creature whilst a verbal description and the name of the creature appear on the pages above. Thus you might start with a Platypus but can then lift the left-hand page to give it a new head, then the centre page to produce a new body, or the right-hand page to equip it with a new rear-end of some kind. (Hence the claim for 1000 amalgamations - I haven't done the maths.) Each time you turn over a picture page, a new verbal text is created which 'works' grammatically. The process also creates a new species; a Werpihoo, for example, combines the head of a weevil, the body of a caterpillar and the rump of a Mohoohoo (a kind of rhino to you and me). The reader plays a version of Consequences, if you like, where the results are bizarre and sometimes amusingly nonsensical. The illustrations are bold in line and colour, slightly anthropomorphic in the creatures' facial expressions, and you can indeed believe the whole thing was great fun to create. It is pleasing for book-loving adults to envisage young children wearying of the technical delights of a computer game to turn to the slower pleasures of manipulating these pages, much as their great-great-grandparents might have done. The translation to paperback implies the success of the hardback, and one certainly hopes that this edition will find many readers. GF

Silver Shoes

★★★★

Caroline Binch, Dorling Kindersley, 32pp, 0 7513 2754 9, £9.99 hbk

Molly finds a pair of silver shoes in her Grandmother's chest of drawers (which she still wears when she goes dancing with Grandad) and is determined to get her very own silver shoes for her dancing class. In the meanwhile she has to dance in her ordinary shoes while other members of the class sport their regulation silver tap shoes. All ends well when she receives her own pair on her birthday. As such shoes are nowadays fairly affordable and normally a prerequisite for classes, this may make the storyline a bit forced, but this matters little in a book with such stunning illustrations, so lavishly displayed in this generously proportioned book. Coincidentally, Molly is from a mixed family and the book is very strong on portraying regular loving, harmonious relations between members of her white and black family and friends. EL

George Shrinks

★★★★

William Joyce, Collins, 32pp, 0 00 711894 5, £9.99 hbk

As the first page of this large picture books relates in a shrinking script, young George dreams of being small and wakes up to find that it is true. In the rest of the book, enormous double page pictures of great detail and vividness depict the Lilliputian child's adventures as he strives to



follow the instructions in the note left by his parents, which forms a bold and minimal set of captions. There is so much going on here that children and their fellow readers will be able to generate endless stories from the 20 odd memorable pages and 100 or so words of which the book consists. Highly recommended as a thought and talk provoking diminutive saga. GH

Fire and Stone, Wind and Tide

POETRY

★★

Selected by Fiona Waters, ill. Robin Bell Corfield, Bloomsbury, 48pp, 0 7475 5085 9, £12.99 hbk

This picture book format anthology of poems about the elements seems in some ways puzzlingly flat. There are some fine moments in the 'traditional poem' genre (Western or American, as in most anthologies for children) - like the image in the Lapp poem of the wind as a man with a spade, shovelling air in all directions. There are also good poems by - for instance - Russell Hoban, X J Kennedy, Aileen Fisher and Jack Prelutsky, but there are a number of other pieces that really aren't doing much, including one by a well-known writer that after having rain enjoy dripping down collars and spines, ends with this desperate - or sloppy - rhyme: 'Maybe it's a shame / but it's the only way / I get some fame.' Reading some of the poems, or rather confronting some of the pages, is also a bit like driving against heavy traffic on a wet night. Whole chunks of text disappear, dimmed by the pulsating fluorescence of the illustrative manner. It's strange to find the book coming from an anthologist of Waters' skill. RH

Cunning Cat Tales

1 86205 376 6

Wicked Wolf Tales

1 86205 460 6

★★★★

Retold by Laura Cecil, ill. Emma Chichester Clark, Pavilion, 80pp, £12.99 each hbk

Both of these handsomely produced volumes contain three stories concerning cats and wolves respectively. In each, an introductory note tells us that they are designed to be read aloud and that direct speech rather than descriptive passages is the preferred means of moving the narratives along. Distinctive type styles in the text are intended to help

readers to give emphasis and variety to their reading. However, these books are not just for listening; as always Chichester Clark's distinctive and delightful illustrations add enormously to the story. Her characters, human, feline or lupine, exude personality and invite the reader into the text.

'Sir Pussycat' and 'Mr W Wolf' are both Italian folktales with great charm and entertainment value - especially the 'sound effects' in 'Mr W Wolf'. I would have preferred more of these less familiar stories to the retellings of 'Puss in Boots' or 'Little Red Riding Hood', and if there are to be future companion volumes to these perhaps the compilers will consider this. VC

Pip

POETRY

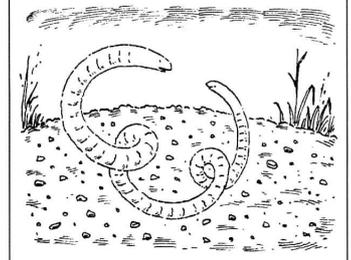
★★★★

Tony Mitton, ill. Peter Bailey, Scholastic, 112pp, 0 439 99392 X, £9.99 hbk

Worm Words

"Keep still!"
said Big Worm
to Little Worm.
"You're driving me
round the bend."

"Don't be daft,"
said Little Worm.
"I'm your other end."



Tony Mitton's first collection, *Plum* (1998), was splendid, full of fluent, technically accomplished rhyming poems of the kind that children like. *Pip*, his third book, also has fine accessible poems for children although I can do without the twee moments - poems about matchbox monsters, tiny elephants and dinosaurs and so on. The poetry I hear gets into the verse in more straightforward things, eg in poems like 'Listening in Bed', 'Insect', and 'Pip'. I like the way, in such poems as these particularly, Mitton's sometimes overly anticipatable rhythms get nudged about in response to the subject: 'I can hear / the telly boom / down in the sitting room.' In 'Insect', 'Listen, / and hear / the tiny song / it sings, / as bits of rainbow / glisten / on its wings.' The title-poem, 'Pip' is for me easily the best poem in the collection. It begins: 'Take a tip, pip', and ends 'Look round for room / to grow and bloom. / Then take a trip, pip.' RH

Come Back to Me My Boomerang

John Agard, ill. Lydia Monks,
1 84121 748 4

The Box Room

Sophie Hannah, ill. Helen Stephens, 1 84121 793 X

Zoo of Dreams

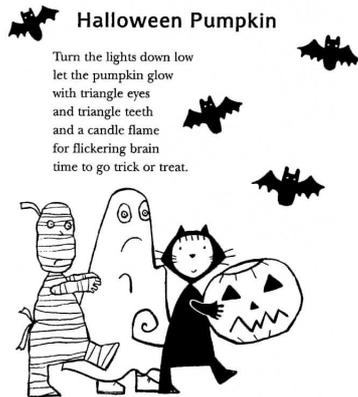
Adrian Mitchell, ill. Peter Bailey, 1 84121 817 0

Fluff and Other Stuff

Tony Mitton, ill. Philip Hopman, 1 84121 813 8

POETRY ★★★★★

Orchard, 48pp, £4.99 each hbk



Halloween Pumpkin

Turn the lights down low
let the pumpkin glow
with triangle eyes
and triangle teeth
and a candle flame
for flickering brain
time to go trick or treat.

Here is a fine set of poetry books. They feature four accomplished poets. They offer cheerful and inviting black and white line drawings. They're generously priced. Best of all, they have engaging subjects, and there's no sign of those exhausted old standbys of children's poetry, the eccentricities of school life or the crazy and disgusting

behaviour of friends and relations.

As usual, the publisher has an eye to the literacy strategy, and, where appropriate, the poems are helpfully labelled in the table of contents, according to their form, as haiku, triolet or limerick and so on. The stroke of genius, however, was to invite the poets to come up with a set of poems around a particular theme.

Sophie Hannah's chosen subject is boxes and what you find in them. John Agard, while waiting for his boomerang to come back, has written a collection of poems on the subject of shapes. Adrian Mitchell has persuaded Daisy, his golden retriever, to offer some insights into the world of animals, and one can imagine Adrian nodding in agreement as Daisy tells him that she doesn't like to think of pigs, 'In crowded sheds all packed in tight - / No sun, no moon, no day, no night.' Tony Mitton has been going through children's pockets and found a surprising number of poetic treasures tucked away there, amid the fluff, including: 'Ghost bug, / invisible, / it makes me wince and squirm / to think that in my pocket squats / a germ.'

It must be difficult, even for poets like these, to produce thirty or more poems on a single theme, without their inspiration flagging or some recycling of the same ideas. Yet, though John Agard and Sophie Hannah seem uncomfortable at times, the limited focus has encouraged all the poets to make interesting discoveries and connections. John Agard's poem 'Shells' moves from a typology of shells to eternity in under forty words. Adrian Mitchell discovers in a ruminating cow the essence of cool, 'Only a cow with peace of mind / Can give milk of the richest kind.' In contrast, Sophie Hannah's 'Money

Box' has all the cajoling confidence of someone on the make, 'I'm stinking rich. I'm blinking rich. / Give me some coins to scratch my itch.' In Tony Mitton's contemplation of a single screw, the reader discovers the human desire for safety and security.

Sophie Hannah's poems make most use of formal verse patterns, and, at the other end of the spectrum, Tony Mitton brings the child's own vocabulary of exclamations and colloquialisms into play. All of the poets have an eye to the kind of pattern and music in a line that grabs and keeps a child's attention. These are excellent collections that are enjoyable and thought provoking. CB

Sink or Swim

★★★

Ghillian Potts, ill. Jan Lewis,
Young Corgi, 80pp,
0 552 52753 X, £3.99 pbk

Timid William is bullied at school by Big Mark. Together with his friends at school, he decides that ignoring Big Mark is the best strategy, and it works well in the school playground. That night after school Mark follows William home and events take a dramatic turn, as Mark accidentally knocks a buggy with a toddler in it into the river. Mark raises the alarm to the emergency services, whilst William heroically rescues the toddler and dedicates the rescue to his dad who, we discover, died some time ago.

