

*the children's
book magazine*

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

November 2002 No.137

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SHIRLEY HUGHES • POETRY • CHRISTMAS BOOKS

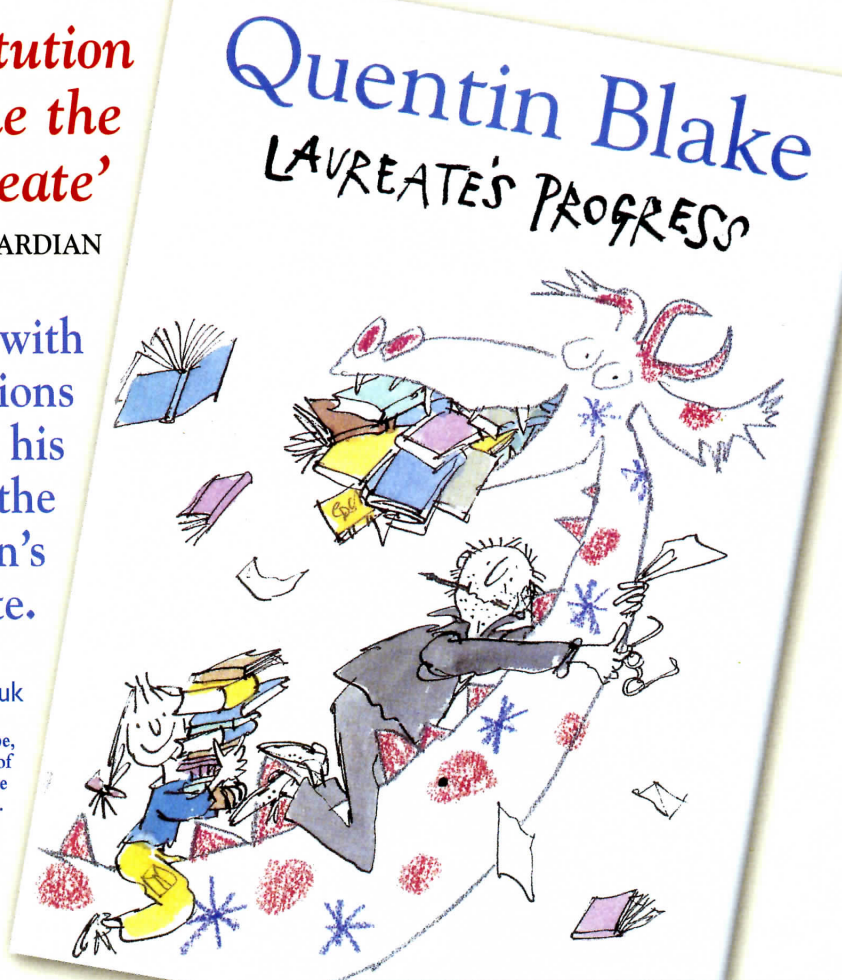
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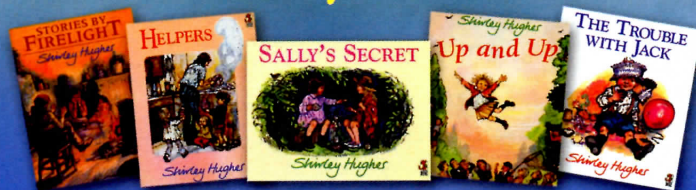
**'No one can match Shirley Hughes in the
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Shirley's enduring picture book characters.

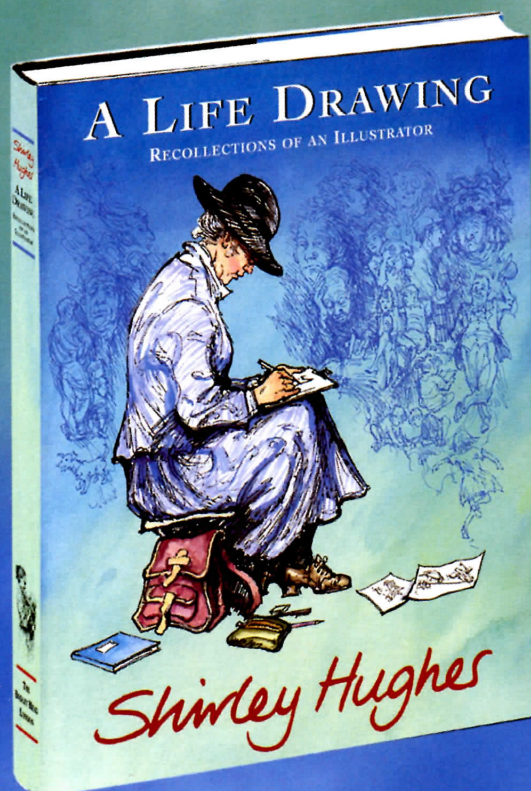
Also newly reissued...



The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford is mounting
a retrospective exhibition of Shirley Hughes' work
from 18th September 2002 to 26th January 2003.

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A Life Drawing is published by The Bodley Head, an imprint of The Random House Group Ltd.



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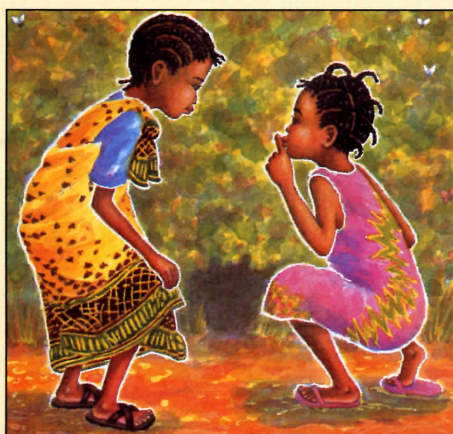
32 Classics in Short No.36

Brian Alderson on Katharine Briggs's *Hobberdy Dick*.

EDITORIAL

'Good Reads', our regular review slot for young readers, is so popular that we have a waiting list of schools whose pupils are keen to have their reviews featured. Over the last few years you have let us know about library displays of titles reviewed in 'Good Reads' and the publication of recommended lists which have been inspired by the column: 'Our children love to read books that have been recommended by other children.' One mother wrote to say that, after having a review published in 'Good Reads', her bookish son, victim of a laddish school culture, no longer felt a love of books and reading to be unmasculine.

But apart from generating enthusiasm for reading, how useful are such reviews to our, in the main, adult readership? Young readers inevitably do not have the breadth of reading experience that we expect from our adult reviewers and the comparative judgements made must be seen in that context. A 'Good Reads' reviewer once awarded *Junk* 10/10. *Mansfield Park* has also been awarded 10/10 and fair enough. But apart from informing us about the nature of young readers' engagement with text, one of the things that we at BfK find tremendously interesting about our young readers' reviews is the evidence they provide about which books children are actually reading. 'Good Reads' tells us that recently published titles are being made available to young readers in their schools and libraries and that there is a lively and informed constituency out there.



Handa's Hen by Eileen Browne, published by Walker, gets a five-star review on page 24.



Rosemary Stones

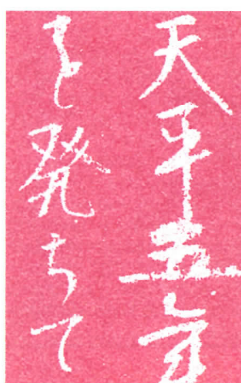
No doubt the innovative shadowing schemes attached to such national children's book awards as the Smarties and the Carnegie and Greenaway must take some of the credit for this. BfK would also like to point to the proliferation in the last few years of regional children's book awards – Angus Book Award, Portsmouth Book Award, Lancashire Children's Book of the Year, Wirral Paperback of the Year, North East Book Award, Sheffield Children's Book Award, South Lanarkshire Book Award, Stockport Schools Book Award (apologies to any I have missed!) – all of which involve young readers in the judging process. This is a tremendous contribution to making young people into keen and knowledgeable readers who are included in literary debate.

Review categories

In this issue of BfK you will see that, following feedback from our readers after the introduction of our 14+ category in the Reviews section, we have now amalgamated our 10-12 and 12+ categories.

Rosemary

CoverStory



This issue's cover illustration is from Lian Hearn's *Across the Nightingale Floor* which is discussed by Clive Barnes on page 4. Thanks to Pan Macmillan for their help with this November cover.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine

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Is Across the Nightingale Floor a Crossover Title?

Published as an adult book, Lian Hearn's epic adventure, **Across the Nightingale Floor**, transcends, according to its publisher, 'the conventionally recognized barriers within the fiction market'. What is its appeal and to whom? **Clive Barnes** investigates.

Across the Nightingale Floor is a novel that has been the subject of considerable hype. Even before its September publication, the publishing rights had been sold worldwide and the film rights had been optioned for large sums. Back at the beginning of the year, a mini mystery had been stoked up over the real author behind the pseudonym, who turns out to be Gillian Rubinstein, a children's author of long standing. The marketing has been so energetic that it attracted the attention of the most unlikely organ of literary criticism, **Private Eye**. The Eye's argument was that the book had been cynically manufactured to capture the crossover market of adults and children. This was previously a no man's area of publishing which has now hit both the financial jackpot with Harry Potter, and the critical jackpot with **The Amber Spyglass**. Add to that the box office and merchandising success of Harry Potter (again) and **Lord of the Rings**, and the fact that this is the first book to be published of a trilogy that is already written, the publishing and film industry's enthusiasm is understandable.

Macmillan's claim that **Across the Nightingale Floor** 'transcends the conventionally recognized barriers within the fiction market' is an interesting one. Intended for anyone over the age of twelve, the novel might be seen as falling into the Young Adult bracket, a body of writing that has recently had new life injected into it. Yet, unlike most other crossover titles, it has been published as an adult book. As Julia Eccleshare noted in May's **BfK**, young people have always read adult novels, and if publishers and critics are becoming more aware of this, it can only be good for everyone's reading.

A real work of literature

Although Hearn's novel may not be the epoch making and money spinning blockbuster that Macmillan would like it to be, it is certainly, contrary to the Eye's jaundiced view, a real work of literature that will be enjoyed by a wide age range. It is in a tradition of epic adventure that, in origin, was the fireside property of all ages; it uses the theme of youth growing to maturity as a means of exploring social mores; and it draws on a developing global culture, particularly among young people, where boundaries are generally becoming more fluid, whether between film and literature, or between cultures.

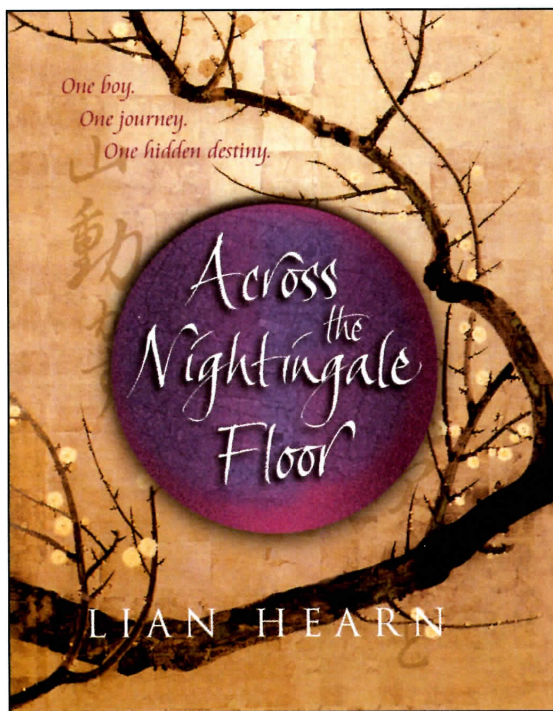
Anyone who knows nothing more of Japan than the films of Akira Kurosawa will immediately recognise the landscape. The currents of passion and intrigue boiling beneath the restraints of ritual and etiquette; violence with the skill and concentration of a lethal dance; the sense of social hierarchy embedded in rigid codes of behaviour and notions of honour; and the acute awareness of the sensual beauty of the natural world and of art.

Its story concerns the fates of two young people, Takeo and Kaede, caught up in political struggles whose dimensions they only gradually understand and whose course they cannot control. The trappings and the sensibility of the novel are those of medieval Japan seen through the eyes of an Australian author. But the novel isn't an attempt to replicate Japanese history; rather it seeks to find a plane of epic storytelling, where East and West meet, much as Kurosawa did in his Shakespeare adaptations. As in courtly romance, Hearn's characters fall in love at a single glance and forever, whatever the cost to themselves, their families or the realm. In Hearn's Japanese fiefdoms, as in the world of Arthurian legend, magic flows at the periphery, from streams of ancient religion and esoteric craft, although here it is the prerogative of The Tribe, a close-knit, secretive clan of assassins.

The strongest element is the story itself. It's a well paced page turner with boldly drawn characters, which moves confidently between periods of relative calm and eruptions of shocking violence, like those that begin and end the book. Hearn has made an effort, too, to acknowledge her appreciation of Japanese style in the writing. She is sparing of the use of simile or metaphor, relying on the accumulation of sensory details to create atmosphere. There is a feeling of restraint in the telling that fits the subject and which means that adult material, particularly the depiction of sex and violence, while not passed over lightly, is not needlessly elaborated. Perhaps the most interesting aspect is Hearn's unobtrusive use of two narrative voices for the converging fates of Takeo and Kaede, Takeo's in the first

person and Kaede's in the third person. A questioning of the different life experiences of men and women runs alongside a questioning of class and tribal divisions, and of the warrior ethos itself. All of which may or may not find more scope in the two books to come.

It remains to be seen whether the novel does break new ground in publishing. It all depends on reviewing practice and reader response. Confining reviews to the children's and young adult pages may well limit the novel's readership among adults, despite the experience of Harry Potter and 'His Dark Materials'. But, as far as young people's reading is concerned, **BfK**'s recent inclusion of adult titles in its new 14+ section, in addition to Young Adult imprints, is a step in the right direction. ■



Across the Nightingale Floor by Lian Hearn is published by Pan Macmillan (304pp, 1 4050 0032 5, £12.99 hbk).

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

天平五年癸酉遣唐使の船難波

もれて海に入る時、親母は子に



Christmas Delights



Whether it snows or not at Christmas time, Christmas books continue to present the season in the nostalgically 'traditional' way. **Stephanie Nettell** looks for titles with that touch of magic that will give lasting pleasure.

A 'real' Christmas for most of us would include richness of colour and celebration, nostalgically traditional songs and stories, and, above all, the wide-eyed pleasure of a child. Barefoot Books have captured all of them in three gorgeous picture books.

Beautiful picture books

The richest is Rachel Griffin's *Twelve Days of Christmas*, a tribute to what joyful creativity and sympathetic publishing can produce. In truth, it may not immediately evoke that wide-eyed pleasure in a small child as it did in me, for it probably demands an accompanying adult to pore over its exquisite pages, pointing out the details and the way they've been achieved. I can't imagine how long it took Rachel Griffin to gather her astonishing range of materials – scraps of fabric and special papers, buttons, braids, embroidery, sequins, shells – and then to stick and sew and draw them into these witty, imaginative images. Each spread is one day: the left page has one panel for the number, and another for the text, where the counting of the days is in different cheerful fonts, with the main illustration on the right page, and all three have their own deep-colour background. Just turning the pages makes you feel good! More pragmatically, it will surely be an inspiration for teachers and young artists. Finally, tucked into the back is a CD of the song, charmingly and rhythmically arranged to appeal to the smallest listener – and make endless playings tolerable. *Twelve Days* is going straight into my grandchild-hoard.



From *Twelve Days of Christmas*.

Babushka is, presumably, a traditional tale from somewhere in Russia, about a little old lady who was 'as round and kindly as a warm plum pudding', but who 'didn't stop sweeping, dusting and polishing from sunrise to starshine'. Sandra Ann Horn's retelling of how her love and generosity overcome her house-proud instincts, when she sets out to look for the poor baby born in a scruffy stable, has a delicious goose-pimply climax. The text is set into the engaging acrylics of French artist Sophie



From *Babushka*.

Fatus, a stylised blend of naif folk-art, humour and Russian dolls, where a scarlet-scarfed, bell-shaped Babushka trots through a landscape of soft blues and greens. A sweet, irresistible book.

New Zealander Tanya Robyn Batt travels worldwide as a storyteller, and is, we're told, one of the world's few professional faeries. This may explain her factual tone when describing Faeryland and its inhabitants, which might be alarming for very young listeners. 'Human babies are stolen because they are usually much stronger and healthier than faery babies'; 'Human children often find it easier to see faery folk than adults do'; 'Some people are kidnapped by the faeries and taken to Faeryland'; 'You can protect yourself from faery magic by wearing your clothes inside out' (a good excuse!) – a spot of reassurance might help little ones unaware of storytelling conventions. The four traditional tales in *A Child's Book of Faeries* are robust and fun, and are interleaved with a few 19th-century poems and her own folklore. Gail Newey's illustrations surround and decorate each page's framed text (see right), vivid and inviting examples of her 'passion for colour', and although I can't see the confessed inspiration of Rossetti (except an occasional head of hair) in her designedly stiff, almost medieval, figures, they do lend a bright other-worldiness to the book.

Christmas animals

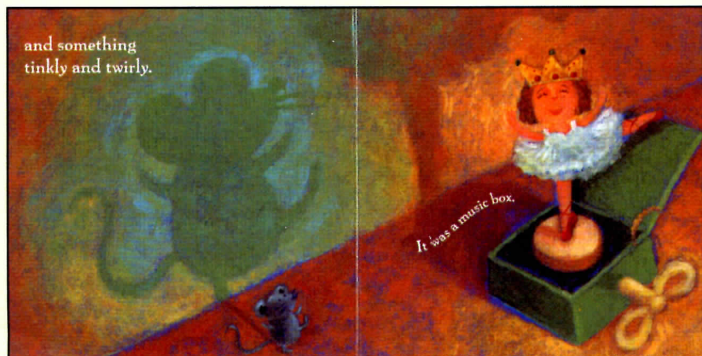
Deborah Inkpen's watercolours are much softer, even in her evocatively pine-dark tree, as she introduces her adventurous hamster to Christmas in *Harriet and the*



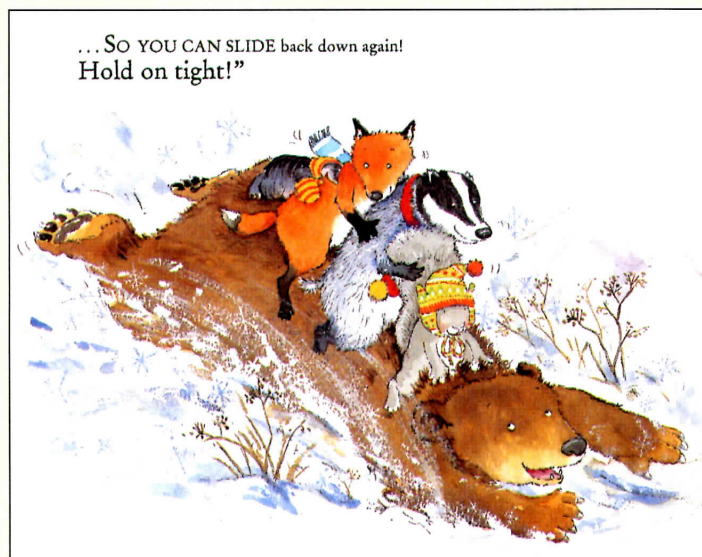


From *Harriet and the Little Fat Fairy*.

Little Fat Fairy. She tells the story of Harriet's explorations among the hamster-sized decorations of the big Christmas tree with quiet simplicity, and the little cameos of Harriet are, as always, adorable. It looks as if Harriet is lost for ever, but not she – and when both Mum and Father Christmas come to the rescue, Christmas morning finds *three* hamsters in the cage. A gentle, satisfying story for around-fives. (But I'm anxious about those three hamsters getting on together...) Similar traditional Christmas symbols are introduced one by one to toddlers and a midnight mouse in an American board book, *Mouse's First Christmas*, by Lauren Thompson, and illustrated with firelight warmth and shadows by Buket Erdogan. Not all of them will be familiar, but repeated readings of each chanting spread – description on one side, answer on the other – will soon make them so.



Above, from *Mouse's First Christmas*.
Below, from *A Perfect Day for It*.

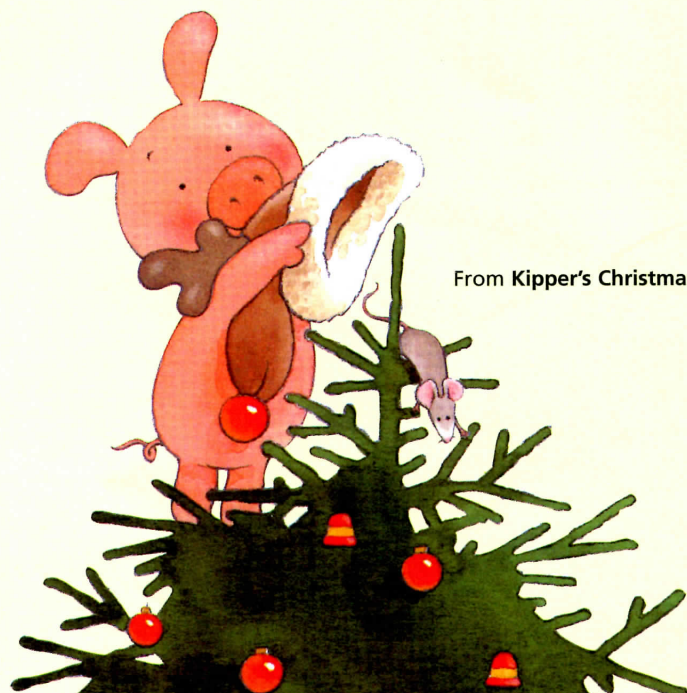


Herbie's Secret Santa, by Petra Mathers, is a moral little tale, told with that peculiarly American affectionate humour in narrative pictures with caption text. Herbie (a white duck) and Lottie (a white hen) are full of Christmas jollity until Herbie sort-of-steals a Santa biscuit from his friend Ali's bakery. It, or his conscience, sits stonily in his stomach, spoiling everything, until he returns in terror next day to confess. *Then* Christmas can really begin. Nothing to do with Christmas, except for the snow (why do we persist in linking Christmas and snow?), is Jan Fearnley's rumbustiously jolly *A Perfect Day For It*. For what, we don't discover until the literal unfolding of the wild ending. As Bear, full of a mysterious expectant happiness, tramps determinedly up the mountain, he's followed by Badger, Fox, Squirrel and Mole, full of curiosity and their own greedy dreams. It's a big picture book designed to be read by adult and child together, with clean-cut, lively illustrations to scale, and expressive typesetting to help the telling and the joke along.

