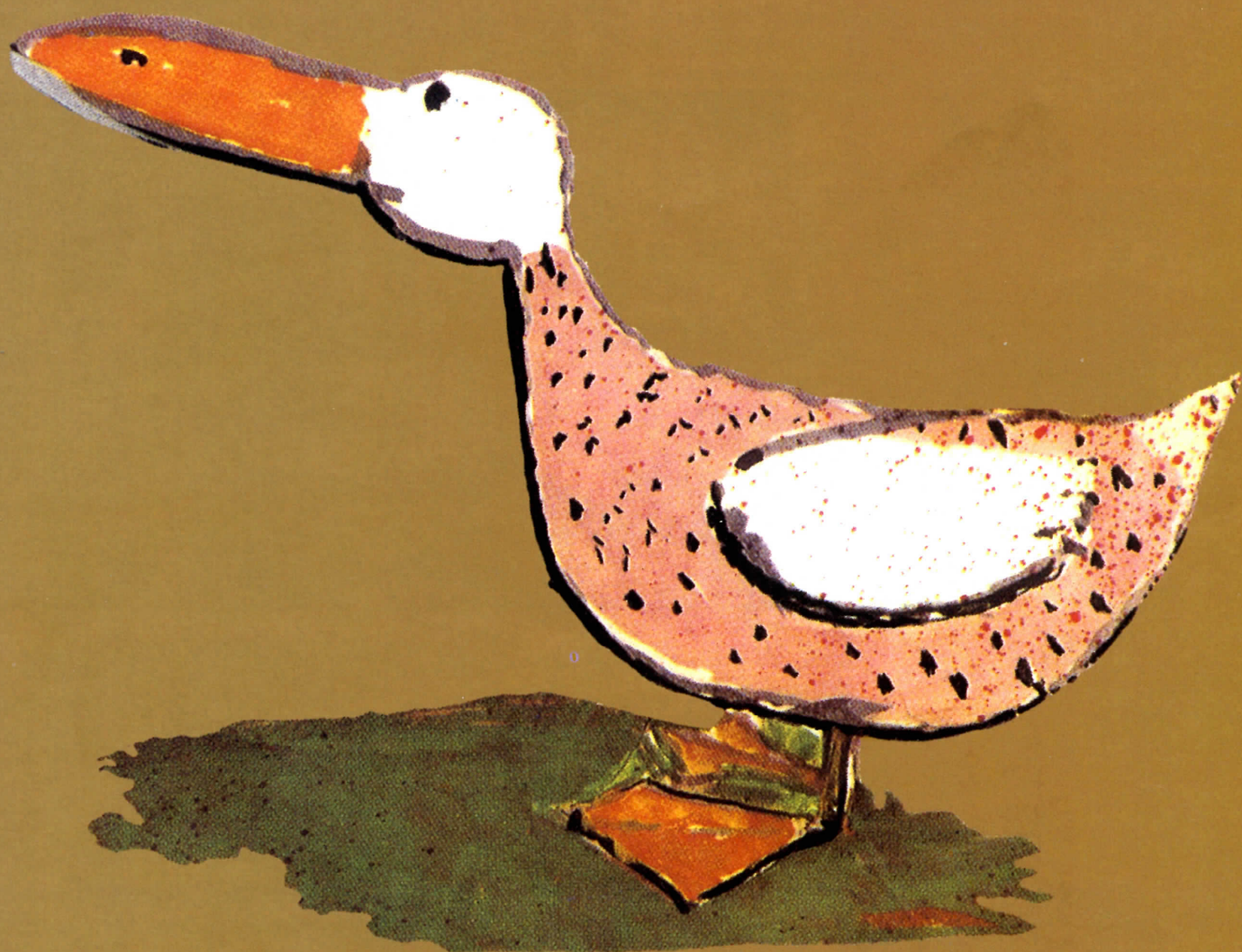


# BOOKS FOR KEEPS

November 2003  
No.143 UK Price £3.65

*the children's book magazine*

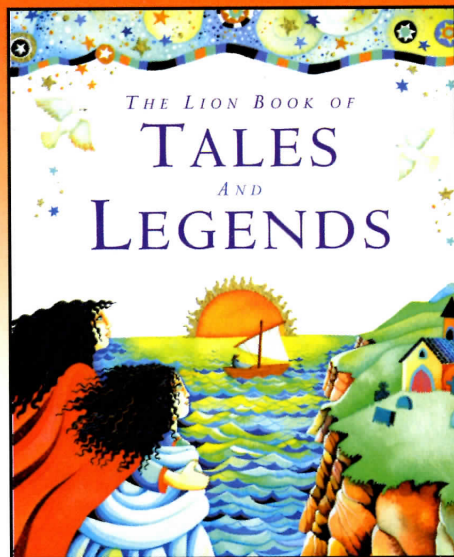


*John Burningham*

PERFORMANCE POETRY • A LITTLE PIECE OF GROUND



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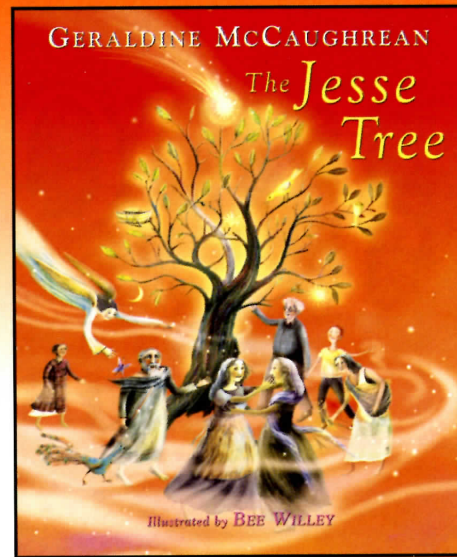
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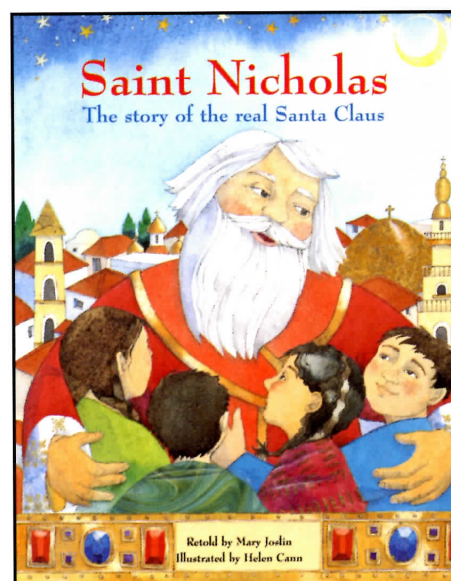
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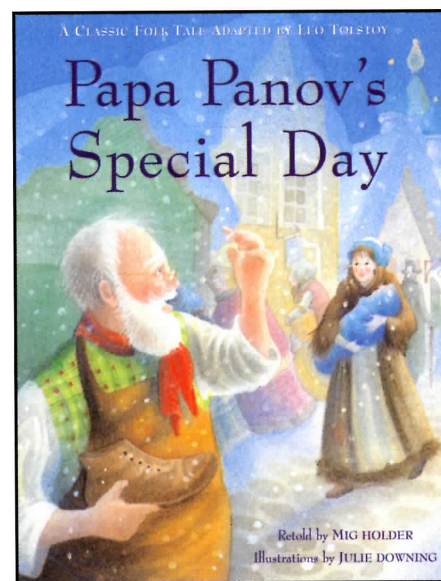
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## Cover Story

This issue's cover illustration is from John Burningham's *Borka*. John Burningham's work is discussed by Brian Alderson on page 4. Thanks to Random House Children's Books for their help with this November cover.

# EDITORIAL

**A** Little Piece of Ground by Elizabeth Laird, written with the collaboration of Sonia Nimr, is the first children's novel to be published in the UK\* about events in the occupied West Bank from the perspective of a Palestinian boy and his family. Lynne Reid Banks's *One More River* (1973) and *Broken Bridge* (1994) are set in Israel but, despite having some Arab characters, present an Israeli perspective on the disputed territories.

Everything in her book, Laird tells us, has been drawn from real events, either from the main Israeli human rights website or from the experiences of Sonia Nimr who lectures at the Bir Zeit university on the West Bank. The book depicts some of the harsh realities of the occupation, including a scene where Palestinian men are deliberately humiliated by Israeli soldiers and one where the boy's family is shot at by Israeli settlers while trying to pick their olives. The publisher has received three demands for the book to be pulped and Jewish pressure groups, including Jews for Justice in Palestine, have expressed concern about its content which they claim is biased.

When a novel breaks new ground as in this case, it is perhaps hard not to burden it with the uniqueness of the particular historical moment and be exigent in our demands. We need to remember that this is a work of fiction, albeit one based on a real and terrible situation, and events are seen through the eyes of a 12-year-old from one side of the divide. It is not the job of a novel to present every perspective on a complex and fraught political issue; nor to achieve the 'balance' one might



Rosemary Stones

look for in a political report. That there are more stories to be told does not mean that this one should not have been published and Macmillan are to be applauded for doing so.

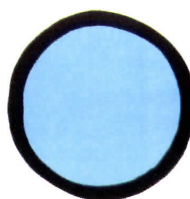
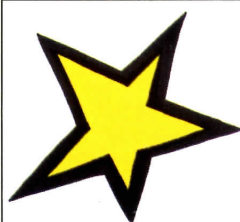
Writing in *The Guardian*†, Israel's leading novelist, Amos Oz, who is also a founder of the Peace Now movement, talks of the 70% on both sides of the Israel/Palestine divide who approve the idea of a two-state solution: 'Israel next to Palestine'. As he sees it, the enemy of peace is the 'coalition of fanatics on both sides' who 'push us all into the infernal cycle of violence and vengeance'. Young readers of Laird's powerful book will begin to understand something of the background to this tragic cycle. *A Little Piece of Ground* is further discussed by Michael Rosen on page 9 of this issue.

*Rosen*

\*see also 'The Depiction of Arabs in Children's Fiction' by Ann Lazim in BfK No. 133

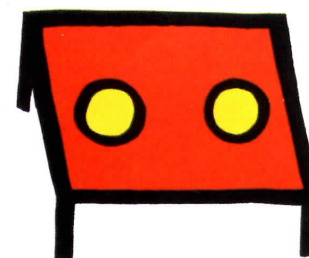
†*The Guardian* 19.8.03

*A Little Piece of Ground* by Elizabeth Laird is published by Macmillan (0 330 43679 1) at £8.99.



রেখা একটি তারা। গোলটি চাঁদ।

Line is a star. Circle is the moon.



রেখা একটি টেবিল। গোলগুলি থালা।

Line is a table. Circle is the plate.

**Line and Circle**, a Bengali and English dual language book, is awarded five stars and reviewed on page 18.

**BOOKS FOR KEEPS**  
the children's book magazine

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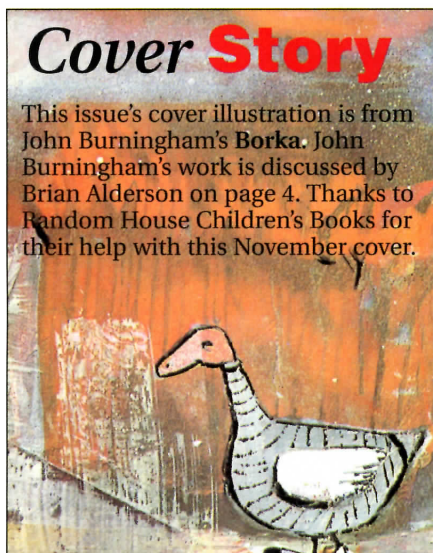
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# On the Tightrope in *Burningham*-land

1963 saw the publication of **Borka: the adventures of a goose with no feathers**, the book which began John Burningham's career as one of our most distinguished and innovative illustrators. Borka is now 40 and BfK is delighted to mark the anniversary with this appreciation of Burningham's work by **Brian Alderson**.

**'N**ow Tracey, come away from that book. Darren – don't touch it. It's dirty. You'll get germs. It'll damage all your latent aesthetic sensibilities.'

Understandable words, madam, spoken as they could have been in 1975 when **The Dog** appeared among 'John Burningham's Little Books' and incontinently 'peed on the flowers'. The nation was appalled, but I am sure that the artist was innocent of all desire to shock. You see, these 'Little Books', with their plain, foregrounded colour-pencil drawings and their elementary language, offered children snatches of what might have been their own lives – losing a comfort blanket, putting up with a new baby... They took a child's-eye view of things: 'sometimes I don't like Arthur/so Arthur goes home.' – and more children than mine, I'm sure, took a passing interest in dogs peeing on flowers (especially Papa's best geraniums). And, madam, do look at that dog. With a few lines and some gingery shading the artist has caught the essence of the act. It is the eternal dog, micturating thus since he first evolved and Leonardo could not have done it better (contrast the crudity of the more specific excretory goings-on in Sendak's **Some Swell Pup**).

## Outside the day-to-day world

Elegant in their unpretentious presentation these 'Little Books' are as good as anything that Burningham has created, but they are by no means typical – and that's not just because their small, square, child-size format differs from the big albums in various dimensions in which most of his stories appear. Three other 'concept book' series: 'Number Play', 'First Words', and 'Play and Learn' (which was initially done for Sainsbury's) were also originally

published in small formats, but they adhered much more closely to the customs of Burningham-land which lies a single step outside the day-to-day world so that the ordinary co-exists with the extraordinary without anyone needing to make a fuss about it. Thus the modest narrative of the 'Little Books' is replaced by individually-conceived page-openings, separate from their fellows, where it's perfectly feasible for the child protagonist to be sitting on a see-saw one minute and dancing with a thin pig and a fat pig the next (in **Opposites**) or to crawl around a farmyard before taking afternoon-tea in an armchair with a couple of monkeys (in **cluck baa** from 'First Words'). The little volumes in this series were later expanded into small quartos, retitled, with the pictures re-organised and accompanied by some rudimentary rhyming couplets.).

## Fanciful into real

This undemonstrative incorporation of the fanciful into the real is with us from the beginning. **Borka**, the featherless goose, is knitted a grey woollen jersey as substitute by her mother, and later, unable to migrate with her companions, she finds herself working her passage – coiling ropes and suchlike – on a small steamboat. The low-key presentation of these preposterous events helps to suggest a complete normality, a narrative method that continues through Burningham's four following storybooks: **Trubloff** about a mouse learning to play a balalaika (!);



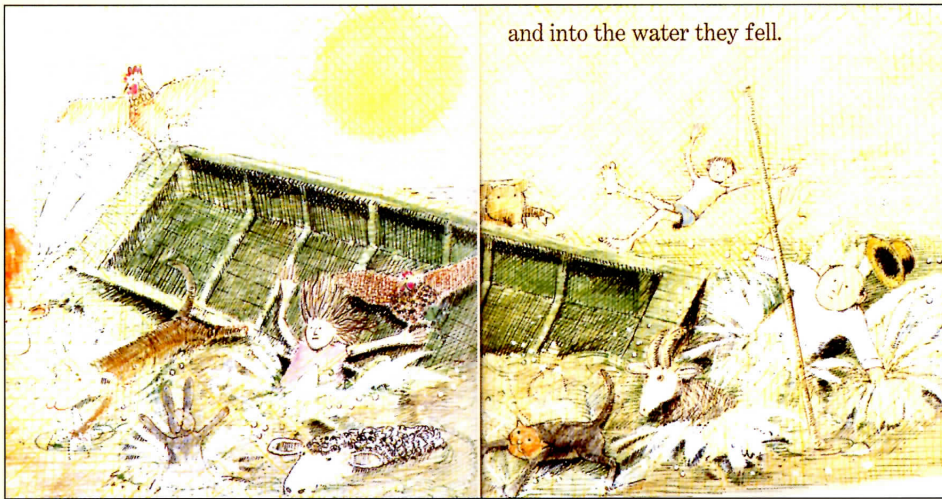
Above from **Opposites**, below, **Trubloff**.



Harquin watched the hunt leave.

From **Harquin**.





From **Mr Gumpy's Outing**.

**Humbert**, a scrapdealer's nag who saves the Lord Mayor's procession; **Cannonball Simp**, a castaway dog who saves the career of a circus clown; and **Harquin**, a foxcub who outwits the local hunt. (A PhD thesis is waiting to be written about the names of the residents in Burninghamland, from these creatures to chaps like Harvey Slumfenburger.)

It must be said that, as texts, these stories are a trifle laboured and harbour the danger of the formula becoming tedious if replicated much further. Hence one portion of the delight with which **Mr Gumpy's Outing** was greeted a couple of years after **Harquin**. (In between Burningham had engaged in one of his few ventures as collaborator on somebody else's story, having been commissioned by an American publisher to illustrate Letta Schatz's retelling of a Nigerian trickster tale, **The Extraordinary Tug-of-War**. Nothing but good came of this. The change to a landscape format permitting wide double-spread pictures, and the opportunity given to pace his way, luxuriously, through the forty-eight pages of a tale which offered wonderful opportunities for high comedy, must have been a refreshing experience. **The Extraordinary Tug-of-War** turned out to be not only a virtuoso performance but also, a venture that revealed to him the wider potentialities of picture-book art.)

### Elastic-sided storytelling

Up to this point all the picture storybooks in which Burningham was involved followed a conventional pattern. A dilemma is posed which gives rise to dramatic events, however modest. One thing follows another along a determined course until a satisfying resolution is reached. **Mr Gumpy's Outing** introduced an alternative pattern: what might be called the elastic-sided story. For although the initial impulse and the final resolution are still there what lies between is scarcely determined at all; the author has given himself multi-choice options. Clearly Mr G needs more than a couple of children to get into his boat but it matters not a whit how many creatures join him (look at the raftful that John Yeoman offers Quentin Blake in **Sixes and Sevens**) or what those creatures might be. The only constraints are

narrative effect – don't go on too long or the whole thing gets boring – and, at a fundamentally practical level, the number of pages available through which the cumulation may build.

Burningham's triumph in judging the pace and the rhythm of his text in **Mr Gumpy** caused him to realize the value to him of elastic-sided storytelling and much of his subsequent work derives its character from the way that he frolics among a wealth of random possibilities, the essential requirement being that he finds a closure congruent with his multiple choices. Thus, it makes no odds what farcical calamities overtake John Patrick Norman McHennessy along the road to learn so long as Sir gets his come-uppance at the end. Steven may be asked to bring home any variety of groceries in his shopping basket and may be delayed by any number of preposterous encounters so long as the reader is gleeful at his mother's concluding reprimand. Some quickfire examples of **Avocado Baby's** strength are displayed before the climax when he chucks the bullies in the pond. **Where's Julius?**, to my mind, comes close to failure because it rambles on too wordily towards a tame and predictable final page, while **Would You Rather...** almost does go on forever. The delight which children take in having to choose amongst page-loads of ludicrous alternatives leads to endless creative extensions when you ask them to think up and illustrate their own sets of ghastly choices ('would you rather walk to school



'Would you rather... swallow a dead frog for £20... or stay all night in a creepy house for £50.'

From **Would You Rather...**

with mummy, or go in a stretch-limo with a tv, a cocktail cabinet, and a small-size skateboard-rink?').