William's timidity is perhaps overplayed in the early part of the story and the fact that the children don't attempt to enlist the support of adults in addressing Mark's bullying behaviour is a little worrying. However, the story has a satisfying end with William's heroism being acclaimed and Big Mark showing that

he hasn't really changed for the better. There is also a nice portrayal of the difficulties faced by single working parents in juggling work and child-care. AK

Crocodile: Disappearing Dragon

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Jonathan London, ill. Paul Morin, Candlewick Press
(Cambridge, Massachusetts),
24pp, 1 56402 634 5, £10.99 hbk

This fine picture book takes us through a crocodile's reproductive cycle from a Spring mating, egg laying in a sandy nest in early May to scooping out the hatchlings in midsummer. We think of crocodiles as ferocious predators, but here the focus is just as much on the dangers they face from other creatures, including humans. We see the female crocodile protecting her eggs against 'rooting pigs and creeping raccoons'. Then we follow the hatchlings' perilous journey to the water where only a handful escape the beak of a heron, the pincers of a blue crab or the talons of an osprey. The book's subtitle, 'Disappearing Dragon', the factual page and the map of Florida alert us to the threat that exists to the very survival of this crocodile species: only four or five hundred are left in Florida's mangrove swamps and canals. The book is illustrated with vivid oil paintings - wonderfully colourful and evocative - which give a powerful sense of the distinctive environment in which the crocodiles live. These pictures would encourage children from about five to eight years to talk and reflect. The poetic text has the immediacy of an informational narrative and combines successfully with the illustrations to make this a book likely to awaken a desire to know more. MM

REVIEWS 8-10 Junior/Middle

Ivor the Invisible

★★★

Raymond Briggs, Channel 4
Books, 40pp, 0 7522 2034 9,
£10.99 hbk

Briggs aficionados will need to look at this one carefully. They may well have seen the animated film *before* the book, since it was screened on Channel Four during Christmas 2001. One wonders what measure of control Briggs had over the book - the story was written 'especially for the screen' and the blurb tells us that the book 'uses images based on his original drawings, selected and compiled by Sue Tong' who was the Art Director on the project. The story is by Briggs, but the language has little of the wit and energy to savour in, say, *Fungus* or *Ug* (and even the odd misprint in the balloons - 'wth' for 'with'). And, although this is a tale about an invisible giant, there is none of the dream-like quality of *The Snowman* or *The Bear* or the challenges of *The Man*.

Nevertheless, it's still Briggs, which means there is the unerring selection of subject matter to engage young readers. John is visited by an Invisible Giant in search of a friend. The giant wreaks sundry kinds of amusing havoc around the house, in the park and in John's classroom. No doubt because the story was written with

film in mind, there are many visually exciting and comical moments provoked by the mischief-making of an invisible pair of giant hands. There are one or two Briggsian scatological giggles, to say nothing of the giant scrawling 'Bum' and 'Poo' on the blackboard behind John's bemused teacher (though it does write 'Sory' later). There is much knockabout fun to enjoy and indeed plenty to work out as to what the giant is up to since it never does materialise.

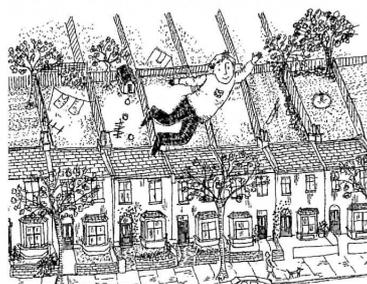
Yet somehow, the book doesn't quite feel like vintage, meticulous Briggs. At the end, for example, it turns out that the giant, whom John has named 'Ivor', is in fact called Beryl, and then the story needs a human girl to make the most of this misunderstanding. So we get one - she comes walking into John's living room; yes, we have met her before at the school and maybe in the park ... but is she John's sister, or just a friend, or what? The book simply feels a little less 'tight' than we expect from Briggs - though we do expect a masterpiece every time. GF

The Boy Who Could Fly

★★★

Sally Gardner, Dolphin, 96pp,
1 85881 839 7, £3.99 pbk

This is a nicely satisfying wish-



fulfilment story. One day Thomas Top is an ordinary, not particularly popular boy, the next he's the boy everyone wants to know. Transformation occurs when he is given the ability to fly by a Fat Fairy, who arrives out of the blue to grant him a birthday wish. Thomas's real problem however is his father's obsession that their family be ordinary and Thomas's first and real wish was for his father to be fun. Fortunately, the Fat Fairy can lend a hand here too, once his father acknowledges the problem.

Thomas's new talent and the various characters' responses to it are described very matter-of-factly; yet this and the prosaic tone of the storytelling highlights the fantasy. The book makes the point that adults are people too and that some people just can't be ordinary. While Fat Fairies are probably more common

now than of yore, this one has a nice line in belching! AR

My Mum's Going to Explode!

★★★

Jeremy Strong, ill. Nick Sharratt, Puffin, 96pp,
0 14 131053 7, £3.99 pbk

Nicholas's mum is pregnant and it is making her do strange things, like organising nappy changing races and having sausages morning, noon and night. However, there is a bigger shock to come when after a scan at the hospital, Mum discovers she is going to have twins. This is a humorous tale from the author of the 1997 overall winner of the Children's Book Award, for *The Hundred Mile an Hour Dog*. Jeremy Strong, who is good at creating larger than life characters. Particularly comical are Nicholas's rather deaf granny and her second husband Lancelot, an ageing Hell's Angel. Gran first thinks Mum has got rabies and then that she's going to have 'tins' instead of twins. Silly, but very appealing to children. Sharratt's illustrations capture the slightly wacky characters perfectly. AK

The Moon Has Got His Pants On and Other Poems

POETRY ★★★★★

Steve Turner, ill. David Mostyn, Lion, 96pp, 0 7459 4582 1, £8.99 hbk

Following midnight to midnight of one day, Steve Turner has written poems about the different things we do at different times of the day. There are poems about what is going on inside and outside, whether it's having nightmares, hearing midnight police patrols, morning assemblies, or watching television. The language has a light touch and the subjects are funny, quirky or thought provoking. A very enjoyable collection. HT

Rob the Roman Gets Eaten by a Lion (Nearly)

0 439 99253 2

Trev the Tudor Gets the Chop (Nearly)

0 439 99254 0

FACTION ★★★

Scoular Anderson, Scholastic, 96pp each, £3.99 pbk

Here are more examples of the ploy of making history palatable by making it funny. Anderson has written and drawn two cartoon stories about boys' adventures in different periods of history which, incidentally, give plenty of information about life in Roman and Tudor times. Both tales ramble about and exhaust credulity and historical plausibility, out of the necessity to include the maximum amount of information. In the desire to engage a modern child's interest, they sometimes distort historical reality. It is unlikely, for instance, that a Roman child would have wanted to grow up to be a gladiator in the same way that a modern child might fantasise about being a pop star. However, as long as they are not taken too seriously, and offered as support for (or relief from) more serious study, they offer a lot of fun and bad jokes along with the facts, particularly **Rob the Roman**, which owes something to 'Up Pompeii'. Anderson manages to pack a lot into some very small pictures. The standard paperback black and white format does him no favours, but his unflagging enthusiasm makes up for a lot, and children will enjoy picking out the footnoted details in the cartoons. CB

Toro! Toro!

★★★

Michael Morpurgo, ill. Michael Foreman, HarperCollins, 128pp, 0 00 710551 7, £9.99 hbk

As an old man telling a tale of childhood wrong-doing to his grandchild, Antonito recalls the days he spent working on his father's bull breeding farm in Andalusia. He falls in love with Paco, a bull calf that he has reared, and decides to liberate him, together with the whole herd, after learning that the magnificent creature is to be sent to face the horrors of the corrida. Meanwhile, Andalusia is invaded by Franco's fascists, and the liberated bull becomes a mythical emblem of the struggle for freedom. I found it difficult to accept the premise that a child reared on a bull farm could be ignorant of the animals' fate until he

sees his first bull-fight, but apart from this reservation I found this book moving and exciting in its blend of almost pagan symbolism with harsh historical realities. The moral dilemma that Antonito faces is at the heart of the book, movingly linking his childhood and old age. GH

Skellig

AUDIO BOOK ★★★★★

David Almond, read by David Almond, Hodder, 2 hrs 10 mins, abridged, 1 840 32224 1, £9.99 tape

David Almond's breathy reading of his own prize-winning story is captivating from the first moment. Without the distancing created by studio overproduction or actorly delivery it is intimate, allowing the listener to feel it is being read for them alone. Almond reads fast, capturing the mood of Michael's suppressed anger caused both by the derelict state of his new home and by his fear for the health of the new baby. Dialogue is snappy; descriptions kept terse and unemotional so that the words speak for themselves. Michael's discovery of the strange creature in the dilapidated garage remains pleasingly mysterious. Even the incidental music is utterly appropriate. JE

A Century of Children's Poems

POETRY ★★★★★

Compiled by John Foster, ill. Emma Shaw-Smith and Tim Stevens, Collins, 160pp, 0 00 711215 7, £9.99 hbk