Old favourites

Christmas tends to bring out a 'born again' impulse in publishers. Or an uncharacteristic belief that if a book's worth issuing once it's worth issuing twice (or more), especially in another guise. Evans have extracted Anita Ganeri's simple account of the birth of Jesus from their earlier *Christian Stories*, dressed up with some realistic and glowingly lit paintings by Rachael Phillips, for *The Christmas Story*: aimed at small children, both text and illustrations are conventional – would Middle Eastern shepherds have seen their 'beautiful' angels as curly-locked blonds? – and slightly boring like its recipe ('Christmas' biscuits if you use the right cutters). Not stopping there, however, they also offer it in huge format, *The Christmas Story Big Book*, perfect for nursery and reception classes were it not for its equally huge price (cheap at 20 viewers a copy?) Dipping back almost 40 years, Egmont reissue Dick Bruna's retelling of the same story, *The Christmas Book*, in a nicely produced paperback (15cms deep by 29 wide) with, of course, his own inimitable illustrations straight out of an infant-school nativity play. But because of the little press-out cast and stable it's not suitable for under-threes, we're told – exactly its audience, I would have thought. Jean de Brunhoff's *Babar and Father Christmas* is 20 years older even than that, and has been reissued several times, but its story of King Babar's adventurous search for Father Christmas and giving him a rest-cure in the sun is as jovial as ever. It's in the splendid large format of the original, although I doubt its 'joined up' handwritten text will be as appealing to today's children.

Going in the other direction – with mini-hardback editions – are some welcome reissues of more recent favourites. In a brilliant partnership of writer and artist, Hilary McKay and Amanda Harvey tell of the bewilderment, disappointment, building excitement and eventual joy as two three-year-olds (Bella and her cat Black Jack) gradually get the hang of the first Christmas they're properly aware of. Touching, witty and astute, *Was That Christmas?* is a lovingly realistic portrait of a first family Christmas (but, again, I wish it wasn't compulsory to make snow fall in fictional Christmases).



From *Kipper's Christmas*.

Mick Inkpen, every toddler's comfort and friend, returns with **Kipper's Christmas Eve** in small format, giving his readers that great feeling of knowing superiority when Kipper's baby cousin Arnold is the only one to spot the Christmas Tree Mouse. Clean, fresh drawings, simple, funny story: works every time. **The Christmas Mystery**, by Jostein Gaarder of *Sophie's World* fame and translated by Elizabeth Rokkan, is smaller in the sense of being abridged, and may well be the better for it. Sarah Gibb delicately decorates it with semi-silhouettes, reminiscent of Pięrkowski, which echo the advent calendar motif and the repetitive accumulation of characters as each day's door opens. Its simple, pure style and 24 tiny chapters belie the typically intricate and puzzling story within a story within a story, and there's an undeniable didacticism about it, but the overall effect remains of a fairytale enchantment shining in a modern world. Wistfully captivating.



From **The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey**.

And finally there's **The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey** in smaller format, trailing its multitudinous awards. The name Susan Wojciechowski may not be as familiar as P J Lynch, but her story is cunningly told, with its distant New England setting, its repetitions, its slow thawing of an almost-Scrooge figure, its use of the traditional nativity picture, its lovably perky wee boy. And its satisfyingly predictable glorious ending. It forms the essential basis for Lynch's visual narrative, told in his formidable style of heightened photographic realism, with its light and shadows, rich in colour and expression. Here

is the classic Christmas book, the very same lump-in-the-throat pleasure, no matter how often you read it or how hard you try to dismiss it as sentimental emotion-tweaking, as Dickens gave us. ■

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

Twelve Days of Christmas, Rachel Griffin, Barefoot, 1 84148 938 7, £10.99 hbk inc. CD

Babushka, retold by Sandra Ann Horn, ill. Sophie Fatus, Barefoot, 1 84148 352 4, £10.99 hbk

A Child's Book of Faeries, collected and retold by Tanya Robyn Batt, ill. Gail Newey, Barefoot, 1 84148 953 0, £12.99 hbk

Harriet and the Little Fat Fairy, Deborah Inkpen, Hodder, 0 340 85417 0, £9.99 hbk, 0 340 85418 9, £4.99 pbk

Mouse's First Christmas, Lauren Thompson, ill. Buket Erdogan, Simon & Schuster, 0 689 83690 2, £5.99 board

Herbie's Secret Santa, Petra Mathers, Simon & Schuster, 0 689 83615 5, £8.99 hbk

A Perfect Day For It, Jan Fearnley, Egmont, 0 434 80786 9, £9.99 hbk, 1 4052 0176 2, £4.99 pbk

The Christmas Story, Anita Ganeri, ill. Rachael Phillips, Evans, 0 237 52468 6, £4.99

The Christmas Story Big Book, Anita Ganeri, ill. Rachael Phillips, Evans, 0 237 52359 0, £17.99 pbk

The Christmas Book, Dick Bruna, Egmont, 0 7497 3821 9, £4.99 pbk

Babar and Father Christmas, Jean de Brunhoff, Methuen, 0 416 15392 5, £15.99 hbk

Was That Christmas?, Hilary McKay, ill. Amanda Harvey, Hodder, 0 340 86626 8, £6.99 hbk

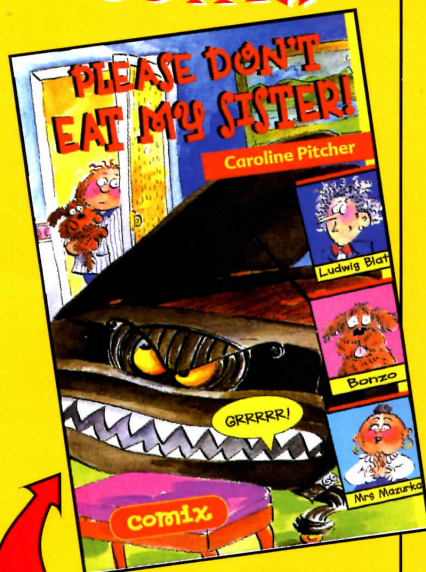
Kipper's Christmas Eve, Mick Inkpen, Hodder, 0 340 86627 6, £6.99 hbk

The Christmas Mystery, Jostein Gaarder, trans. Elizabeth Rokkan, ill. Sarah Gibb, Orion, 1 84255 050 0, £12.99 hbk

The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey, Susan Wojciechowski, ill. P J Lynch, Walker, 0 7445 4007 0, £9.99 hbk, 0 7445 5402 0, £5.99 pbk, 0 7445 9631 9, £7.99 small format gift edition

STOCKING FILLERS

COMIX

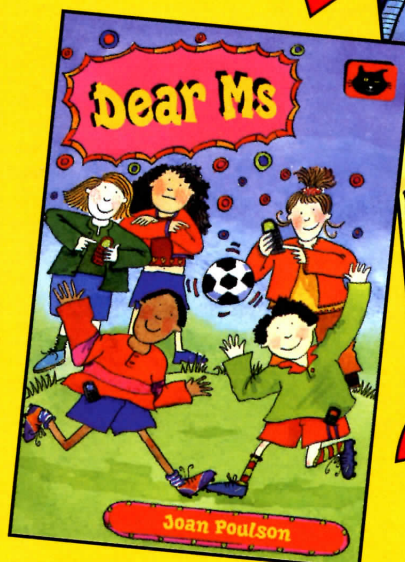


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Giving a Book at Christmas

At this time of year bookshop tables groan with 'gift' titles for the Christmas market.

Fiona Waters selects those which will give young readers lasting pleasure.

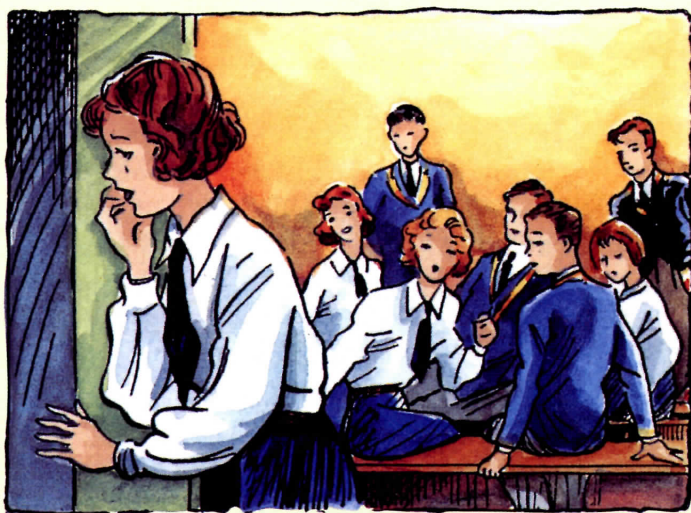
What is a gift book? To me any book is a gift whether you buy it for yourself or whether it is truly a gift from another. But of late, publishers and booksellers alike have fallen into the habit of calling any large collection of stories, whether about the same characters or a motley assembly but with a common theme, a gift book. So be it, I would certainly be very happy to receive any of the following as a gift!

Weighty tomes

If sheer weight were a criteria of selection then the **Thomas the Tank Engine Story Collection** and **The Complete Collection of Stories: Winnie the Pooh and The House at Pooh Corner** would win hands down, hands down flat on the table because these two chunky volumes are very difficult to handle comfortably. They are both handsome and impressive books, complete with ribbon bookmarks and printed on good quality paper, and certainly if a gift of the complete works is required then here is a generous answer but I couldn't help missing the small format hardback Thomas and the simple black and white illustrated Pooh of my childhood.

Blyton and Dahl fans

Mary Cadogan and Norman Wright have compiled a comprehensive collection of stories in **A Treasury of Enid Blyton's School Stories**. For all devotees, this is a must! With extracts, short stories and an out of print novel the book encompasses the entire range of the school stories written by Enid Blyton. The illustrations are coloured versions of the originals so there is a delicious period feel to the selection, and the foreword, by Children's Laureate Anne Fine, pays tribute to Blyton's sheer readability.



From **A Treasury of Enid Blyton's School Stories**.

The **Roald Dahl Treasury** is a big friendly giant of a book, stuffed with extracts from much loved favourites like **The Twits**, **Revolting Rhymes**, **The BFG** himself, **The Witches**, **Danny Champion of the World**, and of course **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory**, but also with some new material, previously unpublished poetry and letters. As well as the familiar Quentin Blake illustrations, such a quintessential part of the Dahl experience, there are some new pictures he has drawn especially for this collection together with new illustrations by artists like Patrick Benson, Babette Cole and Posy Simmonds.

Classic stories

The **Kingfisher Treasury of Classic Stories** is an amalgam of two earlier collections, **Classic Girl Stories** compiled by Rosemary Sandberg and **Classic Boy Stories** by Michael Morpurgo. With extracts from more than thirty classic stories including **Little Women**, **Treasure Island**,

Tom's Midnight Garden, **Black Beauty** and **The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe** this is a wonderful introduction to the best of children's classic literature. The book is lavishly illustrated by the likes of Tony Ross, Christian Birmingham, Jill Murphy and Emma Chichester Clark.

Bible tales and Greek myths



'The Good Samaritan' from **Miracles, Whales and Wonderful Tales: Voices from the Bible**.

Miracles, Whales and Wonderful Tales: Voices from the Bible is an interesting version of some of the best loved bible stories. Narrated by Shirley Isherwood from the perspective of the adults and children involved and, in places, creatures like the serpent in the story of Adam and Eve, this is a warm retelling of stories from both the Old and the New Testaments. Adam and Eve, Noah and the Flood, Jonah and the Whale, the Miracle of the Loaves and the Fishes, the Good Samaritan and the Last Supper are here along with five other tales all fully illustrated by Liz Pyle, Allison Reed, Gareth Lucas, Megan Stewart and Reg Cartwright.

If you are looking for a more comprehensive collection of bible stories there is a huge array, but **The Lion Bible for Children** is a good choice. With beautiful illustrations by Helen Cann that are a real addition to the text rather than mere decoration, here is an excellent retelling of the key stories from both the Old and the New Testaments by playwright Murray Watts. The text is dutiful to the original while bringing a modern and exciting voice to the narrative.

Atticus the Storyteller's 100 Greek Myths written by Lucy Coats and illustrated by Anthony Lewis is a real winner. For a very long time there has been a real lack (despite many attempts!) of a superb retelling of the Greek myths for younger children. This version will be with us for a long time, it is to be hoped, as it is vibrant, immediate and above all, fun! The labours of Heracles, the wanderings of Odysseus, the Minotaur, Medusa, Pandora, Jason and the Argonauts – the list is endless – all are here and we see them through the eyes of Atticus the sandal maker and wandering storyteller as he makes his way to the storytelling festival at Troy. The device works very well as a link to all the tales and provides that wealth of small detail which children find so fascinating. A really lovely book for all the family to share.

Tolkien addicts

A small but exquisitely packaged gem is **Bilbo's Last Song** by J R R Tolkien. Serious Tolkien addicts will not want to be without this beautiful little book of the last song sung by the hobbit Bilbo Baggins as he sets off on his final voyage to the Undying Lands at the end of the sunset. Pauline Baynes, the definitive Tolkien illustrator, and his favourite, produced a jewel in this interpretation of the song, and this small format hardback finally does justice to her interpretation. Alongside the main pictures illustrating the journey towards the Grey

Havens, there is a series of smaller pictures depicting episodes from **The Hobbit** – Bilbo's first journey alongside his last. From the glowing endpapers in, this is a very special little book.

Bedtime stories and fairy tales

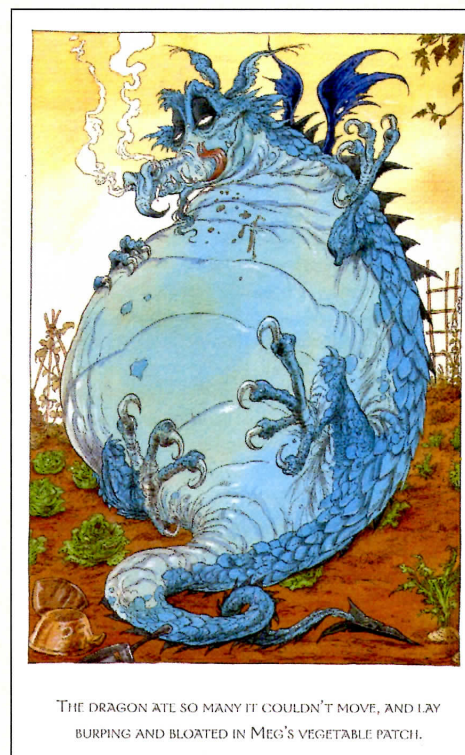


From **Bedtime Stories: Tales from Terry Jones and Nanette Newman**.

There is one story for every night of the week in **Bedtime Stories: Tales from Terry Jones and Nanette Newman**, illustrated by Michael Foreman. First published as individual picture books, this collection of original contemporary stories sparkles with zest, and the vibrant illustrations leap off the page. **The Sleeping Princess and other Fairy Tales from Grimm** is a delightful collection of ten of the best known stories from The Brothers Grimm. Retold with energy by Saviour Pirota and with humorous and richly coloured illustrations by Emma Chichester Clark, including a wonderful full page spread for each story, this would make a very memorable introduction to Grimm for the young reader. **The Nightingale** is a retelling of the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale by Stephen Mitchell with illustrations by Bagram Ibatoulline. Written, as Stephen Mitchell says 'as if Andersen were writing in the English of today' this is an energetic and lively version of the familiar story of the emperor who has to learn the real value of simplicity. The illustrations are very much in the period of the setting of the story and they add a powerful dimension to this lovely book.

Hidden Tales from Eastern Europe by Antonia Barber and illustrated by Paul Hess is a truly different and interesting collection of stories from Eastern Europe. Antonia Barber's poetic retelling of these wonderful tales is vividly brought to life by Paul Hess's unusual and dramatic pictures, full of magic and viewed from such quirky angles. **The Fabrics of Fairytale: Stories spun from far and wide** is a fascinating new book from Barefoot who always do something special and different. Retold by Tanya Robyn Batt, the stories are from varying cultures – Armenian, Swahili, Hawaiian for example – and have all the art of the live storyteller in their magic. The illustrations by Rachel Griffin are a wonderful patchwork of fabric, beads, paper and *objets trouvés*, and each story is introduced by a short history of fabric relevant to the particular story, so carpet weaving before the story of Clever Anaeet for example.

Finally, and spectacularly, is **The Story Giant**. This is a truly magical book that will open so many fabulous doors to young readers. Written by poet Brian Patten, the giant of the title weaves a fantastic mixture of tales from all over the world in his quest to find the one elusive story that



From **The Story Giant**.

THE DRAGON ATE SO MANY IT COULDN'T MOVE, AND LAY BURPING AND BLOATED IN MEG'S VEGETABLE PATCH.

will save him and his castle from destruction and all the stories with it. Four children dream their way into the castle and the giant realises they may be able to help him, finding out a great deal about themselves on the way. Weird and wonderful black and white illustrations from Chris Riddell flesh out the bizarre collection of characters the giant has hidden away in his storehouse. Every child in the land should be given this book, a true gift book if ever there was one! ■

Fiona Waters is a writer and anthologist.

Books discussed

Thomas the Tank Engine Story Collection, Rev. W Awdry, Egmont, 1 4052 0202 5, £35.00

The Complete Collection of Stories: Winnie the Pooh and The House at Pooh Corner, A A Milne, ill. E H Shepard, Egmont, 1 4052 0201 7, £35.00

A Treasury of Enid Blyton's School Stories, compiled by Mary Cadogan and Norman Wright, Hodder, 0 340 84145 1, £19.99

The Roald Dahl Treasury, ill. Quentin Blake et al, Jonathan Cape, 0 224 04691 8, £19.99

The Kingfisher Treasury of Classic Stories, chosen by Rosemary Sandberg and Michael Morpurgo, various illustrators, Kingfisher, 0 7534 0663 2, £19.99

Miracles, Whales and Wonderful Tales: Voices from the Bible, retold by Shirley Isherwood, ill. Reg Cartwright, Gareth Lucas, Liz Pyle, Allison Reed and Megan Stewart, Hutchinson, 0 09 176869 1, £12.99

The Lion Bible for Children, retold by Murray Watts, ill. Helen Cann, Lion Publishing Gift Edition, 0 7459 4804 9, £20.00, also available in a standard edition, 0 7459 4046 3, £15.99

Atticus the Storyteller's 100 Greek Myths, Lucy Coats, ill. Anthony Lewis, Orion, 1 84255 026 8, £16.99

Bilbo's Last Song, J R R Tolkien, ill. Pauline Baynes, Hutchinson, 0 09 188488 8, £7.99

Bedtime Stories: Tales from Terry Jones and Nanette Newman, ill. Michael Foreman, Pavilion, 1 86205 276 X, £14.99

The Sleeping Princess and other Fairy Tales from Grimm, retold by Saviour Pirota, ill. Emma Chichester Clark, Orchard, 1 84121 541 4, £12.99

The Nightingale, Hans Christian Andersen, retold by Stephen Mitchell, ill. Bagram Ibatoulline, Walker, 0 7445 8528 7, £12.99

Hidden Tales from Eastern Europe, Antonia Barber, ill. Paul Hess, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1949 4, £12.99

The Fabrics of Fairytale: Stories spun from far and wide, retold by Tanya Robyn Batt, ill. Rachel Griffin, Barefoot, 1 84148 060 6, £14.99

The Story Giant, Brian Patten, ill. Chris Riddell, HarperCollins, 0 00 711944 5, £14.99

RECENT POETRY FOR CHILDREN

Given our 'narrow and technique-obsessed curriculum' and the prescriptions of the Literacy Hour, does poetry continue to flourish? Peter Hollindale assesses new titles.

Children's poetry is a small world, and the Literacy Hour has made it smaller. Henry Reed once famously wrote, 'Japonica / Glistens like coral in all of the neighbouring gardens / And today we have naming of parts.' Many voices have denounced the infamous 'naming of parts' that afflicts the Literacy Hour. They are right, but the Philistines are still in charge. So in this trawl of poetry published for children over the last year or so, I shall be looking unashamedly for signs of glistening japonica.

ANTHOLOGIES

Can the anthologists help? Their power is immense. As collaborators or as rebels, they determine what is freshly available to the narrow and technique-obsessed curriculum in schools. Well, the usual suspects have been busy again. However accomplished they are, it cannot be healthy for children's poetry that the same names – John Foster, Fiona Waters, Tony Bradman, Roger McGough, Brian Moses, and a very few others – account year after year for the 'core curriculum' of published collections.

The dominance of a few means that the same favoured names from past and present provide the poems that children read. If these were the old days of labour relations, we'd be talking about union membership, and the National Union of Children's Poets is not very big. The same poets, and often the same poems. Robert Frost stops so often by woods on a snowy evening that his little horse must think he is raving mad. (Sometimes a poem's union card is just as unaccountably withdrawn: young Timothy Winters seems to have said 'Amen' once or a dozen times too often.)

Worse than individual power, however, is the insidious corporate policy. Union rules decree that certain members' interests must have their place. Comic poems. Word play. Puns. Lists. Lines of flaccid preparations to set up a final-line surprise. Onomatopoeia. Shape poems. Typographical tricks.

And lots of verse that
Is
Yes, really is,
Indistinguishable
From chopped-up
Prose.

LOOKING FOR A THEME

Every anthology must have a theme, or at any rate a reason for existing. 'What can I but enumerate old themes?' asked Yeats, and desperate anthologists echo him. So here we have a variety of excuses for another new book. Undoubtedly the silliest is *Hello New!*, edited by John Agard, first published in hardback in 2000, crazily cheerful about the new century's arrival, and already looking dated as a paperback two years later, the new century



'Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf' from **100 Best Poems for Children**.

having quickly staked its claim to being even uglier than the old one. Every poem commissioned for this book had to contain the word 'new', and my favourites among its contents are Roger McGough's two rude gestures at the whole idea.

McGough's own latest collection, *100 Best Poems for Children*, is gathered from nominations by teachers and children themselves in 135 schools which answered a questionnaire. Not surprisingly, a lot of card-carrying old union members are duly present, including Mr Frost and his horse. But there are lots of good poems. The most interesting thing about this rather predictable anthology is the list of contributing schools, a disproportionately high number of which are either Irish schools or Church schools or both. There seems to be some life and delight here which Estelle Morris and her pale battalions haven't reached. Long may it last.