### The importance of 'text'

The attention paid here to the content and structure of Burningham's picture books is prompted partly by reservations that I have about our very own drum-major's last editorial in **BfK** where she drew a distinction between 'words people' and 'visual people'. This seems to me to be a double over-generalisation, which is almost instantly contradicted anyway by her own excellent summation of Charlotte Voake's **Ginger Finds a Home**. Picture books are inadequately reviewed in part because almost all children's books are inadequately reviewed (how do you get the space to discuss the processes that Rosemary would like to see criticised?) and – more important here – 'words' are only part of what is being illustrated. What matters is 'text', by which I mean not just words but the nature of the story they tell (I have often argued that true oral tales should never be illustrated), the way words are paced alongside illustrations through the limited length of a standard picture book, and the degree to which the reader may find that they are matched by the artist's visualisation – which will of course demand our ability to distinguish the



The wordless denouement of **Granpa**.



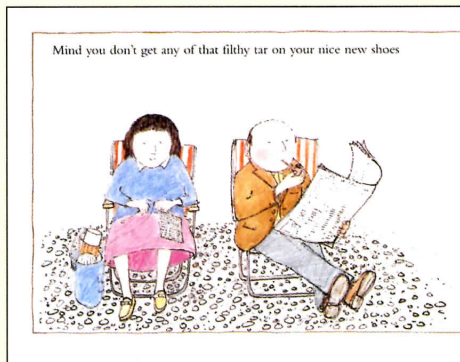
different ways in which line and colour may be handled. What better example could be found than **Granpa**? The 'text' is what Burningham has to say about youth and age. The progress of the story, such as it is, follows the elastic-sided pattern with the choice and order of incidents and their connected illustrations being governed only by the denouement of the final three pages. A most delicate balance is achieved between what is said and not said as the pages are turned and it is this which gives the book its emotional depth. (Proof is hardly needed of the intensity invested in the original work, but doubters ought to look at the first German translation where the terse exchanges between child and grandfather are expanded into fatuous dialogue which goes so far as to intrude upon the silence of the last double-page spread. Both here, and in a crass British 'book of the film' which turns the brief story into a whirligig *bande dessinée*, one quails at the capacity of publishers to foul their own nests.)

### 'Each book is a new tightrope-walk'

Burningham-land is testing territory for anyone seeking to assess the relationship of illustrations and text in picture storybooks. In the few words that he was allowed to explain himself in the British Council's **Magic Pencil** catalogue he confesses (twice) 'I don't have rules' and that each book is a new tightrope-walk, words which suggest a reliance on instinct. (You'd hardly expect someone like Anthony Browne to say such a thing.)

The tightrope exists from the very beginning and some of the excitement over **Borka** may have come from watching the author sway his way across it. Pedants may mutter 'Rouault' or 'François', looking at some of the pictures, but the book is a hodge-podge of instinctive Burningham reactions to his text, with every page-opening showing a different use of space and often a different stylistic weight. What seems to me of consequence for the future is the swerve out of a fairly heterogeneous representationalism (including two line-drawings) into a slashing, splodgy expressionist mode at pages 17-21, the point where **Borka** is deserted by her comrades.

Burningham has no hesitation about altering his graphic methods in that way if he feels like it – a point which I mentioned in my article on Mr Gumpy in **BfK** 140. The apparent randomness with which events are sometimes selected for his elastic-sided stories can be matched by an apparent randomness in the graphics, in what initially look like hastily sketched scenes and portraits or in the mixing of such sketches with forceful and often dramatic colour-work. His command of colour, whether using colour pencils or a variety of other media, is complete and can be seen in full fig in the pictorial exercises of his early **ABC**, which is almost an anthology of twenty-six different ways to get paint on to paper, and in its near-contemporary **Seasons**, the first edition of which had four leaves which opened up into triple-size



Above from **Come away from the water, Shirley**, below, from **Harvey Slumfenburger's Christmas Present**.

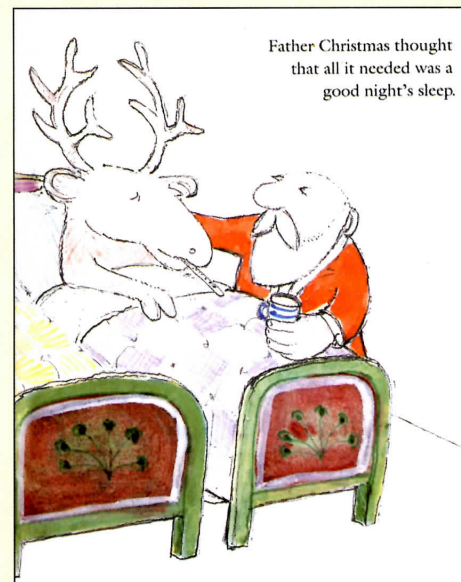
posters. (That period also saw sets of pictorial friezes on themes like **Jungle-land** or **Bird-land**.) The media can be inextricably mixed: 'I use a bit of everything,' he says in **Magic Pencil**, 'always have – ink, crayon, gouache, acrylic, photographs, cut paper, anything' and what seems finally to count is what the paint can do for the drama and the weather of his storybooks. One can be sorry that he resorted to photographs in **Cloudland**; his own skies have more to offer, and the line-drawings would have been better integrated.

As occurred in **Borka**, so we find later on that a rough and ready distinction tends to be made in the artwork between the scenes of the everyday, which may be fairly subdued affairs in pen and ink or coloured pencil, and the fantasy that runs alongside. The 'Shirley' books are the most clear-cut examples. See the rudimentary picture of the sea-side visitors: mother peaceably knitting in her beach-chair next to father, prone under an open newspaper. 'We ought to be getting back soon' say the words, but there is Shirley and her dog on the facing page, in a glory of mauve, pink and yellow, unearthing the treasure of a pirate-isle.

But look again at those parents, oblivious to their child's rampant imagination on a chilly English beach ('Of course it's far too cold for swimming, Shirley'). They are easy prey for the satirist or the social critic (what would Steadman have done to them?) but here they are in Burningham-land where the criteria are different. The reader does not despise so much as feel sorry for them – 'men who lose their fairylands' said Belloc. They are innocent participants in what is now a forty-year-old comedy, ornate with scenes of baroque eccentricity, but whose laughter is never derisory and whose purposes are ruled by an uncomplicated compassion. The tightrope-walk may make us laugh, or hold our breath, but the outcome is more resonant. As Tom Maschler notes in his preface to the anniversary edition of **Borka**: 'the aspect of his talent that I admire above all is his capacity to move readers'. Go look at **Courtney** to see with what delicacy a touching story may be fashioned from total absurdity.

### The traditions of the moral tale

In the last dozen years or so Burningham's



'capacity to move readers' has enlarged itself in radical ways. The simple, elastic structure which Burningham has made his own has continued to show its adaptability in japes like **Harvey Slumfenburger's Christmas Present**, a picture-book shaggy-dog story, and the recent **Magic Bed**. The plot thickened though when **Oil! Get off our Train** was published and the Burningham tightrope was seen to be carrying him across the perilous tracts of Social Concern. That district has been a



From **Oil! Get off our Train**.



natural habitat for sanctimonious writers of children's books ever since the eighteenth century and **Oi!**'s purpose in defending threatened wildlife against the depredations of Man place it firmly within the traditions of the moral tale. But where most social missionaries, even today, end up by dishing out sermons or sog, Burningham works obliquely within a fantasy dreamscape, embedding his message in a picture-book text of great complexity, reflected by the increase of its length from thirty-two to forty-eight pages. The repetitious structure, both of words and illustrations, is extended; relationships between the real and the imagined (that amazing train, those personalized animals) are constantly shifting; and the whole is underpinned by a *joie de vivre* which strengthens its purpose (the wonderful final pay-off). It is a model for its genre – but an inimitable one.

Well – inimitable by all but its author, who followed it up with a sort of sequel, which also used the device of counterpointing an aggressive title with a pacific theme: **Whadayamean**. Here, the onlooker thinks, the tightrope will throw the executant deep into the mire, for he has decided that no less a person than God must be First Cause of his story – a non-conformist God sorrowing over Jerusalem, or, perhaps more exactly, a God of the Tao. The case for conservation which featured in **Oi!** is now opened up to include pacifism, financial reform, and religious ecumenicism, which make up a nice cargo for another forty-eight page picture book and – in deference to the God of balance – forbid any assessment here beyond wonderment that the tightrope-walker most certainly did not fall off.

The expansion of the scale and ambition of Burningham's work in these two books is in part characterised by a tension between comedy and high seriousness, innocence and irony, and subtle perceptions masked by an apparent simplicity. But as though to prove that simplicity works very well on its own, **Whadayamean** was followed by that

The frog did get wet and  
now dreams in a net,  
and he'll hop off once  
more in the morning.



From **Hushierbye**.

most perfect of bedtime books, **Hushierbye**. Formulae, however successful, are suddenly cast aside. Instead of the concertina of central variations we get what are, in effect, two six-finger exercises as child, animals, the man in the moon are brought to the end of their day and are then serially tucked up for the

night. A new register is found for the words, lulling, half-rhymed verses, and there is a beautifully-judged progression of the drawings and paintings as they pace the two sequences of the text. Apprehensive persons, remembering times past, may be assured that not a dog is in sight. ■

Brian Alderson's pioneering **Looking at Picture Books** (National Book League 1973) was the first UK exhibition of illustrated children's books to set out the relationship between the verbal and graphic expression. Brian is founder of the Children's Books History Society, children's book consultant for **The Times** and the author of **BfK's** series, 'Classics in Short'.

The following list supplies a chronology of all the titles mentioned in the article. Except where noted, all were first published by Jonathan Cape and most are still available from Random House in either Cape hardback or Red Fox paperback. Titles not available are marked o/p.

- 1963 **Borka: the adventures of a goose with no feathers**, available as a standard edition, 0 224 60077 X, \$9.99 hbk, or a presentation anniversary edition with a preface by Tom Maschler and a note by the author, 0 224 06494 0, \$10.99 hbk, and 0 09 940067 7, \$5.99 pbk
- 1964 **John Burningham's ABC**, o/p  
**Trubloff: the mouse who wanted to play the balalaika**, 0 09 941428 7, \$5.99 pbk
- 1965 **Humbert, Mr Firkin and the Lord Mayor of London**, 0 09 941322 1, \$4.99 pbk
- 1966 **Cannonball Simp** (now published as **Simp**), 0 09 940077 4, \$5.99 pbk  
**Bird-land** (frieze), o/p
- 1967 **Harquin: the fox who went down to the valley**, 0 09 982510 4, \$4.99 pbk
- 1968 **Jungle-land** (frieze), o/p  
**The Extraordinary Tug-of-War**, retold by Letta Schatz, Bodley Head, o/p
- 1969 **Seasons**, o/p
- 1970 **Mr Gumpy's Outing**, 0 09 940879 1, \$5.99 pbk
- 1973 **Mr Gumpy's Motor Car**, 0 09 941795 2, \$5.99 pbk
- 1974-5 **'The Little Books'**, eight titles, o/p
- 1977 **Come away from the water, Shirley**, 0 09 989940 X, \$5.99 pbk
- 1978 **Time to get out of the bath, Shirley**, 0 224 01372 6, \$9.99 hbk, 0 09 920051 1, \$5.99 pbk
- 1978 **Would You Rather...**, 0 224 01635 0, \$9.99 hbk, 0 09 920041 4, \$5.99 pbk

- 1980 **The Shopping Basket**, 0 09 989930 2, \$5.99 pbk
- 1982 **Avocado Baby**, 0 09 920061 9, \$5.99 pbk
- 1983 **'Number Play'**, Walker Books, o/p
- 1984 **Granpa**, 0 09 943408 3, \$5.99 pbk
- 1984-5 **'First Words'**, six titles including **cluck baa**, Walker Books, o/p
- 1985 **'Play and Learn'**, Walker Books, now available as a board-book series, \$3.99 each  
**Opposites**, 0 7445 9679 3;  
**Letters**, 0 7445 9680 7;  
**Colours**, 0 7445 9677 7;  
**Numbers**, 0 7445 9678 5)
- 1986 **Where's Julius?**, 0 224 02411 6, \$9.99 hbk, 0 09 941429 5, \$5.99 pbk
- 1987 **John Patrick Norman McHennessy: the boy who was always late**, 0 09 975200 X, \$5.99 pbk
- 1989 **Oi! Get off our Train**, 0 09 985340 X, \$5.99 pbk
- 1993 **Harvey Slumfenburger's Christmas Present**, Walker Books, 0 7445 7805 1, \$4.99 pbk
- 1994 **Courtney**, 0 224 03868 0, \$9.99 hbk, 0 09 966681 2, \$4.99 pbk
- 1996 **Cloudland**, 0 09 971161 3, \$6.99 pbk
- 1999 **Whadayamean**, 0 224 04753 1, \$9.99 hbk, 0 09 926668 7, \$4.99 pbk
- 2000 **Hushierbye**, 0 09 940864 3, \$5.99 pbk
- 2003 **The Magic Bed**, 0 224 06468 1, \$10.99 hbk

No attempt was made in the article to deal with the large quarto 'travelogues' **Around the World in Eighty Days** (1972), **England** (1992), and **France** (1998), or with the delicious sketches accompanying his celebration of senior citizenry: **The Time of Your Life: getting on with getting on** (Bloomsbury 2002). Nor have I considered two examples of JB's illustrations of other people's texts: Ian Fleming's **Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bang** (1964) and Kenneth Grahame's **The Wind in the Willows** (1983).



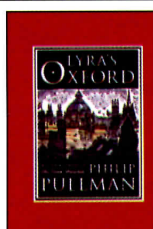
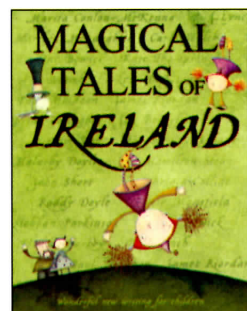
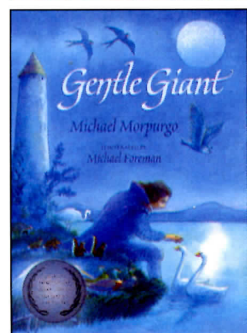
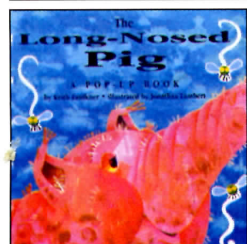
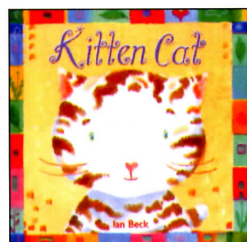
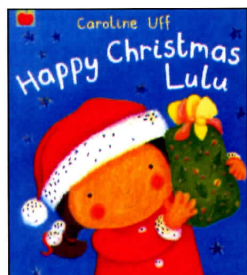
A Travelling Light Theatre Company production of **Cloudland**, with live music, dance and puppetry, is on tour around the UK until the end of February 2004. For further information, contact Travelling Light on 0117 377 3166 or at [www.travellinglight.co.uk](http://www.travellinglight.co.uk)



Swan from **Lyra's Oxford**.

# Christmas Treats

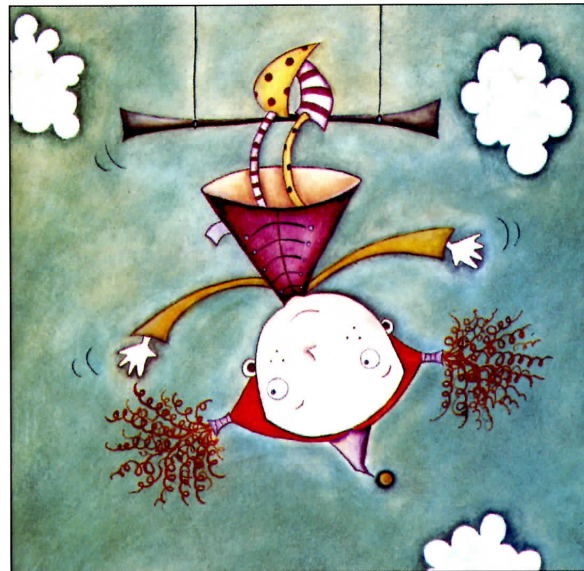
It is stocking filler time and **BfK**'s shelves have filled up with seasonal offerings. This year, retellings of fairy tales with saccharine illustrations and texts dominate so, avoiding the sugar rush, **Rosemary Stones** goes off the traditional gift title piste to offer some very digestible recommendations.



**M**y one exception to the no-Xmas-titles rule is **Happy Christmas Lulu**, a picture book printed on thin card and aimed at the very young. Uff's bold, bright illustrations fill the page confidently and build excitement spread by spread as Lulu puts up decorations, makes cards, goes to see big sister's nativity play and so on. This is a warmly expressive book that is perfectly pitched at small ones. Very young readers will also identify with Ian Beck's **Kitten Cat** about a kitten's first trip outside into the big world of the garden. An encounter with a frog is alarming but Mother Cat is there to provide cuddles. Beck employs a looser style here without his characteristic line and cross-hatching and the result is both gentle and impressionistic.

**The Long-Nosed Pig** is a more rumbustious offering, a pop-up, in which the very first pig in the world boastfully compares his hooter with those of other creatures. Not looking where he is going leads to an inevitable and wittily dramatic outcome. Reminiscent of the style of Eric Carle, Lambert's stylised, painterly illustrations lend energy and dynamism. Perfect for under fives.

**Gentle Giant** is a more reflective title. In this tall, portrait-shaped book, Foreman's lyrical illustrations reveal once again how consummately he uses watercolour to convey landscape, mood and drama. Morpurgo is at his best with stories in the folk tale tradition and here we have the outsider – the gentle

'Reverse Flannery' from **Magical Tales of Ireland**.

giant – who is feared by the villagers until they discover his real worth. Satisfyingly, the denouement depends upon knowing a true fact – that a mat of straw laid on murky green water will clean it. One to try next time the swimming pool goes green... For 5–7 year-olds.

For 8 year-olds and upwards, **Magical Tales of Ireland** is a superb anthology. So far from being the usual 'gift' offering consisting of cobbled together bits plundered from the backlist, this is a collection of newly commissioned stories and poems with colour illustrations from a very fine stable of artists. There are tales in the traditional manner from Siobhan Parkinson and Carlo Gebler, sparsely and beautifully told – imagine a giant whose niece worries about where his seven-league boots will land him if he isn't careful. There are also well pitched contemporary short stories – Roddy Doyle and Marita Conlon-McKenna's stand out, but all the contributions here count. This is a real Christmas treat. Philip Pullman's **Lyra's Oxford** is another such. It is lovely book just to hold in the hand – a small, cloth-covered hardback with a colour plate of Oxford roofs engraved by John Lawrence. It contains a new episode from 'His Dark Materials' and is complete in itself although its appeal will be to cognoscenti of that trilogy. ■

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

**Happy Christmas Lulu**, Caroline Uff, Little Orchard, 1 84362 024 3, £4.99 pbk

**Kitten Cat**, Ian Beck, Scholastic Press, 0 439 97701 0, £8.99 hbk

**The Long-Nosed Pig**, Keith Faulkner, ill. Jonathan Lambert, Contender Books, 1 84357 055 6, £6.99 hbk

**Gentle Giant**, Michael Morpurgo, ill. Michael Foreman, Collins, 0 00 711064 2, £9.99 hbk

**Magical Tales of Ireland**, edited by Madeleine Nicklin, ill. Pam Smy et al, Hutchinson, 0 09 176849 7, £14.99 hbk

**Lyra's Oxford**, Philip Pullman, ill. John Lawrence, David Fickling Books, 0 385 60699 0, £9.99 hbk

Swans from **Gentle Giant**.



# A Little Piece of Ground

Ever since the publication in 1934 of Geoffrey Trease's **Bows Against the Barons**, children's fiction has dealt from time to time with political and social issues of a 'controversial' nature. In setting her new novel, **A Little Piece of Ground**, in occupied Palestine, Elizabeth Laird tackles issues that are being hotly contested in real life. Does her book work? **Michael Rosen** explores.