Foster has collected a hundred poems, mainly from familiar names of the last 100 years. Some of the poems are already thoroughly anthologised - de la Mare's 'The Listeners', Seamus Heaney's 'Trout', Masefield's 'Sea Fever' and many more - but some of the most interesting are perhaps less well-known - like Banjo Paterson's 'Mulga Bill's Bicycle' and David McCord's 'The Star in the Pail'. The offer of one poem per poet does give the reader a wide choice of names to sample, though it brings also the difficulty of tuning in to a different voice all the time. It might be good for the reader - child or adult - to read a few poems at a time, and follow up favourites with a look at others by the same writer. The anthology idea itself is puzzling, perhaps, in the interest it assumes in the number 100. Could it be that the intense pressure to find 'new ideas' is driving publishers away from ideas that connote something in terms of content - collections of poems about something - and towards the safety of collections that don't take such risks. RH

A Poem For Everyone: A Treasury of Poems About People

POETRY ★★★★★

Collected by Michael Harrison and Christopher Stuart-Clark, ill. Alissa Imre Geiss, Rosalind Hudson, Kate Moore, Laura Stoddart and Sarah Young, Oxford, 160pp, 0 19 276248 6, £12.99 hbk

This is a breath of fresh air. Harrison and Stuart-Clark have a solid reputation as anthologists but at last,

they have taken a few more risks and included far more contemporary writers than the usual suspects. Matthew Sweeney and Jackie Kay rub shoulders with Charles Causley and Roger McGough in a collection of poems about people and characters from all walks of life - members of the family, lollipop ladies, spacemen and stolen snowmen. There are poems about dreams and fantasies and the imagination. The thread running through the collection is best summed up by James Berry's poem 'One': 'Only one of me / and nobody can get a second one / from a photocopy machine... I am just this one.' HT

The Lion Bible: Everlasting Stories

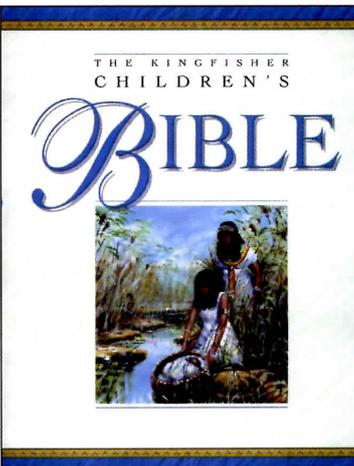
★★★

Retold by Lois Rock, ill. Christina Balit, Lion, 224pp, 0 7459 3954 6, £14.99 hbk

The Kingfisher Children's Bible

★★★★★

Retold by Trevor Barnes, Kingfisher, 256pp, 0 7534 0573 3, £19.99 hbk

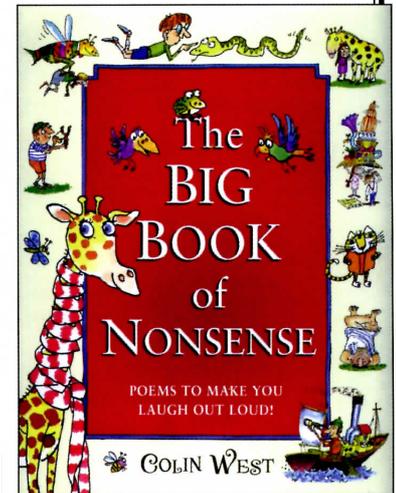


At a point in time when research indicates that fewer and fewer children (and their parents!) know the stories of the Bible, especially those outside of the Gospels, it is good to have two well-produced books of Bible stories, which will greatly assist those who read stories to children. A great deal of thought and care have been put into their production in large format, on high quality paper, with profuse illustrations.

But one book is far superior to the other; the Kingfisher beats the Lion all the way except in price (it costs £5 more) but it is well worth paying the extra. The scope of the stories is greater in **The Kingfisher Children's Bible**, where they go beyond the usual ones. It includes stories of people like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel and even Job, and it gives excerpts from the Psalms and Proverbs as well. In the New Testament the stories do not end on the Day of Pentecost (as in **The Lion Bible**) but they go on to tell some of the stories of St Paul, even including extracts from some of his letters, and amazingly in a child's book, an extract from the Book of Revelation. The stories are told straightforwardly without childishness or inaccuracy. Pharaoh never was 'playing with a kitten, dangling a ball on a piece of string', when Moses and Aaron went

to interview him about the coming (Passover) crisis. Jesus didn't die after saying 'My God... why did you abandon me?' but triumphantly, 'It is finished.'

The pictures are modern and almost symbolic in the **Lion** book; historically accurate and realistic in **Kingfisher**. And while **Lion** adds an Index of Bible People, **Kingfisher's** reference section goes well beyond a 'Who's Who?' to include background articles, a glossary and brief analysis of each Bible book. RG



The Big Book of Nonsense

POETRY ★★★★★

Colin West, Hutchinson, 256pp, 0 09 176879 9, £19.99 hbk

This collection written and illustrated by Colin West is jam-packed with tongue twisters, nonsense verses, pictures and poems which will make the reader laugh and may even inspire her or him to have a go at writing for themselves. Meet an assortment of characters from history, mad members of the family, hedgehogs, dodos, pirates and the deceptive Ooglewop who 'is tall and wide, / And though he looks quite passive, / He's crammed with boys and girls inside / That's why he is so massive!' West is one of those rare contemporary poets who write in the tradition of Lear, Belloc, Harry Graham and Ogden Nash and also manage to be both original and funny rather than a pale imitation of the past. Here is a typical example - a limerick about Einstein: 'Long years ago, nobody cared / That E was really mc2. / Then Albert Einstein thought a bit, / And felt that he should mention it.' HT

Football

NON-FICTION ★★

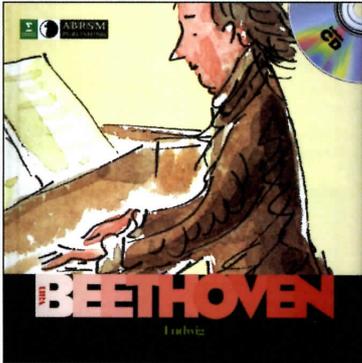
Robert Crowther, Walker, 12pp, 0 7445 8111 7, £12.99 hbk novelty

It's World Cup year so expect a few more books like this. This particular title is a pop-up book with push-out sheets for two games and an opportunity to create a 'dream team' from a selection of top players. There are pull-out flaps containing facts about famous players, teams, managers and stadia, both past and present. Statistics about club and international competitions are included - though annoyingly, apart from the World Cup, these just relate to winners rather than match facts. A token effort has been made to include information about women's

teams and a player.

The problem with books like this is that information on players is very soon out of date. For instance two of the top players have already moved to different clubs. Also, when compiling 'Best Lists' there are bound to be contentious omissions – no mention of Bill Shankly or Sir Alex Ferguson in the list of most successful managers.

With so many bits of card to lose and at £12.99, this is a book better suited for the home rather than the library or school. **AK**



Ludwig van Beethoven

1 85103 310 6

Wolfgang Mozart

1 85103 311 4

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Yann Walcker, ill. Charlotte Voake, narrated by Michael Cantwell, trans. Penelope Stanley-Baker, Moonlight Publishing/ABRSM 'First Discovery – Music', 32pp, £9.99 each hbk with CD (available via Ragged Bears, 01264 772269)

A quite outstanding musical duo jointly published by Moonlight and the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, each book has its own accompanying audio CD introducing the reader to the music of two great composers. Voake's line and wash artwork beautifully evokes the eighteenth-century world of Vienna and Bonn, while photographs include contemporary portraits of composers, their studios and scores, as well as modern-day orchestras and performers.

The books divide into two parts: the first concentrating on the childhood and early life of Mozart and Beethoven, and including practical activities; the second part focusing more on the music itself. Each book and CD is so successfully integrated that, although each can stand alone, together they provide an inspired introduction to the composer and his music. The narrator's text on the CD is that of the book itself, and introduces each musical excerpt. These display an ambitious selection – ranging from Mozart's 'A Little Night Music' and 'Ah vous dirai-je, Maman', with its nursery rhyme echoes, to excerpts from 'The Magic Flute', the 'Coronation' Mass and the Requiem. The examples on Beethoven's disc are similarly wide-ranging, beginning with the Seventh Symphony, and including examples of chamber music (the Septet), a piano sonata, the Horn Sonata and ending with the Finale from 'Fidelio'. Really clear descriptions of different types of musical forms, for example what distinguishes a work for a chamber

ensemble from a concerto or a symphony, are all accompanied by appropriate musical examples. The individual excerpts are relatively short, but certainly long enough to give a flavour of each piece and to whet the appetite, with full details given of the recordings, artists and performers.

These little books, originally created by French publisher Gallimard, are deceptively simple and could be enjoyed by a wide age range. Given the woeful lack of support for music teaching in schools, this excellent series should be a mandatory purchase for any primary school library or music room. **SU**

A Journey Through Time

NON-FICTION ★★★

Selina Wood, ill. Richard Bonson, Dorling Kindersley, 40pp, 0 7513 6162 3, £9.99 hbk novelty

Not since the time of Carter and Tutankhamen can archaeology have been as sexy as it is at the moment. With television series like 'Meet the Ancestors' and 'Time Team' skilfully combining the academic and the popular, they and kindred programmes are up there with 'Ground Force' and the other hickory-diggery documentaries.

