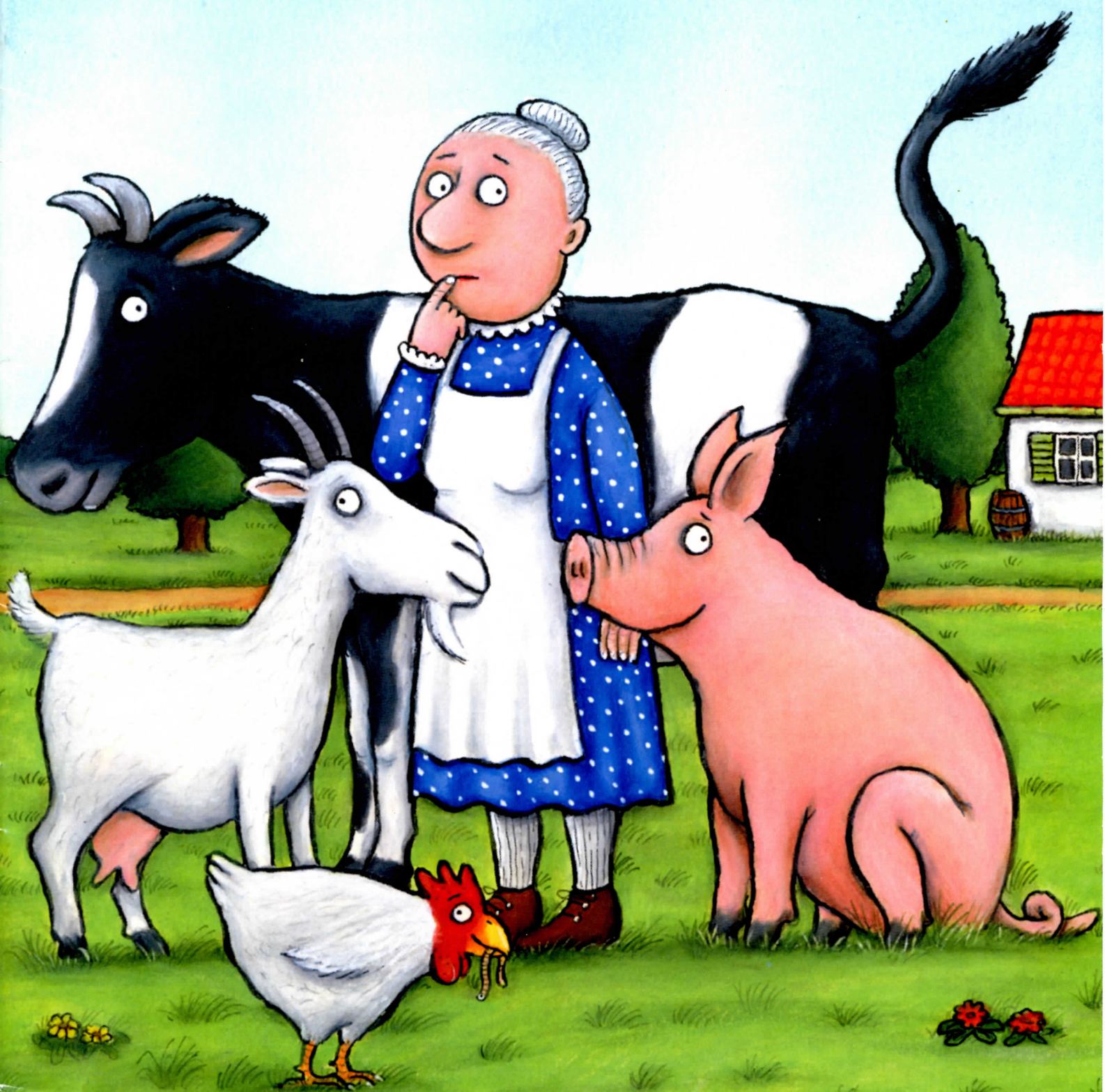


BOOKS FOR KEEPS

May 2003 No.140
UK Price £3.50

the children's books magazine



PICTURE BOOK BIRTH • WHOSE DARK MATERIALS? • MR GUMPY'S OUTING

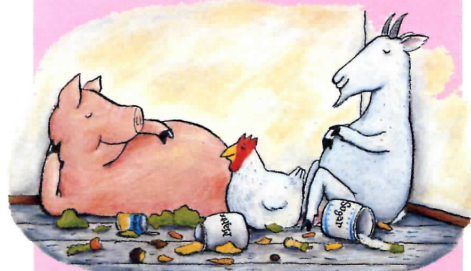
Pocket Paperback Picture Books



Contents

- 3 Editorial**
- 4 Childbirth in Children's Books**
Sarah Hunt on how pregnancy and birth are depicted.
- 6 Hal's Reading Diary**
Roger Mills on his son Hal at 26 months.
- 7 Picture Books with Something to Say**
Joanna Carey finds titles of quality and originality.
- 10 Whose Dark Materials?**
Gillian Cross on theology and Philip Pullman's trilogy.
- 12 Authorgraph No.140**
Julia Donaldson is interviewed by Lindsey Fraser.
- 14 Survivors**
John Rowe Townsend on the 'golden age' titles that are still in print.
- 16 BfK Briefing**
News • Prizes • Useful Organisation • Letters to the Editor • I Wish I'd Written • Good Reads
- 19 Reviews**
Index of Titles and Star Ratings 19
Reviewers 19
Books About Children's Books 20
Now Out in Paperback 20
Under 5s (Pre-School/Nursery/Infant) 21
5-8 (Infant/Junior) 22
+ Editor's Choice 24
8-10 (Junior/Middle) 24
10-14 (Middle/Secondary) 26
14+ (Secondary/Adult) 29
+ New Talent 29
- 32 Classics in Short No.39**
Brian Alderson on John Burningham's *Mr Gumpy's Outing*.

CoverStory



This issue's cover illustration is from Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler's *A Squash and a Squeeze*. Julia Donaldson is interviewed by Lindsey Fraser on page 12. Thanks to Macmillan Children's Books for their help with this May cover.

EDITORIAL



Rosemary Stones

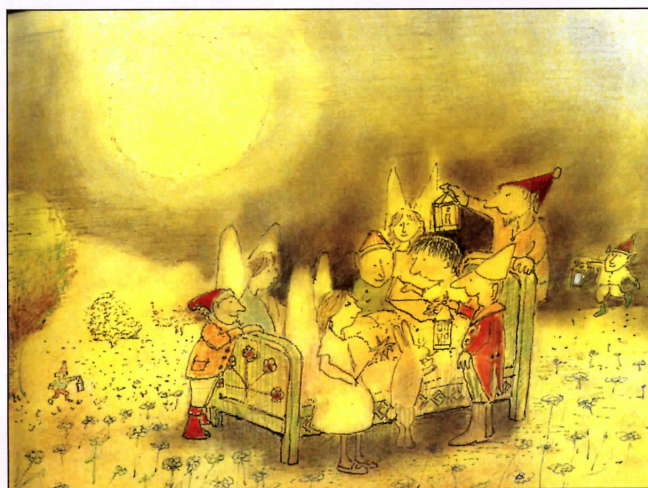
John Burningham's work features on the back page of this issue of BfK where Brian Alderson focuses on the incomparable *Mr Gumpy's Outing*. This deeply satisfying and original book thus stands alongside Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* as the only other picture book by a living artist to be featured so far in our 'Classics in Short' series.

Burningham's work crops up again in the feature on picture books on page 7 where Joanna Carey discusses the 40th anniversary edition of his first picture book, *Borka, the Adventures of a Goose with no Feathers*. In his introduction to this celebratory edition, publisher Tom Maschler, who went out on a limb to publish *Borka* in 1963, tells us that the aspect of Burningham's talent which he then admired and continues to admire above all is 'his capacity to move readers – children and adults equally'. 'There was one picture especially which I found extraordinary,' he writes about *Borka*. 'It was of a mother goose knitting a vest for its child born with no feathers and the child looks on poised and eagerly expectant.' Both *Borka* (1963) and *Mr Gumpy's Outing* (1970) were to be Kate Greenaway Medal winners.

Burningham's latest book, *The Magic Bed*, with its pale crayon tints and dramatic washes, has that same consummate ability to communicate emotion via words and pictures. Georgie's cot is now too small for him and a bed, which

happens to be magic, is bought from a junk shop for the growing boy. When Georgie says the right word the bed takes him off to different worlds of adventure and experience – there he is, storytelling with gnomes and fairies, returning a lost tiger cub to its anxious parents, swimming with dolphins. These adventure spreads have the quality of a dreamlike condensation of experience and contrast with, while appearing to spring from, 'real' life. In some ways, this new book revisits the conventions established by Burningham in his bleakly touching *Come Away From the Water, Shirley* (1977) in which 'reality' is contrasted with daydream although, as ever, Burningham's work continues to be new and challenging.

John Burningham's work will be celebrated at greater length in a major BfK feature by Brian Alderson later this year. In the meantime, warm congratulations to him from BfK on *Borka's* 40th anniversary.



George's bed landed in a field. Lots of gnomes and fairies arrived and he read them a bedtime story.'

From John Burningham's
The Magic Bed.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine

MAY 2003 No. 140

ISSN 0143-909X © School Bookshop Assoc. Ltd 2003
Editor: Rosemary Stones
Managing Director: Richard Hill
Design: Alec Davis, Lydney, Gloucestershire
Printed: The Friary Press, Dorchester, Dorset

Editorial correspondence should be sent to the BfK office, same address as for subscriptions.

Books for Keeps can be obtained on subscription by sending a cheque or postal order to: Books for Keeps, 6 Brightfield Road, Lee, London SE12 8QF. You can also pay by credit card (Access, Visa, Eurocard or Mastercard) and order via:

Tel: 020 8852 4953

Fax: 020 8318 7580

E-mail: booksforkeeps@btinternet.com

Annual subscription for six issues: £21.00 (UK), £24.00 (Europe including Ireland), £27.00 (airmail).

Single copies: £3.50 (UK), £4.00 (Europe including Ireland), £4.50 (airmail).

Childbirth in Children's Books

In our society where childbirth is medicalised and breast feeding in public can be socially unacceptable, how do picture books depict pregnancy and birth? Midwife **Sarah Hunt** investigates.

What have we done to childbirth if women feel they have to have a major operation to avoid it? We should change the approach. We need to promote normal birth... The assumption should be that births take place within a birthing centre, a midwifery-led unit, or at home' (**Hansard**, 15 January 2003). So said Baroness Cumberlege in January this year, in a House of Lords debate about the poor state of UK Maternity Services. She was talking about the fact that the Caesarean section rate is increasing by 1% a year, and 1% adds £5 million to the already overstretched NHS bill.

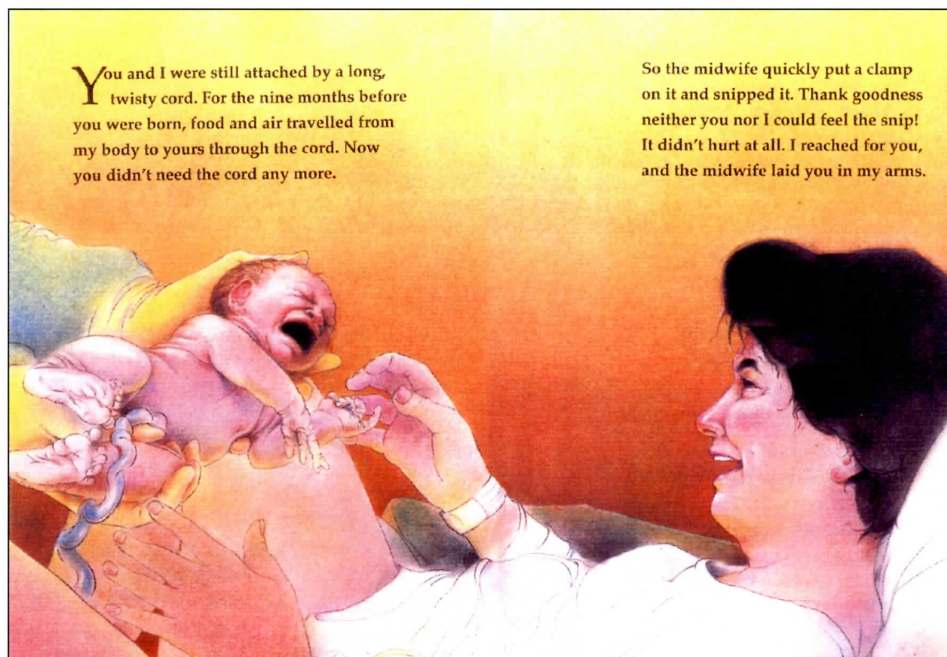
Pregnancy, labour and birth are all normal physiological processes, but we treat them as things that need medical attention in a hospital. And when it comes to breastfeeding, how many mothers have had the experience of being ostracised by some members of society and made to feel that giving their babies the perfect food is somehow socially unacceptable?

How are these ideas perpetuated? If we believe that books read in childhood could influence the way we think as adults, it is interesting to look at what images of pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding appear in picture books. I've been collecting picture books on these subjects over the last few years and this article is based on 35 titles.

Of course, most of these picture books centre on emotional responses – separation and sibling rivalry – rather than on the actual processes of birth, but there are a lot of incidental details that reveal underlying attitudes.

The depiction of pregnancy

Pregnancy is shown as something natural



From **Happy Birth Day!**

in Jean and Gareth Adamson's **Topsy and Tim and the New Baby** and in Jan Ormerod's **Mum and Me**, the pregnant women wear normal clothes and carry on a normal life. While the idea behind **There's a House inside my Mummy** by Giles Andreae and Vanessa Cabban may seem a little eccentric, the first child is fully engaged with his mother's pregnancy, the scan, the way the baby moves, the mother's changed eating habits – and nausea! There is no mention of any negative aspects of the arrival of a new sibling, only an atmosphere of positive anticipation.

But the depiction of the pregnant women

can be less than flattering – as in Bob Graham's **Brand New Baby**, where Mrs Arnold wears 'dresses as big as tents', or Rebecca Hunter's **My New Sister** where the implication is that the mother is virtually incapacitated – she 'is often tired and can't always play with me', and has to sit on the sofa while dad gets out the baby things.

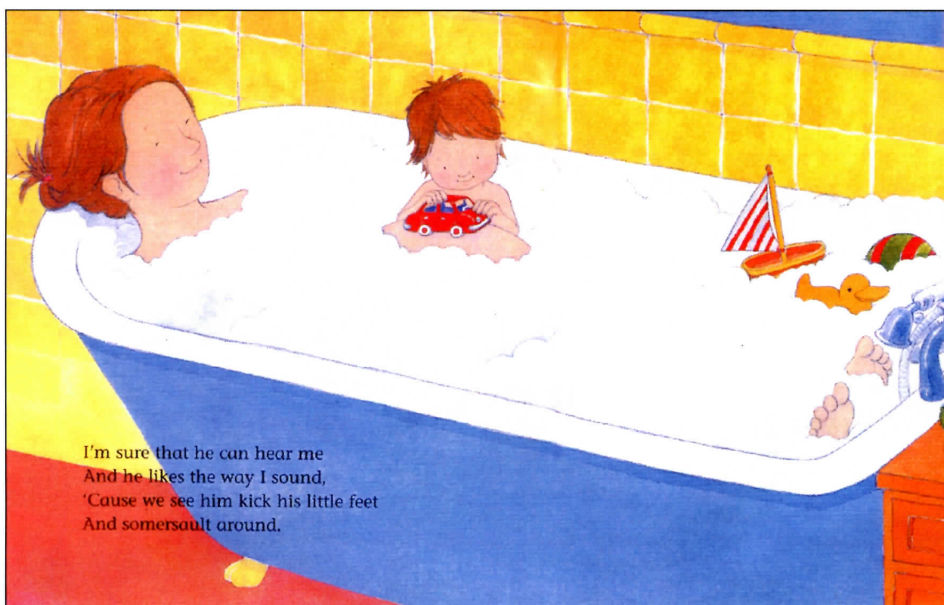
Separation issues

Separation is difficult for both mothers and older siblings, and most books deal with this issue in a sensitive and positive way, as in **I'm Still Important!** by Jen Green and Mike Gordon, which also has sensible 'Notes for Parents and Teachers'. In Wendy McCormick and Sophy Williams's **The Night You Were Born**, Jamie, while initially feeling the loneliness of separation from his mother, is cared for lovingly by his Aunt Isabel who lies on his bed with him and provides the human contact so needed by young children.

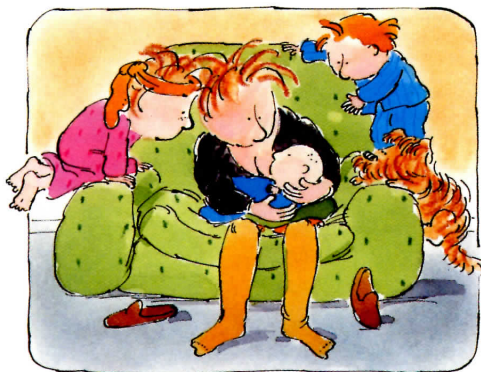
One notable and quite distressing exception to this is found in **A Baby for Grace** by Ian Whybrow and Christian Birmingham. Grace's mother 'will be back home tomorrow' with the baby, but instead of being reassured by her father when she wakes in the night, Grace is sent back to bed: the message is that the child must deal with her anxiety alone, reinforcing the concept of separation on which our society now seems to be based.

Birth

In picture books, hospital is the normal place for birth. In Shirley Hughes's **Angel Mae**, Mae and her brother Frankie go to



From **There's a House inside my Mummy**.



'In fact, Mum was always feeding the baby...' from **Brand New Baby**.

the hospital and 'they looked into the cot and saw their tiny baby sister wrapped up in a white shawl' – separated from its mother. And there are more, very clinical looking hospital settings. **The Baby Dances** by Kathy Henderson and Tony Kerins, opens with a view into a 'delivery room' with shadowy figures in green theatre outfits and some kind of machine in the background. In **Happy Birth Day!** by Robie H Harris and Michael Emberley (which has a dedication to 'The Baby Doctors and the Baby Nurses!'), the mother lies back in a bed and is handed her newborn baby by a gloved and gowned attendant. This mother even has a drip inserted in the back of her hand (something that is only likely to be noted by those who scrutinise picture books closely and repeatedly – children). Perhaps I shouldn't be surprised but even cartoon Zebras are now caught up in the medicalisation of childbirth, as in **Za-za's Baby Brother** by Lucy Cousins which shows the mother Zebra in a hospital bed.

Absent midwives

At least in **Happy Birth Day!**, it is a midwife attending the birth; midwives, after all, are the clinical specialists in normal birth, and are clinically responsible for the mothers even when a doctor's expertise is required. But they feature only three times in my sample. A particularly good example is given in **My Amazing Journey** by Pat Thomas: 'During labour, a midwife was there to check that you and your mum

were all right.' In striking contrast is Babette Coles's witty exploration of taboos, **Mummy Never Told Me**. The illustration following the question 'What is my tummy button for...' has a completely naked mother lying virtually flat on her back, attended by what appear to be a male doctor and a male nurse, all wearing full theatre gear including caps, sterile gloves and masks, and a tray of instruments. At least it looks like this baby is going to get skin-to-skin contact with its mother who has her arms outstretched to hold the baby. Even when there is a comic touch then, the implied message is that the medical model of childbirth is the norm.

Of all the books I looked at, only **Hello Baby** by Jenni Overend and Julie Vivas shows birth as a normal physiological event, in the family surroundings which we know allow the mother to labour instinctively. The midwife is clearly a family friend; the baby is born and instead of the cord being instantly cut by a doctor and the baby given to its mother, the mother is the first person to pick up her baby and hold him to her naked body. Afterwards the



"When will he be going back again?" Sophie asked her mum.
Sophie's mum laughed. "This baby isn't going back," she said.
"He's here for ever. We can't just put him away like your rag doll."

Above, from **Sophie and the New Baby**.

Right, from **Hello Baby**.

Below, from **Mummy Never Told Me**.

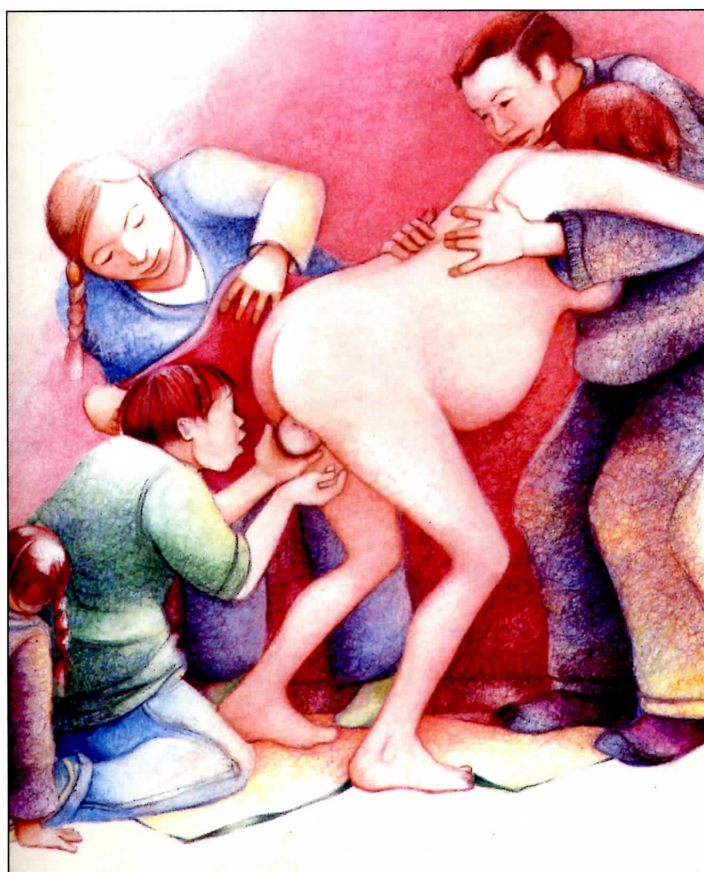
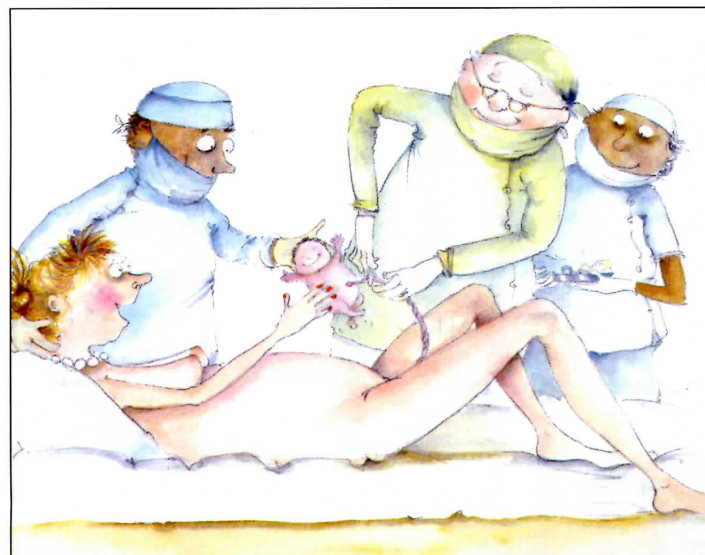
whole family remain together sleeping by the fire with no suggestion of separation; when the youngest child wants extra reassurance: 'I sneak out of my bag and hop in next to Dad. It's warm. He cuddles me in. I bet the baby's warm too.' **Hello Baby** provides the antidote to the medicalisation and invisibility of childbirth, but it is a rarity.

Breastfeeding

The 2002 Infant Feeding Survey by the Office for National Statistics shows that six weeks after their babies are born, 42% of mothers are still breastfeeding (and by six months, only 21%). This is despite the fact that all the research shows that breastfeeding provides enormous (and long-term) health benefits for both babies and mothers – and the Government is committed to raising the number of breastfeeding mothers by 2% a year over the next three years. Clearly, we do not live in a culture that supports breastfeeding.

It seems writers of children's books are beginning to become more aware of this issue. Authors including Melvin Burgess, Philip Pullman and Philippa Pearce recently refused to support a new teenage novel award being proposed by Nestlé because of that company's allegedly aggressive marketing of baby milk substitutes in the Third World.

In the picture books I looked at, where babies are fed, breastfeeding is portrayed as normal (although the Earthlets in **Dr Xargle's Book of Earthlets** are bottle-feeders!). Family life goes on around the feeding mothers in **Topsy and Tim and the New Baby**, **Sophie and the New Baby** by Catherine and Laurence Anholt, and **Rosie's Babies** by Martin Waddell and Penny Dale. The award-winning **The**



From **The New Baby**.

World is Full of Babies! (another hospital birth) puts breastfeeding first, but concedes that there is an alternative ('Some babies drink milk from a bottle'), and in the Usborne 'First Experiences' book, **The New Baby** (another hospital birth), Mrs Bunn breastfeeds the baby while her older daughter Susie role-plays by giving her doll a bottle. All of this can be set against **My New Sister**, in which the baby isn't fed, but there is a background of baby motifs on every page – and it includes a bottle! Bob Graham's **Brand New Baby** sends

mixed messages – what is the subliminal effect of the 37 feeding bottles on the endpapers? And what do we make of the fact that there is a picture of the mother breastfeeding *inside* the book, but when virtually the same picture appears on the cover, it features a bottle?

Do children's books reflect life or affect it? Should they portray 'best practice' in

matters such as childbirth? Is it responsible to simply portray the world as it generally is? Neither option is politically or ethically neutral – especially when you think about the power of the picture book. ■

Sarah Hunt is a Midwife and the Infant Feeding Specialist at Gloucester Hospital. She has an MA in Children's Literature from Reading University, and four daughters.