**Y**our reviewer is an anti-Zionist Jew. This is something that has to be said as this book is an intervention into a matter that calls on powerful allegiances. To sense the scale of the problem that Elizabeth Laird has taken on, you only have to think of the children's books written from within, say, the worst moments of the slavery of Africans, World War 2 or Northern Ireland. If it's children's fiction dealing with these matters, we are usually called on to find strong feelings of sympathy for a young person (or several) as they try to get something done in the midst of the conflicts going on around them. Sometimes this is a matter of struggling to survive, sometimes it's lending assistance to the 'side' they find themselves on. Usually the author tries to suggest that the young hero(es) are trying to make things better, get through the present situation to something better on the other side. Occasionally (think of Joan Lingard or Robert Westall), the author tries to create a situation whereby young people in the book come to see the perspective of the other side.

Elizabeth Laird follows some of these lines but not all. Our sympathies are for Karim and his fellow Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories as they try to go to school, see their aged relatives, play computer games, fancy each other, and create a space in which they can play football. We see, in particular, three boys from different levels in society: 'Hopper' from a refugee camp, Joni from a wealthy family, and Karim himself whose father is a shopkeeper. As a consequence their outlooks are subtly different though all drawn to the same position of loathing the Israeli occupation.

Though newsflashes remind us of the ever-present level of slaughter going on, none of the lead characters die, nor indeed do any

of their near relatives. This is not a book that is going to affect how we think about these matters on the grounds that we see and feel the face of death. It is much more focused on the daily non-fatal brutalities.

## Neither a revelation nor an offence

As I've implied, I come to this book laden with partisan baggage. I realise that for many other people reading the book, their partisanship may well be very different, or indeed the perpetual news from the Middle East may have numbed their feelings. I won't pretend to speak for such readers. In my case, reading the book is neither a revelation nor an offence. In some

ways, I was struck by how un-violent, un-savage the book is. The deepest and worst levels of terror and carnage go on off-stage. Unlike some other Jews, I am not offended by the book in any way whatsoever. For many people used to seeing the Jews of fiction as humane, wise-cracking or angst-ridden Americans or terrorised Germans and Poles, this book might be shocking. For those of us, horrified and appalled by the Zionist project and the terrible price it has forced the Palestinian people to pay, the book is something of a relief. Someone with no cultural or tribal axe to grind has written a book that

how the book asks us to wish that the Israeli forces aren't there, whilst it asks us to 'accept' their presence without ever knowing why they are there. Meanwhile, the Palestinians, as shown, have virtually no political organisation, and the politico-religious aspect is absent too.

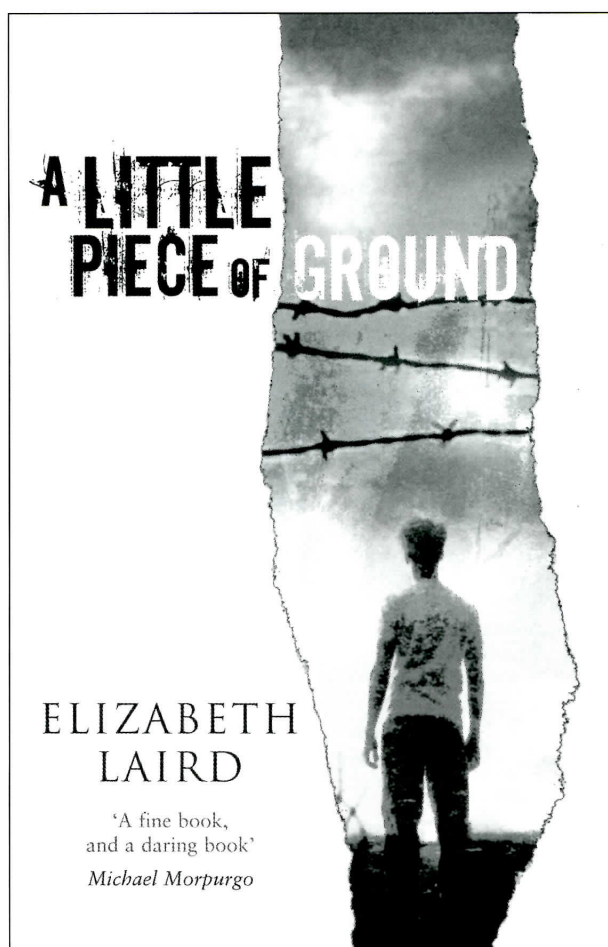
On a more technical point, the book seems to be a deliberate attempt to avoid being a 'war' book, or an 'adventure' book, as invented in the nineteenth century. That's to say, the motor of the story is most definitely not, bang-bang, say-goodbye-to-your-dying-comrade, save-the-day-with-an-act-of-heroism. It is clearly about boys trying to be boys in an intolerable situation, one that is diverting their boyishness into acts of resistance. As a statement about the human condition in the Occupied Territories, this is fine. As a peg on which to hang a story, I wonder if for some readers it might create the kind of response that feels disappointed that the big bang, the big trauma that felt as if it would happen never did happen. I, for one, was certain (but wrong) that one or other of Karim's friends, family or relatives was going to be killed or seized. This led me to feel strangely shielded from the real-life disaster that is the Middle East.

## Consequences not causes

I found myself anticipating the criticism that demands 'fairness' of a book like this. In this situation, it might ask of Laird to show us the effects of a suicide bomb, the rights of Jews to live in peace in their 'homeland', so-called, or the anxiety of Jewish parents as their children climb into tanks and head east. I would defend Laird's right to write a book that is really a domestic family drama from within one community. To that extent, it's a book about the consequences of the politics in question, not the causes. This makes it as partisan as say, **The Children of the New Forest** or, as it happens, any number of children's books I've read about people suffering under the heel of the Nazis. This probably makes **A Little Piece of Ground** a book written from within a sense of urgency. The sad experience of Palestinians is that very few non-Arab, non-Muslim people want to hear about the tragedy of their situation. This book must go down as a brave, serious and successful attempt to reach out and have this story heard. ■

Michael Rosen is a poet and broadcaster.

**A Little Piece of Ground** by Elizabeth Laird is published by Macmillan (0 330 43679 1, £8.99 pbk).



clearly sides with the young people suffering under the weight of what is an unjust and immoral occupation.

## Boys trying to be boys...

But is it a good book? I have a few misgivings. Several political and cultural entities appear in the book as unexplained and therefore motiveless, whilst others are strangely absent. No time here to deal with all of these, but, for example, we see some of the actions by and against 'settlers'. It never becomes clear who 'settlers' are, where they're from, why they've come or why they do what they do. Similarly, there's an unfortunate irony in the way in which there's a conflict between



# Poetry Slam! Respect Slam!

The idea for a London poetry slam!\* originated when the Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, asked his advisor on equality, Lee Jasper, to think of a way to celebrate respect among young people. A sleepless night in front of MTV introduced Lee Jasper to the energy and excitement of a poetry slam! and he contacted the Poetry Society for assistance. Now in its second year, Respect Slam! took place in May. Did it achieve its aim? **Ceri Worman** reports.

**'G**ive it up for the poets!' yells Joelle Taylor, MC and performance poet herself. There are cheers from the audience: parents, teachers and friends of the 11-18 year olds who will perform tonight. They will not be disappointed.

A poetry slam! event like this is relevant to any venue up and down the country where young people gather and would reinvigorate the classroom, library, youth or arts centre.

*I stand alone but I still got the strength of my team*

*to back me up in those moments when times are tough.*

These lyrics are from an excellent trio called 'The Emblem' (Crofton School) and exemplify the spirit of the evening. Slam! is the competitive art of performance poetry where the audience is integral to the judging system. Although this is a competition, with members of the audience holding up score cards, the atmosphere is supportive, with 'competitors' cheering for each other.

## Rap, hip-hop and spoken word

Some students bravely 'stand alone' and perform solo, others work in pairs or groups. The entrants reflect the racial diversity of London and the style is a mixture of rap, hip-hop and spoken word performance. In contrast to the 'bad-boy' image and lyrics of gasta-rap this slam! has some powerful female performers. All the competitors have been asked to take the theme of 'Respect' and run with it. The result is a diversity of presentations about racial pride, female self-respect, friendship, family and an exploration of issues such as bullying, body image, street crime, and the situation facing young refugees. This year the event is dedicated to the memory of Stephen Lawrence.

*So people you better respect each other for a better world and a better future*

rap some members of a young, dynamic, multi-racial group, The Talented Crew, from Preston Manor School. Other



London pupils performing at the Mayor of London Respect Slam! semi finals at the GLA building. (Photo by Carl Dhimant)

members provide the beat box vocals – no musical instruments are allowed, but the voice is creatively deployed.

## Working with professionals

The performers for Respect Slam! were selected through intra-school slams! and had the chance to hone their skills through a Poetry Society initiative working with professional performance poets. The benefits of this are obvious in the high standard of the performances; the students are also aware that they have gained valuable life skills:

'I always wanted to write, this competition has motivated me. I'm happy,' says Juliet Segayi (Fulham Cross School). 'I think about stuff I never thought of before,' adds Natalie Leer (WAC Performing Arts and Media College). 'I write about racism. I prefer to write it down rather than say it to someone's face,' explains Naz Saleh (Fulham Cross School).

## A male-dominated rap scene?

At first the young women say they feel a bit intimidated taking part in what is perceived as a male-dominated rap scene and they choose not to rap but prefer a spoken word performance. However the reactions of their male peers – 'That's deep!' and 'That's cool!' – are very supportive. All three young women say that they feel much more confident and will use their skills with the spoken and written word in their future career plans – which include being a lawyer, a lyricist and a journalist. Some performers from last year's slam! have been motivated to develop their performance skills professionally and some of this year's entrants are, surely, the performance poets of the future.

## Sources of inspiration

Khayo Chingonyi (Robert Clack School) is keeping his options open: he hopes to



keep rap poetry as an interest while he continues his education. His searing performance which explores bullying in a powerful and imaginative way shows a mature handling of language. As well as hip-hop/rap artists such as Dead Prez, Public Enemy and Rapstarr, he cites Ted Hughes, Maya Angelou and Benjamin Zephaniah as sources of inspiration. This eclectic mix is reflected in his lyrics:

*thus proceeding steadily, picks up his feet a little*

*making sure he don't fall cos' his ego's brittle*

All the young people I speak to share an excitement about language and have become actively involved in the creative process:

'Something takes over.' (Natalie)

'I can't write at the height of emotion. When I write, it's fast – if it doesn't come out in ten minutes, I ditch it.' (Juliet)

'It doesn't rhyme but it has to flow. I keep a pen and paper by my bed in case I have the urge to write.' (Naz)

'I feel the words in my head moving about. When you share words with others you have a responsibility to take care with the message.' (Khayo)

Some of the performers are very confident and professional, others are

still building their skills, which is to be expected when, for some, this is one of the few times they have performed in front of an audience.

*Respect's what you earn and not what you buy*

*It's what you gain as time passes you by.*

state two talented female Asian rappers, Huma Ansari and Uzma Uddin: it is clear that they are learning a great deal from this opportunity. Indeed every performance shows the amazing amount of work which has gone on behind the scenes to create, learn and perform effectively:

*Listen to my lyrics and I spit them proper –*

*I come through sharp like a dagger*

(MC Logic, Crofton School)

This is the second year of the Respect Slam! in London. Such is the slammers' success that there are already plans for even more Respect Slams! in 2004. ■

If you would like to run your own poetry slam! to showcase young people's talents, the Poetry Society can offer advice and guidelines. Further information from:

**www.poetrysociety.org.uk**  
**email: jtaylor@poetrysoc.com**

**Ceri Worman** is Librarian for Children and Young People, Huddersfield, and the author of **The Adventures of Jamie B. Schoolboy/Superspy** and **The Adventures of Jamie B. Schoolboy/Rapstar** to be published by Orchard Books in April 2004.

### Sources of Inspiration

The slammers cited both song lyrics and poetry as sources of inspiration. These are just a few of books they recommended:

**The Collected Poems of Maya Angelou**, Maya Angelou, Virago, 1 86049 191 X, £9.99 pbk

**The Works: Every kind of poem you will ever need for the Literacy Hour**, edited by Paul Cookson, Macmillan, 0 330 48104 5, £4.99 pbk

**New Selected Poems 1957-1994**, Ted Hughes, Faber, 0 571 17378 0, £12.99 hbk

**Big Bad Raps**, Tony Mitton, Orchard, 1 86039 365 9, £3.99 pbk, 1 84121 459 0, £12.99 big book

**Too Black, Too Strong**, Bloodaxe, 1 85224 554 9, £7.95 pbk, **Wicked World!**, Puffin, 0 14 130683 1, £4.99 pbk, **Talking Turkeys**, Puffin, 0 14 036330 0, £4.99 pbk, all by Benjamin Zephaniah

*\*A Slam! is a competitive performance poetry event where the audience judge the poets' performances.*

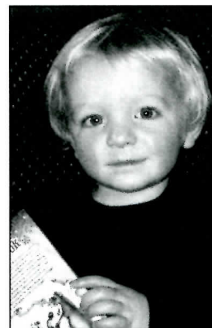
## Hal's Reading Diary

Hal is now 2 years and 9 months and has begun to identify emotionally with the narratives in his books. His father, **Roger Mills**, explains.

A couple of weeks ago my wife Jo gave Hal a gingerbread man to eat in the car on the way back from a shopping trip. Hal is exceedingly fond of gingerbread men and normally the biscuit would have disappeared in double quick time. But on this occasion he just sat and looked at it. 'Aren't you going to eat it?' Jo asked. 'Gingerbread boy run away' was Hal's response, and he carried on looking and not eating. By the end of the ride the gingerbread man was still not inside – an unprecedented act of restraint on Hal's part.

Jo knew exactly why Hal was talking about the gingerbread boy running away. The night before they had been reading a story together called 'The Gingerbread Boy'. An old couple have no children. One day the woman decides to make a little gingerbread boy. When he is cooked they discover that he has come to life. He hops out of the oven and runs away, chased by the couple, and then a cow and a horse. None of them can catch him, but finally he is halted when he comes to a river. A crafty fox offers to help him cross, and after a little subtle cajoling persuades the boy to sit on his nose as he swims across. As soon as they make dry land the fox tosses the gingerbread boy into the air and begins to eat him. The final, poignant page, describes the boy's pitiful cries as he is consumed fraction by fraction until, at last, he is all eaten and the cries are heard no more.

It was obvious to Jo that Hal's abstinence must be due to reading the story. And it marks, I think, a major step for him. In earlier diaries I've described how Hal didn't seem to identify emotionally with the narratives in his books. The death of Babar's mother, for



example, seemed to make no impression on him a few months back. But something has changed now. The gingerbread boy's demise seems to have had a big impact on Hal. Enough to make him hold back from one of his favourite treats.

In the earlier diaries I suggested that the reason Hal wasn't emotionally affected by stories was that, at that stage, he hadn't developed what could be called emotional self-consciousness. It is the difference between a small child who simply has angry feelings, and one who has the feelings but is also conscious of him or herself having the feelings such that they could say 'I am angry'. If you are conscious of yourself as a self that experiences emotions, it means that you can start to identify with what other people are feeling. You can understand that other people have an internal world that is full of feelings just as you have.

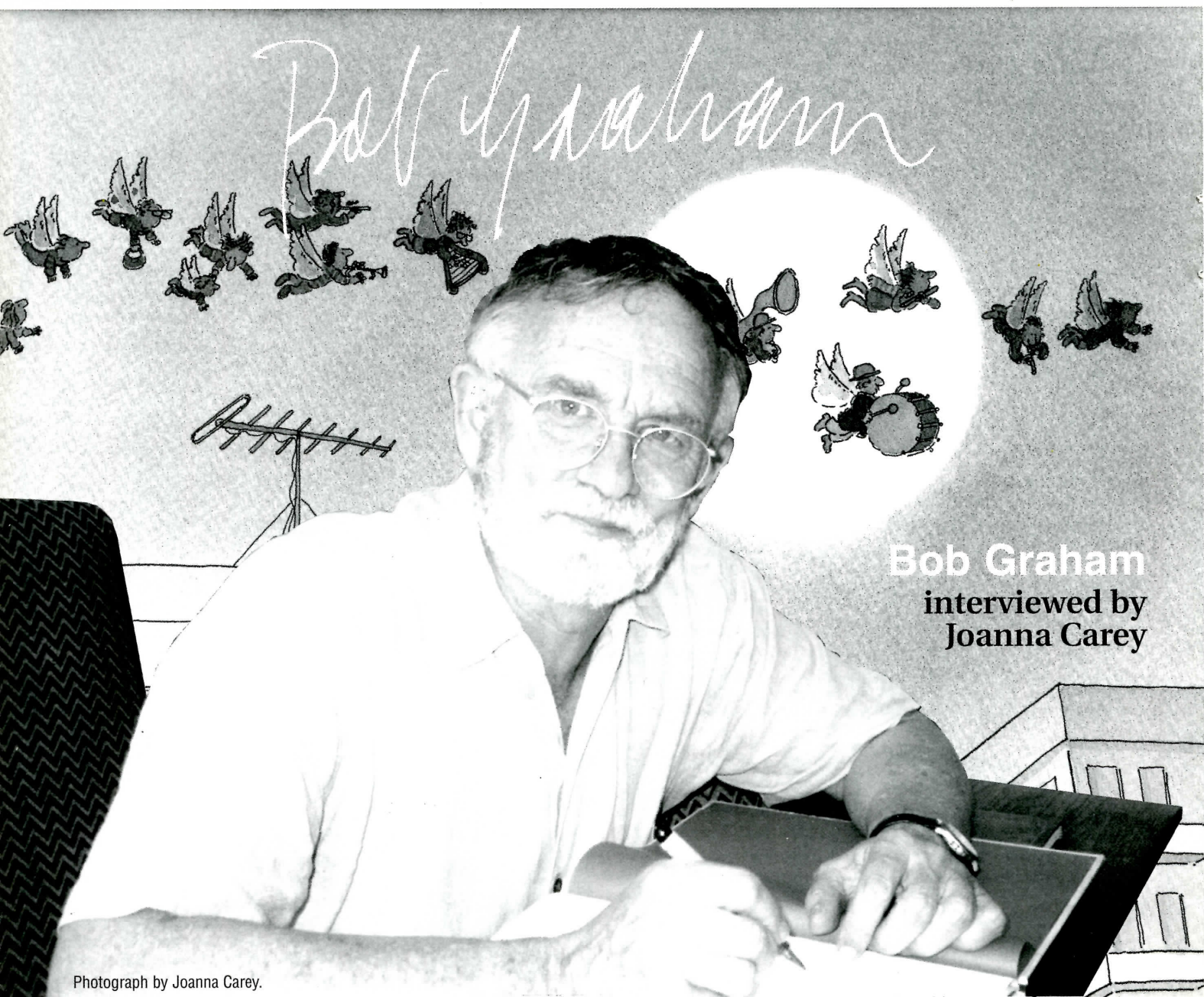
It seems to me that Hal is starting to cross this developmental Rubicon, and has started to be conscious of himself as a self in a way that is quite different from his earlier life. We see it in other respects too. 'I did it, I did' he announces after some little achievement, suggesting that pride, a self-conscious feeling if ever there was one, has joined the party. He has also started to comment on our moods. 'You cross with me Mummy?' he says to Jo if she's been getting impatient with him.