This journey through time starts in the present day and ends 4,560 million years ago – in 40 pages that's going some (it speeds up towards the end, like many another good tale). Cardinal features include the excavations of Pompeii and Xianyang, the Ancient Egypt syndrome, the frozen mammoth, the dinosaur age, the origins of life and then 4,560 million years ago (at just after teatime) the Big Bang itself. These are set, by an ingenious use of double-folding pages, among near-contemporary events. Though of necessity sketchy, this is a pleasantly informative journey – by no means essential but nice enough to pass the time. Its best feature is what makes good archaeo-tv, that is its portrayal of ordinary ways of life, but that other winner – the investigative process itself – hardly features, which is a pity. **TP**

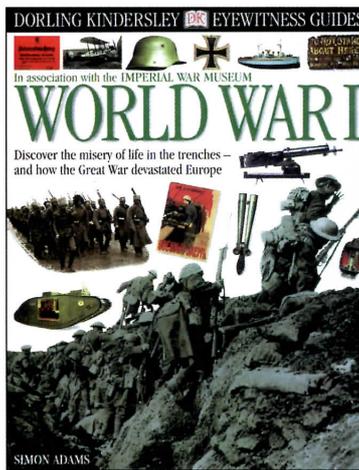
World War I

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Simon Adams, photographs by Andy Crawford, Dorling Kindersley, 64pp, 0 7513 3084 1, £9.99 hbk

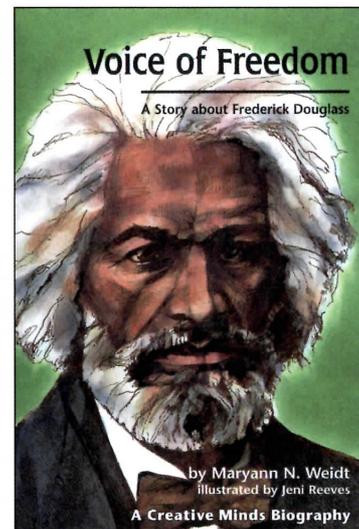
Without the rumoured presence of a cask of rum, buried in a trench-collapse at the start of this 'war to end all wars', someone else would be writing this review. For not only was the reputed rum buried – so was my dad. Two rum-hunting Tommies found him and dug him out to (even more remarkably, perhaps) survive the rest of the conflict in action. They never found the rum.

Reminiscences my dad never bothered us with, but WWI memorabilia (verey pistol, Princess Mary cigarette tin, German field-boots, medals, and lots of letters and pictures) surrounded my earliest days, so many of the excellent images this scrapbook presents are familiar to me as genuine. And a fine scrapbook it is. Making no attempt to explain in depth the politics or tactics of this often absurd war, the authorial



team wisely concentrates on the picturesque – uniforms, armaments, transport, trenches, wounds and ingenious devices like the pigeon-parachute are all portrayed with DK's usual pin-sharp clarity. Adams' text is at all times helpfully illustrative. Although the majority of the material shown is British, virtually every spread contains 'enemy' examples, thereby emphasising that this war – like all others – was primarily about people, not politics, Tommies not tactics.

The Imperial War Museum is a major contributor to this work, and perhaps the book's aptest application would be as a souvenir of a visit there; but for anyone, any age, who wants a '14-'18 image bank, this is an excellent tinner's worth. That written, it's time for a drink – rum, of course. Good health, Dad! **TP**



Voice of Freedom: A story about Frederick Douglass

NON-FICTION ★★★

Maryann N Weidt, ill. Jeni Reeves, First Avenue Editions, 64pp, 1 57505 553 8, £4.99 pbk

This biography of African American freedom fighter Frederick Douglass, is one of the 'Creative Minds Biographies' which also features books on other personalities as diverse as Beatrix Potter and Levi Strauss. It traces Douglass' life from early childhood in the slave-owning south, through years of hunger, backbreaking work and beatings to his eventual escape to the north, and subsequent years as an active anti-slavery campaigner and promoter of

equal rights for black people and women. He travelled widely on speaking tours across America and to England, published his autobiography, founded his own newspaper and in time became a national figure credited with influencing the eventual abolition of slavery and later voting rights for black people.

Weidt's narrative is a model of its sort, written simply and with admirable restraint yet without the suppression of unpleasant truths and with a keen eye for those dramatic highlights which sustains the reader's interest. Reeves' excellent line drawings are featured about every other page. **EL**

The Kingfisher Facts and Records Book of Space

NON-FICTION ★

Clive Gifford, Kingfisher, 64pp, 0 7534 0548 2, £10.99 hbk

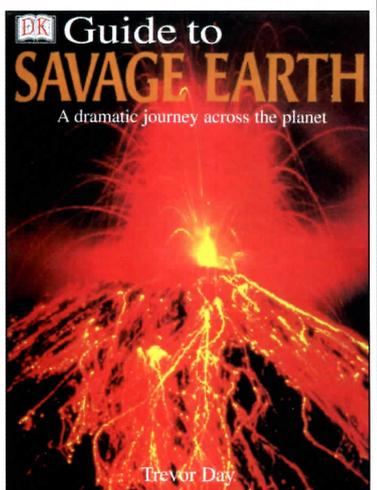
Here, according to Messrs Kingfisher, we have 'The Ultimate Information Database'. Well, dealing as it does with the solar system, stars, the universe, astronomy and people in space, it certainly contains a lot of facts. These are splattered, shotgun style, over each spread, so that purposive fact finding, even allowing for the presence of a reasonably effective index, is very much a hit and miss affair. And when you get a 'fact' it is not necessarily complete. We are told that a martian year lasts for 687 earth days but not how many martian days it takes up; we are told that nobody really knows why Jupiter's Great Red Spot is red. This most unattractive volume will doubtless be rejected equally by space-orientated readers and those who might be wooed by more sympathetic presentation. **TP**

Guide to Savage Earth

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Trevor Day, Dorling Kindersley, 64pp, 0 7513 3075 2, £12.99 hbk

Make no mistake, this planet is out to get us! Such, apparently, is its capacity for natural adversity that we are lucky to be alive. But then, considering its Big Bang Birth, that should be no surprise – violence breeds violence – such is the terror of this large format 'guide' assembled by three art editors and others at DK and 'authored' (sic) by Trevor Day. Every spread tells a story – Plate Tectonics, Lava Flows, Tsunami, Erosion, Glaciers, Deserts, Floods and more –



all apparently symptoms of the Savage Earth's resolve to make things difficult for its population. Added to all this is the danger of being stunned by the quality of this volume's

spectacular pictures which are seriously excellent.

As an old-fashioned 'cor, look at that' Wonder Book, this succeeds very well and there is plenty of good

informational mortar holding together the illustrative bricks of the drama. Occasionally, too, and excellently in the final spread 'Savage Future', we are reminded that natural

adversity can be exacerbated by our own irresponsible behaviour – savage earthlings that we are. TP

REVIEWS 10–12 Middle/Secondary

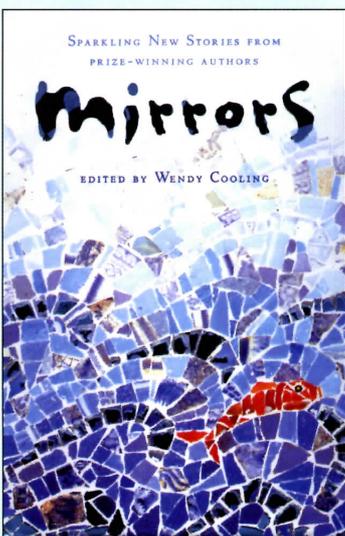
Editor's Choice

Mirrors

★★★★

Edited by Wendy Cooling, Collins, 240pp, 00 710588 6, £12.99 hbk

As Cooling points out in her introduction to this newly commissioned collection of short stories, 'mirrors and reflections have played their part in stories from the ancient tales...to today'. It kicks off, appropriately, with Elizabeth Laird's retelling of the Narcissus and Echo myth, 'The Fateful Mirror' and ends with Berlie Doherty's 'The Girl of the Silver Lake' about a girl who, like Narcissus, doesn't want to grow up. In between these fantasies of self sufficiency are many different takes on mirroring. In Malorie Blackman's 'Watching' the reflection is persecutory while in Melvin Burgess's 'Whose Face Do You See?' it is an affirmation of existence. Vivian French's 'Selim-Hassan the Seventh' and Jeremy Strong's 'Never Trust a



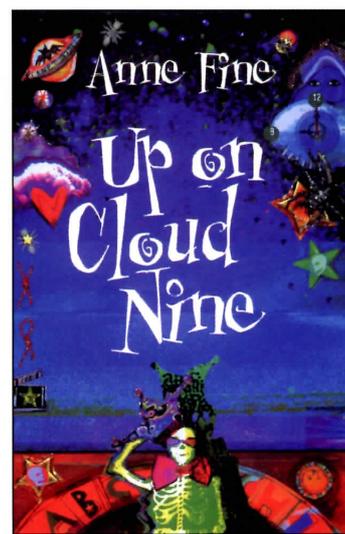
Parrot' are sure footed comedies in which mirrors can be revealing in extraordinary ways... In this varied collection some stories are sparker than others but, overall, there is an appealing freshness to the way these stories play with a powerful theme. RS

girl enthrals the children as Anna weaves a thoughtful, provocative account of Heidi's life. Brought up in isolation by a governess and housekeeper, Heidi wonders about her background, the important man who occasionally comes to see her and the little she hears about the war in Europe. Anna's story leads Mark to ask questions: how would he feel if his father was like Hitler? Are people still being exterminated today? How did his family acquire the land for their farm? Could it have been stolen from the Aborigines?

While it would make a fascinating and worthwhile adjunct to a study of World War II, it would be great pity if this novel were only seen in relation to the classroom. In a relatively few pages it has much to say about the power of story to captivate and to extend imaginative boundaries. Anna is an accomplished storyteller, and it is her voice we hear for much of the book. At the conclusion she leaves the reader with an interesting speculative thought to add to the deeply philosophical questions about ethics, emotions and behaviour.