Books Mentioned

Angel Mae, Shirley Hughes, Walker, 0 7445 6377 1, £4.99 pbk

The Baby Dances, Kathy Henderson, ill. Tony Kerins, Walker, 0 7445 2164 5, £9.99 hbk, 0 7445 6360 7, £4.99 pbk

A Baby for Grace, Ian Whybrow, ill. Christian Birmingham, Kingfisher, 0 7534 0376 5, £6.99 pbk

Brand New Baby, Bob Graham, Walker, 0 7445 6141 8, £9.99 hbk, 0 7445 6970 2, £4.99 pbk

Dr Xargle's Book of Earthlets, Jeanne Willis, ill. Tony Ross, Red Fox, 0 09 964010 4, £4.99 pbk

Happy Birth Day! Robie H Harris, ill. Michael Emberley, Walker, 0 7445 5264 8, £5.99 pbk

Hello Baby, Jenni Overend, ill. Julie Vivas, ABC Books (Australia), 0 7333 0685 3, hbk, 0 7333 0786 8, pbk (available from Ace Graphics, tel: 01959 524622, e-mail: www.birthinternational.com)

I'm Still Important!, Jen Green, ill. Mike Gordon, Hodder Wayland 'New Experiences', 0 7502 2506 8, £8.50 hbk, 0 7502 2684 6, £4.99 pbk

Mum and Me, Jan Ormerod, Walker, 0 7445 6010 1, £4.99 pbk

Mummy Never Told Me, Babette Cole, Jonathan Cape, 0 224 04736 1, £10.99 hbk

My Amazing Journey, A First Look at Where Babies Come From, Pat Thomas, ill. Lesley Harker, Macdonald, 0 7500 2574 3, £4.99 pbk

My New Sister, Rebecca Hunter and Chris Fairclough, Evans 'First Times', 0 237 52020 6, £6.99 hbk

The New Baby, Anne Civardi, ill. Stephen Cartwright, Usborne 'First Experiences', 0 7460 4112 8, £5.99 hbk, 0 7460 4111 X, £3.99 pbk

The Night You Were Born, Wendy McCormick, ill. Sophy Williams, Orchard, 1 84121 593 7, £4.99 pbk

Rosie's Babies, Martin Waddell, ill. Penny Dale, Walker, 0 7445 0976 9, £9.99 hbk, 0 7445 2335 4, £4.99 pbk

Sophie and the New Baby, Catherine and Laurence Anholt, Orchard, 1 84121 057 9, £4.99 pbk

There's a House inside my Mummy, Giles Andreae, ill. Vanessa Cabban, Orchard, 1 84121 068 4, £4.99 pbk

Topsy and Tim and the New Baby, Jean and Gareth Adamson, Ladybird, 0 7214 2851 7, £2.99 pbk

The World is Full of Babies! Mick Manning and Brita Granström, Franklin Watts, 0 7496 2752 2, £4.99 pbk

Za-za's Baby Brother, Lucy Cousins, Walker, 0 7445 4764 4, £5.99 pbk

Hal's Reading Diary

Hal is now 26 months and daddy is sometimes rejected as a suitable bedtime story reader. His father, **Roger Mills**, explains.

Earlier this week I went to Hal's bedroom to get him up. When he saw me coming in to the room he started wailing, 'No, no, mummy do it, mummy do it'. I told him not to be so silly, mummy was having a bit of a lie-in, and he could go downstairs with me for a change. I picked a wailing and weeping Hal out of his cot and took him downstairs, but his keening only got worse. Soon enough a sleepy and mildly disgruntled Jo appeared. Lie-ins had been impossible at that kind of decibel level. In the end the only way Hal could be pacified was to take him back upstairs, put him back in his cot, and do getting up take two, but this time with mummy as the adult who appears at the door.

'Mummy do it' is appearing in many corners of Hal's life at the moment including reading. These days I am sometimes rejected by Hal as a suitable bedtime reader. It has to be mummy who does the evening session with Dr Seuss or **Fix-it Duck** (two current hits in the bedtime book pile). Hal doesn't always veto me, and often even if he starts off by protesting, he will settle down with me if he has started to get engaged with a book. But the constant demands for mummy rather than daddy to be the doer of things is the dominant shift in this month's new behaviour patterns. The infamous terrible twos are, I fear, upon us.

But why is it that only mummy will do at this stage in his life? In earlier Hal diaries I have spoken about the terrors, for small children, that are involved in realising that you are separate from mother. This is an evolving process and it is the key factor behind children who did not seem to be so clingy and needy in their first two years, becoming more so as they move into their third.

Psychoanalysts think of this as one of the crises of development. The theory is this. By the end of the second year the child is getting

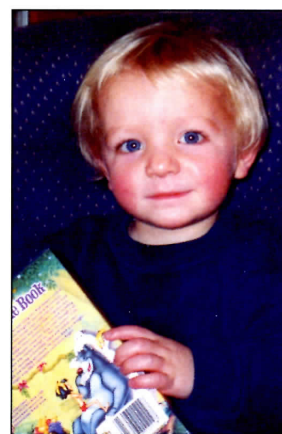
very mobile, walking and running with ease. In one way this is great. So much more capacity to fulfil your wishes. But on the other hand it means frightening realisations. Because the twin of the thought 'I can move away from mother' is the much more frightening one 'and mother can move away from me'.

At the same time as these changes in locomotive power are happening there are huge developments in the child's power to think. And once again there are benefits and losses. On the profit side the child is far more able to get its needs met (the beginning of talking being another huge plus here). But the child's increasingly able brain is also now seeing things more as they really are. And this means knowing that you are little and weak and dependent and that mummy *could* just walk away and leave you to it.

It is important to contrast these new ways of experiencing with what went before. In the earlier part of life psychological research suggests that the child is not really aware of the distinction between him or herself and mother. When mother meets the child's need (with a feed, cleaning, soothing distress etc.) it is as if it has happened magically. The child can bask in an illusion of having a kind of omnipotence. The tragedy of getting cleverer and more mobile is that the omnipotence illusion has to collapse, and with its demise a much more anxious small person begins to emerge.

This, I think, is the nub of 'mummy do it', and of the little tantrums that can blow up if mummy doesn't do it. Hal is trying, it seems, to return to that world of magical omnipotence where his mother's actions seem to be his to command. He is desperately trying to reassert a control that he really knows he has lost. And so he will try to assert his little will again and again, over who gets him up, over who reads to him, over eating his supper, over anything and everything. Hal still loves and needs his evening read, it is clear. But sometimes it just won't do unless mummy is the one that reads the book. ■

Roger Mills is a Psychodynamic Counsellor.

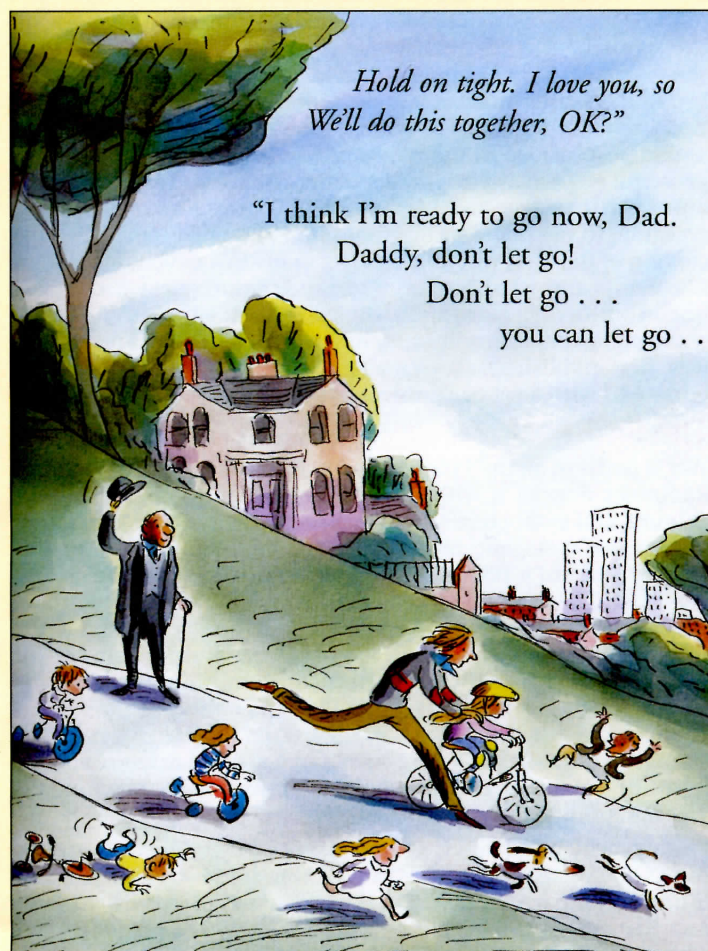


Picture Books with Something to Say

So many picture books are published these days that quality and originality can often give way to quantity. But there are gems lurking in the piles of spring titles. Joanna Carey seeks them out.

With such large numbers of picture books today, it is interesting to note that until the eighteenth century there were no 'children's books' as such – children had to make do with suitable adult books, of a religious, educational or generally improving nature. The idea of books for pleasure – rather than instruction – was frowned upon and it was only with the advent of people like Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll that entertaining books of an entirely non-didactic nature began to appear.

But there's a problem when entertainment is prized above other considerations and today, sadly, there are mountains of unmemorable books full of frenetic, wacky humour, brash colours and ugly design that after an initial skim through don't merit a second glance. It's a mystery how they get published



From **Don't Let Go!**

alongside the work of so many authors and artists of genuine integrity, who really do have something to say; who can be funny and entertaining without being patronizing, who dazzle us with their skills and, without threatening us with *issues*, give a little insight – whether it's serious, thought provoking, humorous or surreal – into the problems, the delights and the uncertainties of the world we live in.

The nature of independence

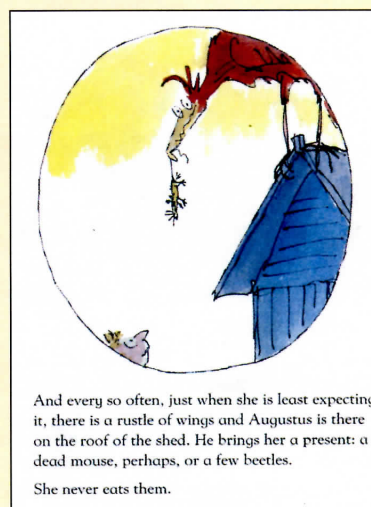
Don't Let Go!, for example, by Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross, is, on the surface, about a little girl, Sophie, learning to ride her bike, with her father running frantically alongside, trying to judge the moment at which she'll be able to get her balance, and ride safely. He's longing for her to get the hang of it, but at the same time he's nervously anticipating the years ahead when she'll be looking for an even greater independence. While the bicycle is an eloquent metaphor, smaller children will enjoy this at face value and the illustrations offer a wealth of detail about Sophie's family. Ross is a hugely entertaining draughtsman – and while his loose limbed figures can be wonderfully funny, he can evoke a subtle range of emotions with just a loose wash and the swish of a scratchy nib.

Both father and daughter in **Don't Let Go!** know that one day Sophie will want to make her own way in life but in **Loveykins** Quentin Blake describes a relationship which, for all the comfortable, daffy humour of the opening pages, offers a really rather startling, thought provoking reflection on the nature of dependence. When Angela, a kindly, rather old-fashioned, middle-aged lady, finds a helpless baby bird that has fallen from his nest, she is delighted to have someone to care for, and she smothers him with attention. Swaddled to within an inch of his life with shawls, cardigans and eiderdowns, and safely strapped in a pushchair, Augustus endures her kindness and, although we can see him looking hungrily at a passing beetle, he allows her the pleasure of satisfying his prodigious appetite with an endless supply of buns, cream cakes and chocolates. Sadly in denial of the fact that her protégé is growing up fast, Angela is shocked one morning to find he's become a colossal ferocious looking bird of prey, and has escaped his shackles. He spreads his wings and, for the first time in his life, he flies – and suddenly *we're* up there, getting a bird's eye view of Augustus' mighty shadow as it passes over the scenes of his cosseted youth. Free at last to enjoy a natural diet, we see Augustus ripping the entrails from a dead squirrel – Blake's drawing is, as ever, economical with the line, but not the *facts* and the image manages to be both discreet and explicit. Later when he calls on Angela, with the gift of a dead mouse, we realize that throughout their relationship food has been their sole means of communication. They remain friends, but she sensibly turns her attention to nurturing cactuses.

Heaven and earth

Up In Heaven by Emma Chichester Clark looks at the reaction of a child to the death of a pet dog. Arthur is lonely without Daisy. His sadness is gently suggested in his forlorn posture and his preoccupied expression – he can't stop thinking about her. 'Where is she now?' he asks. And up in heaven Daisy is worried; she can't get on with enjoying her afterlife until she knows Arthur is happy again. The other dogs in this heaven – a sort of celestial 'dog area' – advise Daisy to send him some dreams to show him how nice it is up there, and to let him know that it's fine by her if he wants to get another dog.

It's a touching story which by virtue of its sincerity and straightforward simplicity avoids any sentimentality. Chichester Clark uses colour with great sensitivity; as ever she excels in



And every so often, just when she is least expecting it, there is a rustle of wings and Augustus is there on the roof of the shed. He brings her a present: a dead mouse, perhaps, or a few beetles. She never eats them.

From **Loveykins**.

From **Up In Heaven**.

moonlit scenes and with her shady veils of colour, heightened with the subtle luminosity of the crayon line, the picture of Daisy's last night on earth has a magical solemnity. And although heaven is depicted as a shimmering light filled place (seething with dancing dogs and tulips), Arthur's home, in a leafy suburb, with loving parents, and a beautiful garden, full of growing things, is clearly something of an earthly paradise, and clutching his new puppy Arthur realizes that life is good, life is for living.

Daisy was lucky – she found heaven to be full of her own sort. But when the tiny yellow, three-eyed rabbit from outer space, in Alexis Deacon's **Beegu**, crashlands on earth she has great difficulty because of her alien appearance. Although she's readily accepted by the children she meets, the adults she encounters – i.e. those in authority – seem unmoved by the fact that she's lost, and seriously in need of help, and she just gets moved on. There's not much of a story here, but there's a real message in this

From **Beegu**.From **Borka, The Adventures of a Goose with no Feathers**.

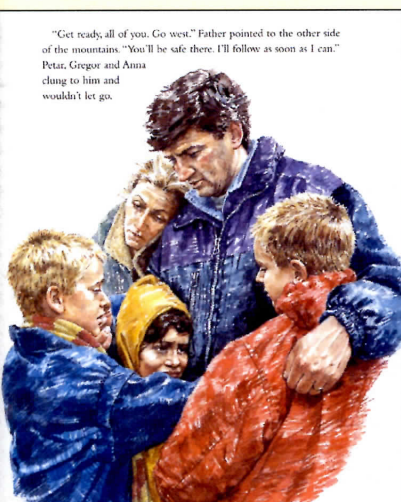
beautifully produced book and the darkly enchanting illustrations with their strangely overcast skies, give it maximum impact. With her prehensile ears, the eloquent gestures she makes with her stumpy little arms and the subtle wit of her hieroglyphic speech bubbles, Beegu is a memorable creation and whether she's mooching along a busy street, lost in a forest of human legs or sleeping under the light of the moon, her sense of isolation is palpable. Deacon draws with a gentle textured line and the children he draws, who befriend Beegu, are full of character with an individuality: recalling a style somewhere between the early Sendak and Paula Rego.

In **Borka, The Adventures of a Goose with no Feathers** by John Burningham Borka, too, is something of an outsider. Because she has no feathers, and has to wear a knitted jumper to keep warm, she is ridiculed and ostracized by the other geese. Consequently she never learns to fly and is therefore unable to migrate with the rest of the family. Making use of colour in a bold, painterly way, Burningham's illustrations have a tragi-comic power that really makes you believe in the plight of this goose and they evoke a powerful response at every turn in the story ... you feel genuinely outraged that her mother has abandoned Borka, enormous gratitude to the dog who befriends her, and great respect for the captain of the boat who delivers her safely to a new home in Kew Gardens – and what a relief that the London geese accept her unconditionally, regardless of her soggy jumper. A heart-warming, award-winning story that was ahead of its time when it was first published 40 years ago, and which has now been honoured with a special anniversary edition.

The futility of war

War is perhaps an unlikely theme for a picture book, but Vladimir Radunsky attacks it with panache, using pure, bright primary colours, and symbolically juxtaposing crude, roughly torn paper images with elegant brush drawings in **Manneken Pis, The Simple Story of a Boy Who Peed on a War**. With a minimal, but EMPHATIC text it tells the legend behind the famous statue in Brussels. Within the walls of a beautiful medieval city that's in the throes of an ugly war, a little boy searches desperately for his parents ... high up on the ramparts, lost and frightened by the sound of fighting, he suddenly needs to pee – and he does so, by chance, directly on to the battleground below. Everyone is astonished, the fighting stops, weapons are laid aside ... and (to borrow from Sassoon) everyone suddenly bursts out laughing ... and the futility of war is exposed.

Pratima Mitchell's story, **Petar's Song**, illustrated by Caroline Binch, is set against a backdrop of war somewhere in Eastern Europe. When war breaks out, the family has to leave their farm and flee across the border to safety. Petar takes his violin he's often played for village celebrations, but now, hungry and homeless in the snow amongst hundreds of other refugees, he no

From **Manneken Pis**.From **Petar's Song**.

longer has the heart to play. But as Christmas approaches, things look up; there's an air of hope and optimism. The story is plainly told and Binch is that rare thing, a wholly *naturalistic* illustrator. She takes a very different approach from any of the other artists here: seeking a very particular sort of authenticity, she makes no secret of the fact that a camera is central to her work in recording the children, the landscapes and the animals. What she loses in freedom and spontaneity she makes up for with telling detail that speaks volumes about the reality of the children's situation. With close reference to the photos and a meticulously controlled water-

colour technique, Binch documents every nuance in the anxious intensity of the children's facial expressions, every last detail of their clothing – their trainers, their crumpled jeans and tracksuits, the texture of their anoraks and nylon rucksacks ... There's a much freer atmosphere though in the illustrations for the endpapers – both show the same war-torn landscape, but there are subtle, symbolic differences in the light ... at the very end of the book, you can see that summer is coming and the swallows are returning to the valley.

After the close-up actuality of Binch's illustrations, which will chime so readily with the images children have seen on news reports, Quentin Blake approaches a similar theme on a much broader canvas. Addressing all sorts of global problems – not just war, but pollution, prejudice and injustice, **A Sailing Boat in the Sky** is the result of a remarkable – and unique – collaborative project for which Blake enlisted the help of no fewer than 1,800 school children from all round the world. It was the children's compassion and imagination that developed this fantasy about a magical sailing boat, and, with his customary breadth and economy, Blake's drawings give it instant lift-off as, with two children at the helm, it sets out on its rescue mission. Whizzing round the world from one front-line emergency to another, the vigorous illustrations give the

From **A Sailing Boat in the Sky**.

impression of having been daringly dashed off on the spot. While backgrounds are vividly suggested, often with no more than a series of semi abstract squiggles, the figure drawing – and there is no end to the variety of people the children haul safely on board – is rich in characterisation and gesture. And along with all the dramatic rescues and the 'derring-do', there are those oases of calm so vital to the rhythm and coherence of any picture book – a tender drawing of a refugee mother and child, for example, resting under an upturned boat, or the homely scene on a far flung beach where a reassuring sense of order and companionship is established as the motley crew sit round the table for a fish supper.

I appointed my **TOP GANG.**

*I gave them identity cards and the
secret password to get them entry to
Top Gang HQ for secret meetings.*

From **Bad News I'm in Charge!**

In **Bad News I'm in Charge!** Bruce Ingman takes a look at government, and the art of leadership. Danny, out hunting with his soopadoopa metal detector, digs up an old treasure chest. It contains a charter entitling him to rule the land, so he sets to work immediately, giving top jobs to all his friends, making radical changes to things like school rules, television viewing, bedtime and chocolate consumption. At first it all goes swimmingly, but gradually he realizes that he's responsible for a lot more than he bargained for... Ingman's very knowing illustrations are a glorious combination of faux-naïf childlike painting and line drawings some of which, against their richly coloured backgrounds, have a curiously languid Matisse like quality. The loud, exclamatory text is set in an eye-catching variety of typefaces, some of it back to front: there's handwriting, a bit of collage here and there, some borrowed textures, decorative twiddles and graphic 'asides'. At the end, it tells you to start again – but you won't really need telling. ■

Joanna Carey is a writer and illustrator.

Books discussed

Don't Let Go!, Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross, Andersen, 1 84270 071 5, £9.99 hbk
Loveykins, Quentin Blake, Jonathan Cape, 0 224 06471 1, £10.99 hbk
Up In Heaven, Emma Chichester Clark, Andersen, 1 84270 046 4, £9.99 hbk
Beegu, Alexis Deacon, Hutchinson, 0 09 176829 2, £10.99 hbk
Borka, The Adventures of a Goose with no Feathers, John Burningham, Jonathan Cape, 0 224 06494 0, £10.99 hbk
Manneken Pis, Vladimir Radunsky, Walker, 0 7445 9683 1, £10.99 hbk
Petar's Song, Pratima Mitchell and Caroline Binch, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 2063 8, £10.99 hbk
A Sailing Boat in the Sky, Quentin Blake, Red Fox, 0 09 943959 X, £5.99 pbk
Bad News I'm in Charge!, Bruce Ingman, Walker, 0 7445 5553 1, £10.99 hbk

Whose Dark Materials?

The **Catholic Herald** has condemned Philip Pullman's trilogy 'His Dark Materials' as atheistic and anti-church. Pullman himself has said that his heroes, Will and Lyra's, search for 'the republic of heaven' is meant as a metaphor for the search for a moral republic. **Gillian Cross** investigates.



Why haven't Christians made more fuss about 'His Dark Materials'? Here's a story, published for children, which kills off God and portrays the Church as totally authoritarian and evil. Wouldn't you have expected vociferous condemnation from the Archbishop of Canterbury? Calls to remove the books from libraries and ban them from schools?

All the priests in the book are either unpleasantly sensual (like Father Semyon, who hugs and kisses Will and gives him vodka) or coldly fanatical (like Father Gomez, who is sent to kill Lyra). Nuns are repressed, inadequate creatures, tricked into denying their sexuality and 'God' himself (who is known as the Authority) is a pathetic, whimpering ancient in a crystal cage. When he is let out into the open air, he simply evaporates. The books are intended as a direct attack on organised religion and Christianity is described as 'a very powerful and convincing mistake' – yet there has been no real protest except for a few angry newspaper articles. The **Church Times** was happy to carry an interview with Philip Pullman and one vicar I know even gave the trilogy to her teenage god-daughter as a birthday present. What's going on?

The big questions

To understand that, you have to understand how the books address the big questions at the centre of all spirituality: What does it mean to be human? How should we live? How can we face death? Children's literature has traditionally dealt with such questions, but Philip Pullman goes right to the root of them. He begins with the assumption that there is (of course) no God. His 'God' is not the creator, but simply an imaginary external authority, a mistake made by matter (in the form of people) when it first became aware of itself. Many people might see the God-mistake as pathetic but harmless. Pullman sees it as disastrous and destructive because it underpins organised religion.

His fictional Church is a cynical, cruel bureaucracy. It kidnaps and tortures children to save them from the Dust which represents the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of human beings. The Church equates Dust with sin and uses the authority of the unreal 'God' to suppress curiosity and creativity. This seems to be the Church's only purpose and all other moral considerations give way to it.

As a Christian, I am, of course, itching to pick holes in this caricature, but that would be self-indulgent. Pullman's 'Holy Church' is, like any satire, not without elements of truth which the real church would do well to consider. But no one except the most prejudiced bigot would take such a grotesque Aunt Sally for a straightforward picture of reality.

It's much more interesting to look at the books' vision of goodness and fulfilment. Opposed to the wicked 'Church' is a huge and varied cast of good characters, led by Will and Lyra, the children who are the new Adam and Eve. The whole long, complex story leads up to the moment when these two meet Mary Malone, the ex-nun who delights in science and in matter. Because of Mary, Lyra finds herself facing the same choice as Eve.