The beginnings of self-consciousness opens the door to connecting with people, and with stories about them, in a quite new way. I'm sure that it made Hal think of the little gingerbread boy as a person, and that the pathos of the little boy's plight was what kept Hal from gobbling his gingerbread man. The compassion didn't last, and by the end of the week Hal had returned gingerbread men to the inanimate object category and was eating them enthusiastically once again. But his experience of stories is going to be radically different from now on. The days of just pointing at a tractor and saying 'tractor' look as if they are over. ■

**Roger Mills** is a Psychodynamic Counsellor.



# Authorgraph No.143



Photograph by Joanna Carey.

**B**ob Graham was already 40 when he wrote and illustrated his first picture book. It was a story about his own family and a budgerigar that flew into their lives for a while and then flew away again. 'When I finished it' he tells me, 'I simply dropped it off at a publisher on my way home from work. I knew nothing about the publisher, but I'd noticed their offices quite near to my bus stop. The publishers were very pleased with it, but when they suggested I did another, I told them I couldn't possibly come up with another idea.' That was in 1981 – now, 25 books later, he laughs at how it's all turned out... 'somehow,' he says, 'my career just happened.'

As you might expect from his stories, Bob Graham is a perceptive and quietly unconventional character. Modest and unassuming too – although he's already received a stack of illustration awards, many of them in his native Australia. He seems genuinely 'bowled over' to have won this year's Kate Greenaway medal. 'I was stunned when they told me – it was quite a burden keeping quiet about it until the presentation here in London.' His wife (also an artist) is English and throughout their marriage they have moved back and forth between the two countries. They have two grown up children and now, after an idyllic seven-year spell in rural Somerset, they've settled again in Australia – mainly

because 'we wanted to be able to *see* our granddaughter, rather than *hear* her growing up on the telephone.'

Family life is central to all Graham's books. With a deceptively light touch, and a tendency now and again to go spiralling off on flights of fancy, his stories explore the ups and downs of everyday domestic life, celebrating its diversity and gently unravelling some of the tangled lines of communication within the family unit. With an easy balance of words and pictures, and an irrepressible humour that's entirely without irony, he always manages to give equal importance to each character, and to see things from all their different points of view whether they are kindly grandparents, long-suffering mothers, attentive dads, questing five-year-olds, wandering toddlers – or ever present household pets – especially the dogs he draws with such affectionate insight.

Drawing has always been a vital form of expression for Graham. As a child he was very aware of the illustrations in the books and comics – 'we had lots of books from England – I always found Rackham a bit scary but I loved the comfortable feeling that emanated from E H Shepard's line drawings. But above all I was fascinated by cartoons and the way the drawing had to be stripped back to essentials. I loved *The New Yorker*, *Punch* etc.,



and my great hero was the cartoonist Emil Mercier.' Although his school offered no art lessons apart from technical drawing, he drew incessantly at home. A favourite story he likes to tell – he's a generous raconteur – is how he tricked his sister into thinking he'd ripped a page from her St Trinian's book by copying one of Searle's drawings onto a torn piece of paper and leaving it on her bed. Completely fooled by the excellence of his forgery, she was furious; so he looks on that as one of his early successes. He left school at 17, and worked for Qantas for four years, but increasingly found himself painting and drawing, even in his lunch hours, so finally he quit his 'upwardly mobile' job and, in spite of his parents' fears that he was embarking on the slippery slope of a bohemian way of life, he enrolled at art school for a traditional training in fine art.

Graham draws with a simple, expressive broken line. The cartoonist in him keeps things to a minimum, but from his sly observational skills he distills a vast range of gestures and attitudes that let you know immediately, however informal the drawing, or from whatever angle it is observed, what a character might be feeling. Faces are uncompromisingly – sometimes alarmingly – minimal and cartoony – a typical Bob Graham face has two dots for eyes, a nose like a saveloy sausage, a tender blush for the cheeks and a mouth that is little more than a hiccup in the line: expression comes from the perfectly judged tilt of the head, the set of the shoulders, the whole stance. Hands are very important, again, however minimal in execution, the exact lift of a chubby finger, the inclination of a fat little palm is always tellingly observed, and even feet are expressive – shoes always being shrugged off at the first opportunity. Animals too are portrayed with great wit and economy – he has no trouble in suggesting – even from behind – the thought processes of a bantam hen preparing to negotiate a cat-flap, or a huge roly-poly dog casually monopolizing the sofa.

Crowd scenes present no difficulty; he can fill the page with bustling activity, yet never lose the narrative thread, or the sense of unity – how does he do it? 'It's all about dynamics, really, about body language and how the figures relate to one another on the page.' Graham shows me a picture in which the father leans across the mother to talk to the child – 'look at that dent on the mother's thigh' he says, 'that little pillow of indentation where his elbow is resting... it's a little thing, but it connects them in an intimate way.'

So what about his technique, his materials? 'I like to work in an uncomplicated way. I certainly don't want people sitting around wondering how I do it... I use a dip pen for the line, and watercolour, and chalks... sometimes, for a certain effect, I rub the chalk with a piece of cotton wool... I think of that as the poor man's airbrush. But really, I don't like to think about technique, I like to keep it simple – if you think about it too much it becomes self-conscious. Drawing is such a rewarding form of self-expression, you just have to go with it... it's a bit like playing jazz, when you've mastered the technique you don't worry about it, and you can improvise, do what you like.'

He frequently includes absorbing panoramic views – which offer, as in **Queenie the Bantam**, those oases of calm and reflection so vital to the rhythm of a busy picture book, and, as Graham says, 'it's important that children should be able to get a sense of the location, so they can explore and find their way round the story.'

Although there's never anything specifically 'British' or 'Australian' in the illustrations – he tries to keep things 'universal', Graham operates a very strict housing policy – he likes to put his families into 'the kind of houses children draw' – ordinary, unremarkable houses, with symmetrical windows, a chimney, a front door, a little garden back and front, a tree and a washing line. In **Rose Meets Mr Wintergarten**, 1992 (one of his finest books), Rose and her family move into just such a house, but it's bang next door to a grim fortified mansion surrounded by razor wire fences and inhabited by a curmudgeonly old man. When Rose's ball goes over the fence she not only dares to ask for it back but decides to help the old man by bringing a little light and friendship into his life. This book Graham tells me was something of a turning point; 'up until then, my books had all, metaphorically, had their feet on the ground, and here I wanted to express something beyond that. There's a scene where the whole family and their pets climb up onto the roof to watch the

sun rise – my editor wasn't at all happy about children, sheep and chickens all perched perilously on the roof ridge, but the image was something I really wanted to keep. If Rose was going to be a real heroine, I needed this scene...' Graham had his way – 'a pivotal moment' in his career, he says and with the surreal touch of the sheep on the roof it is indeed an inspiring scene – full of hope and freedom, in contrast with the prison-like house next door.

'It's important to remember' says Graham, 'that children are at their most creative when they aren't hemmed in by organized activities – they need freedom to muck about and to do nothing in particular. In **Jethro Byrde, Fairy Child**, Annabelle lives in the drab, dusty environment of an anonymous sprawling city (you can find her home in the big cityscape on the title page) and although she has nowhere to play but a patch of concrete by a broken fence, she nevertheless has the privilege of meeting a family of fairies whose van has made a dramatic crash landing nearby. Tiny against the delicately drawn roadside weeds (the sense of scale is brilliantly manipulated here), Jethro explains to Annabelle that they are fairy travellers. Annabelle immediately offers to help get the van sorted out. Annabelle's mum can't see the fairies of course, but she gladly makes tea for them, and the fairies reciprocate their hospitality with a display of music and dancing – a beautifully designed, cleverly cropped double page spread shows an elderly fairy standing on a plate by the milk jug, solemnly singing a folk song while her grandchild, a baby no bigger than a crumb, sleeps in the crinkly paper from a home-made fairy cake. Annabelle watches entranced – a touching figure, her huge nose just level with the table top. Illustrated with the utmost sensitivity, celebrating the power of the imagination, and honouring the ancient tradition of welcoming strangers, this is an enchanting book.

Welcoming strangers into our midst is something Graham feels strongly about – while he was writing this book he tells me, 'the Australian Government refused to rescue a boat full of 438 mostly Afghan people fleeing oppression... wanting no more than a better life. And when they finally allowed these traumatized people to land, the government incarcerated them, whole families behind razor wire on the island of Nauru – and some of them are still there.' As an Australian, he says, he was deeply shocked by this – I'd heard that he'd donated his £5,000 prize money to the relevant organizations for refugees and asylum seekers – 'yes,' he says, 'it was good to have an opportunity to give some practical help.'

Finally, on a lighter note, there's time for one or two last questions – prompted, I suppose, by the thought of having to draw fairies – does he draw from life? Does he keep a sketchbook? Yes he does; he hands it over, more of a scrapbook really, it's full of ideas, newspaper cuttings, jottings, photos, overheard conversations and lots of drawings... I flip through it. A rather romantic pencil drawing shows some children by the sea watching a seal on a rock... was this drawn from life? Was it in Australia? No, he says, it was drawn from the radio – I listen quite a lot, and you get some wonderful images...'

Another wonderful image, which will surely turn up in a picture book one day, is drawn from an incident a little closer to home... it shows a man sitting at a table with a plate of sausage and mash. The man is watching the sausage intently... why? 'Well,' says Graham, 'this was my brother-in-law; he wasn't really *watching* the sausage, he was listening to it. He said it was ringing – like a mobile phone, but very, very quietly – and eventually he answered it.' n

Joanna Carey is a writer and illustrator.

#### The Books published by Walker Books

Brand New Baby, 0 7445 6141 8, £9.99 hbk, 0 7445 6970 2, £4.99 pbk  
 Buffy, 0 7445 6192 2, £9.99 hbk, 0 7445 9828 1, £5.99 pbk  
 Grandad's Magic, 0 7445 8916 9, £4.99 pbk  
 Has Anyone Here Seen William?, 0 7445 7556 7, £9.99 hbk, 0 7445 7807 8, £4.99 pbk  
 Jethro Byrde, Fairy Child, 0 7445 8863 4, £10.99 hbk  
 "Let's Get a Pupil", 0 7445 7574 5, £10.99 hbk, 0 7445 9441 3, £4.99 pbk  
 Max, 0 7445 6787 4, £9.99 hbk, 0 7445 9827 3, £5.99 pbk  
 Queenie the Bantam, 0 7445 5519 1, £9.99 hbk, 0 7445 9826 5, £5.99 pbk  
 The Red Woollen Blanket, 0 7445 7557 5, £9.99 hbk, 0 7445 7808 6, £4.99 pbk  
 Rose Meets Mr Wintergarten, 0 7445 9829 X, £4.99 pbk  
 Aristotle, Dick King-Smith, 0 7445 8320 9, £7.99 hbk  
 This Is Our House, Michael Rosen, 0 7445 3750 9, £8.99 hbk, 0 7445 6020 9, £4.99 pbk



## NEWS

## Save or Delete

J K Rowling, Anne Fine and Philip Pullman are among a number of best-selling authors who have responded to demands from Greenpeace to help protect ancient forests by undertaking to demand that their books be printed on paper from sustainable forestry projects or on recycled material. Given the ever increasing length of some recent highly promoted titles (**Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix** is a whopping 768 pages), this is just as well. It has been estimated that printing 2.5 million copies (the number of copies sold in Britain) of Harry's latest adventure using the greenest methods and on recycled paper would save 89,000 trees, enough water to fill 105 Olympic sized swimming pools, the production of greenhouse gases equivalent to a car being driven 8 million miles and electricity to power an average home for 610 years. Sadly, no calculation has been made of the number of torch batteries needed to read 768 pages under the duvet. Further information about Greenpeace's Save or Delete campaign may be had from [www.saveordelete.com](http://www.saveordelete.com)

## The Impact of Potter

According to the **Bookseller**, the trade journal of the publishing industry, the Potter sales phenomenon is benefiting the whole children's market. While Harry Potter accounts for a large part of the 22% growth in value since 1998 in the general retail market, outperforming overall market growth of 12%, titles other than Harry also outperformed the market increasing sales by 15%. Harry sales grew from 1998 to 2000 by £24 million. With no new Harry title last year, sales in the general retail market declined by £13 million. But the children's market grew overall, ie sales migrated to other titles. The children's market has indeed grown!

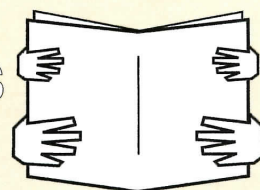
## PEOPLE

University College Worcester has appointed **Professor Judith Elkin** Vice Principal. Judith was previously Dean of the Faculty of Computing, Information and English at the University of Central England. A children's book expert, she is also the compiler of BfK's **A Multicultural Guide to Children's Books**.

**Jonathan Douglas** has been appointed Head of Learning and Access at Resource, the Council for Museums, Libraries and Archives. He was previously Adviser for School and Youth Libraries at CILIP.

Congratulations to **Miriam Hodgson** who is the winner of the 2003 Eleanor Farjeon Award for services to children's literature. She is a much respected editor and has worked with some of the finest children's authors around, including Michael Morpurgo, Robert Westall, Anne Fine, Jamila Gavin, Theresa Breslin, Annie Dalton and Jenny Nimmo.

At Hodder Children's Books **Anne McNeil** has been promoted to Publishing Director, Fiction and Picture Books. **Leilani Clark** has been appointed Editor, Picture Books. **Anne Clark** has been promoted to Publishing Director, Non-fiction and Wayland, **Maurice Lyon** and **Vicky Brooker** Wayland Publishers and **Katie Sergeant** Project Editor. **Margaret Conroy** has been promoted to Publishing Director, Audio and Licensed Publishing. **Geraldine Stroud** has been appointed Head of Publicity; she was previously Publicity Manager at Egmont Books.

USEFUL  
ORGANISATIONS  
No.29

## readtogether

**Read Together!** The Scottish Executive's Home Reading Initiative

National Co-ordinators:  
Lindsey Fraser and Kathryn Ross

6 Wellington Place,  
Edinburgh EH6 7EQ

[www.readtogether.co.uk](http://www.readtogether.co.uk)

The Scottish Executive's Home Reading Initiative recognises that early literacy skills are critical to a happy and successful school career. Books are an essential part of that skills base, but the initiative also recognises the role sharing books plays in the relationship between parents and carers and their children. If enjoyment is the best incentive, children who know the pleasures of books

will be all the more motivated to learn to read when the time comes. Of course, not every child finds learning to read easy, so the initiative provides answers to queries, and points parents in the direction of helpful guidance. Every pre-school child receives a copy of **Read Together**, a booklet full of guidance about sharing books, and there is further information on a regularly updated website from a growing band of Reading Champions with Bright Ideas and of course, recommended books. Any contributions are more than welcome!

## EVENTS

## Miffy at the Library

Dick Bruna's classic storybook character, Miffy, is helping to promote early reading skills to pre-school children in a new, interactive art and book event at libraries in Manchester, London and Reading. 'Miffy at the Library' uses pictures, storytelling and craft activities to help children discover the joys of books within a reading environment. Visually impaired children will also have the chance to join in, as special storytelling sessions will be held using some of the Miffy books published in braille. For further information and venues visit [www.miffy.com](http://www.miffy.com)

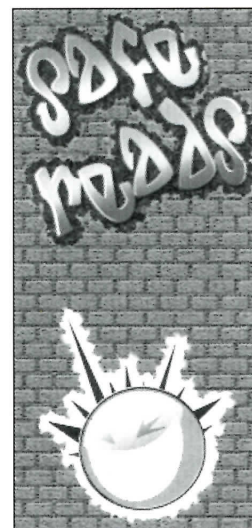
## PUBLICATIONS

## Signal 100

The hundredth and final issue of **Signal** – a bumper issue which includes a lively piece from ex-Children's Laureate, Anne Fine – is now available for sale to non-subscribers (£17.50 post free) from **Thimble Press, Lockwood, Station Road, Woodchester, Stroud, Glos. GL5 5EQ**, tel: 01453 755566.

## Safe Reads

**Safe Reads** [ie. very good!] is an annotated guide to books for teenagers. Available free (+ accompanying poster) from Tower Hamlets Children's Library Service (tel: 020 7247 9510).





## PRIZES

### NATIONAL

#### The Guardian Fiction Award

Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (David Fickling Books) is the winner of the 2003 award. Published on an adult as well as on a children's list, it is genuinely a 'crossover' book. Chair of judges, Julia Eccleshare, commented: 'It has equal, though different appeal to all readers – 15-year-old Christopher Boone's narrative voice is at once childlike in its observations and adult in its profundity.' The runners-up were David Almond's *The Fire-Eaters* (Hodder), Kevin Brooks' *Lucas* (The Chicken House) and Alex Shearer's *The Speed of the Dark* (Macmillan).

#### Sainsbury's Baby Book Award

Sainsbury's Baby Book Award Baby has been won by Sam Lloyd's *Happy Dog, Sad Dog* (Little Tiger Press). Wendy Cooling, Chair of the judging panel, said: 'We loved this book for its simple use of text and its fun illustrations. Ultimately it has been selected as the winning book for the enjoyment it offers very young children.' The other shortlisted titles were Roger Priddy's *Baby Activity Centre* (Priddy Books), Fiona Watt and Rachel Wells's *That's Not My Bear* (Usborne), Dorling Kindersley Team's *Baby Fun: Five in the Bed* (Dorling Kindersley), Lara Jones's *Goodnight Poppy Cat* (Campbell Books) and Amanda Wood and Fiona Macmillan's *Baby Boo!* (Templar).

#### The Spoken Word Awards 2003

The Gold Award in the Children's 6 and Under category was won jointly by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler's *Room on the Broom*, which is read by Josie Lawrence, and by Francesca Simon's *Horrid Henry's Stinkbomb*, read by Miranda Richardson. Competition for Children's Over 6 was very strong but in the end Mark Haddon's highly praised novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* won gold. It also took the award for Production and went on to be voted Audio Book of the Year. Silver in the Children's Over 6 category went to the BBC Radio Collection's dramatisation of Philip Pullman's prize-winning 'His Dark Materials' trilogy. The Gold Award for Children's Classic Fiction went to Ian Fleming's *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* read by Andrew Sachs.

### REGIONAL

#### Wirral Paperback of the Year

Malorie Blackman's *Noughts and Crosses* is the winner of the Wirral Paperback of the Year. The award was started to give young people from Years 8 and 9 the chance to read exciting new fiction, and have their voices heard by choosing their favourite book. Eight Wirral schools participated in this year's judging process.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

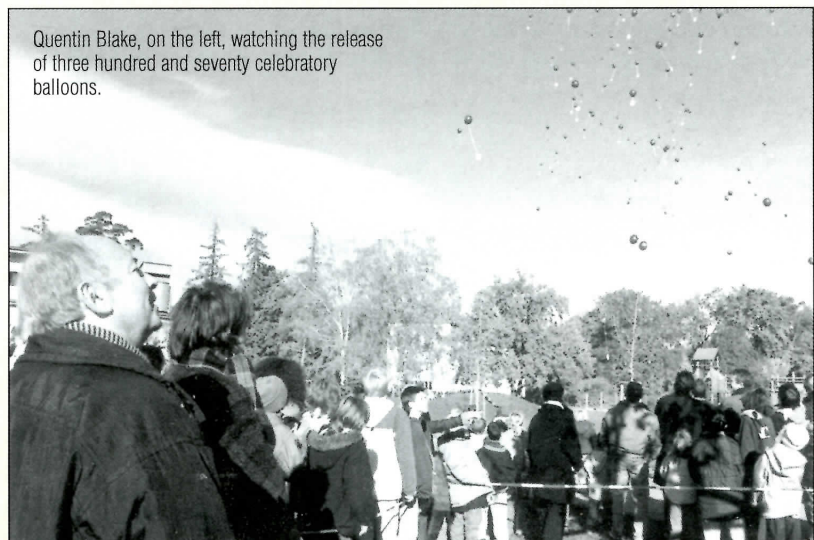
### The Quentin Blake Europe School Naming Party

Dear Editor

I thought your readers would be interested to know that a school in Germany is now named after one of the UK's leading children's book illustrators. A high over Germany called 'Quentin' on the weather map seemed an appropriate omen for the naming party for the Quentin Blake Europe School. Quentin himself and Ghislaine Kenyon from the National Gallery arrived in Berlin the day before in torrential rain. This in no way dampened any spirits and the reception party at Tegel Airport gave

front of the whole school and afterwards planted a chestnut tree in the playground. Finally, in a moment of total magic, the children released three hundred and seventy blue and yellow balloons into a royal blue sky!