The direct gaze of the protagonist on the attractive sepia toned cover invites the reader inside the pages, and it is an invitation well worth taking up. VC

Emily is the child of quite wealthy, pushy parents, enjoying the benefits of a comfortable lifestyle. A very similar looking, streetwise girl starts dogging Em's movements and it isn't long before one of Father's indiscretions is casting a gloomy shadow over the once enviable family group. Quite a bit of the tale is predictable but it is engagingly told and likely to hold teenage girl readers with its suspense and its romantic touches. DB



Up on Cloud Nine

★★★★★

Anne Fine, Doubleday, 176pp, 0 385 60372 X, £10.99 hbk

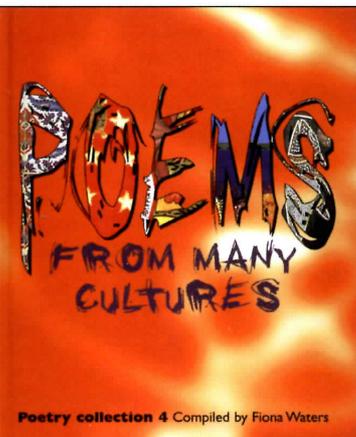
Did Stuart Terence Oliver (Stolly) jump from a top-floor window (for whatever reason) or did he merely fall from one? He now lies retaining consciousness in hospital, watched over by his best friend, Ian, who takes the opportunity to review their young lives and the circumstances which have led to their closeness. Described by himself as a 'fantasist', Stolly has a reputation as liar extraordinaire, and while many of the escapades which have earned him that reputation make for highly entertaining reading they are ultimately of less significance than what they have to say about Stolly himself and the real world of parents, school and friends in which he has to survive. This superbly original novel offers numerous telling and thoughtful insights into the kind of young male sensitivity where the promise of self-fulfilment and the threat of self-destruction are never far apart. Highly recommended. RD

Julie and Me... and Michael Owen Makes Three

★★★

Alan Gibbons, Dolphin, 208pp, 1 84255 048 9, £4.99 pbk

Written in diary form, this book tells of six months in the life of football-mad Terry Payne as he painfully



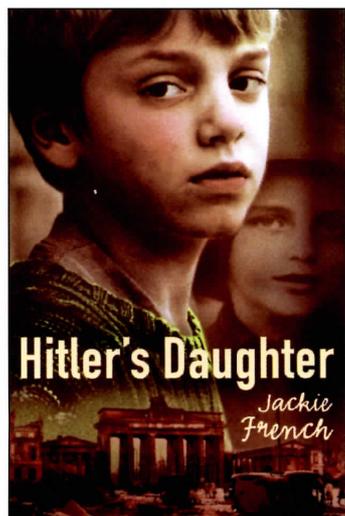
Poems from Many Cultures: Poetry Collection 4

POETRY ★★★★★

Compiled by Fiona Waters, Evans, 112pp, 0 237 52104 0, £11.99 hbk

This is the fourth book in Waters' excellent 'Poetry Collection' series. We are taken on a tour all over the globe, from Croatia and the Caribbean to Russia and Australia listening to voices from many cultures on many subjects. Animals, families, issues and identity – there is a poem for every mood and lots of food for thought. Fiona Waters' selection successfully brings together different forms, themes, experiences and pictures from all over the world. It also brings cultures together and reflects the spirit of Rosemary Dobson's poem 'Folding the Sheets': 'You and I will fold the sheets /

Advancing towards each other / From Burma, from Lapland. / From India where the sheets have been washed in the river / And pounded upon stones: / Together we will match the corners.' HT



Hitler's Daughter

★★★★★

Jackie French, Collins, 144pp, 0 00 712272 1, £3.99 pbk

On wet days Mark and his friends shelter while waiting for the school bus. They started playing 'The Game' – making up stories – to comfort Little Tracey when she started school. One stormy day Anna begins, tentatively at first, to tell the story of what might have happened if Hitler had a daughter, Heidi. Over a period of some days the story of the young

Grandma You're Dead!

★★★★

Sharon O Tai, Bloomsbury, 144pp, 0 7475 5031 X, £5.99 pbk

Good title, good concept: Deena Doon's ordinary teenage life – best friend Cheryl, exams, crush on neighbour Ernie etc – is interrupted by the sudden arrival of the ghost of her grandma. Apparently, Deena is the only one who can effect an after-life reconciliation between Grandma and Grandpa.

At times the two plot lines, ghost story and Deena's blossoming romance, seem to be running side by side but unconnected and there are a few holes in the plot – the rules governing ghosts seem a bit shaky and are only hastily explained in the last chapter, the reason for Grandma and Grandpa's falling out is unconvincing – but otherwise this is an enjoyable and original read. It's set in the Caribbean and the author takes an Enid Blyton like delight in listing food – from soursop juice, callaloo and fried plantain to custard apples, yellow East Indian mangoes and pawpaw – which will make it deliciously exotic to some UK readers. AR

Me and My Shadow

★★★★

Joan Lingard, Puffin, 144pp, 0 14 131331 5, £4.99 pbk

The climax of this novel makes the unpromising start worth the effort. All is not as it appears; there is plenty that is modern in this tale of haves and have-nots, deep family secrets and malicious lies.

enters adolescence. Like the author, Terry is a Manchester United supporter living in Liverpool and he is not happy – he looks like Chris Evans and his mum and dad are splitting up. He falls in love with the gorgeous new girl at school, Julie Carter, but she is a Liverpool fan. This is a book which young adolescent soccer followers will enjoy and with which they will empathise. The book is set in actual Merseyside locations. The events of the Euro 2000 championships are referred to in some detail, as are the Premiership fixtures and key players of the 2000/2001 season. Unfortunately, this will inevitably reduce the shelf life of this title.

As a matter of interest, Terry doesn't get the girl of his dreams by the end of the book. However, there is a chapter-long preview of the next book in the series, *Julie and Me... Treble Trouble* to whet the reader's appetite. AK

The Ruby in the Smoke

AUDIO BOOK ★★★★★

Philip Pullman, read by Anton Lesser, BBC Cover to Cover, 6 hrs 35 mins, unabridged, 1 85549139 7, £14.99 tape

Hearing *The Ruby in the Smoke* brings back all the pleasure of first reading it. Philip Pullman's outstanding storytelling is as evident here as in the now more famous *Northern Lights*. Permeated with the murky fog of Dickensian London, the story of orphaned Sally Lockhart searching to unravel the mystery of The Seven Blessings is richly told in many voices, all of whose precisely described characters Lesser brings clearly to life. The complicated plot and vividly described backgrounds including sleazy boarding houses, home to opium smokers, absorb absolutely. JE

The Flight of the Emu

★★★

Rachel Anderson, Hodder, 224pp, 0 340 79939 0, £4.99 pbk

In her note 'About the Author', Anderson describes her family's unsuccessful attempt to foster a troubled boy from a Children's Home. She says, poignantly, 'I wish I could have written him a happy ever after'. *The Flight of the Emu* is a 'happy ever after' story of another Children's Home boy, Mak, aged about twelve, Welsh-born, mainly English, part-Chinese, was abandoned by his mother and has grown up in a local authority home, with insecurities, behavioural problems and defensive tactics that follow from these beginnings. Then two prospective adoptions erupt into his life.

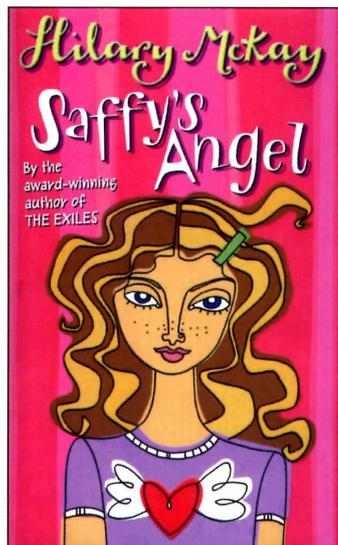
The first would-be adopter is Evelyn Cairns, an odd, engaging, single, middle-aged Australian, and the best thing in the novel is Mak's developing relationship with this unexpected person. Then she dies, and Mak is not told. Instead he is farmed out to an unattractive pair of child-prospectors. So far the texture of Mak's life is authentically conveyed, and makes uncomfortable reading for any social workers or care staff who may come across the book. But then it transpires that Evelyn has left Mak a lot of money, and from this point wish-fulfilment takes command of the author and her story. Mak's 'happy ever after' is a large inheritance in trust at home, and a new life in beautiful, hot, multi-

racial Sydney. His fortunes change beyond belief. Literally. PH

Saffy's Angel

★★★★★

Hilary McKay, Hodder, 224pp, 0 340 85079 5, £10.00 hbk



Saffy's Angel is a beautifully written, warm and richly comic book. Domestic novels about zany families are often merely unbelievable cartoon versions of reality, but McKay's are not like that. The Cassons could really exist, and somewhere they probably do. Mother and father are both Artists. Bill Casson is a weekend Dad, lurking Mondays to Fridays in an expensive London studio, while Mother hides in the garden shed, painting pictures that actually sell. Their joint benign ineptitude leaves their wonderful, colourful children (Cadmium, Saffron and Rose, girls of eighteen, thirteen and six, and Indigo, boy aged eleven) to bring themselves up. This currently means that Cadmium is taking catastrophic driving lessons with a dishy instructor, Indigo is scaring himself to death in training for Antarctic ordeals yet to come, and Rose is creating a wondrous Edible Art that would be a dead cert for the Turner Prize. The odd one out is Saffron, who five years earlier found out that the others were not her siblings but her cousins. Saffy is adopted, following her mother's death in a car crash. She has felt marginal ever since. The serious side of the story is the troubled thirteen-year-old Saffy's recovery of confident emotional membership of her madcap, loving family, a truthful, moving, comic, ultimately joyous journey of rediscovery. The writing is witty, the jokes are good, the events are hilarious, and the characters are vividly real. This is a novel to be grateful for. PH