A new garden of Eden

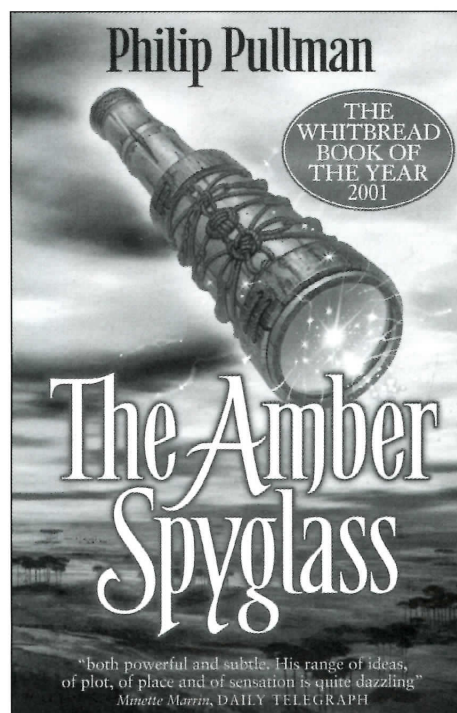
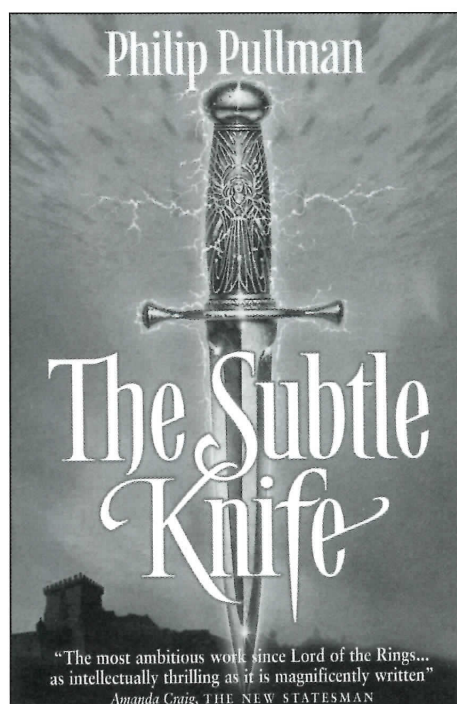
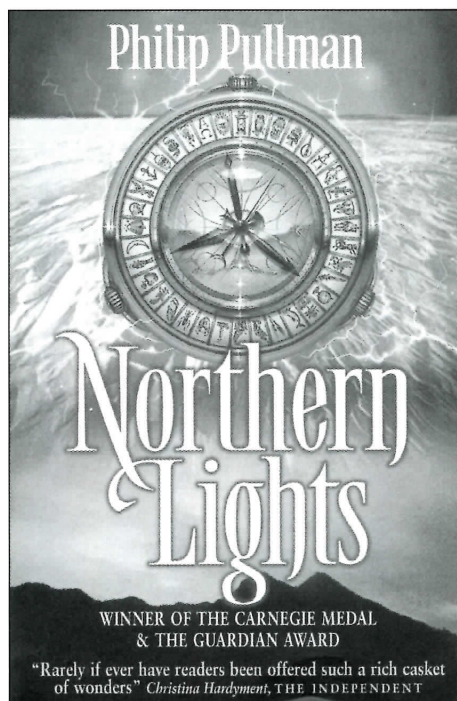
And that's where story and theory part company in an extraordinary way. Pullman clearly intends Lyra's choice to be seen in terms of sexual awakening. Mary Malone (the serpent in this new garden of Eden) tells the story of how she stopped believing in God. This makes Lyra aware of her own sexuality and her feelings for Will. Holding a fruit to his lips, she chooses to embrace him and to enter fully into the real world of love and delight, of matter and human experience. This crucial action saves not just her own world but all parallel worlds as well.

Only it doesn't. It's obviously meant to be the turning point of the whole story, but if it were, Will and Lyra would go off together, free to love each other and rejoice in the world. That doesn't happen. Stories have their own wisdom which, ultimately, Philip Pullman is too good a storyteller to ignore. The action moves on, beyond the moment when Will and Lyra declare their love, to quite a different turning point.

They discover that there is a price to pay for living happily and fully in the real world. While people go through doors into other worlds, the Dust of human wisdom and knowledge leaks slowly away into nothingness. To stay properly human and alive, Will and Lyra must close the doors and commit to the worlds where they belong – which means that they must separate for ever.

Their agonising separation is the true and necessary climax of the story, because that is where they are tested (which is what temptation means). They are tempted to put their own good above everything else – which is the real temptation of consciousness, and of Eve. Will nearly succumbs, but Lyra will not let him. Unlike Eve, she resists the temptation. She and Will separate, knowing that their task is to build 'the republic of heaven' by helping everyone in their worlds 'to learn and understand themselves and each other and the way everything works, and by showing them how to be kind instead of cruel, and patient instead of hasty, and cheerful instead of surly, and above all how to keep their minds open and free and curious'. It's a powerful and beautiful ending.

The irony is that it's very close to the



Christian understanding of what it means to be human. Dualists may hold that the material world is bad and that we should aspire to some purely spiritual reality, but Christians have always been clear that this is the world in which we must live and work and for which we should give thanks. As Metropolitan Anthony Bloom says, 'It is useless to seek God somewhere else.' Only by deep and committed involvement with the world around us can we engage with reality, with other people and with ourselves. That's what incarnation means.

The common good

That commitment to engage with the world, as Pullman rightly sees, cannot happen without cost. Enjoying the world is good, but it's not enough. It's also important to let go, to be willing to give up what you want, for the sake of the common good. 'Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies,' Jesus said, 'it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.' And Lyra has the same insight: 'No one could [build the republic of heaven] if they put themselves first.' It isn't easy to live like that. How can we do it?

And why should we?

Why is one of the questions which 'His Dark Materials' signally fails to answer. Pullman is on record as saying that 'ordinary human decency' is sufficient reason for doing good. So why do people do bad things? Is it because they're innately less 'decent'? Because they're too stupid to work out what's right in a given situation? Or because they aren't listening to the Wills and Lyras who are 'showing them how to be kind instead of cruel, and patient instead of hasty, and cheerful instead of surly'?

Within the story, Pullman escapes these questions by sleight of hand. All the evil is done by characters in the Church who have abandoned their own moral responsibility. They are cardboard villains blindly following the dictates of 'the Authority'. Beyond that, the story has nothing to say about good and evil except Mary Malone's description of what happened when she stopped believing in God: 'I came to believe that good and evil are names for what people do, not for what they are.'

She must have been a strange nun if she believed that people were simply 'good' or 'evil'. Does Philip Pullman really think that Christians categorise human beings like that?

The Christian explanation of evil is, at root, that 'ordinary human decency' is not enough on its own because, when there is a real conflict, we have a tendency to put our own interests first. That's what 'original sin' means. It has no particular connection with sexuality

(although sexual feelings often do lead us to harm other people). It means that we are not, naturally, predisposed to make the kind of choice that Will and Lyra make at the end of **The Amber Spyglass**.

So why do we believe in their sacrifice? How does Philip Pullman manage to make the end of the story deeply satisfying instead of mawkish and unreal?

It's satisfying because it costs so much. Will and Lyra have been through hardship and death together and they understand the true significance of what they have to do. Above all, they both have the strength that comes from being deeply loved by someone who is willing to sacrifice everything.

They sustain themselves with the thought that they will, in some form, be together again after death: 'I'll drift about for ever, all my atoms, till I find you again,' says Will. Lyra responds in the same way: 'And when they use our atoms to make new lives, they won't just be able to take one, they'll have to take two, one of you and one of me, we'll be joined so tight ...' Until then, they promise that on Midsummer's Day, in their own worlds, they will each come at midday to the Botanic Gardens in Oxford and sit for an hour, remembering.

If Pullman had left them free to stay together, to love each other and rejoice in the world, the story would have been immeasurably weaker. Their separation is crucial. They set out to work for the good of their worlds with energy and cheerfulness (what the New Testament calls 'joy'), sustained by something very like prayer, and by the knowledge that they are loved by someone who has made a great sacrifice to save their world.

Each, in a sense, is the other's Jesus.

It would be ludicrous to suggest that 'His Dark Materials' is Christian. It veers schizophrenically between story and satire and its heavy-handed lampooning of the Church is as dogmatic and unpleasant as C S Lewis's attack on experimental schools in **The Silver Chair**. But when it is most truly a story, it is close to the central insights of Christianity. My guess is that most children will treat it as they treat **The Silver Chair**, ignoring the tub-thumping and enjoying the action. I hope they do. It deals with things that are important to everyone, and complex and challenging stories about spiritual issues are hard to find. ■

Northern Lights (0 590 66054 3), **The Subtle Knife** (0 590 11289 9) and **The Amber Spyglass** (0 439 99358 X), the titles in Philip Pullman's 'His Dark Materials' trilogy, are published by Scholastic at £6.99 each.

Gillian Cross is the author of, amongst many other titles, **The Demon Headmaster**.

Authorgraph No.140

Julia Donaldson

Julia Donaldson interviewed by Lindsey Fraser

As a child, Julia Donaldson dreamed of a life on stage. She recalls appearing in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* aged 12 at the Old Vic alongside Tom Courtney and Judi Dench. An understudy fairy who got lucky, she re-enacts her star-struck gaze at her audience. She recalls a slight entanglement between her gently waving branch and the one Oberon was holding, necessitating an exit stage left instead of stage right. The sheer exhilaration she felt at that extraordinary atmosphere is an abiding memory. In adult life her passion has manifested itself in ways that probably wouldn't have occurred to that smitten girl at the Old Vic. But that doesn't imply any compromise.

Writing and music are inextricably linked in Julia's life. As a child she was a member of the Children's Opera Group and perhaps more interested in performance than the solitary business of reading. But she did love Eleanor Farjeon's *The Silver Curlew* and engineered a rather touching means of making the writer's acquaintance. 'It was Harvest Festival time and we were giving out food to the needy elderly in the neighbourhood and I decided that Eleanor must be quite elderly, even if she wasn't very needy, so I found out where she lived and called on her and we became good friends.'

Julia loved writing plays for her school friends, and later developed song-writing skills that propelled her, with her then boyfriend Malcolm and their two guitars, round Europe's best busking spots. A student of Drama and French, she paints a gently self-

mocking picture of herself 'acting in weird expressionist plays in which we cycled through the audience dressed as penguins or stood in

the dark reciting commercials for washing machines.' But it was through the songs she made her mark, and photographs from the time – showing an enviably unchanged Julia and Malcolm – attest to their enjoyment of that life. 'I wrote all these different songs – it was a mixture of singing and crowd control really. I even wrote a song in French – "Nous chanterons pour vous si vous nous donnez vos sous"'. This, amongst other songs, apparently generated enough income for a blissful life in Paris's Latin Quarter. *The Pasta Song* is a beautifully constructed catalogue of Italian cuisine. The witty lyrics and catchy, clever tune are a splendid combination – but performed by this duo it is an unforgettable tour de force.

Later they established a successful semi-professional career on the folk club circuit, and appeared on radio programmes as diverse as *Woman's Hour* and *Financial World Tonight* with their sharply observed, tightly crafted current affairs-related songs. There is a sense that they were not far short of hitting the big time, but with Malcolm building a medical career, and Julia combining writing and composition with bringing up three children they seem content to have continued to perform regularly on a local basis. Although they did produce a record on which the pianist is the BBC Radio 4 stalwart and their good friend, Colin Sell.

It was Julia's skill in responding to commissions – 'I still really love writing to order!' – that led to work with children's radio and television. The necessary creative discipline appealed to Julia but she is guarded when she talks of those days, perhaps slightly resenting the heavy use that was made of her, without any corresponding loyalty on the BBC's part. She tells of having to re-establish herself with every personnel change despite her record of achievement and reliability. Malcolm's irritation at the lack of support she was given by her employers is less restrained. Julia's task – to write poems or songs on specific subjects – is one she relished but it wasn't without challenges. 'I had to write 17 songs for the Think About Science series – anything from how a pond gets polluted to looking after guinea pigs to how a bike works.'

Helping in her son's school, she would write plays for the children, wondering vaguely about whether they could be published but never going so far as to submit them. It was an editor who recalled one of Julia's songs from a BBC tape some 15 years previously, identifying it as a potential picture book text. She tracked Julia down and the result, having secured the services of illustrator Axel Scheffler, was the exuberant *A Squash and a Squeeze*. Julia describes its publication as a dream come true.

Julia justifiably resents the suggestion that there was then a lengthy gap before the publication of *The Gruffalo*. 'A Squash and a Squeeze really gave me the bug. I did do other things too (more song-writing; also working for the Citizen's Advice Bureau; plus lots of author visits), but I was very keen to be "an author". I did have 19 books published... but because they were all 'educational' publications they didn't get reviews, despite my taking every bit as much trouble





over them and considering them very worthwhile.'

Not surprisingly, those 19 books include plays (including work for teenagers), retellings and rhyming texts. She wrote **The Gruffalo** in 1995. 'The apparently long gap was partly due to one publisher sitting on **The Gruffalo** for a year and then Macmillan taking two and a half years between accepting and publishing it.' Axel Scheffler's evolving sketches for the monster are a great source of pride to the author, 'and I couldn't think of him as anything other than Axel's Gruffalo now. Axel and I are quite independent of each other. He doesn't tell me what to write and I respect his freedom to interpret my texts artistically. Occasionally I'll intervene... It might be fun to work more closely with an illustrator but I don't specially crave that.' They are a winning team – in terms of sales and prizes – but Julia's output inevitably outpaces Axel's which has led her to work with other illustrators.

It is evident that Julia gives equal attention to all her work – Malcolm describes her diligence and commitment with great admiration. 'She can spend hours and hours, sometimes a whole weekend, on a single idea,' he says. Julia's study, just round the corner from their welcoming family kitchen, has shelves full of well-thumbed collections of stories and fairy tales. 'Sometimes they just give me enough of an idea for a story or a poem, but I can't always make them work,' she explains cheerfully. She revels in the intellectual process of pinning down her ideas and working with them until they are firmly hers. '**Monkey Puzzle** was structurally quite a difficult book – I had to work out exactly how it would make sense for children and it was quite a puzzle.' She knows from experience that children spot a narrative glitch or weakness a mile off – and her events are never punctuated by puzzled '*But why?*' questions. Her stories are much too thoroughly worked for that.

Malcolm is 'a wonderful sounding board'. He is also an integral part of many of her events, undertaking the lead role in Julia's dramatised versions of **The Gruffalo** or **The Smartest Giant in Town**, often taking annual leave from his paediatric consultant's post to do so. And at the end of the show he's been known to strum songs by Robbie Williams or the Beatles to his young – and by now devoted – audience. 'I

read him work in progress and agonise aloud and he actually seems to enjoy this!' Malcolm nods energetically. 'And when he reads something aloud I can pick up any difficulties with scansion – that's very important to me.' But Julia quotes from **My Fair Lady** – 'she will listen very nicely/Then go out and do precisely/What she wants' – with a smile. 'He thought that the Gruffalo should be a real animal, not a made-up one,' she explains. 'But I'm always talking about my stories, and sometimes his enthusiasm protects them from cutting,' she adds. In moments of doubt, Malcolm's reaction and opinions reassure her.

Julia is currently in negotiation about film rights for **The Gruffalo** and although clearly quite fascinated and excited by the process, 'I'd rather not be too involved; I'd rather be busy writing something totally new than rehashing something I wrote years ago.'

There are brief moments when **The Gruffalo** appears to assume albatross-like characteristics and Julia talks enthusiastically about her new work. She is immensely proud of the critical acclaim and sales figures for **The Gruffalo** but rightly wants the spotlight to fall on her other achievements too. She is especially excited about **The Magic Paintbrush**, delicately illustrated by Joel Stewart of whom she greatly approves. A rhyming retelling of a Chinese legend, it may surprise Gruffalo aficionados but is not out of place in the context of Julia's vast body of pre-publication work. 'The best thing about success is that publishers can then afford to publish more quirky, less obviously viable things, such as a book of poems or songs. I'm not desperate for every book to sell hundreds of thousands. The best and worst thing about being a children's writer is that you don't get much notice taken of your work. It's hard, but it also means that people aren't likely to pounce on you if you don't come up with an artistically perfect bestseller every time.'

In her 20s, Julia wrote two musicals – **King Grunt's Cake** and **Pirate on the Pier** – which enjoyed local success. She is very proud of them – the poster for the former is on her study wall – and looking forward to forthcoming productions of both. She is also enthusiastic about two plays she has written – **Bombs and Blackberries** about World War II and **The Head in the Sand** about the Romans. Drama is clearly still her great passion and she is thrilled by the handsome trade editions she's recently received.

With a novel in the pipeline, and contracted work well into the middle of the decade, Julia continues to work hard at her craft, admitting that writing longer fiction 'can be like getting blood from a stone'. But, armed with her huge case of props and, of course, her guitar, the regular school visits she undertakes remain an integral part of her life. 'I consider myself to be 50/50 performer and writer, and think I would find writing quite isolated without it.' ■

Lindsey Fraser is a partner in the literary consultancy, Fraser Ross Associates.

The Books

(published by Macmillan Children's Books and illustrated by Axel Scheffler unless otherwise indicated)

Several titles also available as audio or song books.

The Gruffalo, 0 333 71092 4, £9.99 hbk, 0 333 71093 2, £5.99 pbk, 0 333 96568 X, £4.99 board, 0 333 90176 2, £14.99 big book

The Magic Paintbrush, ill. Joel Stewart, 0 333 96442 X, £9.99 hbk

Monkey Puzzle, 0 333 72000 8, £9.99 hbk, 0 333 72001 6, £4.99 pbk, 1 405 00912 8, £14.99 big book (0 333 96219 2, £4.99 board, June 03)

Princess Mirror-Belle, ill. Lydia Monks, 0 330 41530 1, £3.99 pbk (August 03)

Room on the Broom, 0 333 90337 4, £9.99 hbk, 0 333 90338 2, £5.99 pbk

The Smartest Giant in Town, 0 333 96144 7, £9.99 hbk

A Squash and a Squeeze, 1 405 00476 2, £9.99 hbk (re-issued June 03)

'Tales from Acorn Wood' series:
Fox's Socks (0 333 96623 6 pbk),
Hide-and-Seek Pig (0 333 76569 9 board, 0 333 96625 2 pbk),
Postman Bear (0 333 76567 2 board, 0 333 96624 4 pbk),
Rabbit's Nap (0 333 76570 2 board, 0 333 98738 1), £3.99 each board, £4.99 each pbk

Julia Donaldson is also published by Puffin and Egmont.

Watership Down (Richard Adams)
Arabel's Raven (Joan Aiken)
A Necklace of Raindrops (Joan Aiken)
The Wolves of Willoughby Chase (Joan Aiken)
Tim All Alone (Edward Ardizzone)
The Trouble with Donovan Croft (Bernard Ashley)
Carrie's War (Nina Bawden)
The Peppermint Pig (Nina Bawden)
The Wombles (Elisabeth Beresford)
Patrick (Quentin Blake)
A Bear Called Paddington (Michael Bond)
A Stranger at Green Knowe (Lucy M Boston)
The Children of Green Knowe (Lucy M Boston)
Jim and the Beanstalk (Raymond Briggs)
Mr Gumpy's Outing (John Burningham)
Humbert (John Burningham)
Figgie Hobbin (Charles Causley)
The Guardians (John Christopher)
The Twelve and the Genii (Pauline Clarke)
The Dark is Rising (Susan Cooper)
The Piemakers (Helen Cresswell)
James and the Giant Peach (Roald Dahl)
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (Roald Dahl)
My Naughty Little Sister (Dorothy Edwards)
Charlotte Sometimes (Penelope Farmer)
Spaces Hostages (Nicholas Fisk)
Chitty Chitty Bang Bang (Ian Fleming)
The Summer After the Funeral (Jane Gardam)
Jack Holborn (Leon Garfield)
The Weirdstone of Brisingamen (Alan Garner)
The Owl Service (Alan Garner)
Elidor (Alan Garner)
The House on the Brink (John Gordon)
The Load of Unicorn (Cynthia Harnett)
Bedtime for Frances (Russell Hoban)
How Tom Beat Captain Najork and His Hired Sportsmen (Russell Hoban)
The Mouse and His Child (Russell Hoban)
The Overland Launch (C Walter Hodges)
Helpers (Shirley Hughes)
The Iron Man (Ted Hughes)
Meet My Folks! (Ted Hughes)
The Sound of Chariots (Mollie Hunter)
Rosie's Walk (Pat Hutchins)
Power of Three (Diana Wynne Jones)
When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit (Judith Kerr)
Stig of the Dump (Clive King)

SURVIVORS

Just over a quarter-century ago, John Rowe Townsend was invited by the National Book League* to put together an exhibition of '25 Years of British Children's Books' to mark the Queen's silver jubilee. It was to be a personal choice of about 200 works of fiction, poetry and picture books by British and Commonwealth writers and artists first published during that period, and he was also to compile an annotated catalogue. But how many of his 'golden age' choices are still in print? **John Rowe Townsend** explores.

I took on the National Book League's commission readily enough. I was then children's books editor of the **Guardian** and had been involved in the field for many of the 25 years. It was an interesting time. The fifties, sixties and early seventies had brought a lot of talent into children's books, publishers had become serious about them and appointed able editors, libraries had money, schools and colleges were becoming aware that they mattered. There was talk of a golden age. At the same time there were misgivings: how many children were actually reading these splendid books, and were there not issues, such as race, class and gender, that were not being properly addressed?

This uncertainty was the background to my choice, but couldn't much affect it. The exhibition was retrospective; I had to look at what existed rather than what might have existed or might exist in the future. The criterion was literary or artistic merit, combined with accessibility to young readers. As no two people would ever make quite the same choices, I expected some disagreement, but there wasn't much. The only adverse comment I can remember came from Brian Alderson, who objected that I had included books from both 1952 and 1977, and therefore covered 26 years, not 25.

The exhibition, so far as I could judge, was a success, and the catalogue sold out. Life moved on. But a few weeks ago, looking for something else, I came across a copy and was struck by the closing remarks of my introduction, which speculated on how many of the books in this exhibition would still be around in a further 25 years' time: that was, in the year 2002. I had guessed about 10 or 12 per cent and added: 'That, I think, would be quite a respectable figure. There is a practical limit to the number of books that can remain

current. Most must die, to make room for their successors.'

Well, now we know which of these books were still in print at the end of 2002. And my guess was way out. If correct it would have produced a figure of about 20 or 25. Actually, of the 211 books in the exhibition, 87 had survived. That is over 40 per cent: a remarkable proportion, considering that all these survivors were at least 25 years old and some were pushing 50. Many of us complain about the short-term horizons of modern publishing, but there's nothing short-term about that.

A varied pattern of survival

Looking at the survivors, and also at those that didn't survive, shows a very varied pattern. Among creators of picture-books, the big names of the sixties and seventies – Blake, Briggs, Burningham, Hughes, and others – are still big names today; no surprises there. Rosie, in Pat Hutchins's **Rosie's Walk** (1968), struts her stuff across the page, a classic now. Edward Ardizzone is still around, represented in my selection by **Tim All Alone** (1956), last in the series that began back in 1936 with **Little Tim and the Brave Sea Captain**. But a sad casualty is **Brian Wildsmith's ABC** (1962), which by its richness of colour and boldness of treatment struck a new and resounding note in picture-books. And gone are all three of the vivid picture-books by Charles Keeping that I chose: **Charley**, **Charlotte and the Golden Canary** (1967), **Through the Window** (1970) and **Railway Passage** (1974).

The weakest area of the 25-year period seemed at the time to be that of fiction for the middle age-group of children; the sevens to tens or elevens. And writing well for readers with limited experience and vocabulary is no easy trick. All the

more credit, I thought, to those who achieved it. Among my choices, and still in print now, were Catherine Storr's **Adventures of Polly and the Wolf** (1957), Ted Hughes's **The Iron Man** (1968), Michael Bond's **A Bear Called Paddington** (1958), Helen Cresswell's **The Piemakers** (1967), Clive King's **Stig of the Dump** (1963), Dodie Smith's **The Hundred and One Dalmatians** (1956), and – included with gritted teeth, because although brilliantly successful it was a book I personally disliked – Roald Dahl's **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory**.

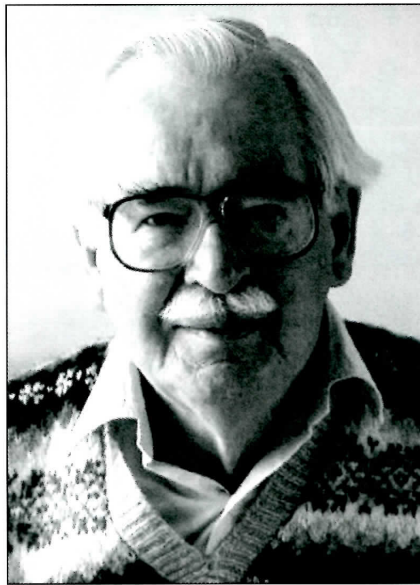
Fiction for over-elevens – mainly novels – used to be divided, in my days as a review editor, for convenience into three broad categories: novels of present-day life, historical novels, and fantasy. In putting together the exhibition, I didn't classify, simply including in alphabetical order of author the books I thought should be included. But looking at the catalogue now, I wondered how each of these groups had got on.

Fantasy, real life and historical fiction

And there is no doubt about which has come off best. It's fantasy. By my count, 52 of the 211 books I chose can be described as fantasy, and 34 of them (two thirds) are still in print. Some of these are by now established classics: Mary Norton's **The Borrowers** (1952), Philippa Pearce's **Tom's Midnight Garden** (1958), Russell Hoban's **The Mouse and His Child** (1969), not to mention books by Lucy Boston, Alan Garner, Penelope Lively, and quite a few others.

Stories of real life have a problem in competition with fantasy: the more accurately they represent contemporary manners, morals and ways of speech, the more likely it is that they will become dated. And realistic fiction was rare in the early years of the period. I counted 24 survivors, which is quite a good tally. Among them are Bernard Ashley's **The Trouble with Donovan Croft** (1974), Sylvia Sherry's **A Pair of Jesus-Boots** (1975) and Jan Mark's **Thunder and Lightnings** (1976). But rather more of the real-life books have gone out of print (27) than have survived.

The real shock comes with the fate of books about the past. The traditional historical novel, in which a young protagonist's endeavours and adventures are set against a background of actual historical events, seems to have crashed.



John Rowe Townsend

Only three out of my choice of more than twenty books set in times before World War II are still in print: Rosemary Sutcliff's classic **The Eagle of the Ninth** (1954), Cynthia Harnett's **The Load of Unicorn** (1959) and K M Peyton's **Flambards** (1967). But World War II, well within living memory in 1977, is now history and adds a handful more, with books like Nina Bawden's **Carrie's War** (1973) and Robert Westall's **The Machine Gunners** (1975). Few of the Commonwealth writers I chose have stayed the course, and I was sad to find three good books by Australian Ivan Southall all out of print. Others by Margaret Mahy, a New Zealander, and C Everard Palmer from the West Indies are still around.