All these experiences produced so much excitement, warmth, laughter, untold learning experiences, and were the rewards for a year of preparation and eight weeks of intense work. But the crowning feature was Quentin Blake, who gave us a new school logo, many books, memorable artwork, and most importantly, himself. His warmth, his modesty, his ability to talk to everybody from the British Ambassador to the small child wanting an autograph, his co-operation in everything we planned, was a wonderful gift. We gave him our



Quentin Blake, on the left, watching the release of three hundred and seventy celebratory balloons.

the guests a hearty welcome. Characters from Quentin's books presented flowers and the cheerleaders performed the specially composed 'Quentin Blake Rap'.

There followed two days of amazingly sunny weather. As well as champagne receptions for the VIPs, there was a big playground concert and party. The speeches and performances were constantly interrupted by Mrs Armitage (or rather her German doppelganger) riding up on her bike and demanding to speak to Mr Blake – 'not now Mrs Armitage!' There was a gigantic three tier papier-mâché cake with fireworks on the top, a performance of the school song 'Children of the Dream', a moving speech by Quentin, the unveiling of a plaque with the new logo for the school building, followed by the playground party. The next day Quentin took a drawing session in

school, but he won our hearts too. Hurray for Mr Quentin Blake's new school!

Here is the Quentin Blake Rap, by Anni Nicholson (4.1):

- 1) Quentin Blake you're our man.  
Every child here is your fan.
- 2) We're so happy that you came  
and proud to give our school your name.
- 3) Quentin Blake, you are the best.  
It's great to have you as our guest.
- 4) Mister Blake, we think it's cool,  
that you have come here to our school.
- 5) England's not so far away,  
you're welcome back here any day.
- 6) We're sorry, that you can't stay long,  
but hope, that you enjoyed our song.

Theresa Heine,  
The Quentin Blake Europe School, Berlin



*I wish I'd written...***WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE****STORY AND PICTURES BY MAURICE SENDAK**

**Marcia Williams** on a perfectly crafted book that is full of excitement, compassion and humour.

Without hesitation, the book that I wish I had written and illustrated is Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*.

When it was first published in 1963 it was hugely innovative and caused a stir among many librarians, parents and teachers who thought it was far too frightening for children. But I believe it is one of the most empowering books a child can read. The focus is so completely on the boy protagonist, Max, that the child reader will never doubt that this is their book. The balance between words and pictures never falters, and never patronises or diminishes Max and his wonderful ability to create an adventure out of controversy. Eventually (for in the space of an evening Max sails 'in and out of weeks and almost over a year')

this leads him to learn a little more about his own enormous strength and the importance of those who love and forgive him.

It is a perfectly crafted book, full of excitement, compassion and humour. Sendak's admiration for children and concern for their struggles in life shows in every line of both text and artwork. He indulges not his own ego but the child's, and therefore leaves a rich amount of space for the reader to live within the book. With great daring, since this is a picture book, the last page has no pictures and only five words but they bring the book to a perfect, child satisfying, conclusion.

Forty years after its publication and just like Max's supper when he returns from his wild rumpus, this book is 'still hot'. I love it and wish I had lived through the daily excitement of its creation.

**Where the Wild Things Are** by Maurice Sendak is published in hardback by The Bodley Head (0 370 00772 7, £12.99) and in paperback by Red Fox (0 09 940839 2, £5.99).

Marcia Williams' latest book is **Charles Dickens and Friends**, Walker, 0 7445 9232 1, £10.99 hbk, 0 7445 9838 9, £5.99 pbk.



Chosen by Year 7 (11/12 year old) pupils from King Solomon High School, Ilford, Essex

**GOOD READS**

Thanks to Veronica Hurley, Librarian

**The Bad Beginning**

Lemony Snicket, Egmont, 0 7497 4611 4, £5.99 hbk

The story starts with three rich children called Klaus, Violet and Sunny. Violet being the oldest, Klaus the second oldest, and then Sunny the youngest. Violet loves to invent things and loves to think of inventions. Klaus loves to read; he is a bookworm. Sunny is a baby and loves to bite things.

The three youngsters were on the beach when their parents' friend comes called Mr Poe. He told them their house had burnt down with parents in it, and told them they were not allowed to use their fortune until Violet was old enough.

They are sent to live with an evil, sneaky and dirty man called Count Olaf who makes them do all the chores while he was off with his theatre group. Count Olaf has a wicked plan to steal their fortune. He uses fraud to try and steal their great fortune but it's not that easy.

David Cohen



Left to right: David Cohen, Sheri Bernstein and Annie Binysh.

**The Henry Game**

Susan Davis, Corgi, 0 552 54793 X, £4.99 pbk

This story is about three teenage girls and one homemade ouija board. Abbie, Marina and Lauren sit around the table one hot, sticky afternoon and have fun summoning up a spirit. They then find out their spirit is a fat English King who killed his seven wives because their babies were girls and not boys. They discover more every afternoon and each time Henry the Eighth gets a little more personal. Are the girls

about to lose their heads?

This is the perfect book for someone who wants a little drama, comedy, romance and horror all under one roof. I recommend this book to an older reader, as the print is fairly small and the terminology used is of a higher standard reader.

With suspense in every turn of the page it'll definitely keep you on the edge of your seat!

Sheri Bernstein

**Lola Rose**

Jacqueline Wilson, Doubleday, 0 385 60184 0, £10.99 hbk

**Lola Rose** is a real life story about a girl who runs away with her mum and little brother. They run away because her dad started to hit her. They change names and go all the way to London. While everything seems to be going ok something bad happens out of the blue and Lola Rose is forced to grow up and act like an adult. She soon finds that just because her name is cool doesn't mean her life is too. Despite all the bad things Lola Rose makes a friend, gets in contact with a relative, and works it out.

I would recommend this book to people over 11 years old because it is very serious. I would also recommend this book to girls although some boys might like it. But like all the other Jacqueline Wilson books, it always turns to be a happy ending.

Annie Binysh



# 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*.

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

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

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

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

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.

Olivia Dickinson works for Children's BBC (CBBC and CBeebies Online).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Vincent Reid is a researcher in infant and toddler development at the Centre for Brain and Cognitive Development, Birkbeck College, London.

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.

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Bold Bad Ben the Beastly Bandit	★★★ 21	Nelson Mandela	★★★ 25
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Magic in Art	★★★ 22		



# REVIEWS Books About Children's Books

## Ezra Jack Keats, A Bibliography and Catalogue

★★★★

Compiled by Brian Alderson, Pelican Publishing, 176pp, 1 56554 007 7, £35.50 hbk (available via Gazelle Books, 01524 68765)

A companion to Alderson's *Ezra Jack Keats, Artist and Picture Book Maker*, this study also serves as a stand-alone reference book. We need more books like this, a thoroughly comprehensive guide to the output of an important twentieth-century illustrator/author. Alderson is in full anorak mode here in his examination of the Keats archive at the University of Southern Mississippi's de Grummond Collection. As well as Keats' paintings and illustrations, the book includes all manner of bits and bobs such as juvenile drawings, sketchbooks, letters, roughs, dummies and photographs.

Keats' overall output was uneven. A commercial artist in the true sense and a highly skilled designer and draughtsman, some of his work stands happily alongside the best

twentieth-century American graphic art. But too often it slips into sentimentality and slickness of characterisation. He was also something of a stylistic magpie, turning easily to Ben Shahn social realist mode one minute, as in his cover for *John Henry, an American Legend*, and into Barnett Freedman Tolstoyesque the next, as in the *Plaza Lithographs*. But Alderson's marathon is full of fascinating contextual detail, as he brings his vast knowledge to the job, frequently commenting on the unworthiness of some of the texts with which Keats was working, for example, 'EJK heroically does what he can with this unlikely material, giving his best, as always, for the dog.'

The book's only major shortcoming is its design. For a book about an artist whose work is so sensitive to good book design, this is a real shame. The layout is messy, the front cover typography sits poorly with the image, and at times it is difficult to know which text column one is supposed to be reading. Good design is vital to a book such as this. Victor Watson's *Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English* is an example of how well it can be done.

MS

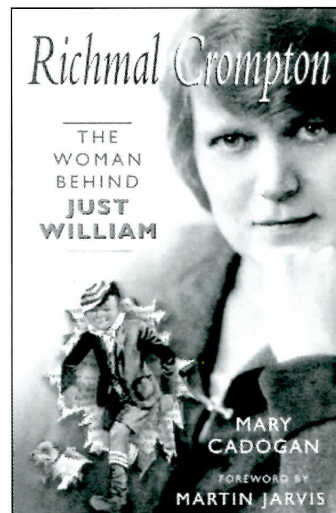
## Richmal Crompton, The Woman Behind Just William

★★★

Mary Cadogan, foreword by Martin Jarvis, Sutton Publishing, 192pp, 0 7509 3285 6, £7.99 pbk

As a specialist in the history of children's literature and editor of the *Just William* magazine, Mary Cadogan speaks with an authoritative voice in this fascinating biography. Richmal Crompton's William, a scruffy, adventurous hero, is known to those who have never even read the books, along with Ginger and the awful Violet Elizabeth. Crompton (died 1969) was a learned, classics scholar and a dedicated teacher. Her many adult novels seem to have become lost in time, yet her William books, the first of which was published in 1922 and the 38th, shortly after her death in 1970, 'remain immensely readable, retaining their sparkle and satirical edge today'.

Since the 1980s they have enjoyed a happy revival, maybe through the audio recordings read so aptly by



Martin Jarvis. Cadogan includes here enough detail to delight, and many who have heard or read of the exploits of this 'dirty rascal' of a boy with a crooked tie and a grimy collar will find much of interest in this biography of an author born in the late 19th century into a family with high Victorian values. GB

# REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant

## Mary Had a Little Lamb

★★★

Sam Childs, Hutchinson, 10pp, 0 09 189296 1, £2.99 novelty board

A retelling of the first verse of the traditional rhyme, this board book presents the story of Mary, a little black girl, and her adventures with her pet lamb. Clearly aimed at under-ones, the book is a perfect size for exploring with a baby. The bold and colourful illustrations with their multicultural emphasis draw the eye and will be attractive to infants as they have a very high contrast with the neutral tones of the background. Given the age group at which the book is aimed, rather too much space is given to the text, which occupies half of most double page spreads. This story will help infants learn how to interact with books.

VRE



other than the words of the song, and no numbers, which is nice. The discussion of the pictures and the counting is left to the adult. There are well observed details: the soft toys are posed in each photo to react to each other, and they snuggle and cuddle well. And they all end up back in bed.

SE

## Five in the bed and the little one said...

★★★★

Dorling Kindersley 'Baby Fun', 16pp, 1 4053 0217 8, £3.99 board

This is a larger-than-usual board book, a nice size for holding with a cosy little group of toddlers round you. It's a comfy sort of book, with up-to-the-minute photos of its subjects, five cuddly toys. The song is the one we know, reduced to five, and as the pages turn we see one after the other cuddly rolling off the bed. A column on each left hand page shows the cumulative falling toys, until only the little one is in the bed and the other four are spiralling downward. This cleverly gives us the chance to count those left in the bed and those falling. There is no text

## Go Maisy, Go!

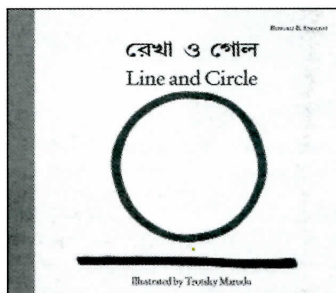
★★★★

Lucy Cousins, Walker, 12pp, 0 7445 9696 3, £7.99 novelty hbk

The bold, energetic illustrations in this die-cut board book will delight toddlers as they spread across the page with exuberance. Maisy the mouse and her friends charge through the book on a plane, bus, train and tractor. Her journey is enhanced through the use of sturdy flaps, which will withstand many readings. Many involve the clever manipulation of the images via changes to movement and action by the characters: a squirrel holds a hose – lift the flap and water sprays everywhere. Other flaps hold unexpected surprises, with a suitcase full of cupcakes and small

bus seats occupied by elephants. The text is minimal, involving repetition and the rhyming of everyday words with an infectious enthusiasm. The generous size and format allow toddlers to explore the book independently while continuing to discover something new with every read. Cousins' quirky sense of humour will have children giggling to the last page.

VRE



## Line and Circle

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★★★

Radhika Menon, ill. Trotsky Marudu, Bengali translation by Kanai Datta, Mantra, 24pp, Bengali and English, 1 84444 003 6, £5.50 pbk

This is a delightful book about shapes. It is simply told, starting with 'One line. Many lines. One circle. Many circles.' The shapes are stark, brightly coloured, and nicely composed on the page. The development is more truthful than most picture books about shape – we are told that 'Line is a star. Circle is the moon. Line is a table. Circle is the plate.' That is, the lines are being used to represent objects. This is a change from having to find the shapes in the illustrations as if they are somehow intrinsically there,

rather than a device to represent 3D on a page. A must for monolingual and multilingual children alike. (Available in 21 dual language editions.) SE

## The Gossipy Parrot

★★★

Shen Roddie, ill. Michael Terry, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 6079 X, £9.99 hbk

Godfrey is a gossipy parrot who loves stirring up trouble by passing on rude remarks. Lion decides to teach Godfrey a lesson by telling him that a 'trouble maker' has insulted various creatures. True to form, Godfrey spreads the news to the supposedly insulted animals. The outcome of the story, with everyone being cross with Godfrey for meanly spreading gossip, is very predictable but it illustrates a useful lesson for young children: spreading tittle-tattle is mean and upsetting.

Terry's vibrant jungle-coloured crayon illustrations (illustrator of *The Selfish Crocodile*) are excellent and dominate the story. The piercing eyes of the various creatures simply bore into the misguided parrot. The use of text is effectively economical.

AK

## Tinka

★★★★

Rainy Dohaney, Simon & Schuster, 40pp, 0 689 83725 9, £9.99 hbk

This fanciful story sounds a cautionary note, enhanced by illustrations in gentle watercolour and coloured pencil. Tinka, a remarkably small sheep, is looked down upon by all the rest of the flock. Every Springtime, they celebrate on seeing the huge purple



spider appear on the faraway hill. When Tinka stands on a stone on tiptoe she is still not tall enough to see the purple spider. But her dream of visiting him comes true when Sooty the crow agrees to fly her to the faraway hill. Here, the purple spider transforms into thousands and thousands of tiny flowers. Despite her insignificant size, Tinka is empowered by the knowledge that the other sheep are all wrong, and that she alone knows the true nature of the spider. Small is beautiful, yet again. Shame about the typo on the spine. **GB**

## Under the Bed

★★★★

Paul Bright, ill. Ben Cort, Little Tiger Press, 32pp, 1 85430 863 7, £9.99 hbk

The usual assortment of bits and pieces lie under the boy's bed: '... a smelly shoe, / A piece of jigsaw, green and blue, / Some purple pants, an apple core.' But in the night '... there are bugs and beasts, nibbling crumbs for their midnight feasts ...' and also a dozy dragon, an alligator, a lazy grizzly bear and something '... bigger than a stable door, / Horrible, hairy, with warts on his nose'. All the creatures which a child might imagine lying in wait to pounce are there, but these mean no harm, they are too busy gobbling and squabbling to bother about anything else. Most harmless of all is the horrible, hairy creature, petrified by what is in the bed. And who is the frightening thing in the bed? Why of course it is YOU, and when you sit up all the creatures run out the door.

**Under the Bed** is a rumbustious account of night time fears vanquished. I would, however, be a little wary of reading it with very nervous children as it might exacerbate their fears, but reasonably robust children should find it great fun, and enjoy booing the creatures as they run away. It would also make a useful talking point about things which are feared, but which actually pose no threat. The painterly artwork is bright and bold and the upside-down cover will provoke curiosity. **VC**

## Little One Step

★★★★★

Simon James, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 9286 0, £10.99 hbk

Youngest children in families or groups, and children who feel they are always a step behind everyone else will love **Little One Step**. On second thought, everyone, child and adult, will love it, for who hasn't felt a bit out of step or unable to keep up with the rest at some time or another.



Three little ducks are lost, and the older ducks know they must keep walking to find their mama. This is too much for the littlest one, but big brothers offer support, encouraging him to take just one step at a time. And that's how he gets his name of 'Little One Step'.

Very soft apricot and yellow tones inside lightly drawn lines on pale creamy pages capture the journey of the ducklings. Sometimes James shows their trek from on high, sometimes up close, and always making the viewer part of their adventure. The large format portrait shape of the book helps with this too, allowing for plenty of space around the illustrations, and adding to the sense of a journey. This is a book which will certainly elicit demands to be read again and again, and I can see lots of Little One Steps following on from James's gentle text and images. **VC**

## The Sheep Fairy: When Wishes Have Wings

★★★★

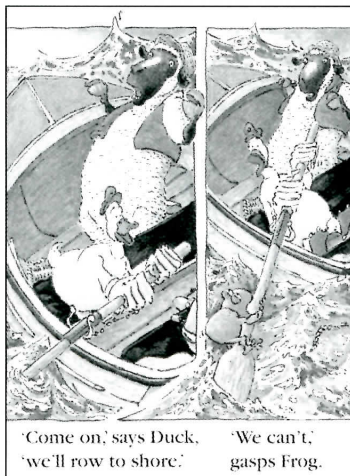
Ruth Louise Symes, ill. David Sim, Chicken House, 32pp, 1 904442 03 X, £10.99 hbk

Sim's richly graphic illustrations have appeared in a number of contexts over the years, and here they grace the somewhat psychedelic story of Wendy the flying sheep. Sim uses a light-on-dark dry brush painting technique to create texture across the page, allowing the colours underneath to peep through the upper layers. The busy spreads are attractively laid out, if a little densely populated at times. Wendy's reward for saving a fairy from a sticky end in the bramble bush is to be granted her wish to fly, and before long she is soaring through the night sky and heroically seeing off predators. A bright and breezy book, full of strong colours and shapes to amuse the younger child. **MS**

## Captain Duck

★★★★★

Jez Alborough, Collins, 40pp, 0 00 713011 2, £4.99 pbk



Disaster always seems to strike when Duck's about. In this, his third misadventure, the impetuous Duck forgets about his conked-out truck and jumps aboard Goat's boat. Before Frog and Sheep can stop him he's taken the helm and headed seawards leaving the owner stranded. After an uncomfortable night on the ocean waves, the trio finally drifts ashore in Goat's 'broken' boat.