Stop the Train

★★★★★

Geraldine McCaughrean, Oxford, 256pp, 0 19 271901 7, £10.99 hbk

With a cast of some 40 characters and a powerfully evoked atmosphere of place and time (the developing Oklahoma of the 1890s), this is an amazingly rich novel. Seen principally through the eyes of young Cissy Sissney and her parents, the events recorded take the form of a struggle between community and

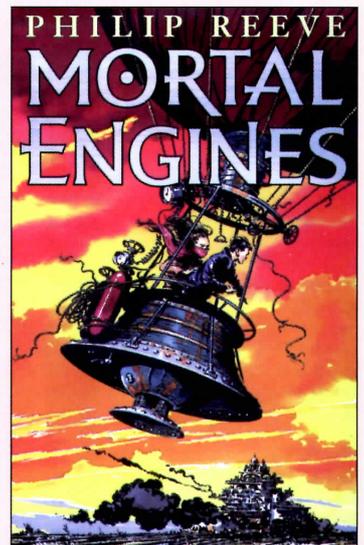
NEW Talent

Mortal Engines

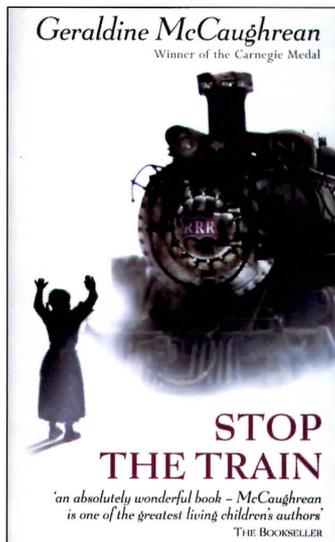
★★★★★

Philip Reeve, Scholastic, 304pp, 0 439 99345 8, £12.99 hbk

It's a town eat town world and Tom, an apprentice historian, has been brought up to believe that municipal Darwinism is a noble and beautiful system. He joins the celebrations as the great traction city of London speeds across the Out-Country gobbling up smaller towns in its path and recycling them for spare parts. But Tom is an historian and the lessons of the history have not been digested as London goes to war with a deadly Old-Tech weapon, against the Anti-Traction League. This is an exceptional debut novel – both imaginatively and intelligently conceived, it bursts with ingenuity and wit. The plot is reminiscent of Star Wars crossed with James Bond with each chapter ending on a cliffhanger which impels the reader forward. For Tom, the disfigured Hester (a bold innovation) who is determined to avenge her parents'



murder and the beautiful Katherine there are no predictable outcomes in this tale where the characters grow convincingly in response to their trials. Tom even wets himself at one of the more terrifying moments – is this a first for children's fiction? RS



corporate interests, a confrontation which is to prove that the good-humoured resolve represented in the former will, though not without much ingenuity and resourcefulness, eventually triumph over the materialistic pragmatism of the latter. McCaughrean's control of her material and her evident joy in the multiple manifestations of humanity and its ways are a delight. Best of all is the portrait of Miss Loucien, one of the most engaging – and unorthodox – of fictional schoolteachers: the book's final page, reproducing her handwritten farewell to her pupils, is a touchingly apposite conclusion to a totally engrossing narrative. RD

The Fire Within

★★

Chris d'Lacey, Orchard, 288pp, 1 84121 533 3, £4.99 pbk

This is a curious tale about dragons, squirrels and unconvincing people. David, a college student, takes lodgings with Liz, a potter who makes model dragons. Liz is quite a dragon herself, but not enough to subdue her irritating ten-year-old daughter, Lucy. Lucy is obsessed with the

welfare of a one-eyed squirrel in the garden. Caught between dragon mysteries and squirrel emergencies, David is distracted from college work into behaviour as odd and unbelievable as everyone else's. The dragons are a damp squib, mere inspirational toys. The sentimentalised squirrels, however, are all too real. Conker, the visually impaired rodent, is of course the familiar grey squirrel, the imported American tree rat responsible for muscling out the beautiful native red squirrel, which few young readers nowadays are lucky enough to see. At a crucial point in the story, the reader is told that grey squirrels are now 'classed as pests' (as indeed they are), and that they must not be released once caught (as indeed they should not), whereupon the four main characters at once proceed to break the law, with the author's obvious approval. Thus the book adds irresponsibility to its already obvious defects of heavy-handed humour and laboriously manic storytelling. PH

Deadly!

★★★

Morris Gleitzman and Paul Jennings, Puffin, 416pp, 0 14 130912 1, £4.99 pbk

This is the second collaboration between these best-selling writers. It is a typically scatological black comedy, full of scabrous detail and weird events, many of which revisit scenes from horror films or comics, and reflect the younger teenage fascination with the taboo, the strange and the violent. It starts as it means to go on, with a naked boy lost in a forest, squatting down to empty his bowels, and pursued by a bunch of sinister toddlers, as interested in examining his excreta as they are in capturing him. The story, played both for shock and laughs, is good value, but not entirely successful.

It appeared first in serial form, and relies heavily on cliffhangers at the end of one sequence and plot recapitulations at the beginning of the next. It is told by two narrators, a boy – Sprocket, and a girl – Amy, who

take alternate chapters, and the reader is constantly aware of the presence of the two writers, apparently taking it in turns to drive the plot on and introduce new twists and turns. This makes for a jerky read, and means that the story is sometimes overwhelmed by events which tumble pell-mell after one another in a relentless cycle of the grotesque and the gross, which leaves little space for development of plot or character. Gradually both do cohere, and there is space for serious preoccupations about mortality, self-knowledge, and the relationship of parents and children. There are some good jokes, too, in the second part, built around Amy's mum experiencing a second childhood. But it is not a format that brings out the best in either writer. CB

The Ropemaker

★★★★★

Peter Dickinson, Macmillan, 432pp, 0 333 94738 X, £12.99 hbk

Dickinson adds another to the growing pile of blockbuster fantasies for the market that emerged in the wake of Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights*, and that bridges teenage and adult readers. Dickinson has been working this vein for a while now and, in his earlier four-book epic, *The Kin*, there was, perhaps, the realisation of a freedom to go more boldly and range more widely than ever before. *The Ropemaker* is not on the same scale. Its use of a journey through alien lands, in conflict with malevolent forces, some of them unknown, to an uncertain end, is an expansive variation on familiar Dickinson preoccupations. That said,



you will not find it done better. There are few writers, whether for adults or children, who have his facility for embedding magic in worlds with credible social and cultural dynamics, whose strangeness is more fascinating than the operation of magic itself. In *The Ropemaker*, magic whirls about as a natural force waiting to be harnessed for good or ill, while the representatives of a threatened mountain valley journey in search of a renewal of the protection that has kept them safe from invasion for generations. Within an inventive and dramatic narrative, Dickinson plays not only with the nature of time but also, through his characterisation, notions of gender and age and, crucially for the story, the power and nature of special gifts. CB

Firsts: The Livewire Book of British Women Achievers

NON-FICTION ★★★

Kate Murphy, The Women's Press, 192pp, 0 7043 4917 5, £5.99 pbk

Firsts is a new edition of a book first published in 1989. Since then there have been many more firsts to add to the roll call of honour; the first woman Chief Constable, first female Head of MI5 and first woman Director of Public Prosecution. More professional and sporting associations have admitted women and statutory changes are providing for greater equality for new parents.

This interesting catalogue of achievement reveals the roles that women have played in history; the contributions to exploration, invention and discovery. Many of the women whose stories are touched on were, unsurprisingly, omitted from the textbooks and many played more than supporting roles to men whose achievements were more gloriously recorded. In spite of contemporary awareness of these issues, *Firsts* still manages to surprise, and succeeds in helping the reader to reassess and contextualise the 'progress' towards equality of opportunity. At times the rationale for selection of entries seems confused; genuine firsts are mixed with entries for women that the author deems 'most acclaimed', 'most successful' or 'most infamous'. A useful bibliography is provided for those who want to delve deeper. NG

The Young Oxford Encyclopedia of Science

NON-FICTION ★★

Consultant Editor: Professor Richard Dawkins, General Editor: Robin Kerrod, Oxford, 448pp, 0 19 910711 4, £30.00 hbk

This book consists of around 300 articles, mostly single pages or spreads, about astronomy, physics, chemistry, zoology, geology, medicine, ecology, technology and industry, on the whole well-illustrated, clearly written, amply cross-referenced, with glossary, index and an associated website.

Some items are over-hyped on the cover: BSE is mentioned there, but the only indexed entry comprises 26 words explaining what the acronym BSE stands for and suggesting the connection with CJD.

There are, however, too many mistakes and erroneous simplifications. Some examples: It is claimed, wrongly, that carrots are nutrient-rich in vitamin D. The distance to the Moon is twice misstated. The leap second is travestied. A false argument claims that two identical light bulbs connected to a dry battery glow more brightly when connected in series than when connected in parallel. The number of Jovian satellites is stated differently on two successive pages. The whole of the Hippocratic corpus, always known to contain works by authors other than Hippocrates, is categorically attributed to him. The article on digestion does not mention the liver.