Poetry

Poetry was rather thinly represented in the exhibition, which aimed to highlight new original work by individuals, not anthologies. Of the books included, most are still in print: Charles Causley's **Figgie Hobbin** (1970), the **Complete Poems for Children** of James Reeves (1973), and two cheerfully disrespectful books of verse: **Meet My Folks!** by Ted Hughes (1961) and **Mind Your Own Business** by Michael Rosen (1974).

Obviously the books mentioned here, and the rest of the 87 survivors, are drawn from a limited pool. There are many more books by the same authors, and by authors who didn't happen to be chosen by me, that are still alive and kicking. And that is to say nothing of the even older stalwarts from more than fifty years back. I'm glad there is life in the old timers yet. Modern children haven't stopped needing them. Long may they stay around. ■

John Rowe Townsend is an author and critic.

* Now Booktrust.

- The Last Battle** (C S Lewis)
- A Stitch in Time** (Penelope Lively)
- The House in Norham Gardens** (Penelope Lively)
- The Ghost of Thomas Kempe** (Penelope Lively)
- Master of Morgana** (Allan Campbell McLean)
- The Man Whose Mother Was a Pirate** (Margaret Mahy)
- A Lion in the Meadow** (Margaret Mahy)
- Thunder and Lightnings** (Jan Mark)
- Uncle Red Fox** (J Percival Martin)
- A Year and a Day** (William Mayne)
- Earthfasts** (William Mayne)
- Ravensgill** (William Mayne)
- The Goalkeeper's Revenge** (Bill Naughton)
- The Borrowers** (Mary Norton)
- The Thirteen Days of Christmas** (Jenny Overton)
- The Cloud with the Silver Lining** (C Everard Palmer)
- Big Doc Bitterroot** (C Everard Palmer)
- What the Neighbours Did and Other Stories** (Philippa Pearce)
- Mrs Cockle's Cat** (Philippa Pearce)
- A Dog So Small** (Philippa Pearce)
- Tom's Midnight Garden** (Philippa Pearce)
- Flambards** (K M Peyton)
- A Pattern of Roses** (K M Peyton)
- Complete Poems for Children** (James Reeves)
- When Marnie Was There** (Joan G Robinson)
- Mind Your Own Business** (Michael Rosen)
- A Pair of Jesus-Boots** (Sylvia Sherry)
- The Hundred and One Dalmatians** (Dodie Smith)
- Adventures of Polly and the Wolf** (Catherine Storr)
- Marianne Dreams** (Catherine Storr)
- Thursday's Child** (Noel Streatfeild)
- Marassa and Midnight** (Morna Stuart)
- The Eagle of the Ninth** (Rosemary Sutcliff)
- The Lord of the Rings** (J R R Tolkien)
- Gumble's Yard** (John Rowe Townsend)
- The Intruder** (John Rowe Townsend)
- The Elephant and the Bad Baby** (Elfrida Vipont)
- Fireweed** (Jill Paton Walsh)
- Goldengrove** (Jill Paton Walsh)
- The Machine Gunners** (Robert Westall)
- I Own the Racecourse** (Patricia Wrightson)

NEWS

Smarties protest

A plan to add a teenage book award to the Smarties Book Prizes was shelved following protests from several children's authors (including Melvin Burgess, Gillian Cross and Philip Pullman) about Nestlé's involvement in the marketing of baby milk products in the Third World. Instead, the new prize has been launched by Booktrust and is called the Booktrust Teenage Prize.

Talk To Your Baby:
Developing Language for Life

The key to helping young children to speak, listen, read, write and socialise better lies in encouraging parents and carers to talk to them more. To this end, the National Literacy Trust is embarking on a development year to plan an early language campaign to benefit children from birth to three. The Trust believes that the **Talk To Your Baby** campaign will make a significant contribution towards sustained long-term improvements in literacy competence. It will bring together a wide range of partners in the field to plan the way forward, promote the issues and create practical ways of sharing good practice. Cross-sector partnerships will be created in the development year to work strategically and imaginatively over a planned ten-year period. This ambitious but potentially transformational initiative is committed to making a genuine difference to early language acquisition that will contribute to the life chances of millions of our children. For more information contact Liz Attenborough, Talk To Your Baby Co-ordinator (liz.attenborough@literacytrust.org.uk) or Neil McClelland, Director, National Literacy Trust (neil.mcclelland@literacytrust.org.uk), ring 020 7828 2435, or look at www.literacytrust.org.uk

Muggle now in the OED

'Muggle', a word invented by J K Rowling in the Harry Potter books to describe a human ignorant of the arts of magic, is included in the latest edition of the **Oxford English Dictionary** where it is defined as someone who is clumsy or unskilled.

Canadian picture books

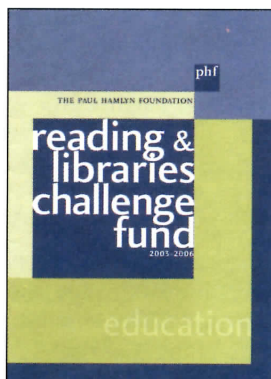
A new web site celebrating the diversity and success of Canadian illustrated children's literature has been launched. The Canadian Children's Illustrated Books Project web site is now accessible to the public via the World Wide Web at <http://www.slais.ubc.ca/saltman/ccib/home.html>

New reading and libraries fund

A new £2.6 million fund for book, reading and library projects is being established by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. **The Reading and Libraries Challenge Fund** is for young people, and others, with limited access to books and reading. It is one of the new programmes set up following Paul Hamlyn's bequest to the Foundation on his death in 2001.

Grants normally will be up to £50,000, although trustees will consider awarding at least one major grant of £100,000 or more each year. Grants usually will be for no more than three years. Funding will be available from April 2003 – April 2006 under three streams:

- **Right to Read** – for collaborative projects intended to improve long term access to books and reading for children and young people in public care. This stream was initially introduced for 2001-3. It now continues as part of the new Fund.
- **Free with Words** – to help young offender institutions and prisons provide easy access to books and reading material for inmates of all nationalities and reading levels and encourage reading for pleasure.

USEFUL
ORGANISATIONS
No.26:

CustomEyes Books

c/o National Blind Children's Society, Bradbury House,
33 Market Street, Highbridge,
Somerset TA9 3BW

Tel: 01278 764764

Fax: 01278 764720

Web: www.nbcs.org.uk

For more information about CustomEyes Books, contact Melanie on 01278 764752 or email Melanie.Kerton@nbcs.org.uk

Please call 01278 764764 if you would like to help with fundraising or are interested in finding out more about the services NBCS offers to VI children.

CustomEyes Books, part of the National Blind Children's Society (NBCS), produce customised large print books for visually impaired (VI) children from its catalogue. CustomEyes Books are A4 sized and are produced in whatever font size, type and with the



spacing and colour paper the child's eye condition dictates. The idea is to make reading fun for VI children by producing titles that they want to read in a format they find accessible. The books are sold to parents at the cost of the original cover price and schools/VI organisations are charged 6p per page.

There are around 200 titles in the CustomEyes catalogue for VI children to choose from including titles from the children's best sellers lists printed in the **Bookseller**; Key Stage, GCSE and 'A' Level English texts and Virgin/Letts GCSE Revision Guides. It is hoped that a reading scheme will be available in the near future.

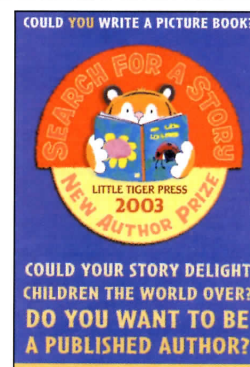
- **Libraries Connect** – for initiatives that are intended to effect lasting change in the way libraries work with communities which currently are not well served, i.e. refugees and asylum seekers, young people at risk.

Details on how to apply for funding through **The Reading and Libraries Challenge Fund** are available from: Ruby Ireland, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 18 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AA (tel: 020 7227 3500, email: ruby@phf.org.uk)

COMPETITIONS

Search for a Story

To encourage fresh talent in children's books, Little Tiger Press and The Travelling Book Company announce the launch of a New Author Prize, 'Search for a Story'. If you have written or think you could write a picture book story, this may be your opportunity to have your book published and receive a cash prize of £2,000. Further information from 'Search for a Story', Little Tiger Press, 1 The Coda Centre, 189 Munster Road, London SW6 6AW (tel: 020 7385 6333, fax: 020 7385 7333, email: jevans@littletiger.co.uk). The closing date for entries is 1 September 2003.



The Perfect Ghost Story?

Piccadilly Press announce the fourth *TheGuardian*/Piccadilly Press short story competition for anyone in Year 8 to Year 13. The theme is 'The Perfect Ghost Story?' Entries must be at Piccadilly Press by 30 September 2003 and the best eight to ten stories received will be published in February 2004 as a book called 'The Perfect Ghost Story?' For further information and entry forms, please contact either: Emma O'Brien, Publicity, on 020 7619 0098, email: obryen@blueyonder.co.uk, or Piccadilly Press on 020 7267 4492, email: books@piccadillypress.co.uk, or look at the Piccadilly website on www.piccadillypress.co.uk

PEOPLE

Fiona Kenshole, Publishing Director for Children's Trade and Reference at Oxford University Press, has left the company following a strategic review in which her role was made redundant. Her future plans are yet to be announced.

Penny Morris has been appointed Editorial Director for fiction and **Kate Burns** Editorial Director for picture books and novelty at Orchard Books.

Anna Billson has been appointed Art Director at Puffin Books. She was previously Deputy Art Director at Orchard Books.

Angela MacPherson has sold Bags of Books, her well known children's bookshop in Lewes, and is setting up as a freelance children's books advisor. The shop will continue to trade under its new management.

REGIONAL PRIZES

South Lanarkshire Book Award

James Riordan has won the fifth annual South Lanarkshire Book Award for his book **Match of Death** (Oxford). It was chosen by groups of S3 pupils from 12 secondary schools in South Lanarkshire. The other shortlisted titles were Gillian Cross's **Calling a Dead Man** (Oxford), Malachy Doyle's **Who is Jesse Flood?** (Bloomsbury), Nicky Singer's **Feather Boy** (Collins) and Mark Swallow's **Zero Per Cent** (Collins).

North East Book Award 2002

This year's North East Book Award, designed to get and keep older teenagers reading, has been won by Sue Mayfield's **Blue** (Hodder). It is a painfully realistic look at bullying and its devastating consequences. The winner was chosen by Year 10 students from schools across the North East from Berwick to Billingham. Malorie Blackman's **Noughts and Crosses** (Corgi) was Highly Recommended and Maggie Prince's **Raider's Tide** (Collins) was Recommended.

Stockton Children's Book of the Year 2003

This award has been won by Thomas Bloor for **The House of Eyes** (Hodder). The runners-up were Debi Gliori's **Pure Dead Magic** (Corgi Yearling), Geraldine McCaughrean's **Stop the Train** (Oxford), Michael Molloy's **The Witch Trade** (The Chicken House), and Sally Prue's **Cold Tom** (Oxford).

INTERNATIONAL PRIZES

Bologna Ragazzi Award 2003

The Bologna Ragazzi Award is the Children's Book Fair award presented in recognition of overall publishing. The Fiction Award was won by Raymond Queneau's **Exercices de Style** (Gallimard Jeunesse, France); the Non-Fiction Award was won by Dominique Gaussen and Alain Mounier's **Jean Moulin & ceux qui ont dit 'non!'** (Mango Jeunesse, France) and the New Horizons Award was won by Hossein Moalem, Barbara Kaef and Kourosh Parsanejad's **The Anecdotes** (The Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, Iran). The Honourable Mentions were (Fiction) Roberto Innocenti and J Patrick Lewis's **The Last Resort** (Creative Editions, USA); (Non-Fiction) Sara Fanelli's **Mythological Monsters of Ancient Greece** (Walker Books, Great Britain) and (New Horizons) Denys Johnson-Davies and Walid Taher's **Tales of Thieves and Robbers** (Dar El Shorouk, Egypt).

US awards

Aidan Chambers has won the Michael Printz Award for **Postcards from No Man's Land**. The Newbery Medal was won by Avi for his historical adventure set in 14th-century England, **Crispin: The Cross of Lead**. The Caldecott Medal was won by Eric Rohmann for **My Friend Rabbit**. Full details to be found on the ALA website: http://www.ala.org/pio/media_awards.html

EVENTS

Children's Literature International Summer School 2003

The second biennial Children's Literature International Summer School will take place from 25-30 July at the University of Surrey Roehampton's campus. CLISS is a concentrated period of study on areas such as the Origins and Development of Children's Literature, The Literature of War, Radical Visual Texts, Comparative Literature, Literature in Translation and Creative Writing for Children Masterclasses. Leading figures in Children's Literature studies will be taking part, including Anthony Browne, Aidan Chambers, Adèle Geras, Peter Hunt, Rod McGillis, Jill Paton Walsh, Lissa Paul, Kimberley Reynolds, John Stephens, and Lynne Vallone. Further information from Laura Atkins, CLISS Administrator, National Centre for Research in Children's Literature, University of Surrey Roehampton, Roehampton Lane, London SW15 5PH (email: L.Atkins@roehampton.ac.uk, website: www.ncrcl.ac.uk).

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SATS Protest

Dear Editor

Almost 100 leading children's authors have now signed a statement calling for the abolition or phasing out of national tests for 7, 11 and 14 year olds (SATS). The statement, originally published in **The Times Educational Supplement** and featured in the **Guardian** and on the BBC, argues that: 'children's understanding, empathy, imagination and creativity are developed best by reading whole books, not by doing comprehension exercises on short excerpts and not from ticking boxes or giving one word answers.' It continues that: 'the relentless pressure of testing...is creating an atmosphere of anxiety around the reading of literature' and calls for resources to be redirected towards libraries and book provision.

Among the signatories are Carnegie Medal winners Beverley Naidoo, David Almond, Robert Swindells, Philip Pullman, Geraldine McCaughrean, Tim Bowler and Melvin Burgess and many other prize-winning authors. The statement gathered the impressive list of signatories in just six days, indicating the strength of feeling among authors and illustrators about the roller coaster ride of endless revision, testing and pre-testing that faces children, and the subsequent pressure on reading for pleasure. Many authors had their own horror stories about activities cancelled to accommodate yet more revision. A recent survey found that a quarter of schools started preparing for the SATS before Christmas!

As I write, at least one major teachers' union is actively considering boycotting the tests, while the NATE, the organisation for the teaching of English, has voiced its opposition to the testing regime. Even the Chief Ofsted Inspectors of England and Wales have criticised the emphasis on tests and targets. There appears to be a real groundswell of opinion against the tests. For more information on the campaign, to get a full list of signatories, or to add your name, contact me at the email address below.

Alan Gibbons (children's author and teacher) aagibbons@blueyonder.co.uk

Mightier Than the Sword

Dear Editor

I have been subscribing to **Books for Keeps** for several years. There are sections

of the magazine that I think are fantastic: the book reviews, Brian Alderson's back page, 'I Wish I'd Written', etc.

But there is something disturbing about this magazine. I first noticed it some time ago in an editorial lamenting the lack of positive images of Muslims in children's literature today. That may be valid or true, but what bothered me were your additional comments regarding too much exposure of Israeli images in the literature, causing an imbalance of views. That smelled to me like good old-fashioned Israel-bashing.

Now I've opened my copy of BfK No.138 to find the lead article on an Institute in Ramallah dedicated to promoting literacy amongst Palestinian children. Not a bad thing by any means. However, tucked inside the article, are many veiled (and not so veiled) attacks at the Israeli 'occupation' and the usual incendiary comments about the oppressor etc.

If you or your editorial position represents a specific political stance, then kindly have the courage to say it loud and clear! Why a magazine dedicated to the promotion of children's literature should be so biased is beyond me, but at least you should have the courtesy to clarify to potential subscribers that you are not interested in maintaining an impartial position on something as loaded as the Arab-Israeli conflict.

And to close, I really take exception with the definition of Intifada, as described on page 5. Masses of oppressed people did not spontaneously rise to confront their oppressors. Rather, the Intifada of 2000-current was well organized and planned in advance.

Phyllis Simon, Vancouver, Canada

BfK is not a 'political' magazine but a children's book review journal. However, children's books inevitably raise political issues by virtue of their content or approach or, on occasion, by virtue of who or what is not included in children's books or only included in a biased or stereotypical way. My editorial policy is to alert our readers to such important issues and to provide a forum for debate. The views expressed by contributors to BfK are their own. Ed.

Letters may be shortened for space reasons.

• Obituary •

Lois Beeson

Died 6 March 2003

Anne Marley writes...

The children's book world lost one of its great unsung heroes on World Book Day 2003 when Lois Beeson died of cancer at the age of 53. She was the Administrator of the Children's Laureate and the Branford Boase Award, as well as being a major contributor to the publication 'Young Writer'. She was previously heavily involved with the 'Poets in Schools' project for the Poetry Society and also the W H Smith Young Writers' competition. Anne Fine, the Children's Laureate, says of Lois: 'She was astonishing: warm in spirit, thoughtful, always interesting and insightful, but, above all, fearless and uncompromising both in principle and intellect. Without her, I could not have done even a small fraction of what we managed together during the last couple of years. She was unfailingly supportive, and I came to have the highest possible respect for her. It doesn't make sense to me that people should be missed even more, simply because of their virtues. But Lois's death will be a lasting loss, not just to her close family, but to us all.'

I wish I'd written...

Keith Gray on a novel whose sheer inventiveness is spectacular...

Jan Mark's *The Eclipse of the Century* took me completely by surprise when I first encountered it.

Ultimately this is a fantasy. Our hero does cross from this world into another. Although we follow him into the empty heart of Central Asia, to a forgotten military outpost on the edge of the desert called Qantoum, not to a world of elves or dwarves. This story has more Kalashnikovs and jaded UN fugitives than swords or sorcery.

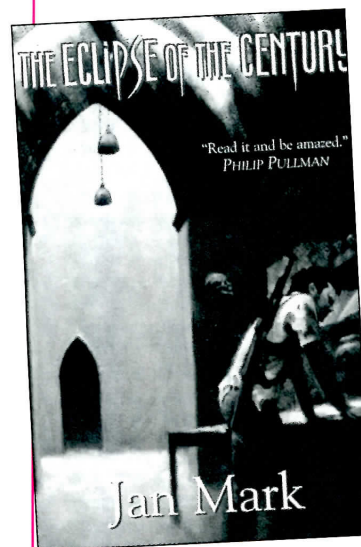
It's a vision or near-death experience

that leads Keith to Qantoum, and it's his intervention that upsets the balance of life there. The town is split between the Sturyats and the Qantoumis, who have been living a forced peace for the past 500 years. When Keith arrives with his talk of 'the black sun at the end of a thousand years' the reader watches mesmerised as that fragile peace is shattered.

The sheer inventiveness of this novel is spectacular, with the richness of Qantoum, its history and its inhabitants, leaping off the page. It is difficult for a writer to say something new, and as the bookshelves get stacked deeper and deeper with 'cross-over' novels, almost impossible for the reader to find something non-derivative. Jan Mark's novel blew me away with its originality.

The Eclipse of the Century by Jan Mark is published by Scholastic (0 439 01482 4, £5.99 pbk).

Keith Gray's latest book is **Malarkey** (Red Fox Definitions, 0 09 943944 1, £4.99 pbk).



Chosen by girls in Senior 2 (13-year-olds) from Craigholme School, Glasgow.

GOOD READS

Thanks to Mrs D Luc, Librarian, and Mrs K Longmuir, Head of English.

Charlotte's Web

E B White, Puffin, 0 14 036449 8, £5.99

The book I have chosen is **Charlotte's Web** by E B White. It is about a little girl called Fern who saves a small pig from the usual fate of the runt of the litter. The little pig meets an affectionate spider who teaches him what life is all about.

The character I found interesting was Wilbur the pig. He is a bit confused about his identity. 'I could spin a web if I wanted,' said Wilbur, boasting, 'I've just never tried.' I feel really sorry for Wilbur because this makes him look very stupid.

The main theme of the book is friendship. I particularly liked this book because it is written with childish themes in an adult way. The image that will stay with me is Wilbur jumping off the manure pile! *Katrina Millar*

Fools Errand

Robin Hobb, Voyager, 0 00 648601 0, £7.99

Are you bored with Harry Potter and **Lord of the Rings**?

Then read **Fools Errand** by Robin Hobb. It's a funny fantasy biography of Fitz Chivarly Farseer. Fitz, in this book has assumed the name Tom Badgerlock and has been dragged kicking and screaming into the world he hates... politics. Worst of all his son, Prince Dutiful has been taken prisoner by the evil Pibalds who are Witted folk and want to



Left to right: Katrina Millar, Munuza Sheikh, Kirsty Robertson, Ronit Wolfson and Emma Worboys

destroy the Farseer throne and take what they think is rightfully theirs. As the Prince's bride-to-be is on her way Fitz has to do some quick thinking and retrieve the Prince in time for the wedding ceremony!

Munuza Sheikh

There's a boy in the girls' bathroom

Louis Sachar, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 5257 6, £4.99

Kirsty Robertson takes on the persona of Jeff Fishkin for her book review:

It was a complete accident, but Bradley didn't believe me. By the way, I'm Jeff Fishkin, a new kid at school. I had to sit beside Bradley Chalkers, a boy who has problems and told me to give him a dollar or he'd spit on me. He is my friend now. As a new kid, I had to go to the school counsellor, Carla Davis. I thought she was really nice and so did Bradley, although not at first. He hated me until I walked into the girls' bathroom by accident. He thought I did it to be tough and when I tried to tell him it was a mistake, he didn't believe me. Carla was really

helpful and helped me settle in at school. She left because some parents thought it was wrong for us to talk to a counsellor. I am not missing my visits to Carla, but I think Bradley is. I wonder if he will ever forgive her for leaving?

Louis Sachar wrote this book with an intriguing storyline. It is very descriptive and highly enjoyable. The title is particularly clever as it makes you want to find out why he called the book 'There's a boy in the girls' bathroom'. All in all, a very funny and pleasant book.

Kirsty Robertson

Stargirl

Jerry Spinelli, Orchard, 1 84121 926 6, £4.99

Jerry Spinelli created Stargirl. What an amazing character. The name Stargirl she gave herself seems to fit. I have never heard of anyone with a name so fitting. She is as distant and far off, as close and as bright as a star. Her name fits her, but she doesn't fit in. At Mica High School there is no such non-conformity. Then Stargirl arrives. She is amazingly different and wonderfully

unique. She seems almost like a saint as she delivers messages to people she doesn't know and gives anonymous gifts. With her radiant happiness and love everyone takes to her. But not for long. She is shunned and excluded by the students and the boy who likes her. He tries to force her to conform but she is like a delicate butterfly – if you try to catch her she just flies away. *Ronit Wolfson*

Noughts and Crosses

Malorie Blackman, Corgi, 0 552 54632 1, £5.99

Persephone Hadley (Sephpy) is a rich Black girl with a White best friend, Callum. White people are discriminated against and so is everybody who associates with them. So when Callum is among a small group of White children being moved to a Black school, problems arise. Together Sephy and Callum learn to stick to their belief that everyone is equal. Later in the book when Callum joins an anti-black association their friendship is again tested.

This is a gripping novel that shows the stupidity of racism and the importance of friendship. A tear jerking, thought provoking read that you will never forget.

Emma Worboys

BfK REVIEWS

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*.

Nick Attwood teaches English at the Dragon School, Oxford.

Gwynneth Bailey is Language Coordinator at Aldborough County Primary School, Norwich. Clive Barnes is Principal Children's Librarian, Southampton City.

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

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

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

Sheila Ebbutt is director of BEAM Education, a former LEA mathematics advisor, and a member of the Early Childhood Mathematics Group.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

Errol Lloyd is an artist and writer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Martin Salisbury is Course Director for MA Children's Book Illustration at APU Cambridge.

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

Rosemary Stones is Editor of *Books for Keeps*.

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

Nicholas Tucker is honorary senior lecturer in Cultural and Community Studies at Sussex University.

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

Jessica Yates is a school librarian working in the London Borough of Haringey.