Alborough's rhyme is as sure-footed as ever and the illustrations are a riot. A great read aloud: the storyline impels you to read it straight through, but make sure you draw attention to the comic detail in the pictures and leave the book available for your rapt listeners to explore further. **JB**

## The Rainbow Book of Nursery Tales

★★★★

Sam Childs, Random, 224pp, 0 09 188484 5, £14.99 hbk

The artist has chosen 26 (largely European in origin) 'nursery' tales which she divides into sections - Boys and Girls, On the Farm, All Creatures Great and Small, Dwarves and Giants, Fairy Land, Princes and Princesses, and Magic - corresponding to the seven colours of the rainbow. Overall the tellings are accessible and easy on the ear though I found a few, most notably 'Little Red Riding Hood', somewhat over elaborate, and Oscar Wilde's 'The Selfish Giant' seems out of place in this collection.

Colourful and vibrant the book certainly is, and the oil pastel illustrations have an obvious child appeal but some of the spreads, where large blocks of the rainbow colour are used as a background to carry the text, seem to me to result in visual overload. All in all though, a jolly collection for bedtime or storytime and certainly good value for money. **JB**

## Hide & Speak French

★★★★

Catherine Bruzzone and Susan Martineau, ill. Louise Comfort, b small publishing, 32pp, 1 902915 72 0, £5.99 pbk

Designed to help young children learn to speak French, this book is organised thematically and calls itself an 'interactive picture word book'. Each theme is given a double spread and comprises, on the right hand side, a list of nine 'key' French words (with pronunciation) each with a small picture prompt and, on the left hand side, a half page colour picture and nine simple sentences (phrases in the case of colours) using the key words. The 15 themes range from parts of the body through various home-based topics to visits to such places as the seaside and the zoo.

At the back of the book are two wipe-clean flaps which can be used to cover the list of words or corresponding pictures so that the user can try saying or writing each word. Hence 'look, cover and speak' or 'look, cover and write': the latter being one of the ways many children are shown to help them learn to spell English words.

Learning French from a book is never the ideal and a child would require a fair amount of interaction with a French speaker for this to work. It seems to me that, rather than a book, a CD rom of the book in which the words were spoken for repetition and imitation would make it more effective and much more fun. Failing that, a cassette sold with the book would greatly enhance its effectiveness. **JB**

## Goldilocks and the Three Bears

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★

Kate Clynes, trans. Sujata Bannerji, Mantra, 32pp, Bengali and English, 1 84444 037 0, £7.50 pbk

What is different about this version of 'Goldilocks' is the inclusion of rhyming verses dotted throughout. These mostly take the form of warnings or admonitions: 'Stop Goldilocks don't be hasty / Things could turn out very nasty,' and give this retelling a ring of pantomime about it. It adds interest and gives scope for discussion but I'm not sure how well this works as a dual language text. For one thing, the rhymes are printed in italic fonts (in both scripts) to distinguish them from the rest of the narrative but this sometimes makes for a confusing looking spread. Overall, a pleasant enough title but not an especially outstanding one. (Available in 22 dual language editions.) **UC**

## The Moon

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Claire Llewellyn, 0 7502 4283 3

## Minibeasts

NON-FICTION ★★★

Lynn Huggins-Cooper, 0 7502 4419 4

### Monster minibeasts

Most minibeasts are quite small. But some are HUGE!

A dragonfly that lived at the same time as the dinosaurs had wings as BIG as a seagull!

Giant water bugs, found in America and Australia, can be as big as hamsters!



## The Sea

NON-FICTION ★★★

Claire Llewellyn, 0 7502 4417 8

## Chocolate

NON-FICTION ★★

Saviour Pirotta, 0 7502 4423 2

## Teeth

NON-FICTION ★★★

Saviour Pirotta, 0 7502 4360 0

## Homes

NON-FICTION ★★

Rosie McCormick, 0 7502 4425 9

Hodder Wayland 'Starters', 24pp, £8.99 each hbk

This new series of topic books for pre-school children and children at the younger end of key stage 1 aims to 'fire every child's imagination' - quite a big claim. There are a lot of books available on these familiar Early Years topics and we need to ask of any new series: are bright new covers and appealing illustrations just pepping up the same old content? I rather feared this might be so in the case of **Chocolate** as it



begins with a lot of pictures of chocolate in all its different forms, pictures that tell children what they already know, supported by a rather basic text. But things improve: we go on to a clear explanation, through text and illustration, of how cocoa beans are harvested from cacao trees and we are helped to track the stages through which the sticky pulp goes to become the chocolate we eat every day. But the young readers are not told, or shown on a map, which countries produce this particular product, only that cacao trees grow

where it is hot and wet.

**Minibeasts** has intriguing photographs and some interesting information but I think, for this age group, a detailed account of the life cycle of one creature would provide a better starting point. Covering so many small creatures shows the variety of the insect and minibeast world, but risks imparting rather miscellaneous information which is soon forgotten. **Teeth** has a narrower focus and therefore works better.

**The Moon** and **The Sea** are both

visually alive and beautifully written. I particularly like the speculative nature of the author's thoughts on the future of space exploration in **Moon**: it is never too early to realise that knowledge is not static but dynamic. When I came to **Homes** with its small and detailed illustrations, I wondered if this book (and indeed all the books in this series) might work best in big format. This would make it possible for the teacher to share the book with a group and to encourage questions and reflection. Most

young children would need some adult mediation to understand the ideas and concepts in more than a superficial way. I am not suggesting that big books should replace the small ones – but rather that they might supplement them.

These books would find a place on the classroom browsing table to extend children's learning and they are also helpful in introducing retrieval devices like contents pages and indexes. **MM**

## REVIEWS 5–8 Infant/Junior

### Crispin and the Three Little Piglets

★★★★

Ted Dewan, Picture Corgi, 32pp, 0 552 54786 7, £5.99 pbk

A sequel to **Crispin, the Pig Who Had it All**, this book is loaded with jokes in both text and illustration, but it also offers food for thought regarding accepting new family members. The Tamworth Pigs live in opulence. Crispin revels in being an indulged, ONLY piglet. So when his parents inform him he is about to have a baby brother or sister, he is not amused. In the hospital, he selects the quietest, least smelly of the triplets, but is appalled when all three 'squealing bundles of love' are brought home. Tremendous sibling rivalry follows, the growing piglets getting away with mess and noise whilst Crispin suffers constant reprimands and exclusion. The underlying layers in the story weave through the book with both charm and wit. The extended text includes references to traditional pig tales, whilst the illustrations add enormously to this richly humorous book. It will delight readers across a wide range of ages. **GB**

### Sandbear

★★★

Shen Roddie, ill. Jenny Jones, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 6115 X, £4.99 pbk

This warm story of care and friendship develops as Hare sets about building a sand bear out on the dunes but gives Sandbear just a blade of grass as an arm. Hearing cries for help, Sandbear discovers that Hare has fallen down a deep hole. To get him out, Sandbear slides down into the hole and Hare hops out – but Sandbear has reverted into a pile of sand. Can Hare recreate him? This well told story is an affirmation of firm friendship, and the painterly, summery illustrations lend credence to a developing and worthwhile relationship. **GB**

### Be Boy Buzz

★★★

Bell Hooks, ill. Chris Raschka, Jump at the Sun/Hyperion, 32pp, 0 7868 0814 4, £12.99 hbk

A book for reading aloud, this is an exuberant celebration of boyiness, of being black, and of the sounds of words. Deeply sophisticated in its ambition, it can perhaps be seen as a descendant of the American classic **Ounce Dice Trice** by Alastair Reid and Ben Shahn. Hooks' simple but powerful text entwines itself with

Raschka's bold shapes, dancing across the double-page spreads. 'I be boy. All bliss boy. All fine beat. All beau boy'. In a book of this kind, words and pictures are inseparable, experienced simultaneously, rather like a vocal duet, and Raschka and Hooks achieve a nice harmony here as the music rises and falls and we explore the many sides of being a boy; '... laughing, crying, telling my story / talking way too loud / Then sitting all quiet / still.'

Perhaps a minor shortcoming of the book is that it is rather relentlessly brown, the uniform background colour of the pages forcing the shapes to work that much harder to create pace and rhythm. It's good to know it's now OK to be a boy, though. **MS**

### Katie in London

INFORMATION STORY ★★★

James Mayhew, Orchard, 32pp, 1 84121 806 5, £10.99 hbk

What would it be like if one of the bronze lions in Trafalgar Square changed into a living lion and took you on an exhilarating tour of London? This picture book mingles fantasy with information most successfully: it provides children of about age four to seven years with a lively introduction to some of the main London sights within the context of an appealing story.

Children's literature is full of strange and fantastic journeys on all manner of objects and creatures. Mayhew uses the device well here, pushing at the boundaries between the real world and the world of the imagination; the lion runs, jumps and sometimes flies over familiar London buildings with the children clinging to his back.

The text keeps up the pace of the story and includes a lot of convincing dialogue. Colourful and extremely detailed illustrations add greatly to the appeal of the book. They show a city full of life and movement – people and vehicles on the city streets, Tower Bridge swinging open for the river traffic and the London Eye turning as Katie, Jack and the lion rise high above London. Grandma is still on the bench, just waking up as the children return – another familiar story convention. Feelings are important too – young readers will like the touching ending when Katie and Jack hand over a woolly blanket, purchased at Harrods with the last of their pocket money, to keep the lion's tummy warm. **MM**

"What on earth is that supposed to be?" asked Dad.  
"It's supposed to be a mother and child," said Mum.  
"Well, why isn't it?" said Dad.



### The Shape Game

★★★★★

Anthony Browne, Doubleday, 32pp, 0 385 60136 0, £10.99 hbk

This is the classiest introduction to Tate Britain that you could hope to buy. It stems from Browne's period as illustrator in residence there. It introduces us to a family visiting the gallery for the first time, guiding and provoking us with Browne's familiar techniques of visual jokes and games, pictures within a story and stories within pictures. It's the same family that visited the **Zoo** in Browne's earlier title, but this time from the point of view of the younger brother. He also appears, much older, at the opening of the book, as the story's narrator and illustrator, remembering a day that 'changed my life forever'.

At the outset, all the family are wary and intimidated, except mum who is enjoying her birthday treat. But Browne's eccentric transformations of the Tate's forbidding architecture and ambience make it immediately more welcoming to the reader who looks over their shoulders. One by one, the other members of the family are engaged by the paintings. The connections that they make with their own lives release the pictures from their frames and free their imaginations. Napoleon wears a cat on his head; blood leaks down the wall from a Stubbs' painting of a lion savaging a horse; and Dad takes all the parts in a Hockney scene. At the end of their visit, all they need to take away from the Gallery shop is a pad and some pens, and they are ready to play the shape game for themselves.

If you know some of these paintings, this book will make you want to go back and look at them again. If you know someone, child or adult, who's never thought of going to the Tate or any other art gallery, this is the book you want to show them. It's that good. For everyone from five upwards. **CB**

### Paddington and the Grand Tour

★★★★

Michael Bond, ill. Bob Alley, Collins, 32pp, 0 00 712313 2, £9.99 hbk, 0 00 712314 0 £4.99 pbk

45 years after his first adventure, the bear equivalent of Peter Pan, Paddington, is still going strong – getting into and out of trouble in his own inimitable style. On a gentle day out in London, with his friend Mr Gruber, and carrying his obligatory suitcase packed full of marmalade sandwiches, Paddington is mistaken by a group of tourists as a tour guide. They follow a perplexed Paddington Bear everywhere. There is nothing ground breaking in either the story or the full colour pen and wash illustrations. It may be a little dated but there is a comfortable feeling of reassurance with Paddington Bear. Bond has a winning formula which children like. So why change after nearly half a century? **AK**

### Evie and the Man Who Helped God

★★★★★

Michael Foreman, Andersen, 32pp, 1 84270 219 X, £10.99 hbk

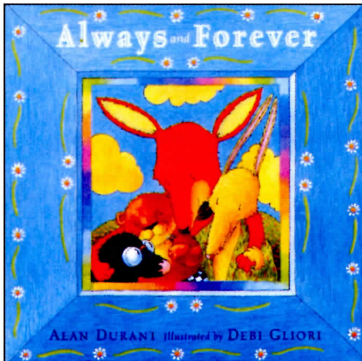
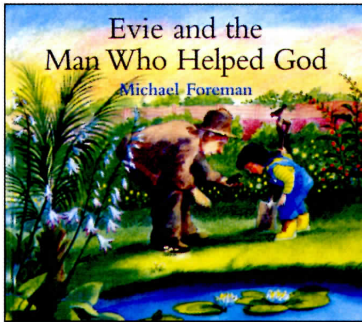
### Always and Forever

★★★★★

Alan Durant, ill. Debi Gliori, Doubleday, 32pp, 0 385 60503 X, £10.99 hbk

Both of these books have death as a theme, and both emphasise the importance of the passing seasons in providing comfort and consolation. In **Evie and the Man Who Helped God**, the death of gardener George only comes at the end. Before that, we see Evie helping George on Mondays, his day to work. Through the seasons and years, George explains to Evie about plants and animals, and together they share the beauty and the fittingness of God's creation. When George doesn't appear one day, Evie asks, 'Who will help God on Mondays?' Mum replies, 'George has gone to help him all the time.' Evie takes on George's work, understanding that solace is found in continuity. Solace will be found, too, in the beauty of Foreman's illustrations. Tiny pictures of newts and frogs, mayflies and marsh marigolds, snowdrops and autumn leaves, swallows and a friendly robin dot the text pages, and the soft-focus full page pictures show clearly the close relationship between the little girl and the old





man. A beautiful, sustaining picture book.

**Always and Forever** has death as the dominant theme. Four animals live happily together. Otter is the cook, Mole mends things, Hare keeps the garden and Fox is the father-figure, who loves and encourages them all. When Fox becomes ill and dies, it is autumn, and his family buries him under a willow tree, his favourite place. Then 'a wintry sadness' falls over the family, and they find it hard to talk about Fox. After the snow comes and goes, and spring is on the way, Squirrel comes to visit. She begins remembering Fox in funny ways, and soon the family is joining in. Their solution to their sadness is to use their talents to make a special place under the willow tree for them all to enjoy. Gliori's illustrations are magic. Full of light and shimmering with colour, they portray all the beauty of Durant's script. ES

### A Winter's Tale

★★★

Marcus Sedgwick, ill. Simon Bartram, Templar, 32pp, 1 84011 307 3, £9.99 hbk

Luxuriously thick paper and a largish format which show to advantage Bartram's sharply defined acrylic paintings, indicate that this is a book to be shared by adult and child,

either at home or at school. And I suspect the nostalgic tone to the whole production makes it a cert for the home gift market. The text is minimal. An unnamed boy bemoans the warmth of a winter night. We infer that it is Christmas Eve as the closing scene the next morning shows that he has received a gift in Christmas wrapping. Getting into bed, the boy wishes that it would snow like it does in his snow globe. And then something magical happens and snow starts to fall. A figure, perhaps Jack Frost, leads the snowflakes as they begin to convert the landscape from deep greens to an icy blue. With the snow comes a whole cavalcade of carnivalesque winter images, skeetering from the top to bottom of the pages: a snowman, skiers and snowboarders, a polar bear, familiar Christmas tree figures, and in the background, set against the large orb of the moon is Santa Clause and his sleigh.

This dream sequence is denoted by heavy semi-translucent pages covered with snowflakes. The closing snow pages mark the end of the magic and the arrival of morning when the boy wakes to find his gift is a pair of skates. There are lots of references from the dream to reality and it makes for satisfying close looking. This is an elegant book, but very heavy on design features which give it a contrived feel and ultimately detract from the freshness we hope to find in an outstanding picture book. It would make a useful gift for families wanting to mark the magic of Christmas, but in a non-religious manner. VC

### The Night Before Christmas

★

Clement Clarke Moore, ill. Mary Engelbreit, Cat's Whiskers, 36pp, 1 903012 70 8, £9.99 hbk

A couple of days after the despatch of my copy for the Current 'Classics in Short' (nicely written out on yellow paper) I received this new illustrated version of Moore's ballad, first published in the USA. It is hardly a runner in the Christmas Stakes though, being so handicapped by its weight of heavily-coloured pages that it doesn't get out of the stalls. The verses are rationed to four lines per 11 x 22 inch page-opening and are surrounded by a brain-numbing clutter of largely irrelevant subjects including about half the population of Elfland. If anyone is likely to enjoy the results it will be those exuberant

folk who defy the Kyoto protocols and illuminate their demesnes with a million coloured lights from Guy Fawke's Day to Easter. BA

### Spud

★★★

Alison Prince, ill. Kate Sheppard, Young Corgi, 64pp, 0 552 54908 8, £3.99 pbk

What happens when you know something is going on behind your back, and you just cannot work out what? Spud enjoys living with Mrs Piffey, but she plans to go to Turkey and does not explain to him in advance what will happen. First of all, Spud thinks he is going to eat some turkey for a treat, but then he is farmed out to a minder who is due to look after him. A trail of disastrous and very funny consequences follow, with Spud going from one minder to another in quick succession. The person he least expects to look after him well turns out to be the most sympathetic. Children will identify easily with Spud's predicaments, and the illustrations by Sheppard lend well to the humour of the story. This is a book that children and adults will enjoy, although the rather more earthy elements of humour will be enjoyed more by some children than by others. RL

### Bold Bad Ben the Beastly Bandit

★★★

Ann Jungman, ill. Cathy Wilcox, Barn Owl Books, 64pp, 1 903015 18 9, £3.99 pbk

The townsfolk are terrified of Bold Bad Ben. No one dares even to peep out of the window to see what he looks like. Living in a cave in the mountains, Bold Bad Ben terrorises the people of the town by stealing and vandalising the property. He announces his arrival each time by singing this dreadful song: 'I am Bold Bad Beastly Ben, I beat the women and eat the men. I'll steal your sheets, your shoes, your hair, And hide them in my mountain lair!'

The toy maker and his talking horse decide to see Bold Bad Ben in his own territory. Reminiscent of Oz, in **The Wizard of Oz**, Bold Bad Ben turns out to be far from terrifying. He is, in fact, a rather insecure little man who felt isolated and so tried to destroy things he couldn't be a part of. The toy maker invites Bold Bad Ben to join him as an employee in his toy workshop. A warm story, accompanied by a liberal smattering

of humorous black and white illustrations, with witty speech bubble asides. Originally published by Collins in 1979. Ann Jungman also wrote **Vlad the Drak** (reviewed in BfK 138). AK

### Violet and the Mean and Rotten Pirates

★★★

Richard Hamilton, ill. Sam Hearn, Bloomsbury, 128pp, 0 7475 6337 3, £4.99 pbk

A band of fearsome pirates boards a ship to find that it is deserted and has been ransacked – but then they hear a noise and find a baby. She gets adopted and brought up by them, learning their trade fast and well. So well, that by the age of eight she is able to go on a raid with them. The details in this amusing book make interesting reading and are interspersed at just the right moments; the illustrations by Hearn are simple but expressive, complementing the text well. What happens to the pirates in the end is a surprise that readers will enjoy – and the way the book ends allows for what I hope will be a sequel. RL

### The Little Dictionary

NON-FICTION

★★★

Kingfisher, 176pp, 0 7534 0875 9, £6.99 pbk

A new edition of a dictionary originally published in 1995, this handy paperback version is ideal for the school bag, aimed at top infants and lower juniors. Around half of the 1500 entries are illustrated with photographs or artwork to augment their definitions, while useful themed picture pages – on cars or aircraft, the human body or musical instruments – give additional vocabulary. Plenty of features are included to help the reader pronounce tricky words, to deal with unusual plurals (such as geese and geese), and example sentences are given with each definition. Simple common words such as 'my' or 'when' are listed at the end of the book, although without any definitions you could still be stumped on whether 'there' or 'their' was the correct spelling. There are some occasional sloppy definitions (eg 'a mother is a woman who has a child' – no good for a cat then), but overall there is a balanced choice of entries. Interestingly the first definition of 'great' is 'good', as in 'we had a great day', but that for 'mouse' only includes the furry four-legged variety. SU

## REVIEWS 8–10 Junior/Middle

### Agent Spike and the Vegetables of Doom

Mark Burgess, ill. Bridget MacKeith, 0 7136 6574 2

### Aargh, it's an Alien!

Karen Wallace, ill. Michael Reid, 0 7136 6307 3

★★★

A & C Black 'Comix', 64pp, £4.99 each pbk

These titles are volumes 19 and 20 in the 'Comix' series aimed at our old friend the 'newly-independent'

reader – cleanly presented, no frills, with clear typefaces linking cartoon illustrations and, mercifully, keeping the action sequential which is a great help to the inexperienced. **Agent Spike** solves a 'veg plot' while preventing a 'leek reaching the press' in a rather frail story whose central idea is not really sustainable to the required length, and whose puns may not be the most helpful to the novice reader who may well have spelling as shaky as reading.