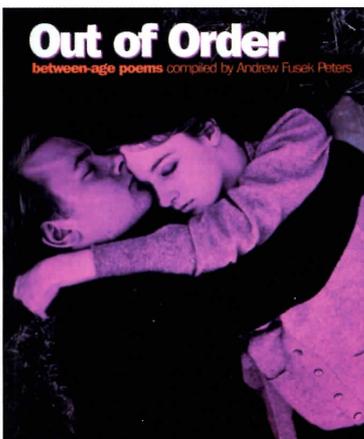
There is a most unfortunate trashing of scientific theory in a box which describes Michael Faraday as 'a classic experimenter, rather than someone who got bogged down in theory'. The characterisation of parallels of latitude and meridians as 'straight' is deplorable. FP

PICTURE BOOKS REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE RELEVANT TO OLDER READERS:

Ivor the Invisible (see p21)

Football (see p22)

REVIEWS 12+ Secondary



Out of Order: between-age poems

POETRY ★★★★★

Compiled by Andrew Fusek Peters, ill. Clive Goodyer, Evans, 112pp, 0 237 52316 7, £6.99 pbk

Fusek Peters' anthologies are always surprising and interesting. He's done it again with this anthology of poems for young people/adolescents/teenagers. There are poems about

anorexia, text messaging, a first bra, kissing, homelessness, racism, school - to mention but a few. A light sprinkling of some well known poets such as Seamus Heaney and Elizabeth Barrett Browning create new contrasts and viewpoints alongside the lesser known poets in the selection. The poems can be disturbing, unsettling or funny, but they are never patronising and young people will have no difficulty in finding a poem which is relevant or makes them think or just laugh out loud. An excellent anthology for a difficult age range. HT

Seeing Red

Jill Atkins, 0 237 52332 9

If Only

Sue Vyner, 0 237 52331 0

Go For It!

Sue Vyner, 0 237 52329 9

★★★

Ill. Robin Lawrie, Evans 'Go For It!', 128pp, £3.99 each pbk

These three titles are part of a series of 'quick read' stories for teens that explore current pressing teenage/family problems. There is lots of well-formatted social realism here,

wrapped up in a yarn and managing to paint a depressing picture of modern society.

Seeing Red is the tale of the misunderstood, rebellious daughter of strict father, driven to run away to London and ending up under railway arches. A happy ending is laid on with lots of chastened family members vowing to try harder. *If Only* deals with the single parent family and the absent father, about whom nothing good has ever been said. When Gordon decides he wants to contact his lost parent the resultant friction requires a lot of courage and ingenuity to handle. *Go For It!* explores the perpetual, much damaged foster child on his last-ditch placement before he is 16 and will be sent out into the world on his own. Life with Reverend and Mrs Martin was going to be a challenge to pull off successfully, not helped by the antagonism of their natural offspring. Fortunately Wayne has the tenacity to make the best of it that he could. Probably worth recommending to PSE teachers. DB

Out of the Blue

★★★

Sue Welford, Oxford, 128pp, 0 19 271839 8, £6.99 pbk

Kegan's life is miserable - his father is a drunken bully and his mother is worn out with the demands of her job and a young baby. Kegan's one asset is his artistic talent but his father strenuously resists the idea of him entering a scholarship, disdaining his artistic achievements.

When Kegan's brother dies suddenly he is even more isolated and seeks solace in the foxes he has found in the local scrapyard. Like him, they are outsiders, threatened by the imminent development of the land which is their home. The arrival of Zoë at Kegan's school heralds another outsider - wealthy and well-spoken, she is too independent to join the crowd. The recent death of her father has left her emotionally isolated and she becomes an unlikely ally in Kegan's fight to save the foxes.

Welford describes the animals beautifully, evoking their power and danger as well as their physical magnificence. She is not as successful in creating a credible relationship between Kegan and Zoë

– it is too sudden, too close, too unlikely. The book's ending is similarly strained – all is abruptly too well, losing instantly the harsh realism which perfectly evokes a life with little hope for the future. VR

When a Girl is Born

★★★★

Pamela Grant, Oxford, 144pp, 0 19 275186 7, £4.99 pbk

China 1897 – and no one is happy when a female child is born. A girl is a burden to her family while a boy brings honour and security to his parents in their old age. But the winds of change are blowing through China. When 14-year-old Ko-chin marries a reformer, her life takes a direction that she could never have anticipated. At first she is unsettled by the requirement to abandon the role for which she has been trained but eventually Ko-chin finds a voice that is even more radical than her husband's; 'we have become such slaves to the past that we've forgotten how to meet changed circumstances..'

Ko-chin's story of resilience, adaptation and personal growth highlights the contradictions of a revolutionary movement that condemns traditional practices but stops short of allowing the women to travel freely outside the home.

This first novel is informed by Grant's extensive knowledge and understanding of this period in Chinese history and its reverberations through the century. Her characters are memorable and the images of the dying empire are realised in clear prose style. A compelling story well told. NG

Mates, Dates and Portobello Princesses

★★★★

Cathy Hopkins, Piccadilly Press, 160pp, 1 85340 664 3, £5.99 pbk

Nesta has fallen in love with Simon, one of the Sloane Set. Although she has a very comfortable middle-class background, Nesta cannot keep up with her new boyfriend's lifestyle. Determined not to lose him, she endeavours to impress her new friends before ultimately learning the value of true friendship.

The plot is largely predictable and operates within the teen reader's comfort zone. Trendy shops are described with relish and some readers may even be inducted into the world of text messaging (<- missed U today; <^0^ > I am laughing loudly). The language is witty and although the characters lack subtlety, they are lively and engaging. An entertaining read. NG

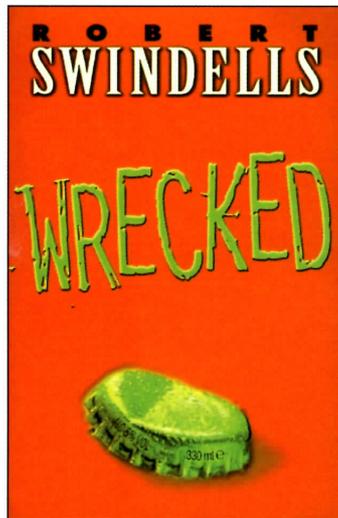
Wrecked

★★★★

Robert Swindells, Puffin, 192pp, 0 14 131035 9, £4.99 pbk

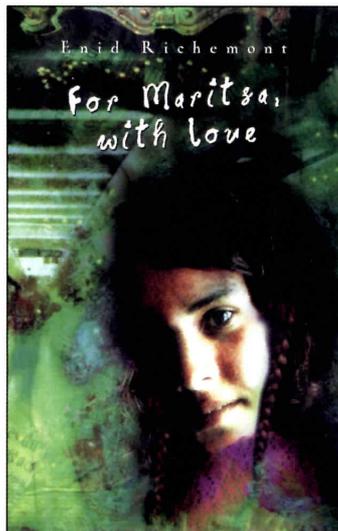
'It's a sad irony in my view that while those who supply our youngsters with other drugs go to prison, those who feed them alcohol are knighted.'

Here is another hard-hitting examination of an important social problem from an award-winning author. Many aspects of our alcohol culture are scrutinised and the adults do not come out of it well; the winos, who buy the drink for under-aged



teenagers for a liquid commission, the greedy pub owners, the woman who plies European cannies under the front of her ice-cream van and the parents who can come up with such justifications as, 'The lotion: to be taken before, with or instead of food. Cures picturing, promotes forgetting. Cheers.'

Skilled storytelling and a fast, hard-hitting pace makes this an important book to get into the hands of teenagers. It avoids being preachy and I defy any youngster not to be left with plenty to think about. DB



For Maritsa, with love

★★★★

Enid Richemont, Simon & Schuster, 208pp, 0 689 83636 8, £7.99 pbk

Maritsa is a gypsy, an accomplished beggar, living by her wits, working the Paris Metro. She is an orphan, but relies on the support of her extended family until the day she decides to strike out on her own. She shares a platform sleeping place with homeless Rose, an elderly retired teacher who alternately scolds and protects her. The hostility and suspicion aroused by her gypsy origins pale into insignificance next to the sinister organiser of a paedophile ring who entraps her with the promise of a fictitious film test. It is her friendship with Paul, a busker-cum-undercover policeman which both endangers and saves her: he judges her strong enough to cope with her captor and rescues her from the lair she has unwittingly led him

to. The book is crammed with fascinatingly detailed descriptions of characters and settings; the alternative world of the Paris Metro is made startlingly clear. Racial prejudice, intolerance and corruption are insistently but subtly developed themes, providing a narrative which entertains and instructs but never patronises. VR

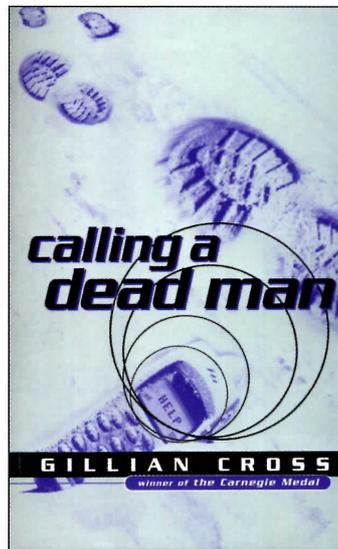
Falling for Joshua

★★

Brian Keaney, Orchard, 176pp, 1 84121 858 8, £4.99 pbk

Falling for Joshua might well have been called 'Abi Has Epilepsy', for the novel is largely an explication of what life is like for a young woman who suffers from this condition. The plot centres around Abi's growing friendship/romance with Josh, a boy with 'very blue eyes'. Fear that Josh might turn away from her leads Abi to postpone telling him about her epilepsy, but of course this puts other strains on the growing relationship, such as when Abi, fearing that she is about to have an attack, abruptly abandons Josh at the opening of an exhibition of her sister's artist husband Pablo's work.