TITLES REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE

	Page		Page
Abortion	★★★★ 30	Life Like Mine, A	★★★★★ 28
Ada Lovelace	★★★★ 28	Little Farmer Joe	★★★★★ 20
Animal Garden, The	★★★★ 26	Little King December	★★★★ 24
Atticus the Storyteller's 100 Greek Myths	★★★★★ 25	Little Rabbit Lost	★★★★★ 21
Atuk	★★★ 22	Locomotion	★★★★ 26
Bad Alice	★★★★★ 26	Love Stings	★★★★ 30
Beauty: A Retelling of the Story of Beauty and the Beast	★★★★★ 30	Lovely Old Roly	★★★★ 20
Bit More Bert, A	★★★★ 21	Lucas	★★ 30
Book of Books, The: The Bible Retold	★★★ 25	Lucky Sovereign, The	★★★ 21
Bread and Sugar	★★★★ 29	Lullaby Lion	★★★★★ 21
Can You Keep a Secret?	★★★★ 29	Magic Paintbrush, The	★★★★ 21
Catalyst	★★★★ 30	Magician of Samarkand, The	★★★ 26
Clever Rat and other African Tales, The	★★★★ 23	Martyn Pig	★★★★★ 21
Coraline (audio book)	★★★ 27	Merlin Conspiracy, The	★★★★★ 28
Daisy Chain Dream	★★★★ 29	Moving	★★★★ 23
Deadly Secret of Dorothy W., The	★★★ 24	Number Chains	★★ 21
Death	★★★★ 23	Oracle, The	★★★★★ 27
Divorce	★★★★ 23	Our Gracie Aunt	★★★★★ 23
Dog	★★★ 27	Palestine	★★★★★ 30
Doll	★★ 29	Pandora's Box (dual language)	★★★ 22
Dragon's Tear	★★★ 27	Periods	★★★★ 30
Dreamland	★★★ 30	Pigface	★★★ 24
Dungeon, The	★★★ 27	Pinocchio Goes Postmodern: Perils of a Puppet in the United States	★★★ 20
Everybody Poos	★★★★★ 23	Pirate Boy	★★★ 20
4 Boys	★★★★ 30	Precious Potter	★★★★ 23
4 Girls	★★★★ 30	Pregnancy	★★★★ 30
Four Ugly Cats in Apartment 3D, The	★★★★★ 24	Riley, Kylie and Smiley	★★★ 23
Full, Full, Full of LOVE	★★★★ 21	River, The	★★★★ 22
Gathering Light, A	★★★★★ 29	Sleepyhead (dual language)	★★★ 21
Good Enough to Eat	★★★★ 25	Swirling Hijaab, The (dual language)	★★★★★ 22
Hal the Highwayman	★★★★★ 24	Terry Pratchett	★★★★ 20
Hamish	★★ 22	Terry Pratchett: Guilty of Literature	★★★★ 20
Happy	★★★★ 26	Tiny	★★★★ 20
Harvey Angell	★★★★ 26	Up on Cloud Nine	★★★★★ 21
Harvey Angell Beats Time	★★★★ 26	Usborne Internet-linked First Encyclopedia of Science, The	★★ 23
Hello, Sailor	★★★ 22	Utterly Me, Clarice Bean	★★★★ 25
Hidden Tales from Eastern Europe	★★★★ 23	Viking! Myths of Gods and Monsters	★★★★★ 25
Holes in Your Nose, The	★★★★★ 23	Way Home	★★★ 24
Hoot	★★★★★ 27	Way the Universe Works, The	★★★★ 28
Hospital	★★★★ 23	We are Britain!	★★★★★ 20
How to Train Your Dragon	★★★★ 25	Wheels	★★ 26
If You Come Softly	★★★★★ 29	Who The Man	★★★ 29
Is Everybody Doing It?	★★★★ 30	Wish List, The	★★★★ 27
Jabberwocky	★★★ 23	Wolf Wing	★ 27
Jennifer Jones won't Leave Me Alone	★★★ 22	You've Got Dragons	★★★ 22
Journey to the River Sea (audio book)	★★★★ 27		
Kingfisher Book of Living Worlds, The	★★ 25		
Lake of Shadows	★★★★ 22		
Land, The	★★★★★ 28		
Last Castaways, The	★★★★ 24		
Last Chance	★★★ 29		

REVIEWS Books About Children's Books

Terry Pratchett: Guilty of Literature

★★★★

Edited by Andrew M Butler, Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, Science Fiction Foundation, 184pp, 0 903007 01 0, £11 payable to the Science Fiction Foundation from 22 Addington Road, Reading RG1 5PT

Terry Pratchett

★★★★

Andrew M Butler, Pocket Essentials, 96pp, 1 903047 39 0, £3.99 (catalogue available from Pocket Essentials, 18 Coleswood Road, Harpenden, Herts AL5 1EQ)

Terry Pratchett: Guilty of Literature is a collection of serious essays, mainly by academics and freelance writers who contribute to the scholarly journal *Foundation*. Most analyse the fiction cycles: *Unseen University*, the *Witches*, *Death* and the *City Watch* and the children's books. It is noted that 'In all the children's books – and in many of the adult novels – the hero is an ordinary person, thrown into the centre of the action without trying to be there or even wanting to be'. The essay on the *Watch* highlights the political and antiracist messages as well as the parodies of hard-boiled American cop fiction and movies. There is even an essay about the Librarian of *Unseen University* – by the librarian who administers the SF Foundation collection at Liverpool University. Inclusive appraisals by critics John Clute and Farah Mendlesohn top and tail the collection.

Terry Pratchett (Pocket Essentials) is one of many mini-books in this series celebrating film genres,

auteurs, and significant cultural figures, and is written by a Foundation contributor. Helpfully it lists the main targets and allusions for each book, and marks them out of five, for example *Small Gods* and *Carpe Jugulum* each get five – I agree. Although Butler misses the *Dirty Harry* allusion in *Guards! Guards!* he understands that the semaphore towers in *The Fifth Elephant* are intended to allude to mobile phones and the Internet. Butler covers *Discworld* up to *Thief of Time*, the children's books and the maps. Both books have bibliographies, the Foundation one being more scholarly, and both include websites. JY

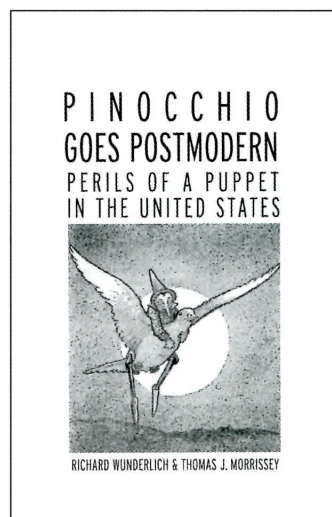
Pinocchio Goes Postmodern: Perils of a Puppet in the United States

★★★★

Richard Wunderlich and Thomas J Morrissey, Routledge, 280pp, 0 8153 3896 1, £65.00 hbk

Disney's choice of *Pinocchio* to succeed *Snow-White* in 1940 has sometimes caused surprise in Britain where, at that time, the story had no very high profile. In the USA however, within twenty years of its first translation (by Miss M A Murray: London, 1892 – not copyrighted), it was available in what Wunderlich and Morrissey call 'a plethora of titles' – a work recognized throughout the land as a well-loved classic.

But that plethora was by no means pure Collodi all the way through (as I noted in a back-page piece in *BfK* 126 two years ago). Very early on abridgment and adaptation had set in with commercial chains and education boards bumping up the market potential and influencing the text. The present study of the



burattino's fate at their hands is an exhaustive analysis of what the cats and foxes among publishers, stage-producers, and movie-makers have done with their victim.

Foundation for the study is, on the one hand, Wunderlich's massive *Pinocchio Catalogue* of 1988 and, on the other, a detailed synopsis, largely drawn from secondary sources, of the social, economic, and educational history of the USA in the twentieth century. By matching the two chronologies the authors are able to demonstrate how Collodi's enigmatic and often violent original has travelled to most of its readers in sanitised, sentimentalised, or even directly edited versions designed to put across messages suited to the 'cultural milieu' of the times. (We saw Jacqueline Rose note the same thing occurring with *Peter Pan* in one of the more comprehensible moments in her book on 'the case' of that hero.)

'Exhaustive' – if not 'exhausting' – is

the word though. The enthusiasm of the authors for their task and their determination to squeeze every drop of evidence from their array of texts makes for something of a trudge through the bulk of the book, and I must question how far the specifics in their case, rather than its larger implications, will hold much interest for British readers. Our experience (if we have any) of both the published work and the social background differs fundamentally from that of the book's American audience – a factor which, when coupled with the crazy price, may well prove inhibiting to sales.

If that is so, it will be a pity, for Wunderlich and Morrissey deal with their obsession in a straightforward way, and in their final two chapters they have things to say about the slippery nature of 'postmodernism' which are thought-provoking and could be applicable to a far wider spread of contemporary children's literature than Collodi's masterpiece.

This book has been published as part of a lengthy, non-uniform series on 'Children's Literature and Culture', edited by Professor Jack Zipes. Fairly recent additions have been *Retelling Stories*, *Framing Culture* by John Stephens and Robyn McCallum (£55), an altogether more academic investigation of similar matters to those dealt with by Wunderlich and Morrissey. Also: a decently-researched attempt to discuss the multifarious elements in *The Case of Peter Rabbit* by Margaret Mackey (£13.99), and a hefty book on *How Picturebooks Work* (£45). You may have thought that you already knew about that and didn't need 300 pages of assistance, but you may have left out of account your grasp of things like *Symmetrical Optatives* and *Visually Provoked Dubitatives*. One of the book's two authors is Professor Maria Nikolajeva of Sweden. BA

REVIEWS Now Out in Paperback

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

Tiny

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Paul Rogers, ill. Korky Paul, Red Fox, 32pp, 0 09 940427 3, £5.99

Reviewed *BfK* 133, March 2002:

"Once upon a time there was a flea called Tiny". From here, the "camera" draws back, and back, and back from the body of Tiny's host, a cartoon mongrel called Cleopatra. We zoom out to an aerial view of Cleopatra's house, to the neighbourhood, the town, the island, the planet, and right out into the solar system. There's a neat twist and a good joke in the ending and, heaven help us, someone might want to argue that it's educational too. Paul's illustrations, as always, have enormous energy and wit in their spiky, wacky fashion.'

Little Farmer Joe

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Ian Whybrow, ill. Christian Birmingham, Kingfisher, 32pp, 0 7534 0702 7, £6.99

Reviewed *BfK* 132, January 2002:

'Perhaps blue is the colour of fear. Certainly in the first half of this picture book, while Joe is experiencing farm animals for the first time and not liking them one little bit, blue is the predominant colour. It is only in the darkness of night when he helps his uncle deliver a baby lamb and comforts the distressed ewe that he truly feels brave. Joe's body language and facial expressions throughout are wonderfully expressive. Outstanding in every way.'

Pirate Boy

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

John Wallace, Collins, 32pp, 0 00 664776 6, £4.99

Reviewed *BfK* 138, January 2003:

'There's a fair amount of WHHHHOOOOSSSHH!, POW!, WOOAAHHHH!!!, CLANG and BOINK, to say nothing of a parrot called Shutup in this picture book adventure, in which a captive young pirate boy tries to evade his masters, Boss and Sidekick. There's also energy, wit and inventive skill in the illustrations, which come in double page spreads, cartoon boxes, circles and starbursts.'

Lovely Old Roly

PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Michael Rosen, ill. Priscilla Lamont, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 1489 1, £5.99

Reviewed *BfK* 134, May 2002:

'It is early spring when the children's dear old cat Roly dies. Time must pass, routines must go on until one day a new puss appears at the door. Sausage gradually takes over their lives, and they are happy. But while Sausage is with them most of the time, the children understand that

Roly is with them always. Rosen's tender words offer a child-like view of life and death, and Lamont's gentle watercolour pictures, depicting the passing of the seasons of the year as well as the seasons of grief, are truly perceptive.'

We are Britain!

POETRY ★★★★★

Benjamin Zephaniah, photographs by Prodeepa Das, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 1902 8, £5.99

Reviewed *BfK* 134, May 2002:

"This colourful and appealing match of photographs and poems in picture book format has portraits of 13 children of varying backgrounds from across the UK. It celebrates not only a kaleidoscope of cultures but also the common joys of childhood. There is an apparent artlessness and a real lack of pretension in both photographs and poems that creates

the impression that readers, say between seven and eleven, would immediately recognise and identify with the children they meet here.'

The Lucky Sovereign

PICTURE BOOK ★★

Stewart Lees, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 1857 9, £5.99

Reviewed BfK 134, May 2002:

'A story of a father and son (no mention of mother or siblings) setting sail for Jamestown and the New World *should* be exciting enough but the shipboard skulduggery isn't wholly plausible. Physically, this is a handsome book and the artwork provides much to

interest the historically or nautically minded reader, not least because of the intriguing perspectives from which we view the action. It's just that sense that the book may be serving too many masters.'

Up on Cloud Nine

FICTION ★★★★★

Anne Fine, Corgi, 176pp, 0 552 54840 5, £4.99

Reviewed BfK 133, March 2002:

'Did Stuart Terence Oliver (Stolly) jump from a top-floor window (for whatever reason) or did he merely fall from one? He now lies retaining consciousness in hospital, watched over by his best friend, Ian, who

takes the opportunity to review their young lives and the circumstances which have led to their closeness. This superbly original novel offers numerous telling and thoughtful insights into the kind of young male sensitivity where the promise of self-fulfilment and the threat of self-destruction are never far apart. Highly recommended.'

Martyn Pig

FICTION ★★★★★

Kevin Brooks, The Chicken House, 224pp, 1 903434 99 8, £5.99

Reviewed BfK 135, July 2002:

'Martyn Pig, aged 15, becomes

trapped in a tangled web of deceit woven when he does not immediately report the death of his brutal, drunken father. The warp and the weft of the story consist of Martyn's accidental involvement in his father's death intersecting with clever, talented Alex who proposes a way in which events may be turned to Martyn's and her advantage. How Martyn ultimately deals with his predicament makes for an absorbing read.'

REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant

ALLAN AHLBERG & RAYMOND BRIGGS

A Bit More BERT



A Bit More Bert

★★★★

Allan Ahlberg, ill. Raymond Briggs, Puffin, 32pp, 0 670 89331 5, £9.99 hbk

A follow up to *The Adventures of Bert*, this collaboration between two master picture book makers displays a similarly minimalist approach to story telling. Bert is a cheery rotund everyman in a three-generation family where everybody including the dog is called Bert. Only one of the stories exceeds 100 words in length and not much happens in any of them: Bert introduces his dog, has a haircut, avoids eating his cabbage, shares his crisps, loses and finds his dog, then goes to bed. That's it, but the play of the page-filling paintings with a simple text that talks to the reader creates a sequence of episodes that are funny in themselves and full of potential for further humorous exploration with young readers. GH

Lullaby Lion

★★★★★

Vivian French, ill. Alison Bartlett, Walker, 12pp, 0 7445 5772 0, £4.99 board

In barely twenty words and five picture openings, this delightful board book introduces us to Large Lion, loving and willing to play, but perhaps a little tired, and Little Lion, apparently tireless, but finally cuddling up and settling down. In glowing shades of red, yellow and

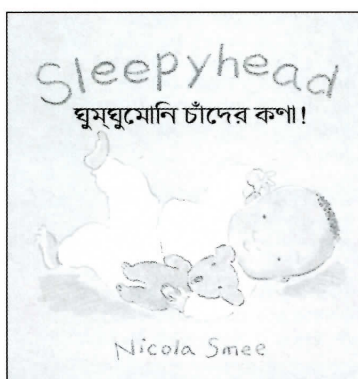
orange, and with an alliterative text that moves from one lion to another ('Lazy Lion...Leaping lion / Lost lion...Looking lion'), the lions romp and snuggle as a sunlit savannah turns to night behind them. The perfect bedtime blend of text and illustration, whose warmth leaps off the page: 'Love you, love you, Lullaby lion!' CB

Sleepyhead

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★

Nicola Smee, Mantra, 12pp, Bengali/English, 1 85269 095 X, £5.50 board

A delightful board book for nursery children, written in rhyme and following baby's preparations for



bed: 'Jim-jams on / Fresh and clean / Sweetest baby / Ever seen.' Clear, unfussy illustrations on the right-hand side support the text opposite very well. The size and fonts for both Bengali and English are clear and pleasing to the eye, having lots of space around them. A small illustration under each page of text invites further related comment. (Also available in Panjabi and Urdu dual language editions.) UC

Full, Full, Full of LOVE

★★★★

Trish Cooke, ill. Paul Howard, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 3234 5, £10.99 hbk

Jay Jay is left with Gran while his mum sets off to fetch Dad. Sunday dinner is not yet ready so Gran diverts J J's attention with a series of delaying ploys, until at long last Mum and Dad and a host of other

relatives and friends arrive in convoy to partake of Gran's traditional – and substantial – Caribbean cuisine. This is a warm reassuring story with strong family values. EL

Number Chains

★★

Devised by Jenny Tyler, Cheryl Evans and Robyn Gee, ill. Stephen Cartwright, Usborne 'Farmyard Tales', 0 7460 5338 X, £6.99 30-piece jigsaw

There are six separate jigsaws, each with five pieces, for the numbers one to six. There are notes for parents in the box. To assemble the jigsaw for three, you find the numeral 3, the three red spots arranged as on a dice, the three puppies all named Rusty, the three dogs all named Patch, and the three yellow ducks. It's got an old-fashioned feel to it, and the challenge here is very limited. The pictures are arranged in the dice pattern for all but number three (in spite of what it says in the notes). The names on the cards are a distraction (should I count the letters?). No chance is given to count a number of *different* animals. Children need to realise that the number five does not always represent five of the same items, and that the dice arrangement is not the only way of arranging five objects. They also need a challenge to excite them to think about numbers. SE

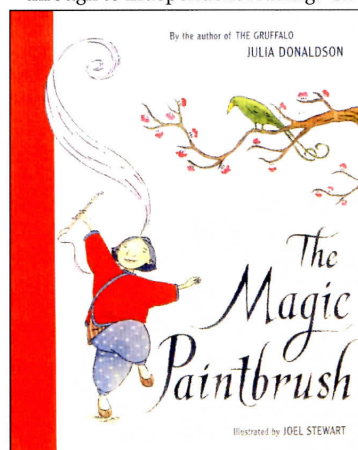
Little Rabbit Lost

★★★★★

Harry Horse, Puffin, 32pp, 0 670 89989 5, £9.99 hbk

Horse deals with a sensitive subject in a caring, accessible manner. He illustrates it throughout with friendly, detailed pictures, and the double spreads are especially enjoyable. One of Little Rabbit's birthday presents is a red balloon, but the big treat is a family trip to Rabbit World theme park. There are such temptations... the pirate ship, carrot speedboats, helter-skelter and the BIG HOPPER. Little Rabbit tells everyone he is big now, not heeding his parents' warnings to stay close. He wanders off, enjoying the bouncy castle until he realises he can no longer see his parents. Fortunately,

he still holds the red balloon, and this is how his parents find him. A cautionary tale, this book can be enjoyed from the earliest days through to independent reading. GB



The Magic Paintbrush

★★★★★

Julia Donaldson, ill. Joel Stewart, Macmillan, 32pp, 0 333 96442 X, £9.99 hbk

This handsomely produced picture book tells the story of a girl in ancient China who loves to draw. As she sits, lost in her doodles in the sand, she is given a magic brush by a stranger. Now, everything that the girl paints comes to life, and her family no longer wants for fish, shrimps or oysters. But of course the evil emperor has other plans...

Donaldson is well known, especially for the award-winning *The Gruffalo*. Stewart is a former winner of the Macmillan Prize for Children's Book Illustration. The text and imagery here seem to flow together seamlessly. Stewart's illustrations nicely pastiche Chinese graphic art traditions without compromising his own stylistic identity. The attention to production detail, such as the slightly heavier than normal parchment-like paper, makes this an attractive addition to the bookshelf. MS

Hamish

★★

Moira Munro, Piccadilly, 32pp, 1 85340 767 4, £9.99 hbk, 1 85340 772 0, £4.99 pbk

By day, Hamish waits in the teddybear shop for a special person to come and buy him, enjoying night-time forays into the House of Teddies where he and his friends can play to their hearts' content.

This is a fairly familiar theme, and the matching of child to doll or teddy can pull poignantly at the heartstrings. Here the text is not coherent enough nor the feelings explored adequately for our engagement: the story is entirely from Hamish's point of view so we have no chance to assess the appropriateness of the outcome. The illustration is marginally better than the text but the whole seems inadequate for its purpose. AG

Hello, Sailor

★★★

André Sollié, ill. Ingrid Godon, Macmillan, 32pp, 0 333 98735 7, £9.99 hbk

Apparently, this book is being promoted as 'the first gay picture book'. The title would seem to bear this out, though a little creative licence may have been used in

arriving at this translation from the original Dutch, which means 'Where is Sailor?' Whatever. This is a gentle and charming tale of loneliness, waiting and dreams. The illustrations, which appear to have been executed through some form of pochoir/stencil technique, are beautifully evocative of the salty air and starry nights of the seashore. Matt the lighthouse keeper spends his days staring out to sea, awaiting the return of 'sailor', with whom he is to set sail on a round the world voyage.

There is much to enjoy in this book, in particular the gently flowing visual pace of the designs, and the attractive all round production. This is just a little let down by what seems to be a rather confused and diluted ending. MS

The Swirling Hijaab

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★★★

Na'ima bint Robert, ill. Nilesh Mistry, Farsi translation Parisima Ahmadi-Ziabari, Mantra, 32pp, Farsi and English, 1 85269 163 8, £7.50 pbk

This is a superb book, with evocative full-page colour illustrations sweeping across each double-page spread. A simple but equally evocative text in rhyme relates all



that a hijab can be to the muslim girl in the text: 'My mum's hijab is black and soft and wide, A fort for me to hide inside! A ship's sails flapping in the air, A comforter when she's not there...' The pictures capture these images in soft colours and present positive, self-confident images. The swirling hijab is to the little girl a source of comfort and imaginary play, but as the text affirms at the end: 'covering my mum as part of her faith / Is what the hijab does best.' A very welcome dual language title for primary classrooms as it invites opportunities for sharing religious, cultural and personal experience. (Available in 20 dual language editions.) UC

The River

INFORMATION STORY ★★★★★

Nik Pollard, David Bennett Books, 32pp, 1 85602 455 5, £9.99 hbk

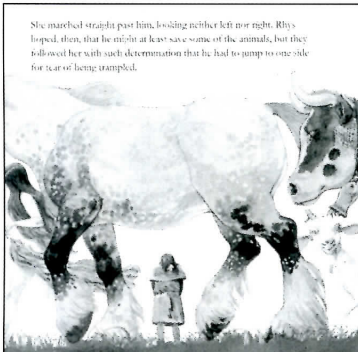
Distinctive collage-like illustrations and poetic text in this spirited picture book describe the course of a river from its source to the sea. Four- to six-year-olds familiar with the cartoon genre will enjoy the 'snapshots' of the river at each stage of the journey. We have a truck which 'makes splashes as it dashes across the widening stream' and, later, a more peaceful impression of 'the stream's safe shallows, where a willow spreads its shadow'. But it is the sounds of the river which are brought most insistently to our attention. For example, 'water laps with soft slop-slaps' and 'horns sound and little boats bob around'. This book would support early geography lessons on water and waterways. For once, we have a double spread that works well: one showing the shape of the whole river which gives some sense of size and scale. Children are also introduced to the language of comparison: now that the stream is 'wider' and 'bigger' it has become a river. But the evocative power of the images, both visual and verbal, make this a picture book worth reading out loud simply to be shared and savoured. MM

REVIEWS 5-8 Infant/Junior

Lake of Shadows

★★★★

Malachy Doyle, ill. Jac Jones, Pont Books, 32pp, 1 84323 076 3, £4.95 pbk



A plaintive and vivid retelling of the tale of the Lady of Llyn y Fan Fach, the remote and bottomless lake of shadows in Camarthenshire. A young farmer falls in love with a woman who emerges from the lake, and persuades her with a gift of bread to marry him. Her dowry is a herd of animals which follow her from the depths, but the groom is warned that if he strike his bride thrice, he will lose everything. You can probably work out what happens next.

Doyle's text carries the rhythms of the oral storytelling tradition from which this tale is drawn: romantically tinged but clear and conversational. Jones' pictures present a pastel Arcadia which blurs into the submerged perils of the supernatural; the scenes of the lovers on the margin of the two worlds are particularly poignant. This combination provides a very attractive and enjoyable book. GH

You've Got Dragons

★★★★

Kathryn Cave, ill. Nick Maland, Hodder, 32pp, 0 340 85158 9, £9.99 hbk

This book introduces us to the idea that we all have 'dragons' – worries, fears, bad things – lurking round every corner, ready to leap out on us without warning. We learn how they make us feel, and are assured that we don't get them 'by being bad'. We discover the characteristics of dragons and the difficulty of managing them, and that when we've got them, we need lots of hugs. Oh, and they will go eventually, and then 'you'll never EVER get dragons so badly again'.

The book ends with a 'problem page', and a 'top tips' section, and has a distinctly American feel to it. It is beautifully produced, from the endpapers to the soft watercolour illustrations, sharpened by cross-hatching. This is one of those 'PG' rated books – great for the right child at the right time; bewildering, even frightening in the wrong circumstances. Know your child, and use it sensitively; play down the certainties – after all, who can predict what another's next big worry may be like? Or use it in 'Circle-time' discussions where many children may find parts they can identify with. AG

Pandora's Box

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★★★

Retold by Henriette Barkow, ill. Diana Mayo, Albanian translation by Viola Baynes, Mantra, 32pp, Albanian/English, 1 85269 893 4, £7.50 pbk

A lovely picture book to hold and

read, this particular retelling is well worth having in KS2 – it's absorbingly told with beautifully coloured illustrations supporting the flow of the story. Typographically, the two languages are very well set and clearly defined (Albanian is written in roman script too) by different fonts, the Albanian text being very slightly larger and bolder. (Available in 21 dual language editions, English only, big book format and on audio CD.) UC

Jennifer Jones won't Leave Me Alone

★★★

Frieda Wishinsky, ill. Neal Layton, Doubleday, 32pp, 0 385 60258 8, £10.99 hbk



This amusing picture book tells of a friendship between a small girl and boy. The girl just adores the boy, sending him love poems decorated with hearts. The boy desperately wishes she would go away, to the

jungle where she could pester monkeys, to the desert, or even the moon. But when the girl actually DOES leave, he realises how lonely he is. When a letter arrives saying, 'See you in June,' he jumps for joy. Written in bouncing rhyme that reads aloud well, with lively, scribbly illustrations adding much to the charm of the story, this book will be returned to by young readers many a time. GB

Atuk

★★★★

Mischa Damjan, ill. Józef Wilkoń, North-South Books, 32pp, 0 7358 1796 0, £4.99 pbk

This is the tale of an Inuit boy who is inseparable from his little sled-dog, Taruk. One day, Taruk is killed by a wolf, and the bereaved boy is consumed with grief and the desire to kill the wolf. But he must grow bigger and stronger before he can exact revenge, and as the winters and summers come and go, he grows



as tall as the beech tree and becomes increasingly skilled as a huntsman, until finally, he finds and kills the wolf. But he learns that nothing is changed. Now his dog is dead and the wolf is dead, and the tundra lies empty and silent. He is even sadder than before. As he searches for new meaning in his life, he finds it in a little flower which he befriends and protects.