**Aargh...** takes on the issue of the emotionally abandoned child of 'successful' working parents. Hero Albert remains undaunted in his

cheerful campaign to make his parents notice him, aided and abetted by the friendly 'aliens'. Many children will sympathise with him on some level – most have experienced the 'too busy' response at times! The latter is more substantial than **Spike** but either would be of some interest to new readers. AG

### Encore, Grace!

★★★

Mary Hoffman, ill. June Allan, Frances Lincoln, 112pp, 0 7112 1976 1, £8.99 hbk

The latest in a series which began with the picture book **Amazing Grace**, this title consists of eight linked stories introducing poor little rich girl Crishell to Grace and her friends.

'Maybe what you don't like is change' suggests Grace's supportive Trinidadian Nana, and attitudes to change are what this book is all about – Crishell's intrusion into the group of friends, Mum's new boyfriend, the death of an elderly friend, a best friend moving away, and secondary school on the horizon. In the face of this, the stories are affirming and positive,



## NEW Talent

### Eager

★★★

Helen Fox, Hodder, 304pp,  
0 340 87582 8, £9.99 hbk

'Eager' is the name that the Bell family give to their latest robot as it seems to sum up his personality – for Eager is a new kind of robot who can learn things and have feelings. Meanwhile the technocrat Morris family, who are rich enough to take holidays in this restricted late 21st-century world, buy their fashionable daughter Marcia a glamorous BDC4 robot who becomes Marcia's 'best friend'. But is something sinister going on? With Eager's help Gavin and Fleur discover the BDC4s are up to no good. This action based first novel has a most engaging character in Eager. His impatience with the slow pace that the Bell family baby, Charlotte, learns raises questions for young readers about human development in a way that is both organic and amusing; Gavin and



Eager's virtual discussions with Socrates on such issues as death, rights and freedom, are also integrated into the story with a light touch. Fox's characterisation is a little thin but she holds the reader well in this original and well paced story. RS

encouraging sensitivity and assertiveness in Grace and her friends (both boys and girls), if in a rather self-conscious and perhaps overly didactic style. One of Crishell's problems is an eating disorder created by her high-achieving but emotionally distant mother – this could be a useful awareness-raiser as issues of body image creep in ever younger.

The book is produced in a clear, fresh format, illustrated with pencil drawings reflecting some of the emotions encountered along the way, and if Grace and her friends seem unrealistically mature in their reactions, the warmth of relationships they experience is key. AG

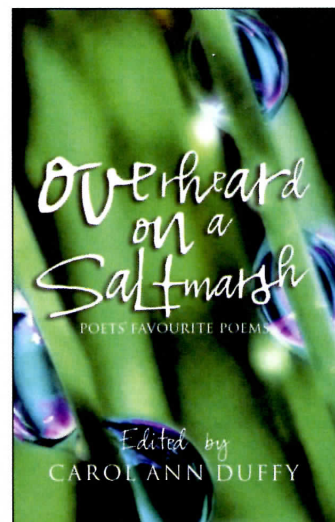
### Elephant Child

★★★

Mary Ellis, ill. Kady MacDonald Denton, Collins 'Roaring Good Reads', 128pp,  
0 00 712820 7, £3.99 pbk

Leo lives in Africa with his parents who study the elephants that roam a national park. One day his parents find a little girl, alone in the reserve but seemingly cared for by the elephants. They give her a home and soon Leo feels as though Shola is his sister. Their happiness is ruined when Leo's parents are killed in an accident. He must live in England while Shola, never formally adopted, remains in Africa. After months of misery Leo's family send him home and he returns only to find terrible changes: Shola is unable to speak while poachers have killed hundreds of the elephants.

The children go to look for the elephant that adopted Shola years before and manage to prevent another slaughter. Finally, the elephants return to the river near their home and Leo's family is complete again. An exciting story which explains the importance of family and belonging. AR



### Overheard on a Saltmarsh: Poets' Favourite Poems

POETRY ★★★★★

Edited by Carol Ann Duffy,  
Young Picador, 128pp,  
0 330 41556 5, £7.99 pbk

This anthology is a jewel. Duffy, an award-winning poet for both children and adults, has invited 29 of the best male and female poets writing today, to select their favourite children's poem to appear alongside a poem of their own. So here, in a beautifully produced book we have voices from the past and the present mingling and calling to us across decades and generations. Contemporary poets range from Andrew Motion and Kit Wright to Jackie Kay and Sujata Bhatt. The poems they have chosen include old favourites by Robert Louis Stevenson, Edward Lear and Charles Causley mixed with lesser known poems by Miroslav Holub, Edna St Vincent Millay and George Mackay Brown. As Duffy says 'In their own poems and in the poems they have chosen, they demonstrate that

poetry is one place, that we first encounter in childhood, and that its fruits and treasures stay in our minds as readers – and sometimes writers – for a lifetime.' This anthology is for everyone. HT

### Attila, Loolagax and the Eagle

★★★

Nichola McAuliffe, ill. Ross Collins, Bloomsbury, 128pp,  
0 7475 6499 X, £4.99 pbk

Three misfits are thrown together in a quest to find somewhere they can be accepted, somewhere they belong. They are: a Penguin, who can't bear the cold, a vegetarian vulture and a hedgehog who thinks he's an eagle. These three are pursued on the journey to their eventual haven (the Galapagos Islands – perfectly sensible if you think about it) by evil animal collector, Mochin Accord, and his meek and much put-upon sidekick.

The animals are helped on their way by all manner of sea creatures – walrus, whales, dolphins, a giant turtle, even a lamp fish – which leads to a fair amount of uninspired eco-preaching. A series of far-fetched adventures are linked together in a linear structure which, combined with the profusion of absurd names, makes the book read very much as though it was developed from a bedtime story, but there's still enough energy, inventiveness and charm to give it a genuine appeal to children. AR

### The Unvisibles

★★★

Ian Whybrow, Macmillan,  
192pp, 0 330 39859 8, £4.99 pbk

Nicky Chew has managed to make himself invisible. Quiet and insecure, he is always careful never to attract attention. Oliver Gaspar is Nicky's complete opposite and can't help attracting attention – usually for the wrong reasons. Though they are next door neighbours, the two have hardly ever spoken, sharing only a mutual incomprehension of the other's lifestyle and habits.

Then, astonishingly, Oliver becomes invisible – literally. While this has its advantages – it's the cue for much mayhem at school – the drawbacks soon outweigh these. Oliver has no way to turn himself back and being invisible is not unlike being dead. The only person who can help is Nicky and the two form an unlikely alliance.

As well as the invisibility there are two rip-roaring plot-lines, involving crooked antiques dealers and a slimy would-be suitor to Nicky's single mum, but the boys' growing friendship, drawn with real understanding, holds this book together and makes it special. AR

### The Vanishing Rainforest

INFORMATION STORY ★★

Richard Platt, ill. Rupert van Wyk, Frances Lincoln, 32pp,  
0 7112 1960 5, £10.99 hbk

We hear a lot about habitat-loss in books about rainforests, but it's usually animal habitat that's considered first. This semi-documentary story shows the effect that rainforest logging can have on

the forest's indigenous human communities. As the loggers approach Remaema's village, the villagers are divided as to whether to help or oppose them. Disaster appears to threaten, but a blonde conservation-botanist, her wise words reinforced by the disappearance of many medicinal plants, and a freedom-fighter turned government official persuade the villagers to become a living heritage centre. This brings harmony back to the village and the peccaries back to the forest. So all ends happily – except for the peccaries which were everyone's favourite food.

Platt has done far better stuff than this – his narrative reads like a limp translation and van Wyk's pictures are muddy scratchings. The result is, as John Rowe Townsend once said of the Swallows and Amazons 'boringly right-minded'. Nobody likes muddy scratchings – even if they're peccary-rind and the appeal of this book is about as slight. TP

### Magic in Art

NON-FICTION

★★★

Alexander Sturgis, Belitha,  
32pp, 1 84138 797 5, £11.99  
hbk, 1 84138 761 4, £5.99pbk

The kind of magic referred to in the title is of the sleight of hand variety, rather than the poetic, and young readers will no doubt love this tour through the world of visual puns, pranks and *trompe l'oeil*.

All the expected tricksters are here, many of their artworks having achieved cliché status over the years. 'The Impossible World of Escher', with its conundrums of mathematical perspective was probably the first on the team-sheet for this collection, with fruit and veg man Giuseppe Archimboldo not far behind. Readers are also introduced to anamorphic paintings, which only make sense when viewed from certain angles or through particular shaped mirrors. As well as these perversions the book deals with the basics of western perspective traditions and theories of colour-mixing and placing, as practised by impressionist pointillists such as Seurat. Reproductions of painted ceilings by Mantegna and Pozzo, creating fabulous illusions of space and height, add to the mix, and will perhaps encourage readers to visit the real thing. This is a useful 'way in' to the more mathematical side of the art world, and may excite curiosity to look further. MS

### Children's World Atlas

NON-FICTION

★★★★

Simon Adams, Mary Atkinson and Sarah Phillips, Dorling Kindersley, 144pp,  
0 7513 6817 2, £14.99 hbk

Here's a colourful magnum which reckons to take us on 'a journey of discovery, illuminating the societies, cultures, histories and landscapes of every corner of the globe'. Never having seen a globe with corners (I once had a Rubik globe but even that was spherical), I expected something startlingly unique. Relief set in on opening a relatively conventional atlas, with continent mapping surrounded by an incontinent flood of social, cultural, historical and landscape capsules – just the sort of thing at which the publishers are dead slick.

The maps are great – not too



physical, they prioritise national and state boundaries and towns and cities. So you can look at a map of the Southern States and find all the places immortalised in American song. You can even follow Route 66 as it winds from Chicago to LA and spot all the towns on the way (but despite the lyric's instructions you *will* have to 'forget Winona' – it's not marked).

The capsules round the maps fit where they touch and can act as stimuli towards further research. It's here you find the odd goof; while

discussing population erosion in the Amazon rainforest one capsule tells us that 'The Kaxinawa Indians (left) still cultivate root vegetables as a food crop.' Now, first, what does 'left' mean? Did they leave, or are there still some left, and then, if growing root crops is a sign of primitivity, how does the 14-strong editorial team react to the news that our beetroots have done really well this summer?

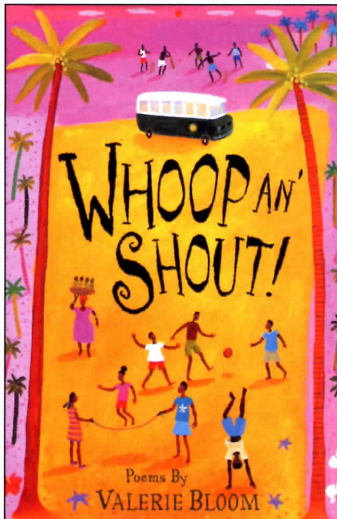
This atlas works very well 'forwards' – you can study a map and find out a lot about the place and its people.

'Backwards', it's less good, and looking up places can be difficult. There's an 'index' with very few places in it but plenty of terms like 'cycling' and 'kite flying' locating the relevant capsules. Then there's a 'gazetteer' which directs us to places marked on the map. Or does it? If you're looking for the birthplace of famous Belgian Adolphe Sax you won't find Dinant in the gazetteer, but it's on the map all right; same with Hawick, birthplace of Hi-note Henry. And I was curious to see how the compilers would fit

P'yattkyhatky (it's in Romania, since you ask) into a conventional alphabetic array, but they chickened out on that one, too.

All the above (and maybe more) apart, this atlas does provide, if not a journey of discovery, a most enjoyable ramble which may induce the highly reward benign form of cartophilia in some of its readers. It'd make a superb bedside browser – one country a night should produce dreams of places you never knew existed. **TP**

## REVIEWS 10–14 Middle/Secondary



### Whoop An' Shout!

**POETRY** ★★★★★

Valerie Bloom, ill. David Dean, Macmillan, 96pp, 0 333 99811 1, £9.99 hbk

Bloom's writing just goes from strength to strength. *Whoop An' Shout!*, her latest collection, dazzles with wit, intelligence, humour and lyricism. She moves effortlessly from subjects as diverse as bullying, waiting, pets, computer viruses to the lost time in Jamaica her birthplace, when the whooping boys drove the cattle and the first colonisers set foot on the island. 'First Contact' wonderfully describes a moment in time which was to change everything – 'Across the blue stillness, / To the three squares of white / Skirting the horizon. She watched them race closer, / Big-bellied with the wind, / Saw the elaborate canoes beneath. They were like nothing she had seen before, / So she dropped her digging stick, / And ran.' Not to be missed. **HT**

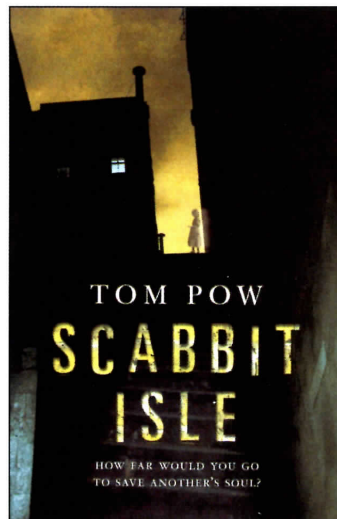
### Scabbit Isle

★★★★★

Tom Pow, ill. Jason Cockcroft, Corgi, 144pp, 0 552 54986 X, £4.99 pbk

For a short novel, *Scabbit Isle* covers a great deal: bullying, bereavement and the effect of a family breakup. It is not, however, an 'issues' book. Pow has contained all of these reflections of modern life within a highly entertaining ghost story encasing social and familial disintegration centuries earlier.

Sam's family is still struggling to recover from the tragic death of his twin sister. Perhaps it is this loss that



enables him to see the mysterious girl who is in some way connected to Scabbit Isle, the place to which plague victims were banished, rarely to return. Pow nicely interweaves a ghostly mystery with the sense of a normal family struggling in different ways to come to terms with an awful loss. Gradually the horror of the plague which terrorized the Scottish town that is now Sam's home is revealed, and Sam discovers that he is being asked to bring peace to Janet, the Provost's daughter who suffered cruelly at that time. There are a number of interesting subsidiary characters, and the main characters are well-drawn in this intelligently constructed debut novel. I shall be on the lookout for Pow's next book. **VC**

### When Isla meets Luke meets Isla

★★★

Rhian Tracey, Bloomsbury, 160pp, 0 7475 6344 6, £5.99 pbk

Two teenagers meet and form a friendship that slowly begins to turn into something more. They tell their story in alternate chapters and in their different voices – Isla is loud, brash even, Luke less confident, more thoughtful. They each have family worries – Isla argues with her parents and little sister while Luke resents his absent father – but there's nothing exceptional about their lives.

Tragedy strikes suddenly and unexpectedly about a third of the way through the book when Isla's nine-year-old sister is killed in a road accident. The effect on Isla is devastating but Luke too is changed as he struggles to support her.

There's a new pressure on their relationship, a pressing need to define what they are to each other and finally an examination of what it means to grow up. Tracey seems more comfortable in this section of the book and the more complex Isla and Luke's relationship becomes, the more convincing and confident her writing. This is an ambitious book which requires quite a bit from its reader but offers much in return. **AR**



### Private Peaceful

★★★★★

Michael Morpurgo, Collins, 176pp, 0 00 715006 7, £10.99 hbk

The very considerable body of children's literature dealing with the First World War has, with Michael Morpurgo's new novel, gained an impressive addition. Particularly for readers familiar with the sentiments and imagery of the poetry of Owen and Sassoon, this will strike a touching and sympathetic chord. In essence, it is the story of two teenage brothers, of how they come to enlist and, most powerfully, of how one of them recalls in diary form the final hours of the other's life as he awaits, for alleged cowardice in the face of the enemy, the firing squad. Thomas, the narrator, fills the waiting hours with loving memories of childhood and early adolescence in the brothers' Devon village: it is the contrast between these memories and the horrors of Thomas's present surroundings that gives the novel its pathos and poignancy. The poetry here really is in the pity. Highly recommended. **RD**

### Faking It

★★★

Pete Johnson, Puffin, 192pp, 0 14 131542 3, £4.99 pbk

Teenage street cred figures large in the lively and amusing diary of Will. He more or less kids himself into an imaginary, glamorous actress girlfriend, who then can't be unimagined without severe loss of face in his laddish social circle.

This is a fast, page-turning read, not all angst and teen yearning; there's a strong hint of a romantic and sensitive side to our Will and his mate, tubby Barney, that underpins the more light-hearted and stereotypical situations that the lads land themselves in.

Well worth trying with Johnson fans and boy readers who require a realistic read, not boy wizards and Hobbits. **DB**

### Feather Boy

**AUDIO BOOK** ★★★★★

Nicky Singer, read by Philip Franks, Chivers, unabridged, 5 hrs 28 mins, 0 7540 6337 2, £19.95 tape

The slow pace of Philip Franks' reading of *Feather Boy* draws it out beyond what the story can carry. In this audio version, there is so much scene and character setting before the real action that the listener is in danger of giving up without finding out what lies at the heart of it. That's a shame since read, *Feather Boy* engages wholly as a strong story of how Robert, who has always been the class victim, learns to be strong through his developing relationship with an elderly resident in an old people's home. Nicky Singer has a good understanding of how boys behave, think and talk which gives *Feather Boy* credibility. **JE**

### Mouse Attack

★★★★★

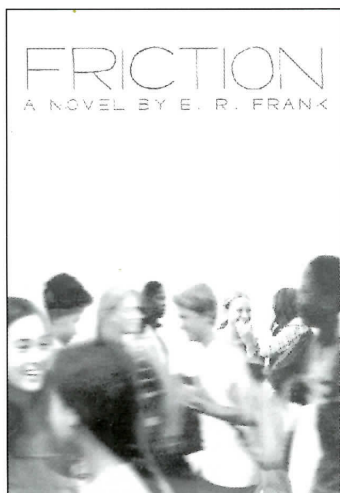
Manjula Padma, Macmillan, 192pp, 0 333 98650 4, £9.99 hbk

Mice make the best anthropomorphic heroes; cute and clever they're the perfect incarnation of right over might, brains versus brawn. Our hero Arvee is particularly brainy: a laboratory mouse, he's become quite a scholar. His adventures begin when he's taken from his cosy home to live as a child's pet. His new life proves comfortable too, if lacking in intellectual stimulation, but before long he's caught up in the struggles of the



house's wild mice against a colony of evil rats.