John Foster has two little collections, one of 'creepy poems', *Watch Out, There's a Ghost About!*, which is feeble and second-rate, and *Why Do We Have to Go to School?* which is better, not least for the presence of John Coldwell's 'Face the Front' and Gareth Owen's 'School Outing'. The year's big Foster offering, though, is *101 Favourite Poems*. The new angle here is to ask 101 poets to choose a favourite from their own work. About half the book supplies proof that modesty and self-criticism are in short supply, but the other half is both entertaining and revealing, not least because so many writers, forced to choose, choose something serious. Japonica glistens quite often. There is Patrick Lewis's 'Stories'

Michaela Morgan

At some time in my childhood I came across the poem 'The Tyger' by William Blake. It made an impression on me – and years later, when I read about the tiger losing its colour in captivity, the news story and Blake's poem collided in my mind and my poem was the result.

Blake's Tyger – revisited

Tiger! Tiger! Turning white
In a cage just twice your height
Six paces left, six paces right,
A long slow day, a longer night.

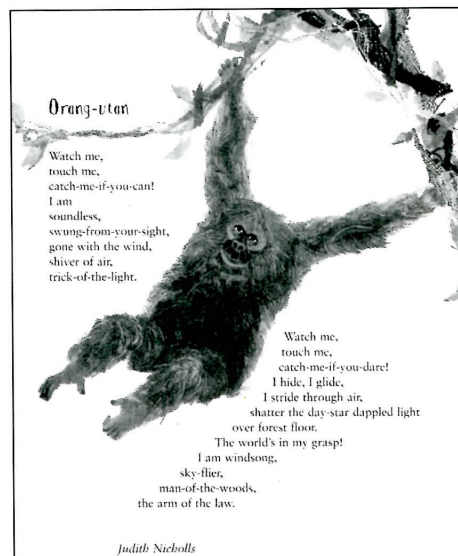
Tiger! Tiger! Dreaming still
Of the scent? The chase? The kill?
And now? No need. No place. No scope.
No space. No point. No hope.

Tiger! Tiger! Paces. Paces.
Once he flashed through open spaces.
His world once echoed to his roars.
Now he's quiet. He stares. He snores.

An inch of sky glimpsed through the bars.
A puddle. Concrete. Smells of cars.
He sniffs the air. He slumps. He sighs.
And stares and stares through jaundiced eyes.

From **101 Favourite Poems**.

(Robert Frost made new), and Michaela Morgan's 'Blake's Tyger – revisited' (Ted Hughes made new), and Ian Whybrow's 'The Last Steam Train to Margate' (Auden's 'Night Mail' made new). And I don't mean derivative, I mean fresh and equal in imaginative alliance. And there is Matt Simpson's 'One Spring Day', a model of how to write a comic poem for children. And Russell Hoban's 'The Ghost



Orang-utan

Watch me,
touch me,
catch-me-if-you-can!
I am
soundless,
swung-from-your-sight,
gone with the wind,
shiver of air,
trick-of-the-light.

Watch me,
touch me,
catch-me-if-you-dare!
I hide, I glide,
I stride through air,
shatter the day-star dappled light
over forest floor.
The world's in my grasp!
I am wind-song,
sky-flier,
man-of-the-woods,
the arm of the law.

Judith Nicholls

From **Wild and Wonderful: poems about the natural world**.

Horse of Chingis Khan', which he says gives him goose pimples, and does the same to me.

The Works 2, edited by Brian Moses and Pie Corbett, is a fat anthology of 'poems on every primary-school subject', and does its openly utilitarian job quite skilfully, while giving the bulk of the jobs to the union membership. It has many good poems, and is assiduously educational in the approved ways. Enough said.

The ever-industrious Fiona Waters has compiled *If the sea was in the sky... Poetry collection 5*. This is a pleasant, inconsequential, attractively produced collection for younger primary children, but it suffers very badly from list disease. Far too many of the poems consist essentially of lists, endorsed by various degrees of ingenuity and check. Lists are a very handy labour-saving device for producing pseudo-poems: they supply easy rhymes, easy contrasts, easy jokes, easy everything. Too many editors fall for them. Waters has done much better with her attractive little anthology for older readers (and adults), *Love*, which has happy, unexpected choices in a very neat pocket format.

Tony Bradman's 'green' anthology *Wild and Wonderful: poems about the natural world*, published in association with WWF-UK, is a handsome and admirable book, with a 'list poem' at its best and most purposeful, Linda Newbery's 'More, MORE, MORE!', and a marvellous 'shape poem', Jane Clarke's 'Web of Life'. Only 21 poems but scarcely any duds, and beautifully illustrated by Susan Winttingham.

ADVENTUROUS AND SURPRISING

The pick of all these anthologies, however, are two compiled by moonlighters from the Union of Children's Novelists, Michael Morpurgo's *Because a Fire Was in My Head* and Anne Fine's *A Shame to Miss* (in three volumes, one for 'young readers' which is good, one for 'middle readers' which is excellent, and one for 'young adults' which should be mandatory stock for every secondary school). They have nearly 20 poems

in common (guess who they've both found lurking by the snowy woods), but these include pieces from Shakespeare and *Ecclesiastes*. There is a big gap in quality. Morpurgo is disappointingly predictable in many of his choices. (If Charles Causley is to have four poems, pick the four most well-known and reprinted, and here they are. Out of all this poet's riches!) Fine, with over twice as many poems altogether, is much more adventurous and surprising.

But what they have in common is a philosophy, also shot through their work as novelists. For the Union anthologists, kids are kids, and the aim is to make them laugh, enjoy word play, and jump early emotional hurdles, which is honourable enough as a calling. For Fine and Morpurgo children are certainly different from us adults but fast becoming adult themselves. That after all is what childhood is *for*. So where poetry is concerned the young can be trusted to play with the grown-ups. The great majority of poems in both anthologies are not by 'children's poets', and the ones who make it are the very best, from Lewis Carroll and Eleanor Farjeon to Causley, Russell Hoban and Kit Wright.

Fine is forever extending the over-familiar canon. To my surprise I found a splendid end-of-war poem, 'Armistice', by John Buxton Hilton, known to me only for the brilliant, underrated detective stories set in Derbyshire that he wrote in retirement. 'Armistice', written in 1945, is unheard-of, simple, and utterly definitive.

Armistice

Snuff the candles, day is done,
Foeman scattered,
Battle won;
Blood ridged mountains of this morning
Solaced, shade the tiring sun.

Field to furrow,
Speed your cart;
Caesar's rendered,
Played your part;
Now in deep nostalgic stillness
Seek the voices of your heart.

Duty called for,
Paid with zest;
Hatred nourished,
Fought your best;
Now the man who slew his brother,
Homes to peace, but knows no rest.

Berlin, 1945

John Buxton Hilton

From *A Shame to Miss 3*.

This should become a classic anthology. So one small complaint. Fine reprints Hilaire Belloc's 'The Yak'. The third stanza should start 'Then tell your papa where the Yak can be got'. In Fine's version this has become 'Then tell your parents where the Yak can be got', which mucks up both tone and scansion. On whose say-so? Not Fine's, I bet, since any child capable of reading her anthology knows what

'papa' means. This little piece of needless vandalism is no doubt the work of closet gender policing at Corgi. A shame to find it in *A Shame to Miss*.

NOSE-PICKING AND FOOTBALL POEMS

The speaker in one of Anne Fine's choices, Susan Hamlyn's 'I Hate Poems', denounces poems about (among other things) 'putting your finger up your nose'. Fine observes, 'You'll know *exactly* the sort of poems she means', and we do. I call them 'snot and nose-picking poems', and her anthology, like Morpurgo's, is blessedly free of them. There are plenty around elsewhere. Their adolescent equivalent is *Poems With Attitude*, by Andrew Fusek Peters and Polly Peters, now in paperback, and its successor, *Poems With Attitude Uncensored*. You either admire these collections for addressing the raw truth of teenage preoccupations (genitalia, drugs, booze, sexual competition and vulnerability) and their responsible warnings (Don't smoke. Don't have unprotected sex. Don't be cruel 'for a laugh'.) or you dislike them for their shameless teenage populism and serious errors of taste. I dislike them. (An evening's cinema snogging should not be depicted as war in the trenches, even for fun.) But the second book, despite its jolily seductive top-shelf title, is an improvement on the first.

FRENCH VERBS

Tomorrow, I will see him.
Erique. He will smile and
We shall sit together on the coach
To some historic castle.
We will be paired,
Like swans on a moat.

Today, we hold hands at the back,
Snatch moments in the shadows of stairs.
I bury my face against his scarf,
He whispers in French and I breathe him –
The smell of cigarettes, incense, vanilla,
Like autumn smoke.

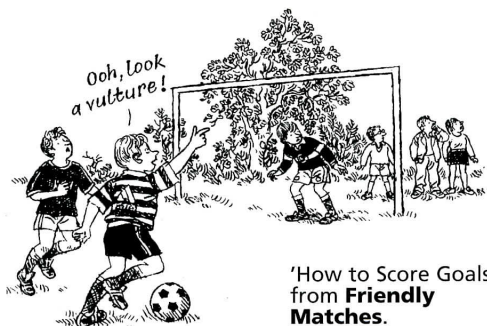
Yesterday, he left.
Our breath froze as we said goodbye.
He gave me his scarf and half a pack of Gauloise
And we each kept a picture of us two
In the Boots photo booth.
As the coach pulled away,
The windows steamed up.
I could hardly see him wave
And the day was grey
As sackcloth.

From *Poems With Attitude Uncensored*.

Another obsession across a much broader age-group (and not only for boys, of course) is football. Football poems are scattered everywhere, but there are two single-author collections devoted to life in Beckhamland. Nick Toczek's *Kick It!* is verbally clever and entertaining but clearly written for the market, and more about wordplay than the game itself. Allan Ahlberg's *Friendly Matches*, on the other hand, is a small masterpiece. It is nostalgic, funny, observant, quirky, varied, and full of knowledgeable love for the people's game. If John Betjeman had written a sequence about children and football, this



'Back in the Playground Blues' from *Because a Fire Was in My Head*.



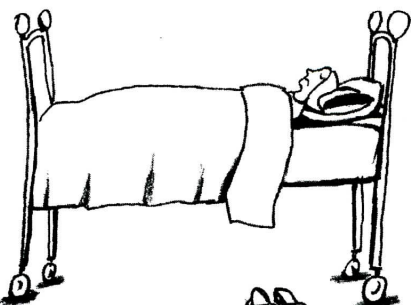
would be it. An accomplished, hugely enjoyable book.

SINGLE-AUTHOR COLLECTIONS

Anglo-Caribbean voices continue to enrich children's poetry far beyond their numbers, but perhaps the time has come to avoid treating them as some kind of cultural collective, and recognize that their individual qualities (and quality) are very varied. Two new collections illustrate this. James Berry's *A Nest Full of Stars* is frankly poor, and a thin self-imitation of what he did some years ago in *When I Dance*. Banality, contrivance, stretched and strained language, forced ideas are everywhere. Compare this book with Valerie Bloom's *Hot Like Fire*, and the difference is vast. *Hot Like Fire* is sheer pleasure. A rich sense of humour, acute social observation, variety of tones and moods, sensitive rendering of the natural world, seemingly effortless wit and wordplay, and remarkable technical skill, all make this book outstanding.

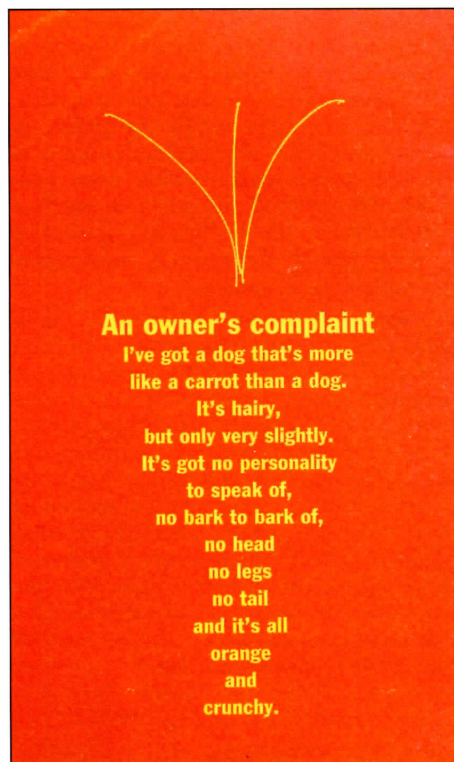
Mary Had Ptomaine Poisoning

Mary had ptomaine poisoning,
The doctor felt her head,
Ptold her pto stick her ptongue out,
And sent her off pto bed.



From Valerie Bloom's *Hot Like Fire*.

Other recent single-author collections are measured by your personal sense of humour, and for my part the harder they try, the harder they fall. So the works of two poet-comedians, Ian McMillan's *The Invisible Villain* and John Hegley's *My Dog is a Carrot*, are not so much poems as zany quips and anecdotes on paper: throwaway writing for throwaway reading. Much funnier than these is a book from Wales for the youngest readers, Ruth Morgan's *Jumping the Waves*, an affectionate, dreamily light-hearted poem-portrait of a seaside



From John Hegley's *My Dog is a Carrot*.



'April Thackeray / The music teacher's daughter / Had eyes like skies / And hands like water' from *To Catch an Elephant*.

holiday. Much funnier too is Gervase Phinn's *The Day Our Teacher Went Batty*, a set of wry, shrewd, witty episodes from a Yorkshire school inspector's life. But one collection is exceptional: Gerard Benson's *To Catch an Elephant*. This attractive book, delightfully illustrated by his wife Cathy, collects together the best of his earlier work - funny and sad, witty and sinister, all of it good.

COMPOSITE STORIES

I have kept the best till last. There are three books in this year's batch that hover somewhere on the boundaries of children's poetry, because all are partly journals, partly dramatic monologues, not too far from being novels - short poems that make a composite story. *The Journal of Danny Chaucer* (Poet),

by Roger Stevens, is the story of one school year in Danny's life - poems, song lyrics, notebook jottings, all wittily recording Danny's efforts to acquire three successive girlfriends and a band called 'Cast No Shadow'. It is very good indeed.

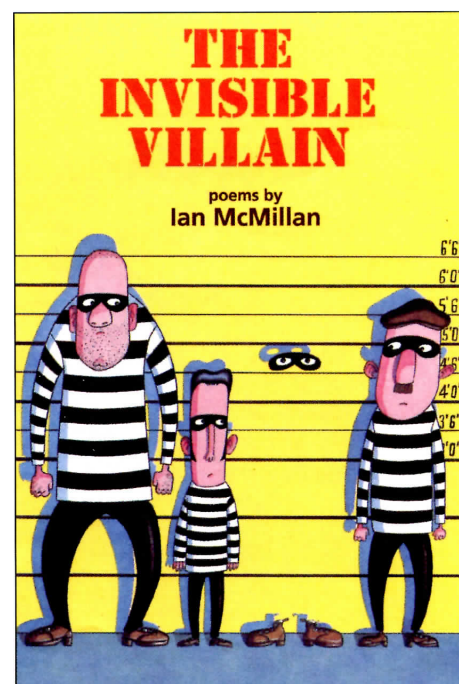
Even better is Sharon Creech's *Love That Dog*, the story of one small boy's school year. Jack is much younger than Danny, and his task as we gradually discover is to come to terms with the violent death of his dog. As he does so, we see him discover poetry, gain confidence as a writer and a person, connect poems with people, and gradually internalise experience. (Among the poems he discovers is one about a Mr Frost in snowy woods, and Jack has pertinent questions to ask about him.) This is a lovely book, totally original, profound and ambitious in scope, funny and moving, yet simple enough for Jack's contemporaries to read and enjoy: a masterpiece.

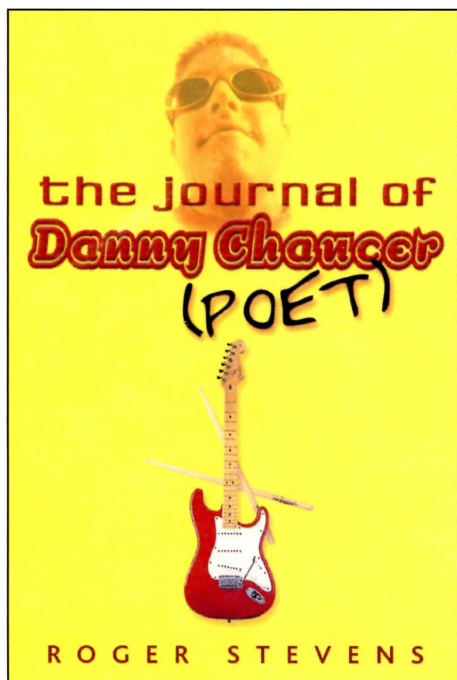
dog

BY VALERIE WORTH

Under a maple tree
The dog lies down,
Lolls his limp
Tongue, yawns,
Rests his long chin
Carefully between
Front paws;
Looks up, alert;
Chops, with heavy
Jaws, at a slow fly,
Blinks, rolls
On his side,
Sighs, closes
His eyes: sleeps
All afternoon
In his loose skin.

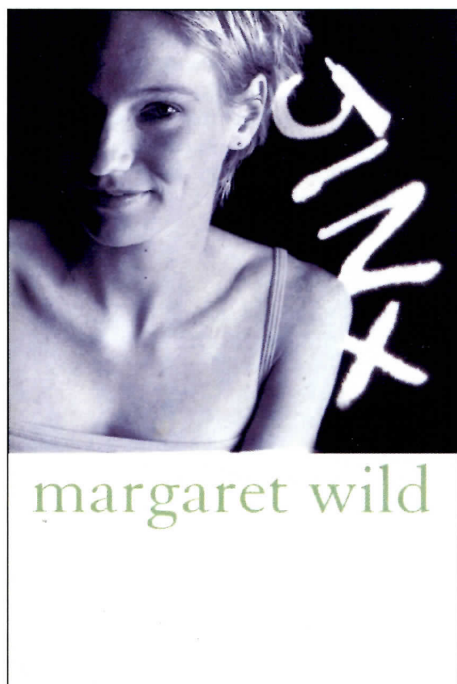
From *Love That Dog*.





And masterpiece is also the word for *Jinx*, by the Australian writer Margaret Wild. Strictly for teenagers, this is a story of adolescent crisis. Except that it is told entirely through poems (mostly monologues), it reminds me of Melvin Burgess's *Junk*. It is a poetic drama in several voices, beautifully written, with extraordinary psychological insight. I cannot recommend it too highly.

Three books, all distinguished individually, that together add something original and important to the repertoire of children's poetry. ■



From *Jumping the Waves*.

BOOKS DISCUSSED

Hello New!, edited by John Agard, ill. Lydia Monks, Orchard, 1 84362 094 4, £7.99 pbk

100 Best Poems for Children, edited by Roger McGough, ill. Sheila Moxley, Viking, 0 670 89490 7, £12.99 hbk

Watch Out, There's a Ghost About!, collected by John Foster, ill. Chris Mould, Oxford, 0 19 276278 8, £4.99 pbk

Why Do We Have to Go to School?, collected by John Foster, ill. Ellis Nadler, Oxford, 0 19 276282 6, £4.99 pbk

101 Favourite Poems, compiled by John Foster, ill. Clare Mackie and Tim Stevens, Collins, 0 00 713975 6, £12.99 hbk

The Works 2, chosen by Brian Moses and Pie Corbett, Macmillan, 0 330 39902 0, £5.99 pbk

If the sea was in the sky... Poetry collection 5, compiled by Fiona Waters, ill. Tracy Fennell, Evans, 0 237 52126 1, £10.99 hbk

Love, chosen by Fiona Waters, Macmillan, 0 333 90348 X, £7.99 hbk

Wild and Wonderful: poems about the natural world, selected by Tony Bradman, ill. Susan Wintringham, Hodder Wayland with WWF-UK, 0 7502 3928 X, £10.99 hbk

Because a Fire Was in My Head, edited by Michael Morpurgo, ill. Quentin Blake, Faber, 0 571 20583 6, £12.99 hbk

A Shame to Miss 1: Perfect poems for young readers, 0 552 54867 7

A Shame to Miss 2: Ideal poems for middle readers, 0 552 54868 5

A Shame to Miss 3: Irresistible poetry for young adults, 0 552 54869 3

Selected by Anne Fine, Corgi, £5.99 each pbk

Poems With Attitude, Andrew Fusek Peters and Polly Peters, Hodder Wayland, 0 7502 4189 6, £4.99 pbk

Poems With Attitude Uncensored, Andrew Fusek Peters and Polly Peters, Hodder Wayland, 0 7502 4116 0, £9.99 hbk

Kick It!, Nick Toczec, ill. Alan Rowe, Macmillan, 0 330 39920 9, £3.99 pbk

Friendly Matches, Allan Ahlberg, ill. Fritz Wegner, Puffin, 0 14 130749 8, £4.99 pbk

A Nest Full of Stars, James Berry, ill. Rachel Merriman, Macmillan, 0 333 96051 3, £9.99 hbk

Hot Like Fire, Valerie Bloom, ill. Debbie Lush, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 5647 4, £3.99 pbk

The Invisible Villain, Ian McMillan, ill. Alan Rowe, Macmillan, 0 330 39845 8, £3.99 pbk

My Dog is a Carrot, John Hegley, Walker, 0 7445 8633 X, £5.99 pbk

Jumping the Waves, Ruth Morgan, ill. Suzanne Carpenter, Pont, 1 84323 106 9, £4.95 pbk (1 84323 155 7, £12.95 big book)

The Day Our Teacher Went Batty, Gervase Phinn, ill. Chris Mould, Puffin, 0 14 131445 1, £4.99 pbk

To Catch an Elephant, Gerard Benson, ill. Cathy Benson, Smith/Doorstop, 1 902382 40 4, £6.00 pbk

The Journal of Danny Chaucer (Poet), Roger Stevens, Dolphin, 1 84255 058 6, £4.99 pbk

Love That Dog, Sharon Creech, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 5749 7, £4.99 pbk

Jinx, Margaret Wild, Allen & Unwin, 1 86508 264 3, £5.99 pbk

Excuses

Didn't have time, Miss
Had to go out.
Couldn't find my book, Miss
Please don't shout.
Mum forgot to iron my blouse, Miss
She said this one would do,
Yes, I know it's not a school one
Yes, I know it isn't blue.
Yes, I did my homework,
But Dad let the dog chew it,
I know you can't read it
But I really did do it.
I lost it on the way, Miss,
No, I don't know where.
I did have it on me.
Oh, it's just not fair!