This is a quietly moving tale, rooted in our relationship to the natural world. The illustrations nicely catch the tone of the text; the sensitive white line, etched out of a textured background, has echoes of ancient cave-wall paintings. Just occasionally, weak design breaks the spell, with too much white space facing some of the single-page illustrations, but by and large, this is a convincing and rewarding read.

MS

Hidden Tales from Eastern Europe

Edited by Shena Guild, retold by Antonia Barber, ill. Paul Hess, Frances Lincoln, 48pp, 0 7112 1949 4, £12.99 hbk

The Clever Rat and other African Tales

Retold by Suzi Lewis-Barned, ill. Karen Perrins, Ragged Bears, 112pp, 1 85714 253 5, £12.99 hbk

★★★★

These two books both contain retellings of traditional stories most of which have not had a particularly wide circulation before the current publications. The former offers a story each from Croatia, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, Russia, Slovakia and Romania; the agricultural labouring traditions from which they emerge are evident in tales of toiling peasants, shepherd kings and the implacable rule of the seasons. This is a timely selection which might help to interest children in less familiar regions of Europe. The latter collection is drawn from a 1930s collection of Swahili stories with borrowings from the Arabian Nights, and it consists of cleverly concise fables mingled with tales of human trickery.

Both books are very good value: they are robust and large format, with clear texts and expansive, colourful, dramatic illustrations.

GH

Our Gracie Aunt

★★★★★

Jacqueline Woodson, ill. Jon J Muth, Hyperion Books for Children (New York), 32pp, 0 7868 0620 6, £11.99 hbk (available from Turnaround, tel: 020 8829 3000)

Beebee and Johnson's mother often goes away – sometimes for a day and sometimes longer – but this time she's been gone a long time. Miss Roy (obviously a social worker) comes to take the children to their Aunt Gracie. Johnson, the younger child, is willing, but Beebee, who knows that Mama and Aunt Gracie have fallen out, tries to resist. Told from Johnson's point of view, we see two children torn between love for their unstable Mama and a new and secure life with Aunt Gracie. Set in America (probably New York City), the sadness of the story comes through in both text and illustration. The watercolour paintings bleed at



the edges, pulling us into the feelings of the children, and we can understand through the tenderness of the soft colours both Aunt Gracie's love and their sick Mama's. The story is told in a semi-vernacular style, appropriate to this black American family, and it brings to life a quiet personal calamity in a stunning and very visual way. At the end, we know the children will have abundant love from both Aunt Gracie and their Mama.

ES

Jabberwocky

POETRY

★★★

Lewis Carroll, ill. Joel Stewart, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 9293 3, £9.99 hbk

This is an attractive and amusing illustrated version of Carroll's poem. The basic question, with us ever since Tenniel's original attempt to give the Jabberwock pictorial form, is whether it should really be done at all. The poem is language at its most freely creative, and there is force in the argument that children in turn should be free to create their own pictures from the sounds, without a mediator. As illustrators go, however, Stewart has to rank among the best. His creatures are zany and witty, especially the borogoves in their hammocks and the mome raths, a musical duo. The final double spread, the victorious swordsman worn out in his hammock like everyone else (including the moon) after a busy day, is especially effective. A succession of small used postage stamps mysteriously appear at page corners, neatly composing a parallel philatelic narrative. Stewart is an able interpreter of Carroll's imagination but, like all his predecessors, inevitably stands in the poet's light.

PH

Riley, Kylie and Smiley

★★★★

Malachy Doyle, ill. Fran Evans, Pont Readalone, 48pp, 1 84323 118 2, £3.50 pbk

Keeping up the high standard of the books in the Pont 'Readalone' series comes this delightful tale of summer holiday fun. Riley, Kylie, and Smiley are three friends who enjoy their time together; first they are catching crabs, then there is ice cream to enjoy, then sandcastles. And so the day continues, until it is time to race off home for dinner. The illustrations by Evans set the tone for a light-hearted book that children will enjoy reading, and Doyle's observations are witty and always true to life. I recommend this book warmly.

RL

Precious Potter

★★★★

Rose Impey, ill. Shoo Rayner, Orchard Colour Crackers, 56pp, 1 84121 236 9, £3.99 pbk

Precious Potter is the runt of the

litter, and the other kittens couldn't care less about him. But his mother takes special care of him, and soon he grows, and grows, and grows. Suddenly he is taken notice of, but what will happen when he wants to get a job? He is, after all, the heaviest cat in the world. Any book by Impey has me sitting up and taking notice, and coupled with Rayner's illustrations I was certainly not disappointed. Children will enjoy the humour in this tale, and there is enough detail in it for an adult reading the story aloud to be amused as well.

RL

Everybody Poos

Taro Gomi, 0 7112 2046 8

The Holes in Your Nose

Genichiro Yagyu, 0 7112 2045 X
NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Translated by Amanda Mayer Stinchecum, Frances Lincoln 'Let's talk about', 32pp, £9.99 each hbk

Here are two truly exciting early science books. They provide just the right amount of information using an inviting text and playful pictures. Above all they have a clear focus: in each case they tune into children's fascination with their bodily functions.



Everybody Poos – for children between about three to five years – is direct, earthy and entertaining. It uses everyday language to explore concepts of similarity and difference. All animals excrete but the size and shape of what they produce varies. So we have a picture of a huge elephant with a large turd and a tiny mouse with its miniature droppings. Eating and excreting are clearly linked: a child and some animals are shown tucking into their food and when we turn the page there they all are, as the book says, 'pooping'.

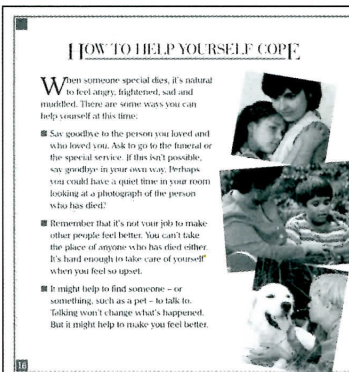
The Holes in Your Nose, more detailed for slightly older children of about five to seven years, has an equally down-to-earth approach. Straight to the point text and delightfully quirky pictures show how the holes in our noses help us breathe and speak. The main text is large and bold while smaller lighter print indicates what people and animals say – 'Ugh! Please use a handkerchief next time!' The introduction of more challenging words – 'connected', 'moisture', 'nostril' and 'mucous' – and the simple but effective diagrams make this a good precursor of later science books. One diagram shows how dirt and mucous combine to make

'bogies' while another is a helpfully annotated cross section of a child's nose and mouth. In short, these books would be an excellent addition to any early years non-fiction collection.

MM

Death

1 84234 163 4



Divorce

1 84234 164 2

Hospital

1 84234 165 0

Moving

1 84234 166 9

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Janine Amos, ill. Gwen Green, photographs by Angela Hampton, Cherrytree 'Separations', 32pp, £4.99 each pbk

These books with their gentle, lifelike illustrations combine the necessary didactic information with a warmth of tone completely suitable to the subject matter. Intended as preparation for serious times of separation in children's lives, they will also be useful while in the midst of crisis, or even after the worst is over. The format is the same for each book: a series of letters written between child and friend or child and relative, explaining some of the feelings and problems the child is having, along with short stories enlarging on the dilemma, and pages of realistic and useful facts and coping strategies. There is much emphasis on talking worries through and that a great deal of time may be needed before emotions and attitudes are sorted out. This is particularly true of the books on divorce and death. Welcome paperback editions of books first published in 1997.

ES

The Usborne Internet-linked First Encyclopedia of Science

NON-FICTION ★★

Rachel Firth, ill. David Hancock, Usborne, 64pp, 0 7460 4202 7, £8.99 hbk

To complement their range of encyclopedias with website links for the upper end of the primary age group, Usborne have now produced a comparable series for younger readers. This introduction to science at Key Stage 1 level has all the right ingredients – practical activities, links to a range of useful websites appropriate for the age group, images that can be downloaded and printed out for homework projects, glossary and busily colourful pages. Apart from some strangely old-

fashioned artwork and some garish background photographs that make it hard to read the overprinted text, there is at first nothing much to object to. And yet there is nothing to ignite a spark of passion for science in a curious child, and in places the text is so simplified as to be misleading. The publisher is keen to stress that the book stands alone for those without access to a computer, but I found myself itching to move away from the book to something more exciting on screen. Not quite what was intended I suspect and not half as entertaining as the old comic-strip style Usborne books. **SU**

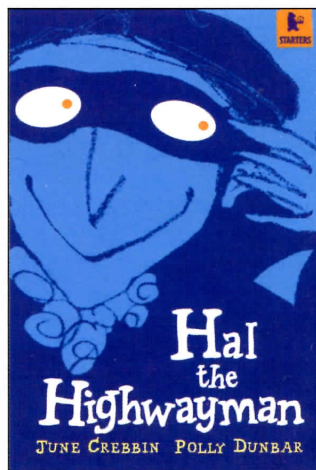
Editor's Choice

Hal the Highwayman

★★★★★

June Crebbin, ill. Polly Dunbar, Walker 'Starters', 48pp, 0 7445 9019 1, £3.99 pbk

If only more first reading books were written and illustrated with the dash and panache of this highly entertaining short tale in which the integration of text and illustration is seamless. Hal is a highwayman and at dead of night, in the Alfred Noyes tradition of highwaymen, he goes



'riding, riding, riding'. But – 'he wasn't very good'. After a series of disasters (falling off his horse, failing to frighten stage coach passengers into handing over their money, etc) Hal enrolls at the Dick Turpin School for Highwaymen for a course of intensive study in map reading, shouting, mask making and riding. His first report is not good ('Hal must remember to cut eye-holes in the mask so he can see where he is going') but he perseveres and his final report is a good one. All that remains is to put his new skills into practice... Young readers will love the jokes, the lists, the school report, the maps, Dunbar's exuberant, scribbly pencil and wash illustrations and above all, Hal's engaging enthusiasm as he keeps trying to be a better highwayman. **RS**

REVIEWS 8–10 Junior/Middle

Way Home

★★★

Libby Hathorn, ill. Gregory Rogers, Andersen, 32pp, 1 84270 232 7, £5.99 pbk

As a Carnegie Medal winner on its original publication, this book attracted much acclaim back in 1994; '... powerful paintings' (*Evening Standard*), 'Streetwise and inventive' (*Guardian*), 'Purrfect' (oh dear, *Daily Telegraph*). There is always something a little uneasy about grown-ups being 'streetwise', and it is an approach to writing and illustrating which can date things alarmingly quickly. Perhaps this book was ground-breaking, but things move on rapidly and the faux graphic novel, photographic 'realism', and jagged-edged paper effect of the design, have a curiously cheesy edge now.

This is the story of a boy and the kitten that he befriends and takes back to his shanty, 'cardboard-city', home. In between time, we travel through the lights, sounds and dangers of the urban jungle. Gangs of bullies, savage dogs, a street 'girl' are all encountered as the boy and his new found pet head home. 'Yeah – you're with me now, Cat. You'n me, Cat. And we're going way away home ...' The images of urban decay, in a predominately sepia based colour range, flash by, avoiding too close an identification with any particular major Western city, through mix-and-match architecture. **MS**

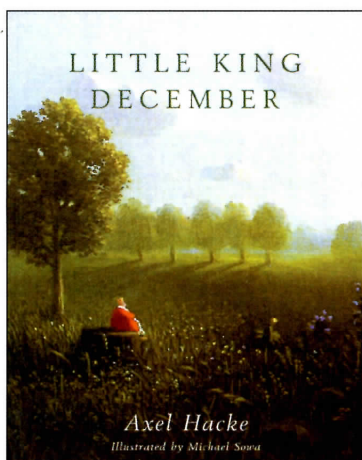
Little King December

★★★★★

Axel Hacke, ill. Michael Sowa, translated from the German by Rosemary Davidson, Bloomsbury, 60pp, 0 7475 5818 3, £9.99 hbk

This strange and charming little book is narrated by a troubled office worker who is visited regularly by a plump, talkative, three-inch tall king. December the second appears from a gap between the bookcase and the wall, emerging from a secret room in which he keeps his dreams in boxes.

His universe is one in which people are born fully grown, 'knowing everything, but as you get a little bit smaller and forget a little bit more'. King December's restless, critical observations on our world are both a



consolation and an inspiration to the narrator, whose wry remarks suggest a man aching for the magic of the childhood towards which the king is progressing. Many of the ironies and allusions of the text mark it out for an older readership, but its mood of gentle whimsy would also appeal to younger children. Sowa's illustrations, in the Magritte-like style of Anthony Browne, are suitably disquieting. **GH**

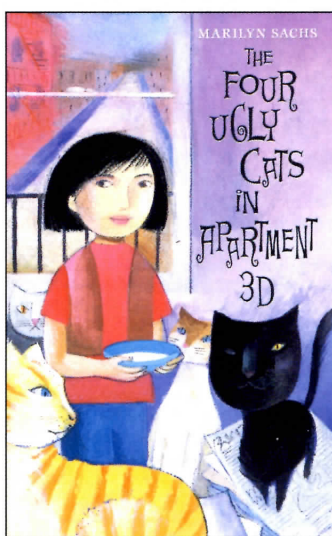
The Four Ugly Cats in Apartment 3D

★★★★★

Marilyn Sachs, ill. Rosanne Litzinger, Simon and Schuster, 80pp, 0 689 83727 5, £9.99 hbk

One day, the disagreeable Mr Freeman is forced to look after Lily, when she is locked out of her apartment after school. She meets his four cats, and has a glimpse of a loneliness and a tenderness in the man that she had never suspected. When Mr Freeman dies, Lily takes on the responsibility of finding homes for his pets, all of them as ugly as Mr Freeman was unfriendly. Through this simple quest, she learns something about human nature. It's not only that sometimes the most hostile person has a vulnerable and caring side, it's also that sometimes good can come from an appeal to unattractive motives like greed – one of the cats turns out to be an expensive rare breed.

Sachs has written a humorous and subtle tale that will appeal to children, and that uses the



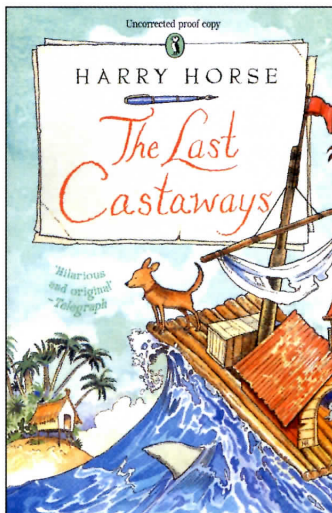
relationship of child and pet to touch gently on human relationships. Litzinger's quirky and characterful line drawings are just right. **CB**

The Last Castaways

★★★★★

Harry Horse, Puffin, 96pp, 0 14 131461 3, £3.99 pbk

Told in a gentle but nevertheless amusing style, *The Last Castaways* tells the story of how Grandfather and Roo become passengers on the good ship *Unsinkable* once more. Aided and abetted by Poopy, a small



grey plastic walrus, they manage to get stranded on a desert island. The calm acceptance with which Grandfather meets situations that are in turn hilarious, puzzling, or frightening will appeal to any adult reading the book out loud, and children should also find much that will amuse them. Horse is at all times an amusing raconteur, with illustrations that will delight those who read the story. This book should win converts to the series, or have readers familiar with it begging for more. **RL**

Pigface

★★★★

Catherine Robinson, ill. Sam Hearn, Young Corgi, 112pp, 0 552 54860 X, £3.99 pbk

'Pigface himself never complained about his nickname, so they assumed he didn't mind.' Noah, who is popular with the other children and a good footballer, always assumes that Pigface does not mind his treatment and life at school. But fate intervenes in the form of a chance accident, with the result that he starts to see life from a different viewpoint. Robinson does not leave things there with a simple resolution to the story, but rather chooses to weave different ideas into the plot thereby helping children to see that teasing can be a many sided affair. There is a wealth of material in the book that is open to discussion, and the simple but skilful illustrations by Hearn complement the text well. **RL**

The Deadly Secret of Dorothy W.

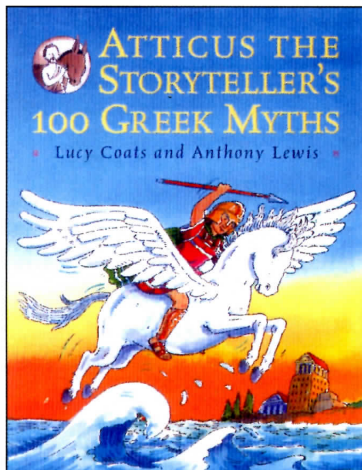
★★★★

Jon Blake, ill. Korky Paul, Hodder, 136pp, 0 340 85558 4, £3.99 pbk

Writing original stories is always hard but imagine if your life depends upon it. That is the situation in which Jasmin, the hero of this book, finds herself. Enrolled in the Dorothy Wordsearch School of Writing she discovers the school's awful secret – hidden in the basement lurks Mr Collins, a terrifying monster who feeds off original, spontaneous stories or, if the stories aren't original or spontaneous enough, their unfortunate authors.

Mr Collins would definitely approve

of this story. It's original and witty, full of amusing characterisation – 'Whenever Mrs Frizzell spoke it sounded like she was telling a bedtime story to a two-year-old, with lots of faces which said Sad or Worried or Very Angry' – not to mention some sharp digs at the children's book world. It sneaks in almost as much about the editorial process as about escaping crazed villains – a funny adventure story which credits its readers with intelligence. **AR**



Atticus the Storyteller's 100 Greek Myths

Lucy Coats, ill. Anthony Lewis, Orion, 264pp, 1 84255 026 8, £16.99 hbk

Viking! Myths of Gods and Monsters

Kevin Crossley-Holland, Orion, 160pp, 1 84255 226 0, £9.99 hbk

★★★★★

These books contain comprehensive and very striking retellings of well-known mythologies.

The Coats and Lewis collection uses the device of a travelling storyteller who recites the old stories to various listeners as he travels from Crete along the routes of the Argonauts, the Odyssey and the Iliad. Atticus's recitations are as light-hearted as is compatible with these dreadful but intriguing tales of lust and slaughter. None of the major episodes are missed, but several details (such as the exact nature of the 'great wound' that Cronus inflicted on Uranus shortly after the creation) are politely passed over. The copious illustrations, which include a useful map of Atticus's wanderings, are in a similar style: vivid and appealing but understandably evasive.

Crossley-Holland characteristically follows a more full-blooded approach. This selection from his adult Norse Myths translation preserves the savagery of the struggles between fire and ice, gods and giants, men and monsters; a ceaseless strife between strata of existence which has influenced writers down to Tolkien and Pullman. The prose-poetry echoes the narrative discord, as in the opening paragraph to the final chapter depicting Ragnarok: 'An axe age, a sword age, shields will be gashed: there will be a wind-age and a wolf-age before the world is wrecked.' The book is prefaced by a visual outline of Norse cosmology



and the main protagonists in the several worlds.

Both books, in very different ways, provide excellent routes into strange home ground. **GH**

Good Enough to Eat

POETRY ★★★★★

Roger McGough, ill. Lydia Monks, Puffin, 96pp, 0 14 131494 X, £4.99 pbk

Once again, McGough shows that 'comic poetry', nonsense verse and tongue twisters can be cleverly crafted, contemplative and inspiring. From the issues in 'Rubber Bullets': 'They sound harmless / But without a doubt / Rubber bullets / Rub people out.' to the beautiful imagery (reminiscent of the first line of Norman MacCaig's 'Trees and Planets') of 'Icy fingers':

'Despite the cold / A line of old trees / Playing with the moon / Tossing it / From one to the other / Never missing a catch.'

McGough, with a deft hand, weaves his magic and humour to create a multi-layered collection of poems. **HT**

Utterly Me, Clarice Bean

★★★★★

Lauren Child, Orchard, 192pp, 1 84121 918 5, £8.99 hbk

Doesn't time fly! Clarice Bean is already old enough to give us her version of school life. And there's no doubt it's her. There she is on the cover; and there's one of Child's bendy chairs on the back; and there's pictures throughout; and the text won't stay still, or the same size or the same shape; and, hurrah say all the girls, the book's got its own pink ribbon bookmark. Yes, it's the same irrepressible Clarice, but there's less of her domestic life and more of the up and downs of life in the classroom. Now she's got two main preoccupations, reading her favourite Ruby Redfort mysteries and trying to win the prize of a silver cup for the best school project, both of which come miraculously together at the end of the story. The story has plenty of comedy and some strong characters, not least Clarice herself, who comes across every bit as well when she shares her thoughts directly with us. There are even two stories for the price of one, as Clarice considerably includes the most

exciting bits from the Ruby Redfort mystery she is reading. But, for a book that has so much going for it, there's a sense of disappointment. This may stem in part from the success of Clarice as a picture book character. There, she is unique. And so is Lauren Child's pictorial vision. In the world of text, although still great fun, Clarice isn't that different from many others, however gymnastic the typography. **CB**

How to Train Your Dragon

★★★★★

Cressida Cowell, Hodder, 224pp, 0 340 86068 5, £4.99 pbk

Cowell loves to create books about books. *Little Bo Peep's Library Book*, her best known book, is packed with in-jokes on genres, title pages, cover blurbs. This too is a book about a book. Timid, weedy Hiccup must pass the Dragon Initiation Programme to become a Viking warrior. Naturally he turns for help to that definitive work 'How To Train Your Dragon' by Professor Yobbish only to find it completely useless.

The real story of how to train a dragon and become a hero is told in the main book: Hiccup has to learn the hard way.



Hiccup first appeared in a picture book and Cowell obviously relishes the chance to write a full-length story about him and his dad, the wonderfully named Stoick the Vast. She has great fun creating their Tribe of Hairy Hooligans, inventing their laws and a natural history for their pet dragons. She puts a contemporary spin on the old brains over brawn moral and brings the story to a climax with a thrilling dragon duel. Lots for lots of different readers to enjoy. **AR**

The Book of Books: The Bible Retold

★★★★★

Trevor Dennis, ill. David Dean, Lion, 468pp, 0 7459 3625 3, £9.99 pbk

'A good try. Could do better' – a familiar enough comment on many a school report, and one which bears repeating for *Book of Books*. As a book which 'gathers together the ancient writings from the Bible, the book of the Christian Faith' it is a good try. Gone is the large format, hardback book with pictures of

golden angels on the cover so familiar in books of Bible stories, and in its place is a hefty paperback at very reasonable cost, so that while sometimes mixing language and length of story appropriate to different age groups between school years 4 and 7, it is nonetheless a good read.

It is certainly comprehensive, covering stories, prophecy and poetry from the Old Testament and stories and letters from the New Testament – indeed, a good try (and in stories of Old Testament characters such as Elijah, and New Testament stories about Jesus, an excellent try). But it could do better. The fundamental problem with a book of this nature is that in the retelling of the stories, the author is tied not only to the original text but to his interpretation of the text. It is clear that the author takes a liberal position sometimes at odds with the received text, surprising in a book published by Lion. It is not just that Goliath was said to be hit in the leg by David's slingshot, but an absence of the tent-temple during the 40-year wilderness wanderings, the existence of Deutero-Isaiah, Jonah walking to Nineveh, a non-mention of the virgin birth of Christ and a refusal to co-ordinate the birth stories ... and so on; but then no two Bible scholars would agree on every point. There are inaccuracies too where God is made to speak from beside the Ark of the Covenant instead of from above it, where Thomas is missing from the disciple-group on Easter Sunday night because he is said to be at Golgotha, and where the point about the difference between absolute-love and friendship-love is totally missed from the story of Jesus' resurrection meeting with Peter at the Sea of Galilee ... and again, 'and so on'. It might be worthwhile waiting for a revision of what is a good try when Lion and Trevor Dennis can manage it. **RG**

The Kingfisher Book of Living Worlds

NON-FICTION ★★

Clive Gifford and Jerry Cadle, Kingfisher, 80pp, 0 7534 0591 1, £14.99 hbk

A natural history book with a difference – much of it is quite unreadable. Not through any fault of the authors, but because the text has been overprinted on photographic backgrounds. You must work very hard to decipher a caption about animal feeding against springbok legs in the Southern African grassland, or try picking out the description of how desert plants store water against the cracked and parched surface of desert rock. Strange juxtapositions of digital artwork and close-up photography result in some baffling imagery, starkly contrasted by silhouetted diagrams in black... and black. We have grown accustomed to such astonishing animal photography through television wildlife documentaries and accompanying books that we start out with high expectations. There are plenty of good examples here but the design just gets in the way of our seeing them. Similarly there is much useful information in the text about habitats and ecosystems struggling to get out. **SU**

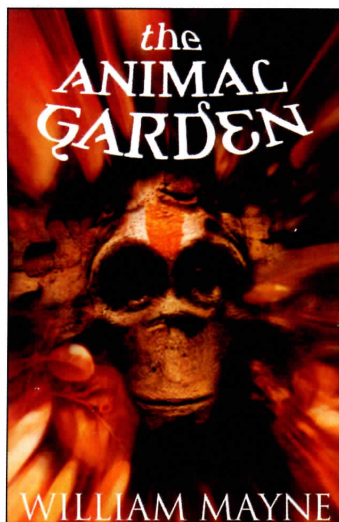
REVIEWS 10-14 Middle/Secondary

Locomotion

★★★★

Jacqueline Woodson, Puffin, 112pp, 0 14 131608 X, £4.99 pbk

This 'poem book' consists of a series of relaxed, conversational poems in which the central character, 11-year-old African American Lonnie, takes a wry, sardonic look at himself and his new life. Having lost both his parents in tragic circumstances, Lonnie's world is now dominated by two women – Miss Edna his foster mother (elderly by the sound of it) and his teacher Miss Marcus who encourages him in his poetry writing. The unflagging good humour of the poems cannot mask their underlying poignancy, and the result is an entertaining and satisfying read. This book can virtually double as a poetry writing manual as it's shot through with Miss Marcus' sound advice to Lonnie on the subject. EL



The Animal Garden

★★★★

William Mayne, Hodder Silver, 112pp, 0 340 85425 1, £4.99 pbk

Philip and Shanya arrive from their different cultures to meet their scientist fathers in a desert camp. They have a clash of personalities within a clash of cultures, a clash of warring factions within the country and then, when the children wake to find the camp deserted, a clash of realities as they come across ape-like creatures who speak very like their fathers. After they are chased by rebel troops and escape into an underground area, they begin to adapt to their new circumstances, their new companions and the struggle for survival. A short and distinctive story from Mayne where again the ordinary is never firmly in control: 'Philip felt the world twitch for him.' It's partly too in the language, not totally secure for the apes, where the failure of a well is that the water 'has changed to dry', where the apes do share but 'towards themselves, not with others'. The return of the adult world and water comes with the growth of the children's understandings and relationships so that this bit of the desert finally blooms richly. AJ

Wheels

★★

Catherine MacPhail, Puffin, 144pp, 0 14 131472 9, £4.99 pbk

James is travelling back from holiday with his parents when their car is hit by an out of control van coming from the other direction. His father is killed along with the young man they believe was the driver and James is paralysed. The subtitle of the book, 'Dead Man Walking' refers to James' horror when some weeks later, he sees the 'dead' driver walking towards him and his attempt to track him down is the centre of this story.