The tribulations of the relationship between Laura and Pablo also impinge on Abi's life, for she is involved in helping to look after their baby, Rafael. The denouement comes when Abi is babysitting Rafael with Josh. Pablo turns up, seemingly intent on kidnapping his son, and Abi has an epileptic attack. Josh behaves like a hero, and the novel closes with the assurance that his regard for Abi is not affected by her condition. This is a gentle novel, which might have value in reassuring young people with epilepsy – presumably it was written for this purpose. VC



Calling a Dead Man

★★★★

Gillian Cross, Oxford University Press, 256pp, 0 19 271827 4, £6.99 pbk

John Cox is dead, unexpectedly killed in an explosion. His sister, Hayley, and girlfriend, Annie Glasgow, cannot lay his memory to rest until they have visited the site where he died. After arriving in Russia, they quickly discover that the situation is not as straightforward as they believed. Why is the Mafia interested in their actions? And why has John's mobile phone been switched on?

Cross' convincing and memorable characters include; the determined, wheelchair bound Annie Glasgow whose insistence and dogged determination leads the girls into the depths of the frozen wastelands; simple minded, middle-aged Frosya, who cares for the elderly inhabitants of the near deserted village on the edge of the forest; Ivan, the taxi driver who teaches himself English and dreams of building a commercial empire specialising in tourist care; and the enigmatic stranger who appears to have lost his memory. This is a thrilling and compelling novel, which maintains its momentum and withholds its secret until the final chapter. NG

Refugee Boy

★★★★

Benjamin Zephaniah, Bloomsbury, 304pp, 0 7475 5086 7, £4.99 pbk

14-year-old Alem, the product of an Ethiopian father and Eritrean mother, who is under constant threat from both sides of the warring factions at home, is brought to England by his father who abandons him tactically, knowing that he will be taken under the wings of 'compassionate people who understand why people have to seek refuge from war.'

Inevitably the plot is interwoven with the various stages of his application for political asylum and, whilst awaiting the outcome, his placement with foster parents and his entry into the school system. British officialdom, the Refugee Council and Alem's white foster parents behave with impeccable civility, professionalism and warm-heartedness respectively and Zephaniah does well to weave an engaging human story with an exciting climax into otherwise routine bureaucratic procedures.

There is a tendency for the author to spell out matters which perhaps could be best left to emerge subtly from the text as when Alem is described by his headmaster as '...one of the most conscientious, hard-working, intelligent people that I have ever met, and I've met a lot of people, young and old.' And too often one senses in the narrative that the characters are the mouthpieces for the author's own views (however progressive and appealing) as when Alem, making a speech at the same demonstration, displays a command of English and a maturity beyond his 14 years.

Such excesses (which could have been avoided by more rigorous editing) are, however, more than offset by the book's positive message of racial and religious tolerance, peaceful living, the delights and benefits of multi-culturalism, and above all, its compassion for the plight of refugees, increasingly a burning issue in Britain and globally. This book may be flawed, but it tackles an important topic with humanity and sheds light on a topic too long shrouded in darkness. EL



CLASSICS IN SHORT No. 32

Brian Alderson

*Once upon a time in a Nice White Cottage
with a Thatched Roof there lived a little girl.
She was (of course) Milly-Molly-Mandy.*



Hard times

for the three Brisley girls way back in 1914: Dad, a Bexhill pharmacist of unprepossessing character, had kicked them out of the family residence along with Mum (he seems not to have cared for their leanings towards Christian Science) and they were left trying to fend for themselves down Brixton way.

Unschool'd

– literally – except for information garnered from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, they got by on their home-grown talents for drawing. Ethel, the eldest, developed a line in portrait miniatures, while Joyce and Nina sold work to magazines. They were even summoned to see that nice Lord Northcliffe ('he's not fat, just comfortable') who handed them on to Miss Brown of *Home Chat* through whom some regular commissions arrived. (As painters, the three girls together may have established some kind of record by having work exhibited at the Royal Academy in the same year.)

Now one day

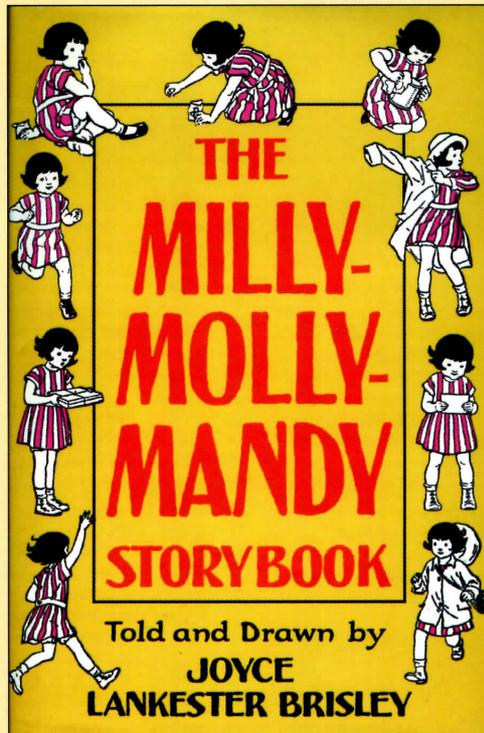
Joyce was doodling on a piece of paper, drawing a family group – an extended family, going right across the sheet from Grandpa at one end to a little girl in a striped frock at the other. 'I want to know more about you,' said Joyce to herself, and her curiosity about this character led to the first of the stories about Millicent Margaret Amanda, or, more mellifluously, Milly-Molly-Mandy. She sent the tale off to the *Christian Science Monitor* and a household name was in the making.

Milly-Molly-Mandy's success

seems to have been reader-generated. The *Monitor* liked the story and asked for more; youthful connoisseurs of its Children's Page liked the heroine and sent in questions: was she real? could they invite her round to tea? And Joyce liked her too, so that the stories flowed and she decided 'at a venture' to submit them to George Harrap to make a book. He accepted them, against some collegial objections, and although Joyce proved unexpectedly determined over the treatment of her illustrations he can hardly have regretted the decision. Volume followed volume – six altogether, plus a collection of plays – fulfilling his forecast (expressed with publisher-like elegance) that the books would be 'a dripping roast – it drips slowly but goes on for a very long time.'

What on earth was the appeal?

(This may be hard to explain to today's promoters, for whom belching, farting, and calling for one's potty are a *sine qua non* in books for young children.) Our Millicent lives in circumstances of rural tranquillity that must have seemed unreal, or at least unachievable, to her



readers from the start. Nothing much happens, and everyone is so confoundedly nice to everyone else that even when a gang appears, knocking people's hats off, it only takes a bit of peaceful Positive Action to turn them into responsible citizens. What's more, as supine members of the proletariat, indelibly white, and regrettably over-feminised (what sort of token male is Billy Blunt?) the books fall seriously short in meeting today's editorial criteria.



They ran right into the water in their bathing dresses



Milly-Molly-Mandy and little-friend-Susan set out

But

the roast is still dripping. The little girl in the nice white cottage has not been expunged from the village-map that forms such an essential adjunct to her stories – even though, by now, it would be cluttered up with executive housing. In a recent classics* edition Shirley Hughes attributes Brisley's success in part to her skill at 'giving you exact details' (something that Shirley has applied to her *Alfie* books) and of course to the regular feasting on things like fried onions and currant-cake that goes on. For me, though, the clue lies simply in Brisley's storytelling voice. It's been called 'cosy', but therein lies its quality, for it's the cosiness that so many parents reach for (usually with less success than JLB) in making up stories for their own children.

Nor is Millicent Miss Brisley's only child.

If you look the author up in the recently published *Cambridge Guide to Children's Books* you will find a typically inadequate entry directing you to a 13-line paragraph on the Milly-Molly-Mandy stories. No mention is made of her other work: the undemonstrative magical tales of *Bunchy* or *The Dawn Shops* or the continuous text of *Marigold in Godmother's House*; nor yet do we hear of those adventurous dolls, *Purl* and *Plain*, while *My Bible Book*, unsurprisingly, does not make it to the two mingy columns on Bible Stories. These works do not deserve such absolute neglect for they body out a sense of Joyce Lankester Brisley's integrity as a writer and illustrator for young children – her care for small things and her ingenuous, warm-hearted storytelling. ■

*Her publisher Harrap is now part of the Kingfisher conglomerate who publish two selections of stories, *The Milly-Molly-Mandy Storybook* (1 85697 493 6, £9.99 hbk), illustrated here, and *More Milly-Molly-Mandy* (0 7534 0200 9, £9.99 hbk), alongside an edition of Brisley's first book *Milly-Molly-Mandy Stories* with a foreword by Shirley Hughes in the Kingfisher Modern Classics series (0 7534 0593 8, £9.99 hbk). A quarto selection in full colour, *The Big Milly-Molly-Mandy Storybook*, is illustrated by Shirley Hughes's daughter, Clara Vulliamy (0 7534 0483 4, £12.99 hbk). Puffin publish four collections at £3.99 each pbk as well as an omnibus edition, *The Adventures of Milly-Molly-Mandy* (0 14 034865 4), at £6.99 pbk. *Marigold in Godmother's House* is published by Jane Nissen Books (1 903252 10 5) at £5.99 pbk.

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