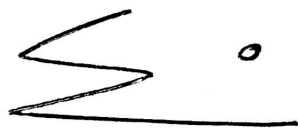
John Cotton



From *Why Do We Have to Go to School?*

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

Authorgraph No.137



Eoin Colfer
interviewed by Rober Dunbar



'I'm a bit elfin myself,' say Eoin Colfer, as our conversation turns to fairies, leprechauns and other inhabitants of Irish mythological and legendary worlds. It is a statement for which his photograph on the blurb of his second Artemis Fowl novel, **Artemis Fowl: The Arctic Incident**, should have prepared us. The eyes are twinkling, the grin is impish and the overall impression is of someone whose wit will be lively and inventive, whose company will be engaging and entertaining. When we meet in the streamlined elegance of his Wexford home, even on an overcast September morning, he more than fulfils such expectations. The sense of humour which characterises so much of his writing is, clearly, a significant dimension of the man himself. But, in neither the life nor the literature, is it the whole story. There is a seriousness underlying his approach to his work, a clear sense of purpose and direction, a levelheadedness which keeps the hype well under control. Similarly, while the prevailing tone of everything he has written to date is light-hearted and the details frequently hilarious, the suggestion of an interest in darker themes is never far distant. **The Wish List**, already published in Ireland, and now available in Britain from Puffin Books, is, perhaps, the clearest demonstration so far of his moves between these dualities.

Second of a family of five boys, Eoin was born 37 years ago and with the exception of four years in Europe and Africa, has lived for all of his life in Wexford, an historic seaside town in Ireland's 'sunny South East'. At primary school there, particularly inspired by his father, one of his teachers, he soon decided that he too was going to teach. It was, he recalls with great affection, the fun-based and progressive ethos of his father's classroom that appealed to him. Later, in his own time as a primary teacher, and, later still, in his role as writer confronting large groups of his young readers in many parts of the world, he would profitably draw on these happy memories. His first creative tendencies were in Art. His early enthusiasm for drawing was maintained while he was at College and remains with him in his fascination with the visual imagery of comic books and graphic novels, a fascination visible in the highly pictorial style of much of his prose. Where literary matters were concerned, he was attracted initially to the writing of plays. Again, there was parental encouragement and inspiration, on this occasion mainly from his mother, a teacher of Drama involved in local amateur theatre. 'I loved the fun of rehearsals and the creation of make-believe worlds,' he remembers, 'and enjoyed the popularity and recognition that came with being writer and director.' As an adult, he has continued to write plays, some of which have been successfully staged in amateur and professional productions, but he wryly implies that in such productions he misses his sense of being 'in control'. These days, the outlet for his dramatic impulses is more likely to be found in the vividly realised set pieces of his fiction and in the quick-fire exchanges between his characters.

Always a keen reader and frequenter of libraries and bookshops,

Eoin has vivid recall of some of the books which he first encountered at the primary school stage. 'I can still remember books I read 25 years ago, but I couldn't name the last five books I read,' he says. Of Irish children's literature, it was Patricia Lynch's **The Turf-cutter's Donkey** which first made a significant impression and which may well have sparked his interest in the possibilities afforded by a belief in magic. There are equally warm memories of Clive King's **Stig of the Dump**, the book to which he attributes his continuing involvement – first as reader and now as writer with fantasy literature. Later, it was when he came to own a three-volume boxed set of **The Lord of the Rings** that the thought first came to him that one day he too might produce a fantasy trilogy. It now looks as if that trilogy might turn into quartet: the boxed set will probably follow!

As a teenager at the local Christian Brothers' secondary school, Eoin was lucky enough to have the encouragement and support of 'some excellent teachers'. But, he is quick to point out, he was hardly the ideal student. 'I was more interested,' he laughs, 'in being the class comedian.' His fondness for the slick one-liner, one of the most obvious facets of his writing, has clearly its secondary school origins. More seriously, these secondary school days also opened Eoin's eyes to the perplexities of bullying, a subject which his books continue to address, whether in implicit or explicit terms. One of the most impressive sequences in **The Wish List**, for example, is devoted to an almost visceral reconstruction by Lowrie McCall, the book's 'helpless pensioner', of an act of bullying to which he had been subjected as a 15-year-old. The subsequent reunion scene between victim and perpetrator affords the opportunity – well taken – to explore the nature and consequences of one particular manifestation of evil – and to reveal how, some 53 years on, it may now be perceived through adult eyes.

If such searing insights derive from Eoin's own school experiences, so also, he acknowledges, do the more usual childhood and adolescent concerns which, usually with a telling mixture of humour and compassion, he reflects in his writing. Even in his three contributions to The O'Brien Press 'Flyer' series for younger readers 'who can take on the challenge of a longer story' he focuses, through his character Ed Cooper, on the fears and uncertainties of early childhood. Many of these, such as Ed's problems with his 'funny feet', were, Eoin assures me, his problems also and the passing of thirty years has done little to diminish the intensity of his memories. In **Benny and Omar** and **Benny and Babe** he skilfully re-creates that male adolescent sense of embarrassment often seen in both social and tentatively sexual contexts. It is interesting to speculate on the extent to which the creation of 'brilliant criminal mastermind' Artemis Fowl, apparently always coolly in control, is an attempt to exorcise such doubts.

Eoin's happiest memories of his time as a student at Carysfort College of Education in Dublin are of his Teaching Practice



experiences. 'I had a ball,' he enthuses, though he was increasingly aware also of the need to reconcile his 'rebellious idealism' with the realities of classroom life. On graduation in 1986, he took up a teaching post in Wexford, staying there some seven years before fulfilling a long-held ambition to work abroad. By now married, he spent a four-year career break in Saudi Arabia, Italy and Tunisia. While in Saudi Arabia he had the inspiration for a still unpublished adult thriller – 'Silence of the Lambs meets Father Ted' is his tantalising summary of its theme – but it was Tunisia which was to provide the material for **Benny and Omar**. This, published in 1998 by The O'Brien Press, was an immediate best-seller in Ireland: its acceptance for publication constituted 'an amazing moment' for Eoin. **Benny and Babe**, the sequel, enjoyed similar success. Eoin's years abroad, he feels in retrospect, brought him not only to his first published work: they also brought home to him (as they do to young Benny) the real potential of 'education' once it is divorced from the narrow strictures of curricular and classroom rigidities.

While the two Omar books, **The Wish List** and his 'Flyer' titles had earned Eoin recognition and a healthy readership in Ireland, it was not until his move to Puffin with **Artemis Fowl** (and subsequently **Artemis Fowl: The Arctic Incident**) that international fame came his way. Vast as the scale of this has been, he clearly remains in a state of almost boyish wonder and bemusement. There have been impressively large financial rewards, sales of well over 500,000 copies, translations into some 40 languages, numerous shortlistings and awards, promotional

visits to every corner of the British Isles, to Europe, the United States, Australia and New Zealand: Japan and India are beckoning. Film rights for **Artemis Fowl** have been bought by Miramax Productions and the search for the Irish boy who will play the title role is now on. For Eoin, **Artemis** is in the tradition of such literary 'criminal masterminds' as Professor Moriarty, a villain, possibly, but not one totally without his own brand of sinister charm. Place this character in a supernatural Irish setting where human cunning confronts fairy guile, decorate the setting with a dazzling array of modern and futuristic technology and we are ready to embark on a determinedly contemporary variation on all traditional stories which feature leprechauns and – possibly – pots of gold at the end of rainbows. Given such a blend, it comes as little surprise when Eoin reveals that fan mail from young readers arrives almost daily from virtually every country where he is published – some of it even in the special 'code' language used as footers on each page of the texts.

A full-time writer since January 2001, Eoin describes his current working routine as 'fairly disciplined'. On a typical morning, his wife Jackie will go out to run her business, their five-year-old son Finn will leave for school and by half-past ten Eoin will be ready to move to his computer. He will, generally, work until about four o'clock. At the outset of his career his first drafts were in longhand, but he nowadays tends to proceed directly to the keyboard, though he emphasises that he is still 'a great reviser'. And as for work currently in progress? We can expect the third **Artemis** novel – provisionally entitled **Artemis Fowl: The Eternity Code** – in Spring 2003. And, he says cryptically, we can expect **Artemis** himself 'to develop and change'. A fourth volume may follow. There is also the possibility of a further **Benny** story and – somewhere in the future – a work of science fiction. On the evidence of the eight books which have so far appeared, one assumption about whatever may come next from Eoin Colfer seems justified. As with his conversation, there will be much to make you smile – and much to make you think as well. ■

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

Photograph courtesy of Puffin Books.

The Books

Benny and Omar, The O'Brien Press, 0 86278 567 7, £4.99 pbk
Benny and Babe, The O'Brien Press, 0 86278 603 7, £4.99 pbk
Going Potty, The O'Brien Press, 0 86278 602 9, £3.99 pbk
Ed's Funny Feet, The O'Brien Press, 0 86278 650 9, £3.99 pbk
Ed's Bed, The O'Brien Press, 0 86278 679 7, £4.50 pbk
The Wish List, The O'Brien Press, 0 86278 658 4, £4.99 pbk (Ireland)
The Wish List, Viking, 0 670 91385 5, £9.99 hbk (Britain)
Artemis Fowl, Viking, 0 670 89962 3, £12.99 hbk, Puffin, 0 14 131212 2, £4.99 pbk
Artemis Fowl: The Arctic Incident, Puffin, 0 670 89963 1, £12.99 hbk



DRAWN FROM LIFE:

Shirley Hughes and Quentin Blake

The work of Shirley Hughes and Quentin Blake is, as we know from our millennium questionnaire (**BfK** No. 119), much valued by readers of **Books for Keeps**. Now Hughes has published a memoir of her life as an illustrator and Blake a diary about his time as the first Children's Laureate. **Joanna Carey** explores.

I once saw Shirley Hughes sketching in my local churchyard – a small crowd had gathered to watch. 'It's the lady who does the Alfie books,' said a little girl approvingly. In **A Life Drawing: recollections of an illustrator** Hughes talks about her 'sketchbook habit' and how vital it is to be able to make a fluent, lightning response to what she sees. She always carries a sketchbook – 'on holiday, in pubs, cafes and parks, and, in my particular field, lurking about in sandpits and play areas.' Constant drawing, she says, feeds 'a memory bank in your head' – and, back in the studio, gives you the freedom to conjure up all those 'telling gestures and movements'.



After a childhood on Merseyside enriched with visual memories that range from comic books to regular visits to the Walker Art Gallery, whose Victorian and Edwardian paintings gave her such an early understanding of the art of narrative painting, Hughes spent a year at Liverpool Art School studying fashion and costume design. She then went to Oxford to do fine art at the Ruskin which, she says, 'was a fine art school with a vengeance'. The course, based on 18th-century principles, 'consisted of drawing antique casts until you were deemed proficient enough to enter the life class.' Life drawing was of paramount importance, a rigorous discipline, which laid firm foundations for her work as an illustrator and she takes the opportunity here to lament the fact that in the 1960s, when art schools abandoned those academic traditions 'something vital was lost. We are now trying, somewhat painfully and confusedly, to regain it. Drawing means looking more intently and for longer than you do at any other time.' Students who don't have the chance to develop these basic skills are, she says, 'on a dangerous quicksand which can all too easily sink into pompous pretension, a slavish reliance on photographic references, or poor drawing disguised as irony.'

Strong words. But there are many strands to this richly textured memoir, in which she talks in depth about her work, reveals her own favourite artists, shares her love of Italian art and talks with illuminating authority about the history and development of book illustration. And in addition to her forthright views on the changing face of art education, she writes vividly, often amusingly self deprecatingly about her own time as a student, arriving on her first day at

the Ruskin, for example 'in a cashmere twinset and pearls – the epitome of "good style" in West Kirby... which I thought would be suitable for upmarket academe. This was an obvious blunder. Everyone else was in paint splattered overalls and bits of discarded service uniform...' An illustration – one of several that strongly evoke the period – shows a life class, circa 1946, where a plump nude model with a peachy bottom, stands on the dais in the glow of an electric fire, surrounded by eager students. As ever in Hughes' illustrations, there's a strong narrative element and it's clear that each character, including the elderly tutor with the red bow tie, has a story to tell...



Dining on 'watery mince' and spotted dick with custard, rubbing shoulders with the likes of Kingsley Amis, listening to jazz, falling in love, defying post-war shortages by making dresses from parachute silk and billiard-table baize, dancing the rumba and exploring the treasures of the Ashmolean Museum (where, over 50 years later, her own work is now on display), Hughes' Oxford years are lovingly, extravagantly remembered, and seem bathed in a golden light... In contrast she writes poignantly about the 'big-city loneliness' she endured as she subsequently looked for work as an illustrator in London: an unpublished illustration for a Jean Rhys novel captures the wistful mood, and she quotes the advice a gloomy tutor had offered: 'Book illustration work can only be undertaken as an adjunct to teaching or matrimony.' She didn't teach but she did marry and had three children... and she pays tribute to her husband John 'who kept a roof over our heads' (he is an architect) while she got her remarkable career under way with the first of her myriad picture books for young children. Hughes writes well about her professional life – her inspirations, her technique and her working relationships with writers, editors and publishers: as well as being a good read, this book has a lot to offer students and aspiring illustrators – and for that reason alone it would surely benefit from a contents page at least, if not an index?

In addition to being generously illustrated throughout, there's a moment near the end of **A Life Drawing** when you find yourself literally *inside* one of Hughes' sketchbooks – 15 pages of drawings, swift character sketches, entertaining vignettes, and lyrical loosely handled watercolours from her travels in Italy which along with the Sussex landscapes magically suggest the freedom Hughes enjoys beyond the constraints of the 32-page picture book.

QUENTIN BLAKE'S LAUREATESHIP

There can't be many people who have been allowed to draw on the walls at the National Gallery but Quentin Blake has – and it's one of the tales he tells in **Laureate's Progress** – an account, in diary form, of two years that followed his election as the first ever Children's Laureate. Unlike the Poet Laureate, whose job is steeped in tradition, the Children's Laureate is a brand new appointment and although it has the ultimate aim of raising the profile of children's literature, there were no hard and fast rules and the brief was simply to do what seemed appropriate and 'to enjoy' – so who better than Blake to approach this blank canvas? Cautious, initially, about the time consuming nature of this task, Blake soon threw himself into it with trail-blazing panache – giving interviews, delivering lectures, launching reading schemes, supporting charities and organizing exhibitions – such as the one at the National Gallery 'Tell me a Picture' which drew thousands of young first-time visitors to the National Gallery to see a carefully selected collection of works by contemporary illustrators, modern painters and old masters, which, in spite of their diversity, were all linked by Blake's own exuberant drawings on the walls, in between the pictures. He also found himself in slightly less opulent surroundings, helping with the National Day of Drawing in the tunnel that leads from South Kensington



Underground station to the museums. 'September 2000,' he wrote, 'we're in the tunnel. Lined with lavatory tiles, not very well lit, about a quarter of a mile long, it isn't the most attractive of places. But there is a lot of paper on the walls, thanks to London Transport, and free artist's materials, thanks to Crayola, teams of helpers from the museums... and no lack of artists, not to mention droves of passers-by'... soon 'the whole place is full of drawings and people drawing

and has developed the benevolent air of an extremely long studio filled with artists happily at work.'

Astonishingly, Blake managed to combine all this with his usual busy schedule, and there are well over a hundred new drawings here from this period, including illustrations for **Words and Pictures** (a book about his own work), **Muck and Magic** (an anthology in support of the charity Farms for City Children), and **A Sailing Boat in the Sky** (done in collaboration with no fewer than 1,800 French speaking school children), and a jacket design for the catalogue of a new exhibition of contemporary illustrators that is coming soon to the British Library. There are posters, sketches of 'literary London', charity greetings cards, and bookplates downloaded from the Internet for the Home Library Scheme which was initiated by Anne Fine, who has now succeeded Blake as Children's Laureate. So what about the Ex-Laureate?... Although he draws himself relaxing in a dustbin it's clearly business as usual with lots of new projects including a plan that's been put forward to use the Quentin Blake archive (of around two to three thousand drawings) as a basis for a new, non-commercial gallery in London, exclusively for illustration. This he says, 'could provide a home for exhibitions of young illustrators, foreign illustrators, illustrators from the past, and open a lot of other portfolios and archives that we rarely see.'

And of course there are new books – the latest is **Loveykins...** about a bird in a pushchair. He's currently working on a series of expressive drawings of 'people-as-birds' and he explains the genesis of this curious preoccupation – 'Birds are two-legged, like us, that gives them something of our balance and gesture and makes them nearer to us. Birds-as-people is also a way of talking about people and somehow I find it enables me to draw characters... that I wouldn't attempt otherwise. I go at them with a black watercolour pencil, which is a new implement for me, and the necessary reminiscence and information seem to seep in from somewhere. The second stage is to brush water into the drawing, when it bleeds black copiously and you really have to pay attention if you want to bring it through.' ■



Joanna Carey is a writer and illustrator.

Shirley Hughes – **A Life Drawing: recollections of an illustrator**, The Bodley Head, 0 370 32605 9, £19.99 hbk
 Quentin Blake – **Laureate's Progress**, Jonathan Cape, 0 224 06481 9, £14.99 hbk

Hal's Reading Diary

Now 20 months, Hal has a passion for books about tractors. His father, Roger Mills, on why that might be.

The other day my wife Jo was in a children's bookshop with our son Hal looking around for some new additions to his library. Hal's eye fell on a colourful title called **Dig, Dig, Digging** and once he had got hold of it, it could not be prized out of his grasp. **Dig, Dig, Digging** offers a series of double page spreads devoted to working vehicles or machines of one kind or another. There's the digger itself. There's a fire engine, a dustcart, a car transporter and a road roller. But there is one page that Hal loves above all – the tractor.

Tractors are becoming a bit of an obsession at the moment. Another of his books, **Farmyard Tales**, features four farmyard stories, but when we pick it up Hal pushes past the first three stories and demands you read the last one, 'The Runaway Tractor' every time. It's the same with **Spot's Big Book of Words**. Here, Spot the dog is found in a whole range of vocabulary generating locations from the kitchen to the beach. But Hal's only interest is the farmyard page with its tractor. He even calls the book 'Tractor'.

Talking to other parents I quickly realised that Hal's tractor passion is by no means unusual, and that it fitted in with other fixations. Almost everyone I talked to who has had a young boy (girls' enthusiasms seem to be a bit different) reports their sons being besotted with tractors, cars and trains. Big powerful moving vehicles, it seems, are uniquely appealing to very young boys.

But what is going on? What is it about tractors, cars and trains that makes Hal and numerous other small boys adore them so? Putting the question in a slightly more elaborate way, asking what it is that makes us have

emotional identifications with things, suggests a possible answer. I would argue that we enthuse about things because in one way or other they can be an expression of how we feel we are.

When we are older, more self-conscious and less happy, what is expressed is often what we would like to be, not what we feel we are. You might be passionate about a powerful, expensive car because you don't feel that powerful in your inner world. But before self-consciousness sets in, the connections are probably less complex. Boys like things like cars and trains and tractors because they offer an expression of something they feel in themselves.

That something, I think is energy. Small boys have vast amounts of it, a constant desire to be doing things, running around, fiddling with things, exploring things. Perhaps what boys love about cars and trains and tractors is that they too seem to be embodiments of energy. In a tractor or train, Hal sees a powerful mover that matches in some way the restless energy that he senses in himself. If only he could tell me if this makes sense to him. But by the time he is thinking like that, the small boy energy will have gone. ■

Dig, Dig, Digging, Margaret Mayo, ill. Alex Ayliffe, Orchard, 1 84121 080 3, £4.99 pbk, 1 84121 418 3, £3.99 board

The Usborne Book of Farmyard Tales, Heather Amery and Stephen Cartwright, Usborne, 0 7460 0263 7, £6.99 hbk

Spot's Big Book of Words, Eric Hill, Puffin, 0 14 054899 8, £4.99 pbk

Roger Mills is a Psychodynamic Counsellor.



NEWS

The Summer Reading Challenge 2003

The theme of next summer's Reading Challenge, the largest children's national reading promotion organised by The Reading Agency in partnership with Books for Students and children's publishers is to be The Reading Maze. Lots of exciting possibilities for reading journeys and unexpected encounters with authors are promised! The Reading Agency will be working in a new partnership with The People's Network to offer on-line Reading Maze activities. This new partnership will result in a website for the Reading Maze. The People's Network is a £170 million lottery-funded project funded by the New Opportunities Fund and managed by Resource, The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries. It provides internet access for everyone in all UK public libraries. Using the web children will be able to explore new reading experiences through a mixture of books and IT.

Formed by merging three existing agencies (Launchpad, The Reading Partnership and Well Worth Reading), The Reading Agency is a new charity which will be working with libraries to create the best possible access to books and reading for everyone. The Agency is funded by an alliance of arts, library and government bodies and marks a step change in public libraries' work with readers. It will work across the public library service, supporting its work with adults and young people. The Reading Agency's website: www.readingagency.org.uk The People's Network website: www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk

Potter Not a Plagiarism

A claim by US author Nancy Stouffer that J K Rowling copied her material in the Harry Potter books has been thrown out by a New York court who ordered Ms Stouffer to pay \$50,000 plus costs to Ms Rowling, Scholastic and Warner Bros.

EVENTS

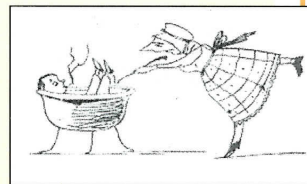
The Youth Festival at the Institut Français

From 21-23 November there will be a festival celebrating children's books with some of the greatest authors and illustrators in France and the UK, catering to young people aged 6 to 18. This year's participants are: Quentin Blake, Michael Morpurgo, Jamila Gavin, Julia Jarman, Satoshi Kitamura, Caroline Lawrence, David Roberts, Michelle Nikly and Jean Claverie, Mario Ramos, Daniel Pennac, Lionel LeNeouanic, Frédéric Pillot, Jean-Loup Chifflet, Véronique Lenormand, Antonin Louchard and Katy Cuprie... and Peter Rabbit. There is a choice of events in both French and English. For more information and bookings, contact Géraldine D'Amico on 020 7073 1307 or geraldine.d-amico@diplomatie.fr

The 9th Annual NCRCL/British IBBY Children's Literature Conference

The theme of this year's NCRCL/British IBBY Children's Literature Conference on Saturday 16 November is Children's Literature and Childhood in Performance. The programme will give delegates an opportunity to discuss adaptation, audiences, children as performers and construction of childhood and youth. Details from NCRCL/British IBBY Conference, National Centre for Research in Children's Literature, University of Surrey Roehampton, Digby Stuart College, Roehampton Lane, London SW15 5PH.