Wheels is one of a newish wave of books for teenagers which has a disabled character as the protagonist and where the ending does not result in a cure. James goes through a lot of feelings of the 'self-hating, wish-I-could-throw-away-the-wheelchair-and-walk-again' kind, although by the end of the story he feels more positive about his future. The style, the language and the setting of this book all seem rather old-fashioned: James' recovery from his angry self-hatred takes place in a church youth club run by the vicar and when equipment is damaged, he and his friends plan a fund raising disco. His long-suffering, house-proud mother is something out of the 1950s.

The story has a dramatic, engaging opening but what is described on the back cover as a 'fast-paced thriller' didn't quite work for me. The mystery element is a great idea, but the characters were a bit two-dimensional and the style too flat for this reader to be biting her nails. LK



Harvey Angell

144pp, 0 09 945104 2

Harvey Angell Beats Time

160pp, 0 09 945105 0

★★★★

Diana Hendry, Red Fox, £4.99 each pbk

Henry lives a dullish life with a mean aunt who runs a boarding house for lodgers who are not allowed to be too tall, fat, talkative or cheerful. Into this world, and totally unexpectedly, steps Harvey Angell with his five hundred kilowatt beam. His job, so he says, is to research energy fields and work with connections. But

what sort of connections? Through his charm as well as through one or two unusual gadgets, he is able to bring about changes for the better for all the characters with whom he comes into contact. In *Harvey Angell Beats Time*, Harvey and his friends set about returning a child from the twenty-third century to her rightful mother. It is not as easy as it seems, and Hendry's observations of people and their quirks are sharp and not without humour. Elements of suspense occur in both books and certainly keep one turning the pages right up to the end; the Waifs and Strays Cafe and the hollyhocks were particular delights. I finished the books actively wanting to read more by Hendry; I would warmly recommend the books both for reading alone or to others. Shame about the off-putting jacket illustrations. (Also available – *Harvey Angell and the Ghost Child*, 0 09 945103 4, £4.99.) RL

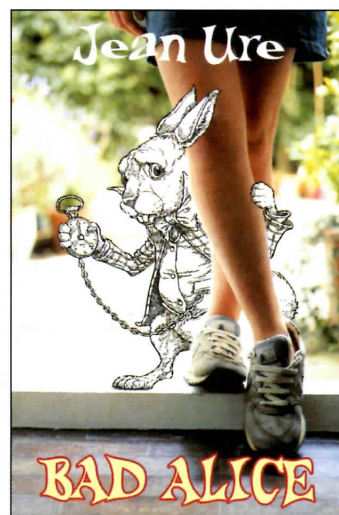
The Magician of Samarkand

★★★

Alan Temperley, ill. Adam Stower, Macmillan, 160pp, 0 333 99775 1, £9.99 hbk

The opening passages of this novel describe the arrival of Zohak Ali with his train of camels, elephants and slaves at the golden city of Samarkand. The gorgeous panoply is watched by Anahita, a leatherworker's daughter who soon attracts Zohak Ali's interest. Zohak Ali can bring powerful magic to the aid of his schemes to control Samarkand and, when Anahita refuses to marry him, to wreak a terrible revenge upon the girl. Turned into an old crone and fleeing from further tribulation she escapes into mountainous country. Meanwhile, Zohak Ali's devastation of the buildings and population of Samarkand is counterbalanced by the increasing splendour of his Blue Palace.

Throughout much of this novel there is the feeling of an author trying to convey a sense of the magnificence and mystery of a time when caravans traversed Europe and Asia carrying exotic merchandise and tales of magic and strange doings from faraway parts. Sentences are generally short and simply structured, perhaps to balance a vocabulary which will stretch younger readers. There is little attempt at character development; most of the time the reader's focus is on Anahita, from the time she first sees Zohak Ali to her enforced exile and eventual triumph over the magician but we never get a sense of her, beyond what is obvious and predictable. Attempts are made to build tension, but we always know that ultimately Anahita will be safe, and it is no surprise at the conclusion to learn the human identity of the bewitched rat and lizard that come to her assistance. This is a book which could have been much richer had the author been a lot less ambitious in his scope. However, I'm sure it will be enjoyed by readers who want a simple good overcomes evil story with an exotic background, and it may have a place as a curricular adjunct to studies of the story's setting. VC



Bad Alice

★★★★★

Jean Ure, Hodder, 176pp, 0 340 81760 7, £5.99 pbk

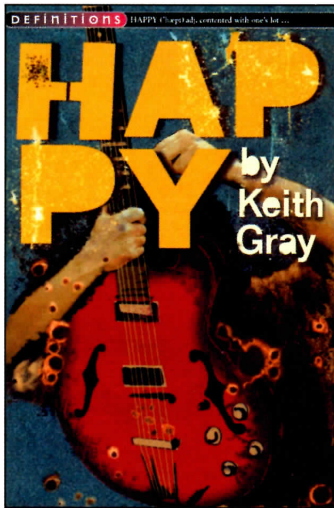
Ure has a long and distinguished record of treating sombre or disturbing themes without being negative or depressing, in novels where the medium of story neither swamps the message nor is dried out by it. She has never used these gifts to better effect than in *Bad Alice*. The book's subject is child abuse, occurring where it mostly does: in families, behind closed doors. The abuser is the warm, extrovert, pious and plausible neighbourhood saint. Alice, aged about twelve, is the younger (and much the brighter) of two adopted children, victims played off against each other. She reads *Alice in Wonderland*, and encodes her secret trauma in brilliant pastiches based on Carroll – marvellous but credible achievements for a gifted, spirited but damaged child. Her deserved good luck is the arrival next door of 13-year-old Duffy. He has major problems of his own, but as a newcomer befriending Alice he is immune to the slanders which have branded her locally as a liar and a basket case. When Alice entrusts her literary efforts to him, he eventually discovers how to read them, and takes action. The story is gripping, both the children and adults subtly drawn and entirely believable, the message important. And the satisfying close is not false comfort. This is a very fine book. Awarders of prizes, please note. PH

Happy

★★★★★

Keith Gray, Red Fox Definitions, 176pp, 0 09 943952 2, £4.99 pbk

For the first few chapters, this novel might seem to be no more than a guitars, groups 'n girlfriends soapie, an enjoyably easy read which might well draw in those elusive male teenage readers. The story is told by Will, would-be singer/songwriter of 'Happy', a band he forms with best mate Danny, electrifying drummer Gav, and boyfriend-of-big-sister Ian. Keith Gray has more to offer than a reworking of clichéd characters and situations, however. His story remains readily accessible, but his



readers may slowly recognise that their engaging narrator, Will, is not to be trusted. The band becomes an obsession. Other commitments, even to stunning girlfriend Beth, are sacrificed in pursuit of a fame he comes to believe is not only deserved but his by right.

Suddenly, the narrative shifts to the voice of Danny, the best mate who has lived in Will's shadow as long as the two can remember. From this new perspective, characterisation becomes more complex and ambivalent. Danny faces choices about his own future as he sees what has happened to Will, whose ruthless ambition prompts him to use even his father's funeral as an audition to secure his break into the big time. The writer's convincing familiarity with the music scene should attract a wide range of readers. Their initial invitation to an easy narrative deftly becomes a demand to make judgements about characters' thoughts and actions. **GF**

Dragon's Tear

★★★★

Sue Lawson, Lothian Books
Takeaways, 192pp,
0 7344 0326 7, £3.99 pbk

Young boy, new home far from the city, no friends, younger brother popular and sporty, mother continually angry, father always busy. Cam's life is grey, unhappy and isolated until he discovers (or is he chosen by?) a dragon. The fierce reality of the dragon, the fantastic colours of the precious stones that make up the nest for its precious egg and the long perspective of the dragon's life, now reduced in this modern world to scarce places to exist, bring the book to life. The dragon's cave is threatened by new development, Dracofir has to search for a new home but needs someone to guard the egg. Cam has been chosen to help and he has to grow into the role and finally become heroic. With the often vivid and exciting writing of the dragon sections, Lawson, like Cam, moves into a new dimension. **AJ**

The Wish List

★★★★

Eoin Colfer, Puffin, 208pp,
0 670 91385 5, £9.99 hbk

Blasted into the afterlife after a bungled burglary, hoodlum Belch Brennan and rookie sidekick Meg Finn wonder whether they are destined for the fires of Hell or the

flora and fauna of heaven. Spiralling upwards, Meg's spectral trail, a colour-coded assessment of Earthly worth, is purple which marks her out for Purgatory, while Belch's red trail – a comet of criminality – assigns him to The Other Place.

But Heaven is merciful. To top up her essential goodness, St Peter sends Meg back to Earth to make amends for her past failings. She must help the pensioner whose flat they broke into achieve his 'Wish List' before he dies. Hell – unsurprisingly – is mercenary. Trident a-sizzle, the Devil commands Belch back to earth. He must stop Meg being good so that he, The Cloven-Footed One, can claim her soul.

From kissing old sweethearts to confronting school bullies to catarrhal coughing over cliffs, *The Wish List* charts the riotous adventures and developing friendship of pensioner and poltergeist partner as both set out to right the wrongs of the past. Fabulously fiendish fun. **NA**

Wolf Wing

★

Tanith Lee, Hodder Silver,
208pp, 0 340 79938 2, £5.99
pbk

The fourth book in the 'Wolf Tower' fantasy sequence which, for lovers of the others, may be good news with many of the relationships and events developed further. The fantasy world is highly detailed and often extravagantly imagined but the telling is strangely flat and trite, locked into Claidi's narration with its repetitively plain sentence structures and frequent attempts to create effects with italics, exclamation marks and capital letters. For fans of the sequence, it doesn't give much away to say that Claidi and Argul are *married!* They return to the House then they find that a revolution took place with the Slaves taking over. Then Dengwi is revealed to be the daughter of a Prince and then Ironel reveals that Ustareth is *still* alive and has invited them all to her Summer land! Then they go there. 'Oh!!!!' **AJ**

Dog

★★★★

Daniel Pennac, trans. Sarah Adams, Walker, 208pp,
0 7445 9009 4, £4.99 pbk

Life as a dog has had a good share of attention from children's writers of late, but it doesn't come much tougher than this. A lucky escape from drowning as a puppy sets Dog off on a paw-to-mouth existence. Narrowly escaping death in the dog pound, he is adopted by a family who first neglect him, then abandon him. Luckily, he finds the friendship of an odd couple of dog and man, Hyena and Wild Boar, whose physical ugliness cannot obscure the beauty of a relationship founded on mutual respect. Through them, Dog gains the strength to endure, and acquires the wiles and fighting qualities necessary to establish his place within his own human family. For much of the novel, the dog's eye view of the world is unsparing. Whether on two or four legs it's a dog eat dog world. But towards the end of the novel, this is offset by the appearance of an amazing degree of canine cooperation where, in a scene somewhere between *The 101*

Dalmatians and *Lord of the Flies*, a motley crew of dogs and cats visits an apocalyptic trashing on the home of Dog's treacherous family. The book was first published in 1982 in France and, despite the excellent translation, there may be aspects of Pennac's portrayal of the urban dog world (particularly the dog catchers) that British children will not recognise. The balance between reality and fantasy in the novel doesn't feel entirely comfortable. Still, it's good to see a European children's novel in translation. **CB**

The Dungeon

★★★★

Lynne Reid Banks, Collins,
224pp, 0 00 713777 X, £10.99
hbk

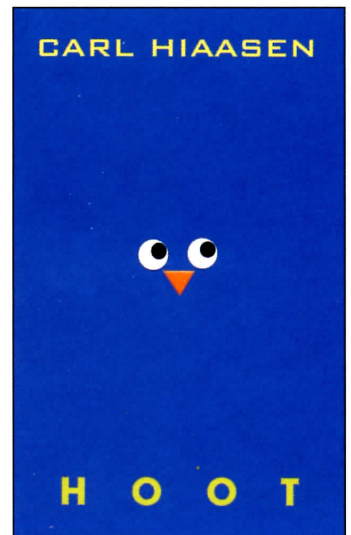
Bruce McLennan, Laird of Kinbracken, has seen his wife stolen, and his children killed, at the hand of his rival, Archibald McInnes. He vows vengeance and, as a first step, orders the construction of a dungeon which, eventually, is intended for McInnes' imprisonment. The events which follow – with the interpolation of a journey which McLennan makes to China and back – provide the subject matter for a novel which vividly re-creates the deep passions, violence and cruelty of its medieval settings and the goriness of fights and battle scenes, whether Scottish or Chinese. This prevailing tone of harshness is balanced by the note of tenderness introduced by Peony, the young Chinese girl bought by McLennan as a personal slave and brought to Scotland to a destiny which, although ultimately tragic for herself, may lighten the lives of those who survive the carnage. Those readers who like their historical fiction to be a blend of romance, dark deeds and savage emotions will find plenty of interest here. **RD**

Journey to the River Sea

AUDIO BOOK ★★★★★

Eva Ibbotson, read by Sophie Ward, BBC Cover to Cover,
7hrs 50mins, unabridged,
1 85549 179 6, £19.99 tape

A wonderfully complete story of adventure and intrigue, *Journey to the River Sea* also celebrates the importance of childhood freedom. At almost eight hours of listening it's a book to wallow in as the many strands of the story are delicately interwoven and then spun out. Accompanied by her governess Miss Minton, Maia is sent to relatives in the Amazon basin. While Maia and Miss Minton wonder at the beauty of the rain forest and the array of possibilities, human and natural, that it offers, Maia's aunt and uncle and her mean-spirited cousins shrink further and further from it. Maia's boldness leads her on adventures that bring her great happiness as well as helping those around her. The vivid detail of the sights and smells of the Amazon are richly evoked by Eva Ibbotson and well conveyed in Sophie Ward's reading. **JE**



Hoot

★★★★★

Carl Hiaasen, Macmillan,
288pp, 0 330 41809 2, £9.99 pbk

Hiaasen must be the most entertaining environmental author there has yet been. Now addressing a younger audience for the first time, his latest passionate but also very funny novel jogs along paths already familiar to fans of his previous adult eco-thrillers. Set in his beloved but continuously over-developed state of Florida, this story features a wild boy out to defeat a Pancake company from building on land dwelt in by rare burrowing owls. Up against him are Curly, the grumpy, bald site foreman, Officer Delinko, an unfortunate policeman, and Chuck E Muckle, company chairman and ruthless entrepreneur. All this is witnessed by Roy, a new boy in the area who is also the target of his school's chief bully. How everything finally works out is a joy to behold, with enough one-liners to keep any reader happy long after the event. **NT**

Coraline

AUDIO BOOK ★★★★★

Neil Gaiman, read by Dawn French, Bloomsbury, 3hrs
30mins, unabridged,
0 7475 6028 5, £9.99 tape

Coraline is an unusually cool, calm and collected child, not one to be easily ruffled by warning messages brought by mice or unpropitious readings of tea leaves. But even her cool is shattered when she steps through a once-blocked door and finds herself in a home that is both the same as hers and spookily different. The unforgettable scary image of her 'other' mother with black button eyes and a powerful hold that threatens to overwhelm Coraline lingers long after the story has reached its satisfying conclusion. Dawn French draws out the chilly undercurrents of this tightly told and emotionally draining story but its intimate and internal scale which works fine in print is less successful when read aloud. **JE**

The Oracle

★★★★★

Catherine Fisher, Hodder,
368pp, 0 340 84376 4, £5.99 pbk

Mirany is one of nine young women chosen to attend 'the god', represented by a scorpion, and his



embodiment on earth, the Archon, in a Greek-inspired world where the framework is provided by Egyptian ritual.

As the old Archon dies, he passes a message to Mirany warning her of the corruption and treachery at the heart of the regime. She sets out to find his true successor, and in doing so hears the god's voice speaking to her, along with finding courage, resourcefulness and an authority she has not possessed hitherto. Fisher's uncompromising style plunges us without explanation into a hot, arid, Mediterranean landscape; impressions of heat, light, weight, colour are very strong. The ultimately strong female lead is complemented by a range of other characters – complicated, flawed, unpredictable – and the tension endures until the last page.

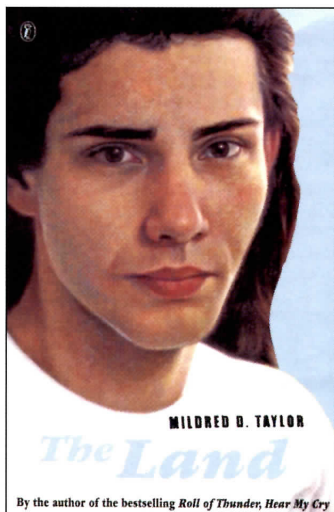
My four testers found aspects of the style confusing but were gripped and thoroughly engaged by the story. They recommend it to readers of either sex, and liked the cover – 'discreet and mysterious'. We want the sequel – soon! AG

The Land

★★★★★

Mildred D Taylor, Puffin, 376pp, 0 14 131459 1, £5.99 pbk

It's a special treat to return to the story of the Logan family, just over 25 years since *Roll of Thunder* was published, this time going back to the grandfather's life and his eventual gaining of their land in Mississippi. Paul-Edward, the child of a part Indian, part African slave and a white plantation owner, has been brought up by both his mother and father. Caught between two worlds, he has to learn hard and difficult racial lessons. The book opens with Paul being beaten by Mitchell, the son of a black sharecropper, because of his whiteness: the first of many hardships which require Paul to learn to use his mind not force. When, later, Paul has a brutal demonstration of his difference from Robert, it marks a turning point. His gifts at working with horses and wood allow him to survive away from home and earn a good living with enormous dignity. There is heartbreaking injustice as he tries to gain his own land, such as the tough contract to earn forty acres by doing months of backbreaking daily work to clear trees which is ultimately reneged on – by Harlan Granger's father. It's a marvellous and very



moving story fuelled by the tension of race and of deep injustice (might is right and white) where the remarkable moral and physical strength of Paul-Edward and his friends allows them to find ways beyond anger, pain and frustration to buy the land that becomes the Logan legacy. The Author's Note at the end gives interesting links with her own desire for land as well as her family's history. AJ

The Merlin Conspiracy

★★★★★

Diana Wynne Jones, Collins, 480pp, 0 00 715141 1, £12.99 hbk



This is several worlds at once which, as if on a road map, are like our world but have followed a different route having branched off at an earlier roundabout in history. We start with Roddy's narrative in a world which seems to be ours but is more grandly, madly and magically different with its King travelling continually about the country in the royal Progress. There is a conspiracy, the new Merlin is switched and the magic is being taken over. It is left to Roddy to sort out. Nick's narration alternates with hers and is a grand and fantastic journey from the apparently usual to the fabulous, through layers and levels of world, encounters with talking elephants and a hired assassin, murders, chases and strange helicopter rides. The two narratives close in together for a wonderful climax. Nobody does it better than Wynne Jones in what is

her first book for more than ten years. She seems to have saved up several books and rolled them extravagantly into this rich one. AJ

Ada Lovelace

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Lucy Lethbridge, ill. James Nunn, Short Books 'Who Was...?', 96pp, 1 904095 52 6, £4.50 pbk

An extraordinarily readable and compact biography of the Victorian mathematical genius Ada Lovelace, daughter of Lord Byron. Recent winner of Blue Peter's award for Best Book with Facts, this neat little paperback illustrated with line drawings gives more than mere factual biographical details of the child prodigy and her domineering mother who separated from Lord Byron when Ada was still a baby. Lethbridge writes lyrically about Ada's strange upbringing in which her father's existence and poetry were never discussed, about her passion for mathematics and her longing to visit Newstead Abbey, once her father's home. Her contribution to Babbage's work on the Analytical Engine, the forerunner of the modern computer, is clearly explained, but we are also left with a memorable portrait of this eccentric and brilliant woman. SU

boring. But this one is no run-of-the-mill chapter per child per country production. Based, as it is, on UNICEF's perception of the basic rights of children worldwide, it examines in detail how different children in different parts of the world fare in relation to these rights.

So, when considering rights related to survival, we look at how children from Afghanistan to the Netherlands fare for fresh water, food, homes, and health. The pattern is repeated for rights related to development (education mainly), protection (family, work and war) and participation (religion, nationality). Each section is interspersed with case studies based on one particular child, so we are introduced to a school day (starting at 0430) for Sbonile in South Africa, life in a Yugoslavian children's home for Ivana, and the Youth Village in Israel where Uzbeki immigrant Eli lives.

This parallel approach to children's lives is a far, brave and welcome cry from the endless series of the 'Arif lives in Bangladesh' type that used to stagnate on our shelves. Though it can provide a satisfying end-to-end read, its real strength would seem to be as a multi-faceted reference book, in which capacity it can throw light into many a dark corner. TP

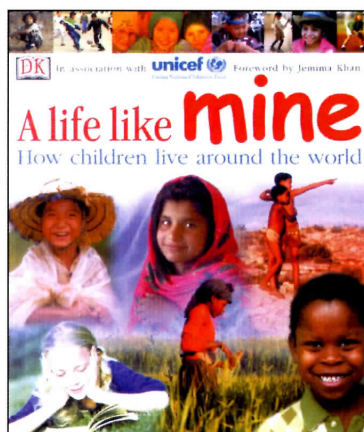
The Way the Universe Works

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Robin Kerrod and Giles Sparrow, Dorling Kindersley, 160pp, 0 7513 4575 X, £14.99 hbk

An admirable sibling of *The Way Science Works* (reviewed BfK No. 138), this large format book works outwards from the Solar System, with details of each planet, to the stars, the galaxies and the Universe as a whole. It gives the evolution of planetary, stellar and galactic structure, often neglected, due attention. Like its sibling, there are good illustrations, a glossary and simple experiments for 10+ readers. There is a useful 'Timeline' presentation of history of astronomy.

The text is clear, accurate, thorough and up-to-date. Minor cavils: the mechanics of 'wall of death' riding is ill-explained and the analogy with planets inappropriate; the difference between the Earth's period of rotation and the length of the day is inadequately related to it motion round the Sun; the difficulty of the Foucault pendulum experiment, which demonstrates the Earth's rotation, is severely understated. FP



A Life Like Mine

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Dorling Kindersley, 128pp, 0 7513 3982 2, £14.99 hbk

This book looks at children round the world and the sorts of life they lead. This kind of thing has been done loads of times before and often with a turgid right-mindedness that renders the products uniformly

PICTURE BOOKS, ANTHOLOGIES AND INFORMATION BOOKS RELEVANT TO OLDER READERS:

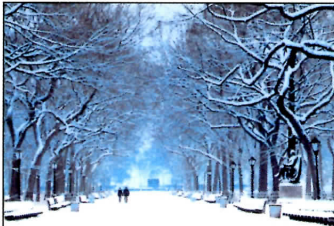
Death, Divorce, Hospital, Moving (see p23)

Little King December (see p24)

Atticus the Storyteller's 100 Greek Myths (see p25)

Viking! Myths of Gods and Monsters (see p25)

REVIEWS 14+ Secondary/Adult



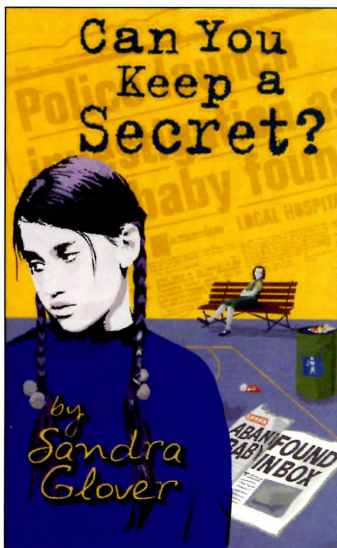
JACQUELINE WOODSON
if you come softly

If You Come Softly

★★★★★

Jacqueline Woodson, Puffin, 192pp, 0 14 131448 6, £4.99 pbk

This is a story of inter-racial love involving Jeremiah and Elisha – African American and Jewish New York teenagers respectively. No stereotypes are served up here as it's Jeremiah who is the rich, privileged one, and it is tragic circumstances rather than predictable family objections that ultimately frustrate their budding romance. Woodson handles language with the sensibility of a poet – a streetwise one at that – and issues of race and racism are handled with insight and sensitivity, which together make this a highly readable novel for modern teenagers from all backgrounds. **EL**



Can You Keep a Secret?