Useful Organisations No.23: The Children's Books History Society



Further details and applications for membership can be obtained from:

Secretary: Mrs P Garrett,
25 Field Way, Hoddesdon,
Herts EN11 0QN

Tel/Fax: 01992 464885

Email: cbhs@abccgarrett.demon.co.uk

Membership is £10.00 per annum (UK & Europe).

Overseas Members: £15 sterling.

The Children's Books History Society exists to promote an appreciation of children's books in their literary, historical and bibliographical aspects, and further to encourage a distribution and exchange of information on

children's literature. New members are invited to join the Society whether their interest is amateur or professional.

Meetings and talks are held in London four to six times a year, with occasional provincial meetings, and visits to collections are arranged. Three substantial Newsletters are issued to members annually, containing news of exhibitions, conferences, events, etc; also reports of meetings, book reviews, articles and other matters. Occasional Papers are also issued; previous papers have covered subjects from 'Early Alphabets' to 'The Firm of Blackie and some of their Children's Books'.

National Storytelling Week

The third Annual National Storytelling Week will be held from 1-8 February 2003. The Society for Storytelling wants as many people as possible to join in the celebration which will consist of nationwide storytelling events and performances. For further information or if you would like to take part, call Del Reid on 020 8866 4232 or 0118 935 1381 and view the website: www.sfs.org.uk

PUBLICATIONS

100 Best Books 2002

The new edition of Booktrust's **100 Best Books 2002** (0 85353 493 4) picks the best paperback fiction titles published in the previous 12 months for all ages from babies to teenagers, including books by many favourite authors. It includes a useful subject index to titles in categories such as Families & Domestic, Friendships, Reluctant Readers and Something a Bit Different. Available from Booktrust, Book House, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ at £4.00 (made payable to Booktrust).

AuthorZone 4

AuthorZone 4 is the fourth edition of Peter Sheldon's excellent and fun guide to children's authors and illustrators and the world of children's books. It is aimed at children, teachers, librarians and anyone with an interest in children's literature. £6.95 plus £1.00 p&p per copy from **Peters Bookselling Services**, 120 Bromsgrove Street, Birmingham B5 6RJ, tel: 0121 666 6646, fax: 0121 666 7033, e-mail: marthur@petersbooks.co.uk

Correction

In BfK No. 136 we listed the Guardian longlist books as the shortlist and left off Marcus Sedgwick's **The Dark Horse**. See opposite for details of the winner and shortlist.

Great Ormond Street Hospital Children's Charity has launched Write4GOSH, a national competition open to children aged 6 to 16. The competition theme is to 'cheer up a child in hospital', by inviting children to write stories, either about their own experiences or from their fertile imagination. Cherie Booth QC, as the prize's patron, heads up the panel of judges that includes children's authors Jacqueline Wilson and Philip Pullman, Australian pop singer Dannii Minogue, television presenters John Craven, Michael Aspel and George Layton, and Sunday Times Editor, Dave Coombs. Full details of the competition, including how to enter and prizes, can be accessed online at www.write4gosh.nhs.uk. Contact **Kathy Chelley/Gary Loach** in the GOSH press office on 020 7829 8671 for more information, or e-mail loachg@GOSH.NHS.UK

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

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

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

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

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

Jill Bennett is the author of *Learning to Read with Picture Books*. She is Early Years Coordinator and 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*.

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

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

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

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

Adrian Jackson is General Adviser – English, West Sussex.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

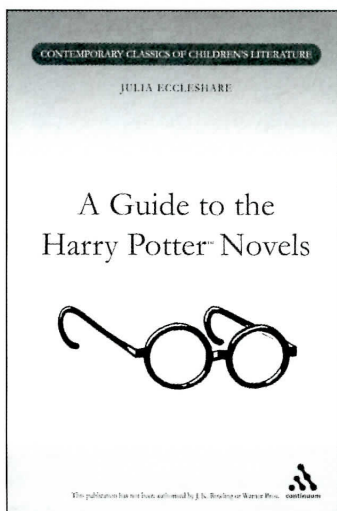
Rosemary Stones is Editor of *Books for Keeps*.

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

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Branded	★★★ 28	Moon Jumpers, The	★★★★ 24
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British Folk-Tales and Legends	★★★★★ 22	No Trouble at All	★★★ 23
Carwash	★★★ 29	Notso Hotso	★★★★★ 25
Causes	★★★★ 23	Poochie-Poo	★★★★ 24
Crispin and the Three Little Piglets	★★★ 23	Princesses Are Not Quitters!	★★★★ 25
Dan's Angel	★★ 27	Race Day!	★★★★ 24
Dark Horse, The	★★★★ 28	Ramsbottom Rumble, The	★★ 26
Dear Ms	★★★★ 26	Resistance	★★ 28
Death Camps, The	★★★★ 23	S.W.A.L.K.	★★★★★ 25
Dovey Coe	★★★★★ 28	Secret Life of Ms Wiz, The	★★★★ 26
Earth from the Air for Children, The	★★★★ 26	Secret Summer of Daniel Lyons, The	★★★ 27
Elmer and the Lost Teddy	★★★ 23	Shell House, The	★★★★ 30
False Papers	★★★ 23	Smartest GIANT in Town, The	★★★★★ 24
Film	★★★ 29	Something Slimy on Primrose Drive	★★★ 26
George and the Dragon and other saintly stories	★★★ 25	South Africa Since Apartheid	★★★★ 29
Greeks on Stage, The	★★★★ 27	Star Dragon	★★ 28
Growing up in the Eighties	★★★ 27	Stories and Tales	★★ 22
Growing up in the Seventies	★★★ 27	Thief Lord, The	★★★★★ 29
Guide to the Harry Potter Novels, A	★★★ 22	Three Cheers for Ostrich!	★★★★ 23
Handa's Hen	★★★★★ 24	Waking Dream	★★★★ 29
Hat off, Baby!	★★ 23	Weetzie Bat	★★★ 30
Horrid Henry and the Bogey Babysitter	★★★ 25	Who is Jesse Flood?	★★★★ 30
Hush Little Ones	★★★ 25	Why are Castles Castle-Shaped?	★★★★ 36
I Know a Rhino	★★★ 23	Witch's Children, The	★★★ 24
I Want a Cuddle!	★★★★★ 24	Worlds of Chrestomanci, The (audio book)	★★★★★ 26
Internet	★★★ 29	Worm in the Well, The	★★★★ 28
Into the Lion's Den	★★★ 26	Yellow Star, The	★★★★ 26
Jim Davis	★★ 29	Young Dracula	★★★ 28
Lettice, The Dancing Rabbit	★★★★ 22		
Lion Storyteller Book of Animal Tales, The	★★★ 24		
Little Old Mrs Pepperpot / Mrs Pepperpot Again (audio book)	★★ 25		
Long Walk to Lavender Street	★★★ 23		
Look! There's Elmer	★★★★★ 22		

Books About Children's Books



A Guide to the Harry Potter Novels

★★★

Julia Eccleshare, Continuum, 128pp, 0 8264 5317 1, £12.99 pbk

While adult Potter enthusiasts are waiting for the fifth book, they might fill in the time with this guide from Julia Eccleshare. It offers surveys of the Potter world, an examination of its sources and antecedents, and a look at its social and political values.

Eccleshare is even-handed with praise and misgiving. The misgivings are mainly about the conservative aspects of the stories, particularly the portrayal of female characters. On the positive side, she stresses Rowling's endorsement of fair play, family values and education. In particular, discussing the relationship of Muggles and Wizards, she makes an interesting argument about Rowling as an advocate of racial and cultural tolerance.

Eccleshare labours under the severe, and absurd, handicap of being prevented (by Warner Bros?) from quoting from the books themselves. This involves her in a lot of unfortunately necessary paraphrase. I have no idea what this prohibition is supposed to achieve, or what fate awaits any of us who have the temerity to quote a line in print or to write Harry Potter without the little TM sitting on his shoulder. But I have tremendous admiration for a critic who, in the face of such hamstringing, retains her poise and delivers a balanced verdict.

Eccleshare recognises at the outset that the success of the first books was more due to the real excitement of children and peer group recommendation than to publishing hype, and she is more aware than

many other critics that the four books already published show interesting developments in Rowling's preoccupations. In terms of literary judgement, it would be hard to disagree with her assessment that, while Rowling's themes and characters are broadly derivative, she is immensely ingenious and invariably sure-footed in deploying them. The Harry Potter books, whatever else they are, are funny, inventive, exciting and entertaining. **CB**



Portrait of Shirley Hughes by her daughter, from *Beatrix Potter to Harry Potter*.

Beatrix Potter to Harry Potter: portraits of children's writers

★★★

Julia Eccleshare, foreword by Anne Fine, National Portrait Gallery, 136pp, 1 85514 342 9, £15.00 hbk

Magic Pencil: children's book illustration today

★★★

Selected by Quentin Blake, The British Council/The British Library, 112pp, 0 7123 4770 4, £11.95 hbk

Of late there has been a healthy proliferation of exhibitions to do with children's books: visages of creative talents at the National Portrait Gallery; illustration as Art at the Laing Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne; a wide-ranging display at the National Library of Scotland; Shirley Hughes at the Ashmolean... You don't need a

philosopher's stone or an amber spyglass to guess why this should be, and the phenomenon is especially welcome in so far as it may lead Joe Public towards a greater awareness of the rich variety of the genre.

Where the exhibitions possess a *raison d'être*, it is also well that they be given published catalogues which explain the same and serve as a permanent record of the passing show. This is not always easy to do (I speak from long experience) since Joe Public is often deemed by nervous institutions to be uninterested in the aesthetic, technical and commercial fundamentals that determine each generation's children's books, and the two handbooks – not exactly catalogues – under review here certainly don't go far towards delving into the implications of their subjects.

Beatrix Potter to Harry Potter displays what was of central importance in the NPG's exhibition: photographs, portraits, caricatures of the fifty-six authors selected by Michèle Brown and Gyles Brandreth 'inspired by their own childhood favourites' (difficult thus to see how a clutch of chaps from Jacqui Wilson to Benjamin Zephaniah have found their way in). The pictures are, without exception, stunning – although Mike Rosen may disagree – but the selectors have delegated the job of writing about them to Julia Eccleshare, whose very brief brief seems to have been to supply potted biographies and *obiter dicta* on books of consequence. Thus she has with grace, lucidity and much over-generalisation, but such synopses relate only tenuously to any reading you care to make of the faces that loom at you from the opposite pages. Look at our Enid, typewriter typically on her knee, grinning (at Mr Pinkwhistle perhaps) across a sunlit garden; or the Pullein Thompsons, crowded beneath a black umbrella; or Leon Garfield, his own anti-villain, revolving dark plots in the shadows.

Magic Pencil similarly resists the opportunity to explore 'the complex twist of strands' which Quentin Blake describes in his Introduction as being unavoidable for the born illustrator. His words raise hopes, but these are not fulfilled by his colleagues. Joanna Carey offers a neat but superficial history of illustration with some breathless notes on the thirteen artists whose work is on view in the exhibition. These persons are then allowed a page to talk about their life and work with some random, unannotated samples of their illustrations to follow. Of *raison d'être* there is nowt. **BA**

British Folk-Tales and Legends: a sampler

★★★★★

Katharine Briggs, Routledge xiv, 400pp, 0 415 28602 6, £9.99 pbk

Stories and Tales

★★

Hans Christian Andersen, trans. H W Dulcken, ill. A W Bayes and engraved by the Brothers Dalziel, Routledge xi, 416pp, 0 415 28598 4, £9.99 pbk

How often do you find people from politicians to primary schoolchildren referring to 'fairy tales' as though they are a single, undifferentiated genre? Way back in the early 1970s the folklore scholar, Katharine Briggs, was at pains to demonstrate the many varieties of such narratives, and her majestic four-volume *Dictionary of British Folk-Tales* not only made careful discriminations between different kinds of story but also served as a compendium of texts and sources.

In 1977 this huge, but unwieldy, collection was boiled down to the more manageable volume which is now reissued in Routledge's sturdy, well-produced softback series of 'Classic Authors'. The eighteen main divisions of the original are retained, along with Briggs's explanatory introductions and her reprinting or summarising of outstanding examples with some notes on sources and the interrelationship between tales. The indexing, cross-referencing, and bibliographical guidance leave much to be desired (what's the use of merely 'Ruth L Tongue Somerset Folklore pp 29–30'?). Readers whose interest will be justifiably stimulated by the book ought to be told more of the publishing, dating and status of its essential elements. Nonetheless, one might be in mortal danger to deny the pleasures and the insights afforded by so many wonder-tales, and if you set the book alongside that other fine collection, Neil Philip's *Penguin Book of English Folktales* (1992) as a kind of analytical companion, you will have a perfect introduction to the splendours, the mysteries, and the comedy of our numinous past.

No such recommendation can be made for the Andersen in Routledge's series. Dulcken's translation of sixty-two of the *eventyr* (certainly not fairy tales) must be one of the worst ever. The wood engravings after drawings by Bayes are worth seeing as examples of the Victorians' narrative and graphic skills in illustration, but they have suffered somewhat through modern reproductive processes. **BA**

Now Out in Paperback

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

WRITTEN BY PETER JACKSON
ILLUSTRATED BY
ALAN BURNETT

Look! There's Elmer

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

David McKee, Red Fox, 24pp, 0 09 943206 4, £4.99 novelty

Reviewed BfK 126, January 2001:

'This is a book full of fun, produced on thick, strong paper, with peepholes that will survive curious fingers. The tale is cumulative, with repetitive language well suited to inexperienced readers tackling the book alone. Elmer fans will love it.'

Lettice, The Dancing Rabbit

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Mandy Stanley, Collins, 32pp, 0 00 664777 4, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 130, September 2001:

'Lettice Rabbit decides she wants to be a dancer "more than anything else in the world" and she leaves her comfortable hill top life with all the other bunnies for the town where she finds a ballet class. There is a great feeling of vibrancy and joy in this little story. Stanley's delicate pinks, greys and greens are printed on

cream paper and her mannered, rather '50s style gives a delicious flavour to this very 'girly' book.'

Blue Horse and Tilly

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Helen Stephens, Picture Corgi, 32pp, 0 552 54742 5, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 131, November 2001:

'Tilly is new in town and finds it difficult to make friends. Her toy blue horse comes to the rescue. Together they play games and eventually blue horse encourages Tilly to speak to another little girl in the playground. Stephens' stylish paintings and her use of purple, blue and turquoise help to create a feeling of space and an atmosphere of being apart.'

Three Cheers for Ostrich!

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Francesca Simon, ill. Neal Layton, Gullane, 32pp, 1 86233 289 4, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 132, January 2002:

'Poor Ostrich! Why is there always

someone older, bigger, faster, cleverer, and stronger than he is? But who is the kindest? This message about different strengths and values is conveyed with great energy and fun.'

Animal Rights

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Barbara James, Hodder Wayland 'Talking Points', 64pp, 0 7502 4259 0, £6.99

Reviewed BfK 116, May 1999:

'Written in clear but uncondescending prose, the cruelties involved in vivisection, dolphinarium, big game hunting and factory farming are described and questions about benefits to medicine and other aspects of human welfare are posed. Information is well presented and allowed to speak for itself, though discussion prompts are inserted at strategic places. The texts are illustrated with contemporary photographs, most of them in colour.'

Long Walk to Lavender Street: A Story from South Africa

Belinda Hollyer, 0 7502 3637 X

False Papers: A Story from World War One

Stewart Ross, 0 7502 3873 9

FICTION ★★★★★

Hodder Wayland 'Survivors', 96pp, £4.99 each

Reviewed BfK 134, May 2002:

'These two novels are part of a series about young people faced with harrowing experiences. **False Papers** deals with trench warfare and **Long Walk to Lavender Street** is about apartheid yet there is rarely a feeling of the books getting to grips with the trauma implied in their subject matter. Apart from its main story, each book has an introduction, map, historical notes, a list of follow-up reading and a glossary.'

Causes and Consequences

Causes

Pat Levy, 0 7502 4276 0

The Death Camps

Sean Sheehan, 0 7502 4275 2

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Hodder Wayland 'The Holocaust', 64pp, £6.99 each

Reviewed BfK 127, March 2001:

'These are the first two of a series of four books which examine the subject of the extermination of European Jewry by Nazi Germany. Levy carefully charts the ideological, political and economic currents that came together with such appalling consequences in the Third Reich. Sheehan's book looks closely at the organisation of genocide in wartime Germany and the experience of the death camps for the prisoners and their guards. Both books have been written with young adults in mind and address them with informed clarity.'

REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant

Hat off, Baby!

★★

Jan Ormerod, Bodley Head, 12pp, 0 370 32654 7, £3.99 novelty board

Large, easily manipulated flaps help young readers to undress a baby ready for a bath in this chunky, boldly illustrated board book.

Colourful but rather crude drawings show little of the sensitivity of line found in Ormerod's previous board and baby books: her gift for capturing expression and gesture is somewhat lost beneath the strong black outlines here. Additionally, anomalies between text and picture may prove confusing for young, very literal, readers: 'Coat off, baby' includes gloves, tossed aside; 'Top off, baby' leaves half the 'top' on; lifting the bath (tipping it up?) reveals the baby lying on a towel. Conceptually difficult, these pages need sensitive interpretation by sharers. AG

Louie's BIG BOOK of Words

★★★

Yves Got, English text by Simona Sideri, Zero to Ten, 32pp, 1 84089 250 1, £8.99 hbk

First published in France as *Les Vacances de DIDOU*, this word book sees a small white rabbit translated into Louie packing, travelling, playing on the beach, visiting an aquarium, a farm and a supermarket, picnicking and playing indoors and out. Each of the twelve spreads, some multi-framed, others a single picture, show clearly labelled and captioned items or activities illustrated in bold blocks of colour contained within thick black outlines.

As well as for individual use with toddlers, this is a book which, if strategically placed in an early years classroom, could stimulate children's play/literacy activities. JB

Mimi's Book of Counting

1 84270 062 6

Mimi's Book of Opposites

1 84270 063 4

★★★★

Emma Chichester Clark, Andersen, 24pp, £5.99 each hbk

Mimi is delightful! She is a merry monkey just at the stage when learning something new is the most exciting thing about being alive. In the first book her relationship with Grandma is contagiously warm, as they go through their day sharing counting. The readers will echo each interaction between Grandma and Mimi, as numbers one to ten are exuberantly explored. Mimi can't find one favourite book at bedtime, she produces nine, and as Grandma tucks Mimi up with her ten little teds, she returns to her opening endearment, 'Goodnight, my one and only dumpling!' In *Opposites*, Mimi continues to explore new concepts, this time with her baby brother. Yes and No, High and Low, we romp through the book, learning as we go! Both books, with their sturdy pages, have great charm, and the monkey family life echoes that of many a small child. GB

I Know a Rhino

★★★★

Charles Fuge, Gullane, 24pp, 1 86233 303 3, £8.99 hbk

This imaginative adventure between a medley of different creatures and a small child begs to be celebrated through song and dance, whether solo, with a baby or a whole class! Each spread is devoted to a mini adventure, boldly illustrated in appealing style. The rhythmic, rhyming text is clear, very large, with key words in bold. Singing along to a simple 4 x 4 melody like 'Twinkle,

twinkle little star' enhances the fun of the book.

'I know a giraffe and we laugh and laugh, blowing hundreds of bubbles when we take a bath.' There is often engaging eye contact between enormous animal and child, increasing the reality of the game. This serves to emphasise the vital role of imaginative play in a small child's life. Bedtime arrives, and the whole menagerie of friends troops upstairs, for the characters are in fact the child's soft toys. Creative play at its best, written and illustrated with exuberant delight. GB

Elmer and the Lost Teddy

★★★★

David McKee, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 863 7, £9.99 hbk

Elmer, the patchwork elephant, has become something of a publishing – and marketing – phenomenon since first appearing in 1989. Early stories deal with celebration of difference, and with co-operating to solve problems, themes germane to much of McKee's other work.

Here, Baby Elephant has lost his teddy and can't get to sleep. Elmer comes to the rescue, lending his own distinctive bear and eventually returning with the lost teddy because 'all teddies are special, especially your own'.

The exuberant illustrations are less subtly drawn than in the earlier volumes, and the story's premise weak – a case of stretching a good idea too far, perhaps? AG

Crispin and the Three Little Piglets

★★★★

Ted Dewan, Doubleday, 32pp, 0 385 60329 0, £10.99 hbk

Loaded with jokes in both text and illustration, this book also provides

food for thought about accepting new members to the family. The Tamworth Pig family live in opulent style, Crispin enjoying being an *only* pig. When his parents inform him he is about to have a baby brother or sister, he is not pleased. In the hospital, he selects the quietest, least smelly of the triplets, but is appalled when all three are brought home. There is tremendous sibling rivalry, for the growing piglets get away with mess and noise whilst Crispin suffers constant reprimands and exclusion. The underlying layers in the story weave through the book with charm and glee, visual jokes abounding. Watch out for Mrs Tamworth's homeopathic ultrasound suspension babybather! GB

No Trouble at All

★★★★

Sally Grindley, ill. Eleanor Taylor, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 5234 7, £9.99 hbk

Bespectacled Grandfather Bear babysits his two grandchildren and as the story unfolds through his monologue addressed to the cat (and readers) a view of two angelic little bears unfolds. But, read the pictures – some divided upstairs/downstairs or left/right by the gutter – and a very different story emerges with pillow fights, hide and seek, and midnight feasts. As Grandfather retires to bed only the cat knows what really went on.

The cosy watercolour and pencil interiors of Grandfather's log cabin cum tree house are full of detail, nooks and crannies for little bears and readers to 'paw' over. JB

Max and the Rainbow Rain Hat

★★★★

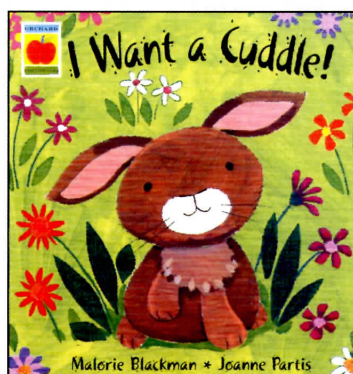
Gus Clarke, Andersen, 32pp, 1 84270 078 2, £9.99 hbk

Max lives under a cloud – literally.

Everywhere he goes the rain follows, so he never smiles and he has no friends. Who wants to talk to a bunny if it means getting wet? So Max is sad. Then he finds a solution; he makes a huge, multi-coloured rain hat. It is so big that it keeps him and all the other animals dry. Life becomes full and interesting, the cloud disappears, and Max is happy. The gentle, droll illustrations will be enjoyed even by very young children, but the full impact of the sophisticated theme – that the solution to happiness lies within oneself – will only be appreciated with more maturity. ES

results in his being sidetracked to assist various characters along the way. Reassuringly, he wins through, thanks to receiving advice on short cuts from various onlookers.

Layton's dynamic, naïve illustrations are supremely suitable for the story. They are very appealing to children because they look as though a child has created them. AK

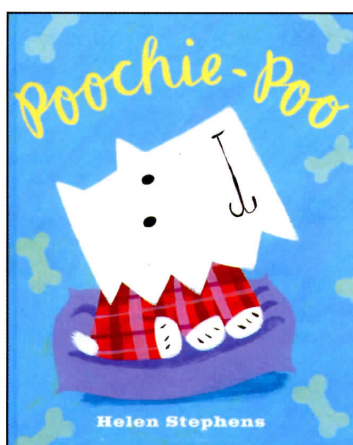


I Want a Cuddle!

★★★★★

Malorie Blackman, ill. Joanne Partis, Orchard, 32pp, 1 84121 092 7, £4.99 pbk
All children will empathise with Little Rabbit who falls over, hurts her paw and wants a cuddle. However, the cuddle has to be from the right person. Offers of cuddles from a hedgehog, squirrel, badger, toad are rejected for being too prickly, tickly, bristly or bumpy. The Little Fox has other motives for cuddling and is rejected, but even Little Fox needs a cuddle when he bumps his head. Finally, Little Rabbit runs into the arms (paws?) of her mum and a cuddle which feels just right.

Award-winning author Malorie Blackman was inspired to write this heart-warming story having seen her own daughter fall and come running to her with out-stretched arms crying, 'I want a cuddle.' Striking illustrations demonstrating a bold use of colour are another attraction of what will undoubtedly become a very popular picture book. AK



Poochie-Poo

★★★★★

Helen Stephens, David Fickling Books, 32pp, 0 385 60410 6, £10.99 hbk

A delightful story of two dogs and their decorative, French beret-wearing lady owners. Miss Loopy's dog, Victor, is a well-behaved, tartan-adorned terrier, whilst Butch is a

rather naughty dog of unknown breeding, whose owner we don't meet until the last page. Butch comes to visit Victor, who would quite like to do the naughty things which come second nature to Butch, like biting furniture or stealing sausages. To Victor, Butch is 'cool'. Being bad really isn't Victor though, and when he tries to be bad by going into a shop where dogs are banned he ends up apologising to the shopkeeper much to Butch's disgust.

This is a lovely book in which each character has its own appropriate font for its name. Victor in plain comic sans, Butch in a Western 'Wanted Poster' style font, and Miss Loopy in an extravagant and elegant handwriting script. Butch's cool image is completely shattered at the end when his owner, the gloriously named Miss Froopy-Frou-Frou, comes in to collect Butch, referring to him as her Poochie-Poo and tickling his tummy. The final picture of a blushing Butch, covered in pink lipstick kisses, as Victor calls out, 'Bye, bye Poochie-poochie-poochie-poo!' is priceless.

The witty illustrations and dramatic use of colour, both in the pictures and as backgrounds are great. I like the table cloth, cushion cover and wallpaper with bones on them and a framed picture of Victor with an outrageously large gilded frame which is appropriately ostentatious, as are the butterflies on Miss Loopy's beret and shoes. AK

The Witch's Children

★★★

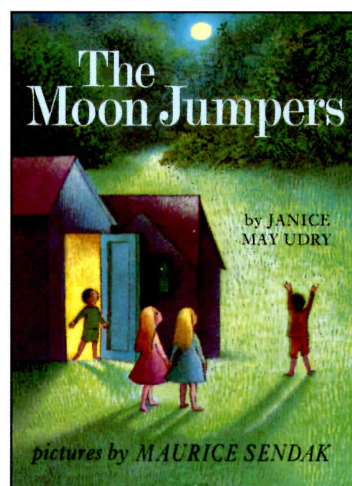
Ursula Jones, ill. Russell Ayto, Orchard, 32pp, 1 84121 551 1, £10.99 hbk

When the witch's troublesome children arrive at the park, all the animals run for cover, but a child playing by the lakeside is not so prescient and is changed into a frog. In an attempt to undo the damage, the children work their half-learned magic and soon every inhabitant of the park is caught up in a shape-shifting muddle. This is a short, schematic story in which the bright, anarchic, page-filling, cartoon-like pictures do as much work as the bold and simple text set into them. A very pleasing variant on the themes of mischief and magic. GH

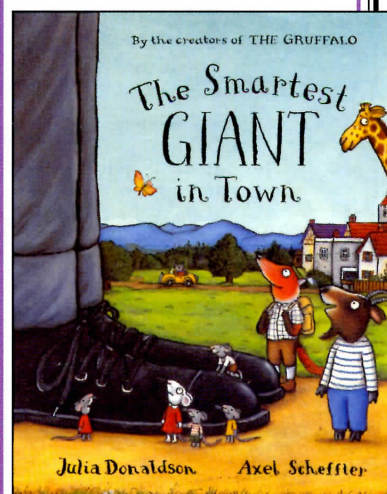
The Moon Jumpers

★★★★★

Janice May Udry, ill. Maurice Sendak, Red Fox, 32pp, 0 09 943294 3, £4.99 pbk



Editor's Choice



The Smartest GIANT in Town

★★★★★

Julia Donaldson, ill. Axel Scheffler, 32pp, Macmillan, 0 333 961447, £9.99 hbk

George the genial giant kits himself out with a smart new outfit only to find that the animals he meets on his way home all need his help. His new shirt becomes a sail, a new shoe a house for some mice, his sock a sleeping bag, and so forth. Feeling cold, George discovers his discarded shabby smock and sandals and puts them on again. Scheffler's stylish artwork creates an utterly convincing world in which George's size is unremarkable – there is even a giant's outfitters – as is a pig driving a car or fox in need of a sleeping bag. He adds delicious touches such as the female giant who eyes George with interest as he sets off in his smart new clothes and a rabbit talking earnestly into his mobile. There are also stories within the story as the animals tell of the disasters which have befallen them. Donaldson's plain yet rhythmic cumulative text and Scheffler's artwork complement each other wonderfully in this most accomplished and satisfying picture book. RS

A sparse, haunting text interleaved with seven double pages of Sendak's crepuscular paintings present a vivid description of the rise of a full moon and of the awe and joy this arouses in a family of young children.

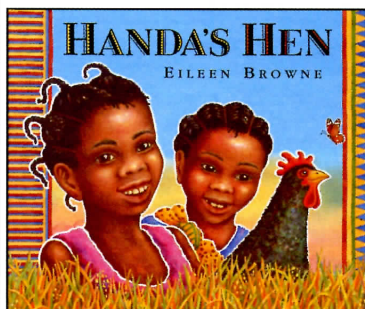
The story is told in brief, tersely poetic sentences, using an incantatory historic present. The pictures convey exhilaration, enchantment, a tinge of danger and a resigned return to bed. This is a simple, exciting and reassuring book. GH

The Lion Storyteller Book of Animal Tales

★★★

Bob Hartman, ill. Susie Poole, Lion, 120pp, 0 7459 4581 3, £10.99 hbk

A useful storytelling collection comprising three dozen largely traditional tales from around the



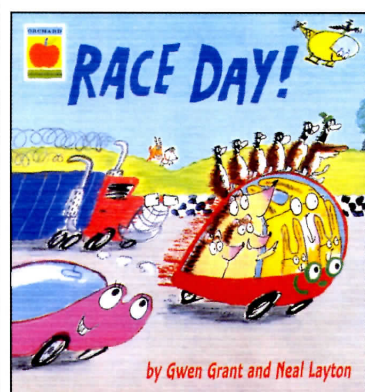
Handa's Hen

★★★★★

Eileen Browne, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 7502 8, £10.99 hbk

One morning Grandma's black hen is missing so Handa and her friend Akeyo set out to find her. On their search through the village, fields and bush they find 'two fluttery butterflies, three stripy mice... nine shiny starlings'. Finally as they trudge sadly back from the water hole Handa hears a 'cheep cheep' and Mond is discovered in the undergrowth with ten chicks.

There is so much to enjoy here: the engaging hide-and-seek story with natural built-in repetition, the fun of anticipating and counting, and above all, the stunning watercolour paintings of both the human characters and the south-west Kenyan village and its flora and fauna. A veritable treasure trove and a must for a big book edition. JB



Race Day!

★★★★★

Gwen Grant, ill. Neal Layton, Orchard, 32pp, 1 84121 090 0, £4.99 pbk

This humorous picture book is Wacky Races meets *The Hare and the Tortoise*. It's a tall order for Little Red Bubble Car as he competes against Supersonic Sporty, Old Chugger Tractor, Smokey-Chokey Lorry and Diesel Dumptruck on race day. The task is made all the more difficult as Little Red Bubble Car's kind nature

world together with a few of Hartman's own, specially written and retold for reading aloud. My favourites are 'The Crocodile Brother' and 'The Woman and the Bird', both from Africa and both with a message of living together in peace. As Hartman says in his introduction, 'Animal stories are really just stories about us'. So, also featured are ten of Aesop's fables, trickster tales from various cultures and a sprinkling of pourquoi tales.

I would want the storyteller's words

to paint the pictures in the first instance but Poole's lively watercolours adorning every double spread help to make the book more accessible particularly for children wanting to read the stories for themselves. **JB**

Hush Little Ones

NON-FICTION

★★★

John Butler, Orchard, 32pp, 1 84121 894 4, £10.99 hbk

This book invites children to join

animals from around the world as they go to sleep in their natural environments. Each baby – including rabbit, monkey, mouse, tiger, penguin, kangaroo, bear, zebra, duckling and whale – is shown snuggled close to its parent. So it would be a very comforting book to read to under-fours just before they go to sleep whether they are having a nap after lunch at nursery school or about to go to bed at home. The rhythmic, rhyming text will please: children will start to join in if this becomes part of the bedtime ritual.

The animals are all unbelievably pristine and children will not gain much insight into the behaviour and nature of the different species. But who wants to be frightened just before they go to sleep! The safe, nurturing world presented here will help children settle. **MM**

REVIEWS 5–8 Infant/Junior

Princesses Are Not Quitters!

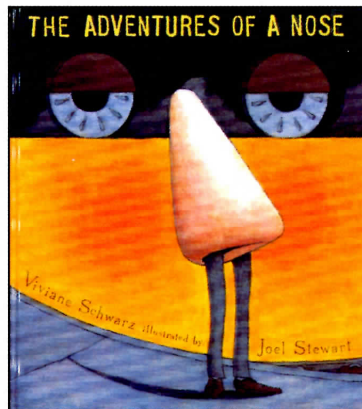
★★★★

Kate Lum, ill. Sue Hellard, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 5026 3, £9.99 hbk

A moral tale, with quite a bit of fun attached, this is the story of Princesses Allie, Mellie and Libby, who despite having all a reasonable sort of princess might wish for, are bored by palace life. Changing places with three servant girls seems like a good idea, but they discover that the life of a maidservant is a lot tougher than anticipated. It doesn't quite make republicans out of the three young women, but they do, on reverting to the life of princesses, decree that servants should have an easier time. Democracy even seems possible as on the closing spread we see them mucking in with the chores.

There are many entertaining visual asides in Hellard's busy line and watercolour illustrations which are a good balance for Lum's sparky narrative. An engaging and lively story, which despite the rather feminine title and cover should be enjoyed by boys as well as girls. **VC**

Beatles' songs (She loves you, yeah, yeah yeah...). There is the holiday romance... (will it last?)... whilst McNaughton's usual visual jokes litter each page. Once introduced, Preston Pig seems to remain a firm favourite over several years. All the books are readily accessible to the pre-school child, but still enjoyed by the 8–80s group! A must for every KS1 classroom and library, as well as the home bookshelf. **GB**



The Adventures of a Nose

★★★★

Viviane Schwarz, ill. Joel Stewart, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 8138 9, £10.99 hbk

A large nose, disembodied but for two legs protruding from its nostrils, embarks upon a journey of self-discovery, seeking a place where it can 'fit in and stick out'. As in many classic quest tales, there are animal guides both benign and ambiguous, expeditions to the ends of the earth, a crisis of disillusionment, and ultimate enlightenment delivered by a guru figure. The story is as surrealistic as Gogol's tale of the same name, and shares some of its concerns with identity and alienation, but it can be read quite comfortably with younger children as a tale of higher silliness. The design of the book is striking: large, bold simple print faces or overlays bright and vivid episodes in the Nose's quest, whilst alongside, pencil drawings and collages of 'found text' related to the episodes form thought-provoking, talk-evoking palimpsests. **GH**

George and the Dragon and other saintly stories

★★★

Richard Brassey, Orion, 32pp, 1 84255 019 5, £10.99 hbk

Seventeen stories of saints are told in this colourful and funny book. 'Were these saints bonkers?' asks the author at the start of the book as he explains how the saints were the heroes of the Christian church in the Middle Ages. Some are well known such as St George but there are lesser known and very strange tales such as 'St Frideswide and the Treacle Well', 'St Brendan who went Round in Circles', 'St Wilgefortis and the Bearded Bride' and 'St Simeon who Sat on a Pillar'.

The layout is occasionally confusing for a young reader as the main illustrations are overtaken by the narrative, with witty speech bubbles thrown in for good measure. I found it a little difficult to decide which age group this book is for. Younger children may need a slightly fuller account of each saint's story. Brassey's cleverly edited versions may be more suited to older children who will also appreciate the subtle humour contained in the speech bubbles. **AK**

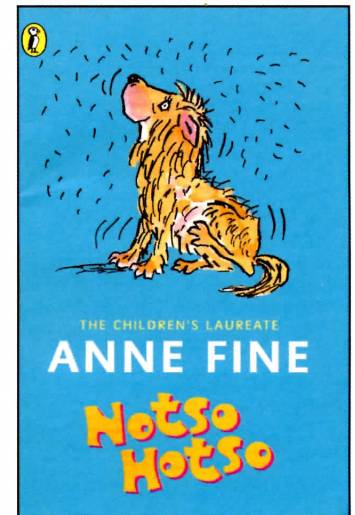
Little Old Mrs Pepperpot / Mrs Pepperpot Again

AUDIO BOOK

★★

Alf Prøysen, read by Penelope Keith, Cavalcade, 3 hrs 25 mins, unabridged, 0 7540 7163 4, £8.99 tape

A classic of the early 1960s, the stories of Little Old Mrs Pepperpot are quite charming but quickly begin to pall when listened to in a single sitting. Mrs Pepperpot is a perfectly normal person but she has a secret: sometimes she wakes up no bigger than a peppercorn. What happens then is certainly far from normal and Mrs Pepperpot's adventures as an object small enough to go in her husband's pocket are relatively entertaining. Alas, bossy little Mrs Pepperpot herself is not a very entertaining character and the fact that she has no control over the moments when she can change makes the magic of her transformation disappointingly arbitrary. Penelope Keith gets the best possible out of the stories: she doesn't labour the wit allowing the listener to decide for themselves whether what happens to Mrs Pepperpot is funny or not. **JE**



Notso Hotso

★★★★★

Anne Fine, ill. Tony Ross, Puffin, 96pp, 0 14 131250 5, £3.99 pbk

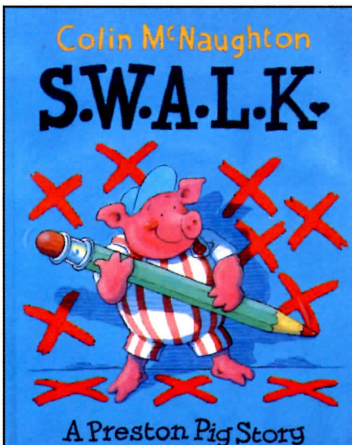
A must for the school library, this side-splittingly witty tale of embarrassment has a rather neglected dog, Anthony, as a central character. His owner is horrified when Anthony's skin problem gets to the point where bits of it threaten to spoil the furnishings in her pristine home. Anthony is horrified about what his friends down the park will think and also what the vet is going to do to him. Written in the first person by Anthony himself, the acute embarrassment is articulated superbly as Anthony is shaved from his tail up to his neck, giving him the appearance of a miniature lion. Following his initial shock, Anthony uses his new look to conjure up some fun. Revenge is sweet! Ross's ink and wash illustrations capture the agonies that Anthony goes through masterfully. **AK**

Horrid Henry and the Bogey Babysitter

★★★

Francesca Simon, ill. Tony Ross, Dolphin, 96pp, 1 85881 826 5, £3.99 pbk

Is Henry as horrid as ever? You bet, and in the latest collection of stories he manages to keep up his reputation as *enfant terrible*. His fans will not be disappointed at his latest antics, which include getting extra treats on Halloween night, scaring off a babysitter who looks as if she has him beaten (if she only but knew!), skirmishes with a rival gang, and making a car journey into the sort of



S.W.A.L.K.

★★★★★

Colin McNaughton, Andersen, 32pp, 1 84270 098 7, £9.99 hbk

Another HUGE hit, enormously loved by my class of six- and seven-year-olds! Fans of Preston Pig expect great things of each new adventure. And no one is disappointed here, in the seventh in the series, as Preston continues his friendship with Max, his holiday girlfriend, through lively letter-writing. Adults privileged to share this book with a child will enjoy lots of chuckles, in text and pictures. There are a couple of references to

occasion when his parents could be justified in practising road rage on him. Ross's illustrations only serve to emphasise the horrorbleness of Henry even more. You have been warned.

RL

The Secret Life of Ms Wiz

★★★★

Terence Blacker, ill. Tony Ross, Macmillan, 112pp, 0 333 99460 4, £9.99 hbk

This is the sixteenth title in a series about a remarkable teacher with paranormal powers. Ms Wiz has attitude and has, in previous tales, turned teachers into farmyard animals, fallen in love with Dracula, become the Prime Minister and visited the underworld. Unlike the other stories, *The Secret Life of Ms Wiz* is written in the first person, as Ms Wiz reveals the secrets of her extraordinary life beyond St Barnabas School. She travels with Jack, Podge and Caroline, three children from her class, millions of miles outside the known universe to the Kingdom of Paranormal Magic and Utter Eternal Mystery. Her ageing father is the ruler of this kingdom but he wants to retire and thinks Ms Wiz



should succeed him. Ms Wiz has many other sisters but none of them wants to be queen.

This delightfully dotty tale sees Ms Wiz in a dilemma; remain at St Barnabas or fulfil her paranormal royal obligations and become Queen. The hilarious tale rattles on at a pace, and with a smattering of Tony Ross sketches, each of the eight brisk

chapters is over before you know it. AK

The Earth from the Air for Children

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Yann Arthus-Bertrand, text by Robert Burleigh, ill. David Giraudon, Thames & Hudson, 80pp, 0 500 54261 9, £9.95 hbk

Most 'from the air' books succeed by rendering the familiar unrecognisable, thereby provoking a curiosity, the satisfaction of which reveals new unsuspected facts and features. This one reveals far more, and the phrase 'in a new light' will never be more apposite.

Arthus-Bertrand is obsessed by aerial views of unusual terrestrial features and has travelled the world – in what *Scotland on Sunday* dubbed 'the most comprehensive work of aerial photography ever published' – indulging this obsession. Using a cameramanship that *The Amateur Photographer* describes as 'little short of sensational' Bertrand uses light to extraordinarily creative effect as he shows us scarlet ibis in Venezuela, a mosaic of drying dates in Egypt, drying salt and carpets in Morocco

and our own Uffington white horse. Every spread is a surprise and delight; such is the photographer's skill that the accompanying text passes almost unnoticed (and the nauseating introduction – this is 'for children', remember – is better left unnoticed). Just by studying the pictures (34 but it seems like twice that) we learn more about varieties of natural form and ways of human life than may be got from a dozen well-meaning publishers' series.

This is a filleted version of Bertrand's previous *Earth from the Air* which sent *Scotland on Sunday* so rhapsodic and which the publishers call 'the world's most famous photography project'. Being a *Herald* reader, I'd never heard of it, but filleted or not the 'for children' bit is unhelpfully misleading. This book is a fine experience for what George Formby called 'folks of every age', and, as with what Mr Formby advised us to put on the ice, 'it'll never go bad.' At the price of a decent cafetière, this is remarkable value. It's a coffee-table book of the highest quality which, while rendering conversation superfluous, will stimulate buckets of it. I bet this guy listens to John Coltrane and Miles Davis! TP

REVIEWS 8–10 Junior/Middle

The Yellow Star: The Legend of King Christian X of Denmark

★★★★

Carmen Agra Deedy, ill. Henri Sørensen, Cat's Whiskers, 32pp, 1 903012 50 3, £10.99 hbk

This is a visually and textually charming book, which revives the myth of how King Christian of Denmark resisted anti-Semitism under Nazi occupation. According to the story, which first emerged in 1943, he insisted on being the first to wear the prescribed yellow star as he rode amongst his loyal people, and thus created the solidarity that caused them all to do the same. The implication is that this gesture saved most of the Jews of Denmark. As the informative appendix admits, it is a myth, but one that should be seen as inspiring in a time of threatened human rights.

Yes, but wasn't it also a piece of nationalist propaganda designed to rescue Denmark's pride after its failure to resist the Nazi invasion? This is a genuinely problematical, issue-raising book, and as such invaluable, as long as the children reading it are helped to find between the lines more of the story than they will find at first sight between the covers.