★★★★★

Sandra Glover, Andersen, 144pp, 0 86264 985 4, £9.99 hbk

When tearaway Tracy leaves school peremptorily, Zoë, a fellow 'three day weekend' taker and 'behind the bikesheds' type, is in need of a new friend. Quickly she befriends new girl Karen. Goodie-two-shoes Karen and gobby Zoë are unlikely GCSE soulmates. But, in shouldering Zoë's secret, Karen is forced to reveal her

own secret, a secret which links the circumstances of the present with her own calamitous past.

Can You Keep a Secret? The front cover can't. Revelation revealed, the first half of the book serves to jigsaw together the full facts of Zoë's pregnancy and baby-dumping, while the writer skilfully sustains the reader's interest by centring the second half of the novel on THAT SECRET of Karen's own problematic past. A riveting read which sensitively depicts teenage pregnancy, prevarication and the binding ties of the past on the present. **NA**

Last Chance

★★★

Patrick Cave, Oxford, 176pp, 0 19 275241 3, £4.99 pbk

Prepare to suspend ALL disbelief. Single parent Don Egg goes AWOL and Julian, his 15-year-old son, is left to take care of his two half-sisters on his own. Explaining away his father's absence quicker than you could say 'Foster Care', he successfully shrugs off his school's suspicions, bamboozles his nosy neighbours and fobs off his shrink – yes, shrink! If that wasn't enough to cope with, he also has the demands of his author's subplot thrust upon him, in which he is single-handedly expected to infiltrate and investigate a multinational toymaker whose 'Fuzzball' products so inexplicably mesmerize his younger sisters.

Therapist's thesis-turned-thriller, **Last Chance** is a readable but uneven novel which champions a youngster who copes with life's problems and improbabilities while failing to condemn his absent parents who cop out. **NA**

Who The Man

★★★

Chris Lynch, Bloomsbury, 192pp, 0 7475 6265 2, £5.99 pbk

Earl is physically developed beyond his years. In direct contrast to his stature, his emotional development is retarded. He is childishly devoted to his parents – especially his mother, who relies on food and her gentle nature to cement the bond between them. His father encourages him to defend himself aggressively against the insidious bullying he receives from his peers and those who are older than him who have a point to prove.

With this background of immaturity and taunts, it is inevitable that Earl will develop a crush on his former babysitter, Louisa – inevitable too, that this will end in disaster, when, not understanding courtship, he tries to save her from the very boy she loves. His only sanctuary from the slow collapse of his life is a ruined church on the very outskirts of town. When he unwittingly leads older boys there who have plied him with drink, then this haven, too, vanishes.

The final anchor in Earl's life founders when his father confesses to an affair and leaves the family home. Curiously, this proves something of a relief to Earl, who had sensed for months that something was wrong but had to contend with his parents' erroneous decision to

NEW Talent

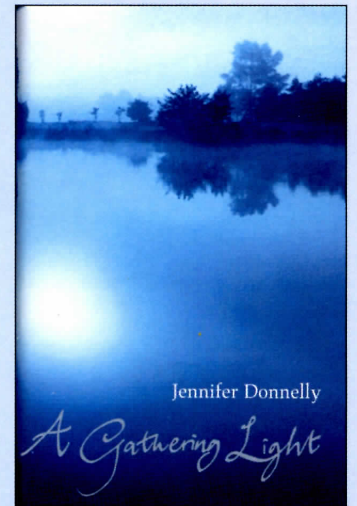
A Gathering Light

★★★★★

Jennifer Donnelly, Bloomsbury, 400pp, 0 7475 6304 7, £12.99 hbk

Can you have love and books? For 17-year-old Mattie, growing up by Big Moose Lake on the edge of the Adirondack Mountains in the early 1900s, the only option appears to be marriage and life on a farm. Even her teacher, the stylish Miss Wilcox, who introduces her to such writers as Edith Wharton, Zola, Hardy and Walt Whitman and who turns out to be the controversial author of a book of feminist poems, has not reconciled marriage and the life of the intellect.

Donnelly's assured voice conjures up the riveting detail of rural life and work (Mattie's heart swells up 'like bread dough') into which the outside world of New York begins to impinge as Big Moose Lake attracts tourists. But more disturbing themes surface as time moves back and forth to create a many layered and turbulent narrative – more **The Stone Diaries** than **Little House on the Prairie**. A young woman guest at the nearby hotel where Mattie works in the



Jennifer Donnelly

kitchens is found drowned in the Lake. A canoeing accident is assumed but her letters, entrusted to Mattie, tell another story. Betrayal is everywhere and ironically, it is Mattie who has to break a promise in order to pursue her authentic self.

Mattie's love of words has her playing a dictionary game, choosing 'the word of the day' ('sesquipedalian', 'abscission', 'gravid' etc) and fitting it into sentences. This love of words is surely Donnelly's too, as witness this wonderfully accomplished, demanding first novel. **RS**

shield him from the truth.

This is a book for thoughtful and capable readers, since much of it focuses on Earl's introspection, delivering his view of the world through eyes which do not see the whole picture and leave us to complete it. However, it covers what will be familiar ground for many adolescents and will strike a chord of sympathy even in those who have no first-hand experience of emotional trauma. **VR**

Doll

★★★

Nicky Singer, Collins Flamingo, 208pp, 0 00 715416 X, £4.99 pbk

Singer is expert in depicting adolescent angst of the type that could seem paranoid to outsiders but vital truth to the individual concerned. This story describes the conflicting emotions of 14-year-old Tilly, whose mother is an alcoholic and whose father has opted out. But Granny is there to take some of the flack arising from Tilly's unpopularity with her classmates. There is also a mysterious doll, made from materials her mother wore before a last suicide attempt. Although this is an object Tilly venerates, it is no friend to her, often urging her on in the imagination to even rasher behaviour in the face of her peers.

Only one contemporary has any time for this troubled girl, and he is an adopted Chilean boy with a genius for making music. But although Tilly finds him increasingly wonderful, he comes over on the page as a pompous prig rather than the romantic force capable of

turning Tilly's life round. Plot lines too become increasingly stretched as what started as a lively and well-crafted story disappointingly fizzles out well before its end. **NT**

Bread and Sugar

288pp, 0 340 85467 7

Daisy Chain Dream

240pp, 0 340 85468 5

★★★★★

Joan O'Neill, Hodder, £5.99 each pbk

Bread and Sugar and **Daisy Chain Dream** are the second and third parts in Joan O'Neill's family saga which began with **Daisy Chain War**. The trilogy has already received critical acclaim in Ireland, where it was first published between 1987 and 1994.

Principally set in Dun Laoghaire during the immediate post-war years, **Bread and Sugar** follows the fortunes and misfortunes of the Doyle and Quinn families. Karen's husband, Paul, is missing, presumed dead and she is planning to remarry Hank who wants to send her son, John, to boarding school. Lizzie seizes an opportunity for greater freedom by moving to England to complete her nursing training, while Vicky trains to be a doctor in Toronto. Meanwhile, in Dun Laoghaire young Patsy Quinn is sent to a sanatorium for the unpleasant treatment of, and slow recovery from, TB.

In **Daisy Chain Dream**, Lizzie rekindles her romance with childhood sweetheart, Pete Scanlon, and Karen is reunited with her long-lost husband, Paul. The older generations of the Doyle family

benevolently preside over their family and extend their protection to others in need. As the children leave home, Gertie finds a new interest in converting the large family home into a guest house aided by her home help, Mrs Keogh.

The evocation of time and place and engaging characterisation make the 'Daisy Chain' trilogy an ideal candidate for televised drama. The narrative is infused with warmth and light and presents an affirming portrait of a family overcoming adversity and celebrating 'the wonders of life'. Even in the bleaker episodes, such as pregnant Biddy's incarceration in the Magdalen Convent and enforced labour in the convent's laundry, her strong self-determination and optimism carry the story forward. The 'Daisy Chain' trilogy will be enjoyed as much by adults as teenage readers and will linger in the memory like other well-loved family stories such as *Little Women*. **NG**

Catalyst

★★★★

Laurie Halse Anderson,
Hodder Bite, 240pp,
0 340 85464 2, £5.99 pbk

Kate Malone is a straight A Science student, gifted runner, and, following the death of her mother, the lynchpin of family life for her father and brother. Her life is composed of building blocks – one placed carefully on the other, the structure holding together despite its exaggerated mass.

Then a series of events occurs which topples the edifice – she is rejected by the only college she wants to attend, she breaks up with her boyfriend and one of the most loathed of her fellow students – Teri Litch – and her baby brother Mikey come to live with the Malones after a fire damages their own home. When Mikey dies in an accident the tragedy reveals deep-seated trauma: he is really Teri's son, born of her father's sexual abuse.

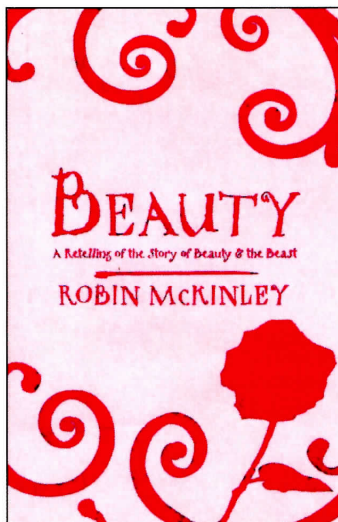
These events provide the catalyst of the title, forcing Kate to decompartmentalise her life and so precipitating her into much-needed change and to accept previously unthinkable alternatives. This flux and subsequent transformation are signalled by the section titles and the chapter headings – neat references both to Kate's prowess in Science and the process of change which she undergoes. In helping Teri to rebuild her shattered life and in releasing herself from the relentless treadmill of her own existence, Kate gains the physical and emotional space which she never dared to allow herself in order to come to terms with her problems. **VR**

Beauty : A Retelling of the Story of Beauty and the Beast

★★★★★

Robin McKinley, David
Fickling Books, 272pp,
0 385 60480 7, £10.99 hbk

Beauty is a remarkable achievement. It is exactly what it professes to be, a retelling of the traditional story of Beauty and the Beast, playing fair and straight, with no labelling to update or displace or play clever narrative tricks with the familiar version, and not the slightest effort



to politicize or moralize it, except that particular stress is laid on the power of love to transform not only the Beast but Beauty herself. Yet the result is a full-scale novel, told in sophisticated, graceful and accomplished prose, which can sometimes make considerable demands on young or inexperienced readers. The tale is given a fuller than usual context of family life, and here there are some effective embellishments of the original. 'Beauty' is Beauty's nickname, because at the age of five she chose it in preference to her given name of 'Honour'. Beauty is not actually beautiful, until love makes her so, but the family nickname is never unkind. And in the event she proves she has both beauty and honour in plenty. This is a simple and happy story, delightfully told at a level that will give much pleasure to older readers (adults included) who might think themselves long past such things. **PH**

Dreamland

★★★★

Sarah Dessen, Hodder Bite,
320pp, 0 340 85460 X, £4.99 pbk

Caitlin wakes up on the morning of her sixteenth birthday to discover that her older, talented sister Cass has run away with her boyfriend leaving quiet Caitlin to fill the void in her parents' attentions and to be the focus for their aspirations. Then she meets sexy, wild-boy Rogerson who represents a chance for her to discover new things about herself:

'I saw myself, then, setting out across uncharted territory, places Cass had never been or heard of. My world was suddenly wide and limitless, as vast as the sky and stars I'd been dazzled by earlier, and it all started there with the door he was holding open for me.'

But when Rogerson starts to beat Caitlin the dream turns sour and she finds that only a drug-induced dreamlike state can dull the physical and emotional pain. Dessen's readable style and convincing portrayal of an intense, physical adolescent love should ensure a wide readership for *Dreamland* which addresses important issues about date violence against young women. **NG**

Lucas

★★★

Kevin Brooks, *The Chicken House*, 368pp, 1 903434 76 9, £12.99 hbk

This second novel from Brooks concentrates on the strange, intimate and at times agonising experience of being fifteen years old. It is well written, settling early on into the type of easy flow only found with accomplished authors. The story features Lucas, a messiah-type outsider up against some irretrievably evil local teenagers. Only young Caitlin knows him for the disinterested martyr that he is, but however great her faith he still remains hard to believe in, let alone visualise. When he unexpectedly produces a capacity for murderous violence she is duly puzzled and has to stay that way, since there are no explanations for how Lucas acquired such alarming talents.

Brooks' first novel, *Martyn Pig*, also contained considerable violence, described as here in emotions ranging from disgust to almost lip-smacking delight. If he could work out a more consistent approach to this key topic in his next novel, it might then be the unqualified success each previous book has hinted at without ever quite achieving. **NT**

Abortion Love Stings

1 899194 18 5 1 899194 71 1

4 Boys Periods

1 899194 60 6 0 903289 98 9

4 Girls Pregnancy

1 899194 36 3 1 899194 37 1

Is Everybody Doing It?

1 899194 55 X

NON-FICTION

★★★★★

fpa, 12–32pp, single title free with sae, or £12.00 + £2.50 p&p for 50 copies of a single title, available from fpa, 2–12 Pentonville Road, London N1 9PF, tel: 020 7837 5432

Seven little booklets produced by the fpa (once the Family Planning Association) cover areas of concern to teenagers (and their parents). Small enough to put in a pocket or bag, and sassy enough to look OK if caught out reading one in public, there are comic strip illustrations and cartoons to lighten the tone while driving home the message. Those covering pregnancy and periods are straightforward and informative, dotted with quotes to reassure the reader that others have trodden the same path. Two useful guides to the body – one for girls, one for boys, but ideally to be read by both – explain changes that occur in puberty, answering questions and dispelling myths. *Abortion* presents different sides to the argument to help understand the choices when facing an unplanned pregnancy, while *Love Stings* uses a cartoon 'whodunnit' to explain sexually transmitted infections. *Is Everybody Doing It?* offers sympathetic guidance on contraception with plenty of advice about where to go for confidential help. Addresses and phone numbers on all these booklets make them of real practical use. **SU**

Palestine

NON-FICTION

★★★★★

Joe Saccho, Jonathan Cape,
288pp, 0 224 06982 9, £12.99 pbk

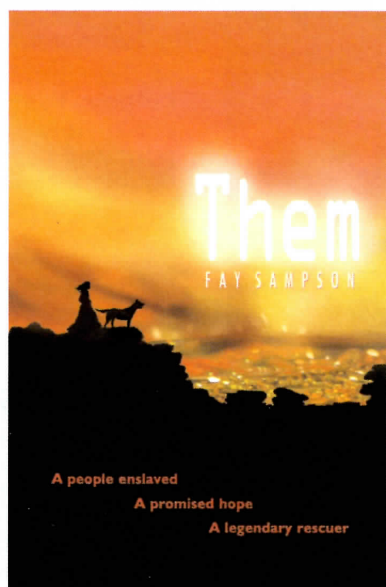
Saccho, an American journalist and cartoonist, spent two months in Palestine in the winter of 1991–2, at the time when the first intifada, the mass Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation, was gradually coming to an end. He spent those two months on buses and taxis in the west Bank and Gaza Strip moving constantly between refugee camps, towns and villages, living with the Palestinians and talking to them about their lives and political struggle. On his return to America, he distilled his experience into a series of nine comic books, now brought together in one volume.

This is documentary reportage in a venerable American tradition, in which the reporter's own motives and reactions are as much a matter of scrutiny and comment as the witnesses whose experiences he records. It is also an enterprise of great artistic courage and stamina, which shows perhaps both the versatility and the limits of the comic form. There can rarely have been a subject that seems less suited to its medium than this, not only in the complex context that needs to be conveyed but also in the repetitive nature of the content, as Saccho sits in room after room, listening to 'tales of woe': 'The cold, the men, the tea... That's the essence of the Palestinian Room... These rooms... not even the talk changes... The soldiers closed down the school, the soldiers imposed a curfew... The soldiers clubbed me on the head, the soldiers took me away... Over and over, the same stories, maybe with some bruises shuffled.'

It's deliberately uncomfortable reading, particularly for those of us in the western democracies, and Saccho makes sure that the reader shares his physical, cultural and moral discomfort. In monochrome, here are the squalid conditions in which many of the Palestinians live, the contorted faces of Israeli soldiers, settlers and Palestinians as they confront one another, the casual indignities and entrenched injustice of Palestinian life, and, above all, the best and worst of the human struggle against oppression: sacrifice, courage and resilience alongside hatred, brutality and despair. It's a claustrophobic and relentless experience, so that when Saccho finds himself in Tel Aviv, on the other side of the fences and road blocks, he feels a relief that is shared by the reader as he sits chatting with two Israeli girls, 'their day-to-day concerns remind me of the stuff that makes up the lives of people I know in Europe, the States.'

The book makes no attempt to be balanced in terms of the politics of the Middle East; it is a report from one side only. But it is not a propaganda piece with an axe to grind, except the basic point that Palestinians have grievances which must be addressed. Young people won't find it easy reading. To see the full picture, it shouldn't be the only thing they read about the Palestinian situation. But they should read it, particularly as, even as I write this, we engage in a war whose repercussions for the region can only be guessed at. **CB**

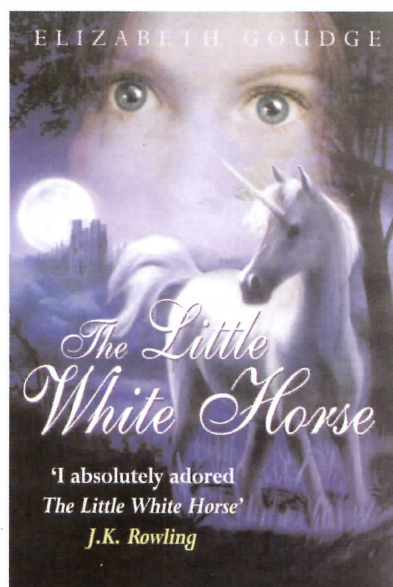
For *great* fiction you won't want to put down...



0 7459 46704, £4.99

'Fay Sampson is a writer of great invention and power'

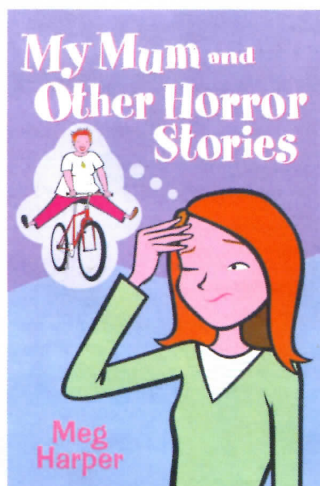
Books for Keeps



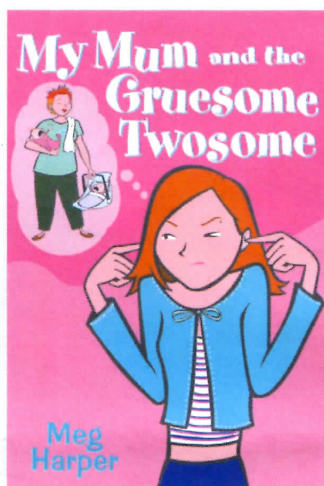
0 7459 45783, £4.99

'I absolutely adored The Little White Horse'

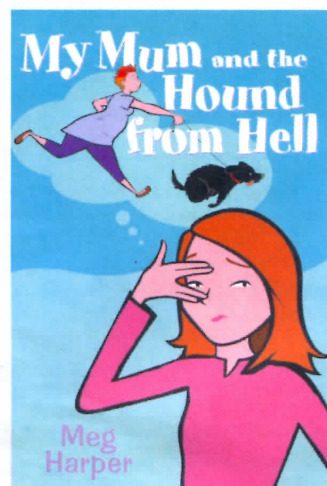
J.K. Rowling



0 7459 48308, £4.99



0 7459 48294, £4.99



0 7459 47999, £4.99

'Lively writing and a feisty, funny heroine...'

School Librarian

CLASSICS IN SHORT No. 39

Brian Alderson

Who is this engaging figure with his coat buttoned up the wrong way? It is Mr Gumpy. Let us join him for...

*Ah – the calamities and triumphs*

of those caught up in nursery rigmaroles. What violence must be done that the old woman may get her pig over a stile. What frenzied events precede the nuptials of the forlorn maiden and the man all tattered and torn. And at the end of 'Titty Mouse and Tatty Mouse' there is ruination all round.

It is a long tradition

(the Opies point to equivalences between our nineteenth-century Old Woman and her Pig and some verses in a sixteenth-century edition of the Haggadah) and the simple pleasure of hearing cumulative texts unwind is easy to comprehend – rather like that laborious carpet-game of standing up a serpentine row of playing-cards and causing them to collapse *seriatim*.

Thus,

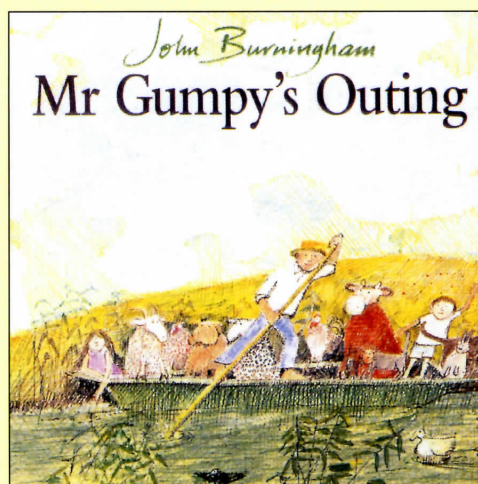
John Burningham was employing a well-loved formula when he composed **Mr Gumpy's Outing** in 1970. One by one children and animals pile into Mr G's boat, each in turn being commanded to behave. (Telling the tale to children in England and America I have found – as, no doubt, has everyone else – that one of its great moments is when the pig is allowed to board with the words 'Very well, but don't muck about.'). Of course they do not behave: 'The goat kicked, the calf trampled...' and the chain unwinds... 'and into the water they fell.'

Such a simple climax,

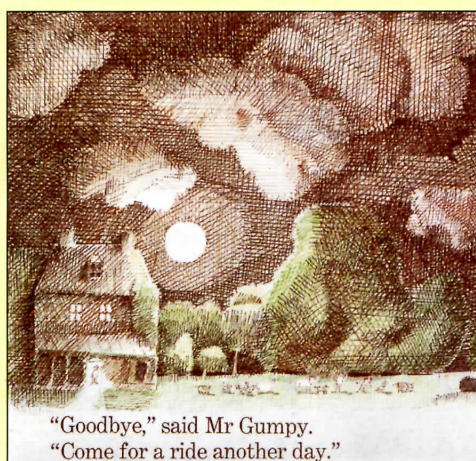
so perfectly judged, and then followed by the happy outcome when they all walk back across the sunlit fields for tea at Mr G's place. It was a sumptuous meal and when they leave for home the moon is up and they are bidden to 'Come for a ride another day.'

This is indeed a story for telling.

John Burningham gives you the words and they fall naturally into the traditional pattern. But of course it's a story to look at too (preferably in printings in the original size: more or less ten inches square). There is an almost haphazard spontaneity about the illustrations, with little of the narrative detail that might have been given in a traditional picture book, and, indeed, one of the virtues of the drawing is the extreme sketchiness with which the characters are delineated. You may interpret their almost vacuous expressions how you will. As they take their places in the punt you get a full-scale colour



portrait of each on the right-hand page, but with inconsequential variations in graphic style – sometimes pretty coloured pen or pencil work (Mr Gumpy on the first page, or the flapping hens), sometimes with hefty doses of colour (crayon, watercolour, and what looks like acrylic for the cat with its speculative stare). On the left-hand page though, in more orderly



"Goodbye," said Mr Gumpy.
"Come for a ride another day."

fashion, you get sepia pen drawings as Mr Gumpy poles his punt through the pastoral landscape with his growing company of voyagers.

The varied music

of these turning pages has its own purpose. For with the capsizing boat the rhythm changes. The upset is portrayed in a magnificent dynamic double-page colour illustration, which is balanced two pages later by the peaceable feast. Everybody scoffs tea and cake, too full for words, before the final, single-page, moonlit valediction. The exigencies of the 32-page picture book are perfectly exploited.

The magic of this performance

(could it ever be illustrated by anyone else?) is perhaps best shown by comparing it with its lesser-known sequel: **Mr Gumpy's Motor Car** (Cape, 1973). Here the gang is all awaiting the ride, promised for 'another day', in our hero's old jalopy ('It will be a squash' says he) and they take to the cart-track across the fields. Rain falls however and they have much ado pushing the car out of the mud.

It is a picture book superior to most.

Its text and graphic character are as endearing as those of the **Outing**, but they cannot help having the factitious qualities of a sequel. The bright spontaneity of its predecessor is gone and it relies for its full effect on the pleasure we have in renewing old acquaintanceships. What's more, there's no bun-fight at the end. ■

STOP PRESS: Kibroth-Hattaavah

Two readers have kindly written to identify this reference in Dean Farrar's **Eric**, mentioned in our last. Both seem to be more familiar with the Internet than with Old Testament exegesis so readers must make what they can of this dark passage about 'the graves of those taken in lust' in **Numbers** xi.34. To relish the full implication of the phrase you probably need to be a Victorian clergyman.

The illustrations are taken from the Red Fox edition (which is more or less ten inches square), 0 09 940879 1, £5.99 pbk.

This year is the fortieth anniversary of the publication of **Borka**, John Burningham's first book. Brian Alderson will be writing a celebratory article for a later issue of **BfK** this year.

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