(http://www.dchf.dk/publications/books_and_articles/kingandthestar2.html, website of the Danish Centre for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, provides some interesting background information on the legend.) GH

The Worlds of Chrestomanci

AUDIO BOOK ★★★★★

Diana Wynne Jones, read by Anthony Head, Collins, 4 hrs,

unabridged, 0 00 714313 3, £12.99 tape

Anthony Head's throatily deadpan reading of these four wizardly stories is compelling. At the centre of each story is the tall, handsome enchanter, Chrestomanci, who must control the lesser wizards and warlocks who surround him. Anthony Head's measured tones seem to capture absolutely the enigmatic nature of Chrestomanci whose work is usually – but by no means always – for the good. As ever, Wynne Jones's invention is funny and refreshingly original returning a good name to stories of wizards. JE

Into the Lion's Den

★★★

Terry Deary, ill. Lynne Chapman, 80pp, 0 7136 6189 5, £8.99 hbk

Dear Ms

★★★★

Joan Poulson, ill. Charlotte Hard, 112pp, 0 7136 6072 4, £4.99 pbk

Something Slimy on Primrose Drive

★★★

Karen Wallace, ill. Helen Flook, 96pp, 0 7136 5993 9, £8.99 hbk

The Ramsbottom Rumble

★★

Georgia Byng, ill. Helen Flook, 96pp, 0 7136 6173 9, £4.99 pbk

A & C Black 'Black Cats'

The 'Black Cats' series promises fast, exciting stories for fluent readers age eight plus and Deary's *Into the Lion's Den* certainly matches that description. It's an action-packed adventure set against the background

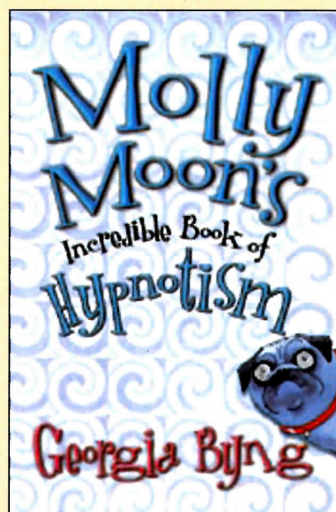
NEW Talent

Molly Moon's Incredible Book of Hypnotism

★★★★

Georgia Byng, Macmillan, 336pp, 0 333 98489 7, £12.99 hbk

Orphan Molly lives at Hardwick House orphanage under the far from benevolent care of Miss Adderstone. Her only escape from bullying and deprivation is in daydreams or the occasional visit from Mrs Trinklebury, the kind village woman who looked after her when she was small. In a series of fast-moving events Molly and her friend, Rocky, use hypnotism (learnt about from a library book) to create a better life for themselves. So far so rather standard children's book fare, albeit with pacey plotting – but where Byng is more deeply adventurous is in the final section of the story where Molly and Rocky become aware of the need for inner as well as material transformations. Thus, is Molly only liked because she can hypnotise people into liking her? There is also no need for revenge in this novel – the orphanage bully, Hazel, in turn risks facing herself and confronting the possibility of inner change (unlike the horrid sisters in Eva Ibbotson's *Journey to the River Sea*).



The song that Mrs Trinklebury used to sing to her small charges ('Forgive, little bird, that brown cuckoo/ For pushing you out of your nests./ It's what mamma cuckoo taught it to do/ She taught that pushing is best.') resonates throughout this novel about nestless children. It could be used to support Oliver James's recent and deeply unsurprising thesis* that poor early childhood parenting or the lack of any parenting can indeed f**k you up. RS

* *They F**k You Up* by Oliver James is published by Bloomsbury.

of a particularly horrible bit of history, the Roman gladiatorial games where Christians were thrown to the lions. The book mixes real and invented characters – the trio of unfortunate Christians waiting to face the lions is invented as are the evil animal keeper and noble attendant boy but the Emperor Marcus Aurelius and his son and daughter Commodus and Lucilla

were real. The book is packed with historical information but Deary knows exactly how to keep his readers hooked. The pace never flags and there's an equal mix of humour and excitement.

Deary's book uses diary entries, gladiatorial reports, letters, even diagrams to break up the text. Poulson's *Dear Ms* uses letters, notes passed between children in class and



text messages – and nothing but – to tell the stories of her characters, football-mad David, popular Mandy, depressed Kate, outsider Tracey and down-to-earth Steve. She uses this format really well; the truth about what's happening to each child outside school is gradually revealed as those bites of direct first-person narrative create characters we genuinely care about. The book doesn't shy away from the ordinary misery of life, family break-up in particular, and is often genuinely poignant.

Something Slimy on Primrose Drive is a zany, madcap adventure. It tells of two sets of neighbours, the ultra conservative Rigid-Smythes and the Wolfbanes, newly arrived, weird but desperate to fit in. There's more than a touch of the Adamases about the Wolfbane family although, in all the excitement of the plot – the two families find out they actually have much in common then unite to retrieve a suitcase full of cash stolen from the Rigid-Smythes by an unscrupulous and phoney property developer – it's never really made clear whether the Wolfbanes are truly supernatural or just acting it. Trifles like this won't spoil the fun for young readers though.

The weakest of the bunch is Byng's **The Ramsbottom Rumble** which while it shares some of the tempo of Wallace's book suffers from a very old-fashioned story – two boys set out to prove that their gran's new suitor is a trickster up to no good – and a plot which relies on the serial stupidity of old women. AR

The Secret Summer of Daniel Lyons

★★★

Roy Apps, Barn Owl Books, 128pp, 1 903015 16 2, £4.99 pbk
It is 1909 and 14-year-old Tom Jupe dreams of being a photographer or better still a cameraman in the brand new motion picture industry. But his parents are 'Prims' – Primitive Methodists and deeply suspicious of cinematography. When a company of film makers moves into Tom's little Sussex town however, he can't keep

away, even though it means deceiving his parents, and soon he is living a double life as Daniel Lyons, his choice of pseudonym inspired by his bible studies, helping the crew, playing a part in a film and, at the book's climax, defending the company against the violent attentions of the sinister 'busters'.

This is an unusual and original story told with pace and a good deal of humour. Apps brings the early twentieth century to life with skill and warmth, packing in lots of information and detail together with a real sense of affection and respect for his characters. AR



The Greeks on Stage

★★★★

Geraldine McCaughrean, ill. Richard Brassey, 336pp, Dolphin, 1 84255 034 9, £7.99 pbk

Dramatising twenty-five myths for children seems from these versions, a very good idea. McCaughrean knows so well how to tell a good story and how to retell a good old story for today's young people. These mostly well-known stories become an array of voices: gods and mortals, Apollo with a ventriloquist's dummy (yes 'gocckle of geer'), and Icarus mimicking aeroplane noises as he flies. Dialogue reflects the characters and is mostly straightforwardly simple with some glimpses of the richness of the original stories. The scripts are well-planned with helpful guidance about staging, useful stage directions and link scenes to make a longer sequence. This is a book that many groups of children will have a lot of fun using (pity about the price). AJ

Dan's Angel

INFORMATION STORY ★★

Alexander Sturgis, ill. Lauren Child, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 1884 6, £10.99 hbk

Attempts to introduce children to famous works of art have been coming off the presses with increasing regularity in the past couple of years. The idea of carrying out detective work in order to explore

why an artist painted particular objects or in a certain style has been used effectively before. Dan's Angel certainly has a lively narrative as Dan, the boy detective, is guided through an art gallery by an angel who has escaped, temporarily, from a 15th-century masterpiece by Angelico. In colourful spreads, techniques and symbolism used by Jackson Pollock, Picasso, Botticelli and Van Gogh, amongst others, are explained to Dan. The problem with such books is how they bridge the fiction/non-fiction gap. There is a danger in falling into it. Primarily this book aims to explain symbolism in art to a young audience. But how young? Children who are mature enough to understand such symbolism probably don't need Lauren Child's very striking cartoon characters to gain access to this area. The contrast between Child's artwork and that contained in the masterpieces is purposefully stark, but the fiction element is a distraction from the non-fiction element. AK

Growing up in the Seventies

0 7502 4086 5

Growing up in the Eighties

0 7502 4088 1

NON-FICTION

★★★

Kathryn Walker, Hodder
Wayland, 32pp, £10.99 each hbk

Part of a series that examines what it was like to be a child in different decades in the last century, this is well-trodden territory, prompted by the National Curriculum's requirement to study the effect of change on adults' and children's lives in Britain since 1930 in History at Key Stage 2. What sets these two titles apart are the portraits of four individuals in each book whose personal recollections shed light on events such as decimalization of the currency or the Queen's Silver Jubilee. Factual information is interspersed with family snapshots of picnics and holidays, school concerts and exam results. The slices of daily life are the most interesting, with photos of an interminable supermarket queue in the 70s, toy crazes one has quite forgotten, food packaging and adverts. Bigger issues and world events are only briefly touched on, but more ephemeral matters such as fashion, pop music and TV are amply covered. SU

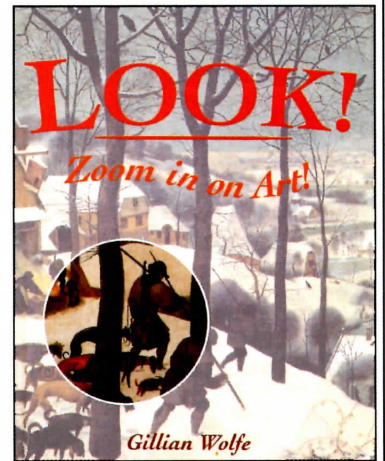
Look! Zoom in on Art!

NON-FICTION

★★★★★

Gillian Wolfe, Frances Lincoln, 40pp, 0 7112 1905 2, £12.99 hbk

How can we help children find interesting and illuminating ways of looking at paintings? Wolfe chooses eighteen paintings on different subjects and from different periods and invites children of between about seven and eleven years to look at them in a variety of ways. Sometimes we might look quickly to gain the full impact of a dynamic picture or, on



other occasions, we might allow our eye to wander from a foreground to a distant landscape, perhaps homing in on a particular small detail. Changing the orientation of a work affects our perception of it: the trapeze artist in Curry's 'The Flying Codonas' and the buildings in Sheeler's 'Windows' look very different when viewed upside down.

Intriguing snippets of information are offered: the pie in Frederick Cotman's 'One of the Family' was stuffed with coal so that it kept its shape for the days it took to paint it. Landseer, known for his paintings of animals with expressive eyes, exhibited his first painting at The Royal Academy when he was only twelve years old. And Ravilious only painted with watercolour, calling oil paint 'too thick, like toothpaste'. The book has a wonderfully uncluttered look and the quality of the paper helps each picture shine out of the pages. So it would be a lovely book for a child to own as well as a good text to support art and English work at school. There is a useful 'look it up' section which tells us more about the artists and where the paintings discussed in the book can be seen. The clear text accompanying the quality illustrations seeks to genuinely involve young readers and to make them think and wonder. There are a lot of questions and ideas to stimulate good discussion. What would be another good name for Bridget Riley's 'Cataract 3'? How can you tell that it is an old-fashioned train in Eric Ravilious' 'Train Landscape'? Can a painting just be about shape and colour rather than meaning and memory?

Children are encouraged to think of themselves as artists as well as appreciators of art. They might, it is suggested, try sketching to record memories of a place as an alternative to taking photographs. Or they might take inspiration from Jan Steen's 'The Poultry Yard' and use thick paint, collage or pastels to see if they can achieve the texture of feathers, tree bark and clothes in their own pictures. Applying this sort of effort in their own work is likely to encourage deeper scrutiny of the paintings they look at and greater appreciation of the technical and imaginative achievements of great painters. MM

PICTURE BOOKS REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE RELEVANT TO OLDER READERS:

The Adventures of a Nose (see p25)

The Earth from the Air for Children (see p26)

The Yellow Star: The Legend of King Christian X of Denmark (see p26)

REVIEWS 10-14 Middle/Secondary

Star Dragon

★★

Douglas Hill, ill. Tony Ross,
76pp, 1 84299 046 2

Resistance

★★

Ann Jungman, ill. Alan Marks,
92pp, 1 84299 047 0

Young Dracula

★★★

Michael Lawrence, ill. Chris
Mould, 76pp, 1 84299 051 9

Mad Iris

★★★★

Jeremy Strong, ill. Scoular
Anderson, 76pp, 1 84299 052 7

Barrington Stoke, £4.50 each
pbk

A series of books where popular authors and illustrators combine to tell accessible stories simply to top juniors and older pupils is bound to be well liked by pupils, teachers and parents if successful. It's not easy. **Star Dragon** shows the problems with its flat and simple sentence structures and little compensation of a story. The formula becomes just that and we might just as well keep to reading schemes. **Resistance** tries to do much more, telling the potentially moving story of two Dutch children whose parents collaborate with the Nazis, leaving the children hated but eventually able to help the resistance. But, here too, the telling, like the development of the story and its emotional life, feels partial and more like a summary. You feel that the readers have been short-changed. **Young Dracula** works better in telling a witty story with some style. There is an unfortunate swap at birth which leaves the Dracula child misplaced (and called Smirk) while the natural child feels strangely out of key with the Count who says: 'You're not a vampire, Wilfred, you're a wimpire.' Good fun, but apart from the excitement and suspense of a chase this is undemanding and unambitious. The most successful of the four is **Mad Iris** where Jeremy Strong is in his element, fast and furious, knowing exactly how to pitch a story to juniors and leave them something to think about as well. The arrival of the frenetic ostrich into school allows Ross to appreciate Katie, and find a way of defeating the men in black who come to turn Iris into meat. Story and storytelling in combination. These four titles in the series demonstrate the formula but also the old truth that it is one thing to be readable and another to be worth reading. Simplicity is a tough ingredient in cooking a satisfying story.

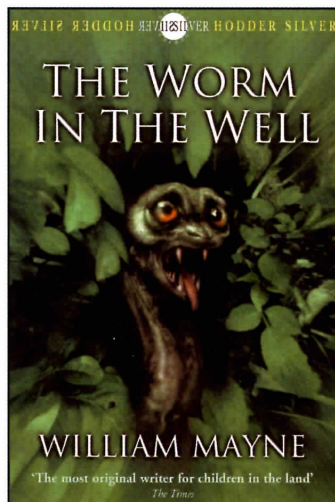
AJ

The Worm in the Well

★★★★

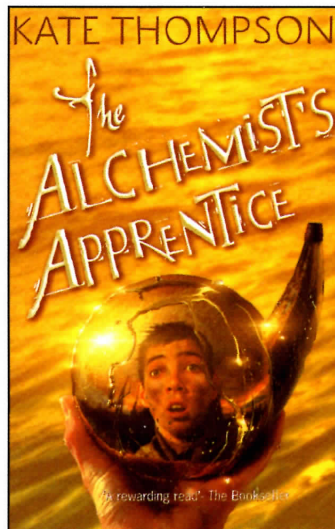
William Mayne, Hodder Silver,
160pp, 0 340 81712 7, £4.99 pbk

It might be just a retelling of the Lambton Worm story but this is Mayne as storyteller trickster, mixing tales and styles with his wonderful ability to conjure up otherness through language which is the equivalent of the visual illusion. At its



simplest it is about Robin and Meric, the sons of local lords. They go fishing and, in disobeying the witch, Granny Shaftoe, unleash events which start with Meric's disappearance and the finding of the baby Margaret. Robin tells the stories of all this to Alan, his son, and Margaret who themselves go fishing. Alan is told by Granny Shaftoe to keep whatever he catches but, when faced by the monster on his line, cannot do it and, this time, Margaret disappears. Alan joins the crusade, like Robin and Meric before him, and returns to find that the monster has destroyed his home and all around it. He has to do the right thing. The story is unexpectedly very funny, often darkly so, particularly in the devouring of the worm's victims and the seediness of the crusade, and so well written that shape-shifting is part of the fabric of the language. A folk-tale fuelled with life.

AJ



The Alchemist's Apprentice

★★★★

Kate Thompson, The Bodley
Head, 160pp, 0 370 32545 1,
£10.99 hbk

While quite a number of children's books set out to convey the sense of what Kate Thompson calls 'a world full of contradictions and obstacles', few succeed in doing so with such power and wisdom as she does here. Set in the early 18th century, this is the story of Jack, a 14-year-old apprentice farrier, whose discovery

one morning of a strange object floating in the Thames is the prelude to a journey into, and out of, the fascinating world of alchemy. En route, as the plot moves between London and Yorkshire, Jack's encounters with a colourful (and occasionally sinister) gallery of characters provide him with many opportunities to experience both the rapture and the disillusionment of materialistic endeavour. Is it gold in the hand or gold in the spirit that ultimately matters? Thompson's skill in encompassing such speculation within a beautifully paced and atmospheric narrative is truly remarkable and goes far to illuminate what Jack, as the story ends, designates 'our long painful darkness'.

RD

Branded

★★★

M E Allen, Egmont, 192pp,
0 7497 4636 X, £4.99 pbk

Branded was written by a mother-and-son partnership, which may account for the perfectly observed dialogue from both parents and offspring in this often hilarious, fast-paced read. The storyline revolves around an attempt by the central (un-named) protagonist to acquire a girlfriend and so return to an equal footing with his best friend Ric. There are several entertaining set pieces – the summer barbeque, the family wedding, the school disco, the Female Icon talent contest, requiring boys to dress as famous women. These are executed with a fine grasp of the burlesque and a great deal of energy, providing both light entertainment and food for thought eg. gender stereotyping raises its head in the chapters devoted to the Female Icon competition.

The denouement is too obvious, too early – a girlfriend has been patiently waiting in the wings until the frantic flailings of courtship are over, with no end result. Sandi, faithful friend since junior school, takes on a new role as girlfriend just in time to rescue the narrator and make a sequel necessary.

VR

The Dark Horse

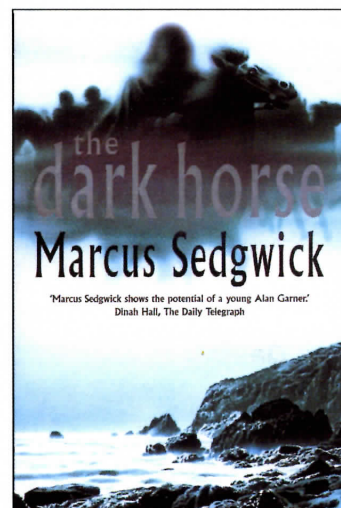
★★★★

Marcus Sedgwick, Orion,
192pp, 1 84255 215 5, £7.99 hbk

Sedgwick's dark tapestry weaves loyalty and betrayal in a stark, affecting narrative. The Storn are a simple people, living close to nature and dependent on it. When crop yields are poor and the fishing fails, suspicion falls on Mouse, the strange, silent child found in a cave of wolves.

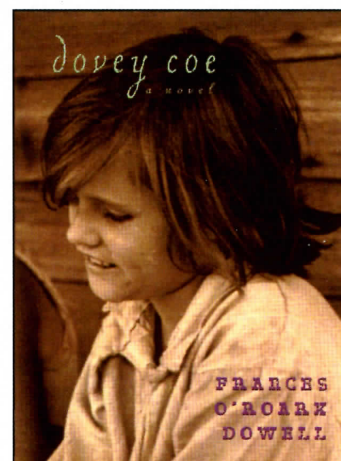
Sigurd takes Mouse as his sister, encouraging her to use her powers to aid his people in the struggle to overcome the vagaries of the natural world and their own apathy – a listlessness which prevents them fulfilling their potential – an over-reliance on a flawed leader and awe of ancient and ineffectual traditions.

Sigurd is used by Mouse when she allows herself to be reclaimed by her people, the bleakly vicious Dark Horse. This bitter act of betrayal shatters the Storn on every level but under Sigurd's leadership they find a new, determined way to survive. The



compelling narrative is divided between Sigurd and Sedgwick, giving at once an intense intimacy and a broader perspective – a wider framework within which to enclose the immediacy and directness of Sigurd's experience.

VR



Dovey Coe

★★★★

Frances O'Roark Dowell,
Walker, 192pp, 0 7445 9029 9,
£4.99 pbk

Set in the 1920s, with shades of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (prejudice and courtroom drama in the USA) and Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* stories (proud, hardworking country family, much loved disabled sibling), this is a thoroughly enjoyable, old fashioned tale with modern sensibilities. The spirited North Carolina dialect draws you in from the opening pages and Dovey is a wonderful character, sassy, honest and wise. Her deaf brother Amos, is a bit of a second fiddle character but O'Roark Dowell's heart is in the right place and he plays an important part in the conclusion of the story.

12-year Dovey Coe's strong opinions often get her into trouble, particularly when she speaks her mind about local no-good rich boy Parnell who thinks he can buy the affections of her beautiful sister Caroline but who is foul to Dovey and 13-year-old Amos. Unlike Caroline, Dovey never wants to leave the mountain home her grandfather built in 1844 and would happily roam

the mountains all day with Amos and his dogs. But when Caroline publicly rejects Parnell's marriage proposal, things turn nasty, especially when he threatens to get Amos sent away. Covey tries to stop him when she finds him trying to kill Amos' dog, but receives a beating herself. When she wakes up from this she finds Parnell lying dead by her side and is accused of his murder.

If the National Curriculum and school funding allowed it, this would make a good shared reader for Years 6 or 7 – the ending provides an interesting moral dilemma. The book itself has an unusual square-ish format and is a pleasure to hold in your hands. **LC**

Jim Davis

★★

John Masefield, with an introduction by Michael Morpurgo, ill. David Frankland, Chicken House, 224pp, 1 903434 64 5, £4.99 pbk

The language and outdatedness of this 1911 adventure could challenge the stickability of many modern readers. Coincidences and credibility leaps abound as the eponymous young hero adventures forth with the ne'er-do-well smuggling fraternity of South Devon. It is adrenaline pumping stuff with not a special effect in sight; just the sea coast and caves of the two sides of The Channel and the battle of wits against The Authorities.

The process of being captured, frightened witless and subjected to a fair bit of pain and not a few deaths is intended to make a man of Jim, which the author obviously wishes to underline to his reader. Today's youth might just see it as an old fashioned yarn. **DB**

Waking Dream

★★★★

Rhiannon Lassiter, Macmillan, 224pp, 0 333 96007 6, £9.99 hbk

This clever and ambitious novel leads the reader from a recognisable world, give or take a bit of magic, into a dreamscape littered with mythological, psychological and literary allusions. It is a coming of age novel, in that the protagonists, teenage cousins Bethany, Poppy and Rivalaun, come to a realisation of who they are and what they might become. Each is the child of one of three brothers, all of whom have supernatural powers. There are considerable tensions between the charismatic Poppy and the reflective, inhibited Bethany, and Rivalaun's arrival does not calm these.

The story begins with the reading of the will of Bethany's artist father, Felix. Her specific inheritance is one of Felix's own paintings, a seemingly conventional landscape, which is the conduit into the dream kingdom through which each pilgrim cousin must find a way. Like all dreams nothing in this land is constant, and at times Lassiter is struggling to hold the dream aura without losing her reader in a slough of confusion. Divided throughout into a series of short chapters, the first half consists of entries from the journals of each of the cousins, and the second part, tracking their journey through the land of dream, is narrated in the third person, but holding the focus on each of the three. Meanwhile, through their journals, in which the

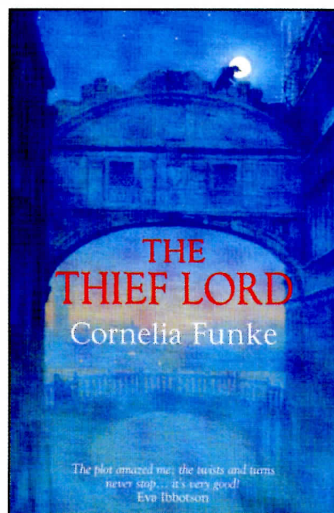
story magically appears, the parents can see what is happening but are powerless to guide their children. This is a brave book: Lassiter has a many-layered story to tell, and she is not afraid to take risks with form and structure. A book for literary readers, they will enjoy, and perhaps feel challenged by its allegorical resonance and by the stanzas at the beginning of each chapter, drawn from a galaxy of British and Irish poets. **VC**

Carwash

★★★★

Lesley Howarth, Puffin, 256pp, 0 14 131079 0, £4.99 pbk

The cover and blurb would lead you to believe that this is just a conventional teenage romance but that's not likely with Howarth. Luke is the budding entrepreneur, the carwash specialist at the moment, whose conceit might be damning in a simpler book. But like the array of other teenage characters, quirks and faults bring people together rather than separating them. Luke's development is seen in sudden reckless acts of generosity towards his apparently hapless brother (why did no one realise that he needed glasses?) and the beautiful Liv. The main characters are seen through their own voice, weaving their way through teenage complexities, without simple resolutions but with a humour and resilience which the oldies seem to have lost. A gentle and humane story, very funny in a dry and droll way, about daring to be different – and that goes for the book as much the plot. There are lovely recurring details like the adverts for the lost cats and dogs (cat-lovers can be reassured that cats are safe here). They may, like one 'lost' dog, be rediscovered boarding a bus as a regular commuter having found a different and probably better home. As the character nicknamed Innit would have it (and he has the last word) it's a good read, innit? **AJ**



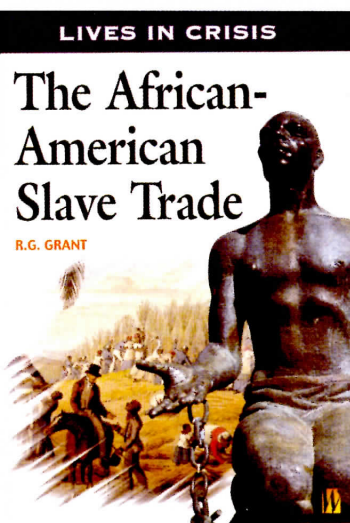
The Thief Lord

★★★★★

Cornelia Funke, trans. Oliver Latsch, The Chicken House, 352pp, 1 903434 77 7, £5.99 pbk

12-year-old Prosper and his 5-year-old brother Bo are on the run in Venice. On their trail is Victor Getz, a bumbling detective hired by an aunt who, following their mother's death, wishes to separate them by adopting

Bo and placing Prosper in boarding school. Initially, they join three other child runaways who have made a home of a disused cinema. Their lives are sustained by petty theft and protected by teenage Scipio, a young man who, in one of the novel's numerous twists, turns out to be very different from what he originally seems. As Victor Getz reflects on first discovering Scipio's real identity, the world is full of surprises. It is this element of surprise that the story triumphantly celebrates, through its ingenious plotting and its convincing moves between the worlds of childhood and adulthood, their shared losses, disappointments and moments of recovery and joy. The grandeur and decay of the Venetian setting, its misty alleyways, its heraldic lions and its many masks provide a wonderfully atmospheric dimension to a totally absorbing narrative. Translated by Oliver Latsch from the original German, this has to be one of the highlights of the children's literature year. **RD**



The African-American Slave Trade

R G Grant, 0 7502 4028 8

South Africa Since Apartheid

Sean Sheehan, 0 7502 4027 X

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Wayland 'Lives in Crisis', 64pp, £12.99 each hbk

The new titles in Wayland's modern history series deal with two very different time spans. Grant's tackles nearly three hundred years of the growth and consequences of the transatlantic slave trade, while Sheehan has only just over a decade of the struggling new South Africa to assess. Grant has the benefit of some hindsight, and much historical research, while Sheehan has to sift through today's headlines to form a coherent account.

Both do their job well, helped by an accessible series format which features a narrative text in self-contained chapters. These chapters give them enough space to examine individual aspects of their subjects in reasonable depth.

Grant keeps his subject manageable by focusing on the slave trade itself, and offering less on slavery as a social institution. He also concentrates on the USA, referring to South America and the Caribbean largely for comparative purposes; and including

more than is usual of the African end of the trade.

Both authors handily integrate the historical context of their subjects and introduce controversial questions in a way that encourages readers to make their own judgements. They strike a good balance between overall analyses of social, economic and political trends and the consideration of the individual experiences implied in the series title. Sheehan examines statistical evidence for change, while acknowledging, especially in his discussion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the deep changes in attitudes, behaviour and expectations involved in moving beyond a society firmly rooted in racial inequity and injustice.

The series is at a level of difficulty to suit researchers of up to 16 years of age. It also acts as an introduction to each subject for older students. Both titles draw mainly on adult secondary sources. Grant, while providing a full bibliography, is careful to pick out titles for further reading that might not be too daunting. With his usual consideration for his readership, he includes novels, films and biography. **CB**

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NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Hodder Wayland 'Mediawise', 64pp, £12.99 each hbk

Part of the Literacy programme requires that children become accustomed to reading and distinguishing different kinds of text – not just fiction, but a wide spectrum of non-fiction including newspaper reports, travel journals and biography. They are also encouraged to explore how the media present information in Citizenship studies too, so Wayland's new series 'Mediawise' will be welcomed as a useful resource for understanding the workings of the media, the technology and the processes. Each of the four titles here provides a factual and informed account of the industry from knowledgeable authors and consultants, and there are useful quotes from leading figures as well as a good selection of up-to-date photos to give a flavour of what goes on behind the scenes. However, there is surprisingly little discussion about the ethics or issues involved, no debate about the role of investigative journalism or the invasion of privacy, and no information about industry watchdogs. Given the fact that the Curriculum encourages children to compare different ways in which the media portray a single event, this lack of questioning seems a strange omission. The series will perhaps prove most useful as an insight into the adult workplace, and for those interested in pursuing a career in the industry each title provides a range of job profiles with details of qualifications required and relevant organisations for reference. **SU**

Why are Castles Castle-Shaped?

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Ill. Peter Gregory, cartoons by Mark Davis, 0 571 21437 1

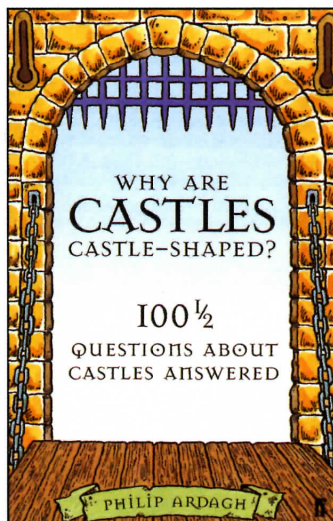
The Archaeologist's Handbook

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Ill. Kevin Maddison, 0 571 20687 5

Philip Ardagh, Faber, 128pp, £4.99 each pbk

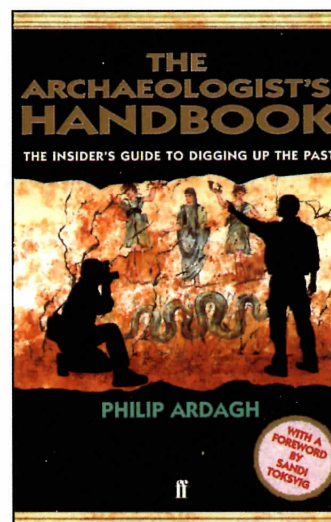
Two nicely produced paperbacks, the first is an approachable and easily digested question and answer book on castles, full of information in Philip Ardagh's chatty, informal style. Don't be irritated by his diversions in so many different directions – you will undoubtedly learn plenty of interesting things *en route*. Line drawings provide additional information on armour or the feudal pyramid for example, as well as a pictorial sequence of the changing shape of castles from 11th-century



motte and bailey to 16th-century Tudor rose. Quizzes intersperse the questions, while a glossary and index help you track down specific information. Slightly frustrating that the only actual castles mentioned are

the Tower of London and six famous castles in other parts of the world (Krak des Chevaliers et al), but for a broad sweep on medieval life, this is an entertaining volume.

The Archaeologist's Handbook by the same author offers a much more satisfying approach to the history of the past. In a light-hearted foreword, Sandi Toksvig (not just a comic writer but President of the Young Friends of the British Museum) tells us 'this marvellous handbook covers the lot...in here is everything you need to know'. Her words of praise are quite justified, for it is indeed an excellent introduction to modern archaeology, from the basic methods of excavation with trowel and barrow to the most up-to-date technological advances. Ardagh includes descriptions of five of the most famous and exciting archaeological finds including Pompeii, Troy and Tutankhamun's tomb, with plenty of spooky stuff about the curse of the mummy. If you want a thoroughly readable update on archaeology today, this is highly recommended, and it should be required reading for all who volunteer to join a dig. **SU**



REVIEWS 14+ Secondary/Adult

Weetzie Bat (Dangerous Angels, Part I)

★★★

Francesca Lia Block, Atom Books, 128pp, 1 904233 03 1, £5.00 pbk

This short novel is a children's fairy story for streetwise teenagers. Originally published in America in 1989, it is the first of five books under the series title 'Dangerous Angels'. The dangerous angel is love, and Weetzie Bat, an American girl in very late adolescence, is in search of it. So is her first boyfriend Dirk, who proves not to be the answer to Weetzie's dreams but a fellow-dreamer, because he is gay. Helped by the three wishes granted her by a genie, Weetzie is able to set up house for them both, each with a partner. Between them the male threesome, one straight and two gay, provide Weetzie with the next accessory she craves, a baby. Eventually a second baby is deposited on their doorstep by a witch, and the domestic circle (augmented by numerous dogs) is complete.

Set in Los Angeles, this zany story is part send-up and part celebration of young adult life in the hot, cool, one-off city, where a wild hedonism, greedy for food and drink and sex and sun, is shadowed by the unnamed, omnipresent threat of AIDS. Although its raw anarchic invention has almost lyrical intensity, the writing is oddly parochial in both time and place. A successful transatlantic crossing seems unlikely. **PH**

Who is Jesse Flood?

★★★★

Malachy Doyle, Bloomsbury, 176pp, 0 7475 5960 0, £5.99 pbk

Jesse Flood (age 14) doesn't know who he is but the one thing he is certain about is his feeling for Sophie Cameron aka Yellow Lilly. Through the course of one summer the story follows Jesse's growing self-awareness as he reflects on the experiences that have impacted on his life to date; his sense of confusion when his mother abandons him; his relationship with his abusive drunken father and an uneasy friendship with the older but irresponsible Flynn.

Malachy Doyle has a distinctive and accomplished narrative voice. The opening chapter, in which Jesse tests himself by anticipating and experiencing the sensation of a passing train in a railway tunnel, is startling and totally gripping; the pacing is perfect, leaving the reader physically breathless. Doyle's unusual use of a second-person narration positions the reader as witness to the event and heightens the sense of involvement. I was less convinced with the subplot of the search for a missing boy; though this can be seen as a counterpoint to Jesse's move towards self-discovery it was, I thought, insufficiently developed.

In *Who is Jesse Flood?* Doyle creates a portrait of male youth which shows that masculinity and sensitivity are not antithetical. **NG**

Bright Angel

★★★

Carol Hedges, Oxford, 192pp, 0 19 271898 3, £6.99 pbk

Hedges envisages an end of the twenty-second century where peace and world government is the norm. Otherwise there are remarkable similarities to our own daily life; school still seems to figure, relationships are as problematic and politics is tainted with more than a

whiff of shadiness.

Her main characters are Bryn, who seems normal enough, Jade, a kind of clairvoyant girlfriend, Kirrin the nerdy side-kick, and a unique, antique hacker's computer called Ned. As the tale unfolds the fight between God and his fallen angels goes into replay with *The Apocalypse* dangerously near. This suspense/thriller becomes a compulsive read, but it'll take a good dose of background Biblical Knowledge for the ending to be totally appreciated. **DB**

The Shell House

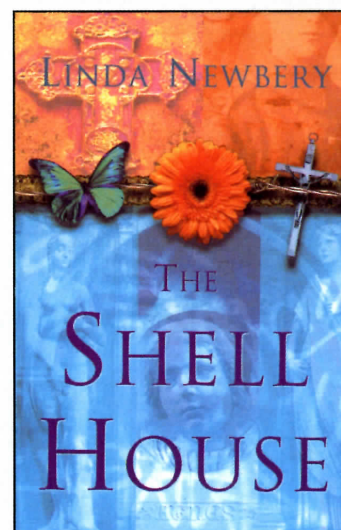
★★★★

Linda Newbery, David Fickling Books, 352pp, 0 385 60389 4, £10.99 hbk

This is an ambitious and complex literary novel whose tone is set by the preface of a poem from Larkin's *Whitsun Weddings*. It weaves two narratives. One concerns the life-changing experiences of Edmund, the young heir to a country estate, during the First World War. The other charts the developing artistic and emotional sensibilities of Greg, a modern sixth-former. Their worlds intersect at the now derelict country house, which would have been Edmund's inheritance, had it not burnt down mysteriously at the time of his apparent death at the front.

The novel is part historical detective story, as Greg and his friend Faith gradually discover the truth of the fire and Edmund's death. It is also a meditation on growing up in a world where there are no moral certainties.

Newbery is tackling a number of issues (class, sexuality and religious belief among them) and moving between past and present, with a variety of conflicting voices, including those recruited from Greg's syllabus, like Hardy, Owen and Plath. Occasionally, the narrative frame creaks under the weight of these concerns and the symbolism that attaches to them, especially as most



of these themes have been aired recently in similar guises in adult and young adult novels.

Whether present-day young people like Greg and Faith would be so exercised about religion is doubtful. Yet intelligent and questioning readers will recognise the intensity of their engagement with the great questions of love and death, particularly through art and literature. Newbery's characters do convince us of how much all this matters, and there is excitement and apprehension in seeing how they work out their fates. **CB**

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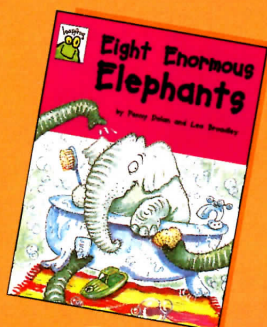
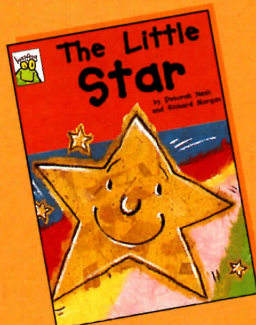
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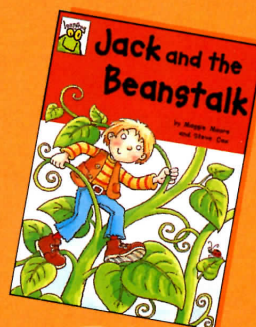
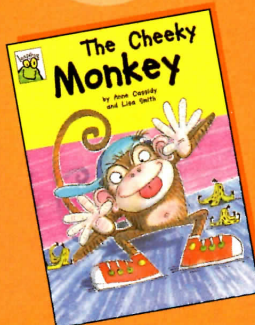
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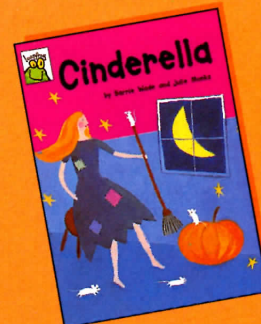
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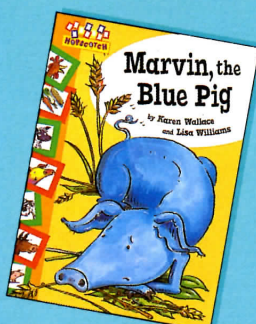
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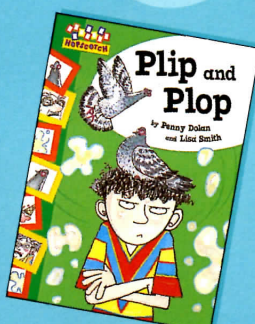
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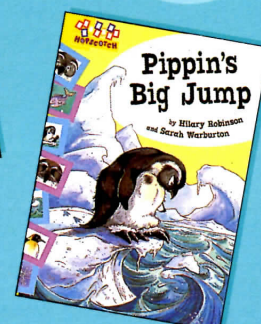
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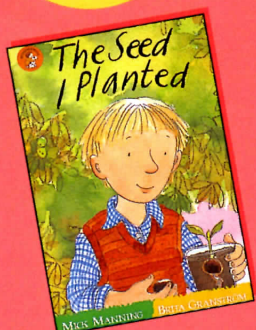
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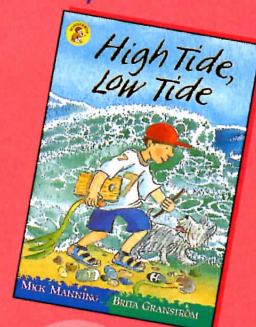
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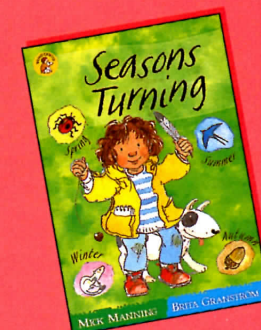
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CLASSICS IN SHORT No. 36

Brian Alderson

'What fools mortals were! They had not so much as a spayed bitch in a house with two ghosts in it.' But at least they had Hobberdy Dick...



Philip Pullman is not the only chap

to give the chapters of his fictions apposite epigraphs. Pretentious, say some ('Look! I've read *Paradise Lost* ... *Jerusalem* ... *The Faerie Queene* ...') but such things can lend a kind of authentication to the text, placing a new story in an old tradition.

That is certainly true

of the epigraphs which Katharine Briggs chose for the twenty-five chapters of *Hobberdy Dick*, and these also bear witness to her pre-eminence as a folklorist, which I mention in my review (p22) of the reissue of her *British Folk-Tales*. Nursery rhymes, border ballads, snatches of folktale, seventeenth-century poetry are all aptly laid under contribution in order to root her historical romance in the ambience of its times.

The romance,

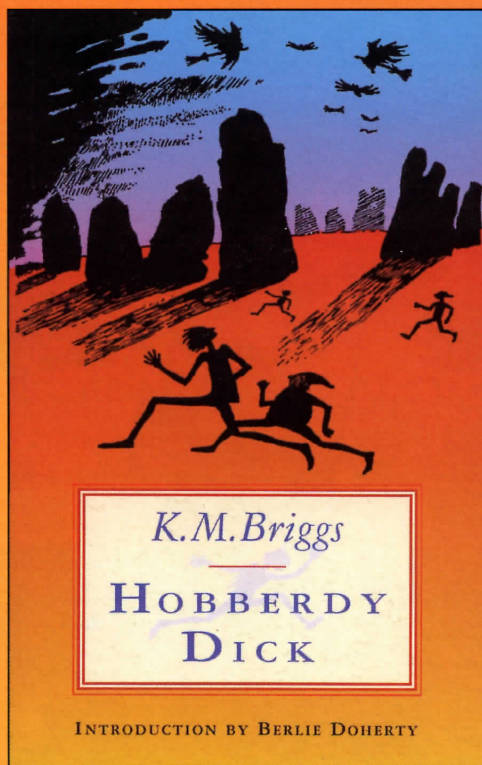
set in Nollie Cromwell's time, is conventional enough: a puritan Cheapside merchant has ambitions for the squirearchy and moves his family to Widford in Oxfordshire. His son by his first wife, now dead, has a taking for country life, and also – in the teeth of parental opposition – for his stepmother's waiting-gentlewoman, last survivor of the old family that owned Widford Manor. Straight-dealing – and the discovery of some handy buried treasure – ensure that: *Jack shall have Jill, / Naught shall go ill; / The man shall have his mare again, / And all shall go well.* (Epigraph to Chapter 24.)

The story

that is layered in with these events is what turns the book from the conventional to the classic. For there, on the fringe of things, subsisting in parallel with human activity, are the chthonic powers: the ghosts, bogles, lucifugi, and such, whose time is not our time and whose irregular interventions in our affairs may have unpredictable consequences.

Hobberdy Dick

is the house-spirit of Widford since 'time out of mind' – a shadowy, raggedy, unkempt apparition, occasionally caught in the corner of someone's eye, and with a deep-rooted concern for the right management of house and land. It is his benign working in favour of the lovers (and, somewhat melodramatically, in preventing the abduction of a daughter of the house by witches) that swings the plot



The illustrations, by Scoular Anderson, are taken from the Jane Nissen Books edition (1 903252 05 9, £5.99 pbk).

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

towards its happy conclusion; but it is his character as ancient guardian that holds the reader. For the true conclusion is that sanctioned by fairy lore: the offer of mortal cloth for Dick to wear which will bring him eternal release from servitude.

The intertwining of the strands

in this tale is carried out with practised ease. Katharine Briggs loved writing and was devoted to the study of folk customs from childhood on (her D.Phil at Oxford, much curtailed, was on 'Some aspects of folk-lore in early seventeenth-century literature') and, by choosing the period of the puritan regime after the Great Rebellion, she supplied her story with that dramatic tension between old belief and new enlightenment which is of permanent concern. (What was that big march* about just now? Have not present generations abolished Whitsuntide, advanced tinned goods as proper fare for a Harvest Festival, and determined to cut Easter loose from the phases of the moon?) Katharine Briggs's absorption in 'the personnel of fairyland' gave a naturalness to the supernatural goings-on in her story, while the precise attention she gave to its setting reinforced this. Much of her youth had been spent in Scotland, but in 1939 she had bought a house in Burford and her love of the Cotswolds, with their green roads, their barrows, and their standing stones brought accuracy to her portrayal of both landscape and local dialect.

The recent reissue of

Hobberdy Dick by Jane Nissen Books is most welcome. It retains the drawings that Scoular Anderson did for the Puffin edition of 1972, although it would be nice to know if the strange, toned illustrations of the first edition of 1955 could have been used. (They were by Jane Kingshill, Dr Briggs's god-daughter.) It would also be nice to know why no edition is in print of Dr Briggs's earlier book for children: *Kate Crackernuts* (not published till 1963). It draws upon her profound attachment to Scotland and is a novelised reconstruction of the folktale with the same title – a powerful story which could be seen as something of a forerunner to Janni Howker's incomparable *Martin Farrell*. ■

* The Countryside Alliance march took place in London in September '02