Padma creates a convincing world: Arvee is fascinated by the ant line – a sort of ant telephone the mice have devised. There's psychological detail too: the wild mice are suspicious of Arvee because of his ability to read, while he is tempted by the Rat Lord's offer to put him in charge of an educational foundation. After the mice's exciting and tightly plotted victory over the rats the scene is set for a sequel; many readers would snap it up. **AR**



## Friction

★★★★

E R Frank, Simon & Schuster, 208pp, 0 689 83749 6, £8.99 hbk  
She goes 'Yeah' and he goes 'Wild, Man', but at least nobody goes 'And I was like – aah – like – whatever...' in Frank's exploration of the dangerous border country at the edge of adolescence in this-is-now America.

Alex, our first-person guide to the territory, is 12 and her psychiatrist parents send her to a private alternative school – 'funny schools', they called them in the sixties when such places thrived in a spirit of Summerhill experimentation. Many of those schools were staffed by thoughtful, pioneering teachers. Here, however, Alex is taught by Simon, a close relative of the uncaring Robin Williams teacher in *Dead Poets' Society*, who was so full of his own charisma that he failed to notice one of his students wandering down the path to suicide. Simon is less self-absorbed than the Williams character, but he does do some stupid things while peddling his ersatz wisdom to his young students. You have to wonder which educational planet he has been on when he crawls into a crowded tent in the middle of the night to bed down alongside 12-year-old girls, or hugs them long and tight when they are upset, or nips off for a snog with his (adult) girlfriend in a supermarket car park in full view of a student with whom he's on a shopping errand.

He is an easy target for new girl Stacy, the damaged victim of her own father. Stacy poisons her classmates' impressionable minds, provoking painful doubts and a sense of betrayal. Such a tangled web is not unwoven without casualties.

This is one of those books which exposes the fallacy of the C S Lewis dictum that 'no book which is really worth reading at the age of ten' – or

10-14 in this case – 'is not equally ... worth reading at the age of fifty.' That may be true of the books we would like children to like, but this book captures an adolescent voice speaking to adolescent areas of anxiety and confusion, while probably alienating bookish adults. It does not exploit its readers' concerns, it has narrative energy to keep the pages turning, and its language will not deter British readers accustomed to the idiom through television, movies and the ubiquitous universal codes. **GF**

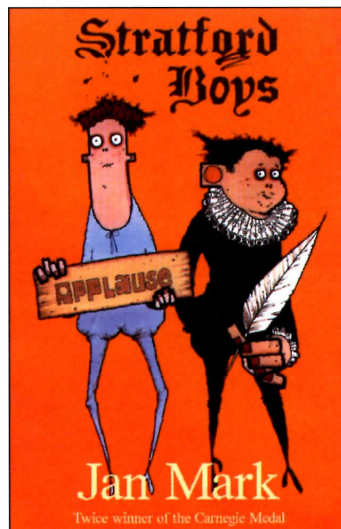
## Going Straight

★★★★

Michael Coleman, Orchard, 208pp, 1 84362 299 8, £4.99 pbk

Some years ago in an article in BfK, Pat Thomson dubbed a certain kind of children's books as 'second fiddle books'. These are stories where a disabled character exists only to promote the development of a troubled or anti-social non disabled character who learns to be a better person by helping those 'less fortunate' than themselves. Coleman's *Going Straight* starts off with this rather old-fashioned premise but manages to escape the patronising route by giving each of his main characters an identity of their own.

Luke, a persistent offender from the worst housing estate in town, is given a choice by the youth offending team: either he gets locked up or he helps Jodi – a blind girl unwittingly caught up in his latest crime – to fulfil her dream of running the mini marathon. Some of the characters are a bit stereotyped: Jodi's over protective parents for example; Luke's dad as the recidivist who finally sees the error of his ways, but the story gains its own momentum through the account of their training and the race itself. Together they build up a relationship of mutual trust and Luke learns to give and take clear, helpful instruction and to put himself second. The subplot of the two hardened youths from the estate who persuade Luke to be involved in more crime by threatening Jodi's life, makes for an exciting, if rather over-neat ending. **LK**



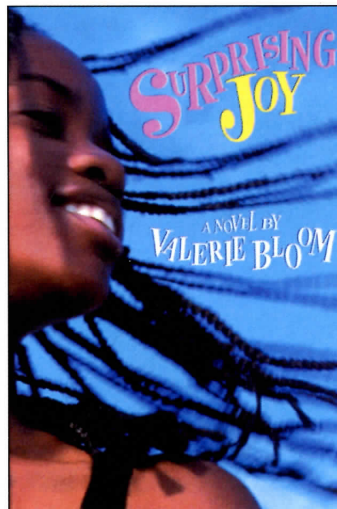
## Stratford Boys

★★★★

Jan Mark, Hodder, 208pp, 0 340 86097 9, £12.99 hbk

While several children's novelists

have drawn on Shakespeare's life and times as a starting point for their fictions, it is difficult to think of an example which does so with quite the combination of earthiness, exuberance and wit which Mark achieves here. Her re-creation of a bustling Stratford where one William Shakespeare, aged 16, undertakes to provide the script for a Whitsun play is utterly convincing and has moments of total hilarity, both in the preparations for the play and its eventual staging. There is some delightful Shakespearean pastiche and some clever prefiguring of the Shakespeare which is to come. And, more seriously, there are some reflective moments which touch on the whole business of creativity, its origins and manifestations. Warmly recommended. **RD**



## Surprising Joy

★★★★

Valerie Bloom, Macmillan, 224pp, 0 333 96393 8, £9.99 hbk

"Mind you don't" means "make sure you don't" in England.

'And "mind you" means "make sure you do"? I said slowly.

She nodded.

'Not in Jamaica,' I said. 'It's the other way round, there.' (p.205)

The arrival of this eagerly anticipated first novel by poet Valerie Bloom fulfils expectations. Set in Jamaica and London, the differences in culture, climate and language are experienced through the eyes of first-person narrator, Joy.

After years of waiting Joy's mum eventually writes to say that she is ready for her daughter to join her in England. Joy loves Jamaica where she lives with her formidable yet loving granny, but moving to England to be with her mother is a long-awaited dream. She quickly discovers that London is not what she expected and there are even more shocking discoveries to be made. In this warm and colourful novel about friendship, family, secrets and belonging Valerie Bloom develops empathy for Joy through to the ultimately satisfying conclusion. Characterisation is convincing, the reader appreciates the adult dilemmas at the same time as feeling Joy's pain and confusion. The setting is vividly created and the vibrant descriptions of Jamaica are simply mouth-watering. *Surprising Joy* is a joy. **NG**

## Borderland

★★★

Rhiannon Lassiter, Oxford, 224pp, 0 19 275237 5, £4.99 pbk

The 'Borderland' of Lassiter's title – the first in a projected trilogy – is an imaginary city state known as Shattershard, ruled by a boy king called Kal. Although the territory enjoys a measure of independence, it is really part of the Tetrarchate Empire, the rulers of which decide to send in their troops and eventually impose martial law when a nomadic band of warriors, the Hajhim, seems to be threatening attack. Into this parallel world come, at different states and in different circumstances, four Weybridge teenagers, via a 'Door' (always capitalised) in one of their gardens: maybe, as Zoë, the most recent entrant reflects at one point, 'you found a Door into another world because you weren't properly fixed in this one.' Whatever the explanation, in this particular case the four young people are soon involved in the power struggles and machinations which characterise the 'uncertain times' of the landscape beyond the Door. There are colourful and dramatic moments as we watch the young people's assorted loyalties being increasingly put to the test, but the details of the narrative are unnecessarily convoluted and the worlds of magic and reality do not convincingly interact. **RD**

## Esperanza Rising

★★★★

Pam Muñoz Ryan, The Chicken House, 272pp, 1 90343 498 X, £5.99 pbk

'So you're a princess who's come to be a peasant? Where's all your finery?' The 'princess' is 13-year-old Esperanza Ortega, here being taunted by Marta, a young would-be revolutionary not happy to settle for the status quo in the Mexico of 1930. Esperanza's has indeed been a riches to rags story. When we first meet her, she is the privileged only child of privileged landowners, whose fortunes are soon to be transformed when her father is killed and unscrupulous uncles seize his property. For Esperanza, her mother and three loyal servants what follows is a long, dangerous journey to the fruit and vegetable farms of California, where, as workers, they witness and experience hardship and degradation. But, as its heroine's name implies, this is a story ultimately dominated by notions of hope; while having occasional moments of near sentimentality and overt didacticism, it is firmly on the side of life, growth and necessary personal and social change. **RD**

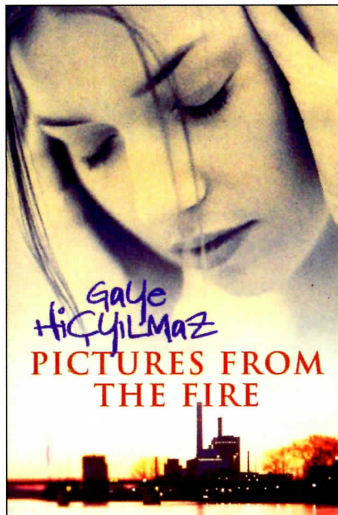
## Pictures from the Fire

★★★★★

Gaye Hıçılmaz, Dolphin, 272pp, 1 85881 896 6, £4.99 pbk

Emilia spends a lot of the time alone locked in a room in a refugee hostel somewhere in Europe, perhaps Germany. She will already be familiar to readers of Hıçılmaz's earlier story, *Girl in Red*. This time, the novel tells her story, mainly in flashback through the medium of the pictures she draws in an old diary. It's not her own. She has found it taped beneath the table in the room. This and her stolen crayons





are emblematic of a life of poverty and persecution, lived at the margins and in the shadows, first in Romania, then in England, and now in this unnamed country. Emilia and her family are Romanians and refugees, the subjects of suspicion, antagonism and violence wherever they are. To her fearful and secretive parents, their daughter and her pictures have been a source of bewilderment, embarrassment and shame. She and her brother Zoltan look back on their time in England as a time when, for a while, they were able to be like other children, to go to school and have friends. Now she is back in the darkness and hiding again.

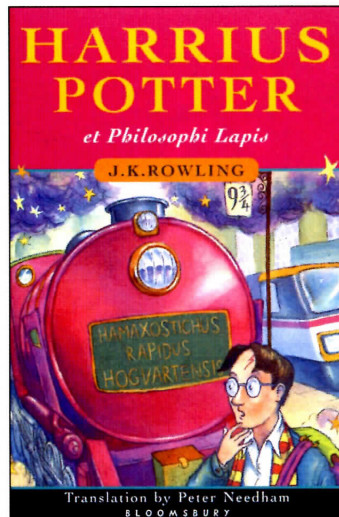
This is a claustrophobic book, moving back and forth in time and place to build to a double climax of mob assault in England and at the hostel, as Emilia struggles to look through her window on the outside world with unflinching eyes. It demands a lot of its readers in perception, empathy and stamina. Those who stay with it to the end will be rewarded with a rare experience of literary craft and emotional intensity. CB

### Harrius Potter et Philosophi Lapis

★★★★

J K Rowling, trans. Peter Needham, Bloomsbury, 256pp, 0 7475 6196 6, £12.99 hbk

Harry Potter joins Winnie the Pooh and Paddington Bear in what may seem one of the oddest and most quixotic enterprises of modern times, translations into Latin. Who does Latin nowadays? And what place can it claim on the overcrowded school curriculum, in competition with such arcane, abstruse and taxing areas of learning as Citizenship? A deserved one, some of us might say, if we remember the old grammar school curriculum and realise, as I do, that apart from bits of Maths the only



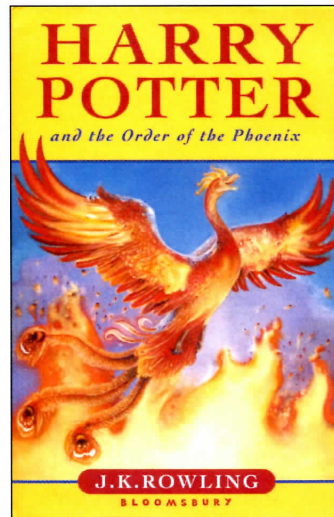
stuff from all those hours that we still gratefully use is Latin and French. Something of the mystique of Potter is shown up by the pedantic dignities of Latin. 'Albus Dumbledore, currently Headmaster of Hogwarts. Considered by many the greatest wizard of modern times,' takes on extra wizardly glory when he becomes 'Albus Dumbledore, nunc Praeses Scholae Hogwartensis. Magus nostrae aetatis maximus, ut fert opinio multorum hominum.' Rowling's creation has many relatives, living and dead. A modern one may be Ang Lee's film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, but older ones are the heroic stories of classical Greece and Rome. If a few children, using side-by-side copies of this book and Harry's first adventure in English, are captivated by the magic of language as well as the magic of wands, this will count as a publishing Good Deed. Teachers who can should try it. PH

### Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

★★★★

J K Rowling, Bloomsbury, 768pp, 0 7475 5100 6, £16.99 hbk

The Muggle children who were Rowling's first generation of readers are three years older than they were when the last instalment of 'Harry Potter' appeared, whereas Harry, now 15, begins this book just one school holiday on from when we last left him. It is time to ditch the always unsustainable illusion that Harry's growth is somehow in step with his readers'. Instead we have an altogether more improbable achievement. This massive doorstep of a book is accessible to any reader who can cope with its vast length. Give or take the appearance of some innocuous teenage sexual awakening, one actual death which is nowhere near so upsetting as rumours touted it to be, and some sharpening and effective satire on



our own unmagical world, there is nothing here to deter the newest cohort of ten-year-olds. On the other hand, there is plenty for older, indeed very old, readers. The book is an immensely skilful piece of chameleon storytelling, changing its mood, depth and emotional colours with impressive ease.

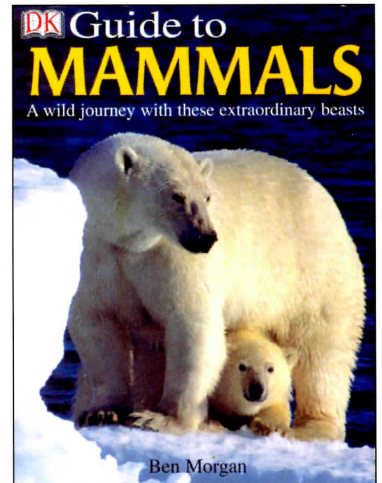
The personal confrontation of good and evil between Harry and Voldemort – the world's fate hanging on their drawn-out, mortal, single combat – is made more explicit this time, but uncovers little that existing readers won't have guessed. The ritual interim clash between them forms as usual the climax of the book, but as before the numerous deviations of the plot are at least as entertaining as its central conflict. This huge episode isn't solely or even mainly about Voldemort. It is about the Ministry of Magic's tyrannous, harmful and crass interference in the teaching and management at Hogwarts. That is to say, it is covertly about Ofsted, and Secretaries of State for Education, and real-life government spin and 'briefing against' people out of favour, in this case Harry.

It is also about the pressure of OWLs (Ordinary Wizarding Level), and therefore GCSE, and choosing your follow-up NEWTs (A levels, naturally), and careers. And with wonderful light accuracy it is about teenage sex, and the mysteries of the volatile female psyche for 15-year-old boys. The magic cavorts inventively, across the spectrum from mischievous fun to deadly evil, but so (increasingly) does real life. And the gap between the two is perceptibly closing, once you spot the parallels. Does the book live up to expectations? Yes, it does. PH

### DK Guide to Mammals

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Ben Morgan, Dorling Kindersley, 64pp, 0 7513 3918 0, £9.99 hbk



Roll up, roll up, ladies an gen'men for the Carnival of the Animals! Everything from Aardvark to Zebra in glorious colour – each one a miracle of evolution and the editor's art! Starting off with what is a mammal (warm-blooded, viviparous, lactating etc.) we then comb through the mammalian kingdom, family by family from the primates to the platypus with its electric bill. Here's a happy jumble of picture and verbal image which makes a brilliant 'Did you know?' book for browsing and reference alike. As an introduction to the diversity of mammalia it's excellent – a follow-up bibliography would have been a helpful addition but the appended websiteography will probably score more hits with the intended readership – who could resist [www.lioncrusher.com](http://www.lioncrusher.com)? And tarsiers' eyes are bigger than their brains... and walrus blush to cool down... and pangolins use termites to eat their parasites – and then eat the termites... and so *ad infinitum*. A great book for Christmas! TP

### Nelson Mandela

NON-FICTION ★★★

Adrian Hadland, ill. James Nunn, Short Books 'Who is...?', 128pp, 1 904095 59 3, £4.50 pbk

Another readable compact biography in this excellent series from Short Books. Adrian Hadland, a political writer living in South Africa, traces the life of Nelson Mandela, focusing on his 10,000 days in detention as a political prisoner and his unshakeable belief in fighting for equality for black people. He describes Mandela's upbringing and his training as a lawyer, as well as his growing conviction that he must build support for the ANC's fight against apartheid beyond South Africa, using violence if necessary. Little space is devoted to his achievements as President of South Africa, but it offers a sympathetic portrait of the man who led his people to freedom. SU

## REVIEWS 14+ Secondary/Adult

### Many Stones

★★★★

Carolyn Coman, Young Picador, 128pp, 0 330 41560 3, £8.99 pbk

Berry, the main character in this story, is one, stropic American adolescent with a lot to be stropic about. Unwillingly in the company of her insensitive, estranged father, she is visiting South Africa in order to commemorate the death of her older

sister, casually murdered while she was working for a charity. So much, so bleak, but the sheer intensity of this story finally gets through, which is more than Berry's hapless father ever manages to do so far as his daughter is concerned. Adolescent

readers anxious to hone their own techniques of dumb insolence and cutting asides will find plenty to learn from here. But they will also discover something about the nature of guilt and depression within a family context, and the way that



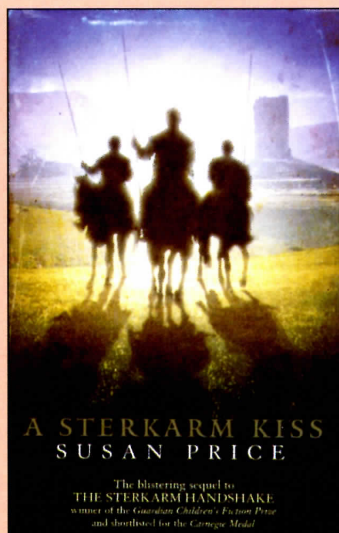
## Editor's Choice

### A Sterkarm Kiss

★★★★★

Susan Price, Scholastic, 312pp, 0 439 97838 6, £12.99 hbk

The sequel to *The Sterkarm Handshake*, Price's outstanding time slip novel in which people from the 21st century can return to the 16th, *A Sterkarm Kiss* tantalises the reader by bringing the protagonists together again, albeit in a different time frame, yet leaving the resolution to this tale of treachery, colonialist plundering and love for the next, as yet unpublished volume in this trilogy. As ever, Price's 16th-century reiver country is superbly well evoked – from the unpolluted landscape to the smells and mud of the Sterkarm's Bedesdale Tower. More problematic are the gruesome events that unfold as 21st-side anthropologist, Andrea, witnesses the atrocities unleashed by the blood feud between the Sterkarm and Grannam families who are unwittingly manipulated by the cynical company who own the time travel machine. The political marriage brokered by the company between Per Sterkarm and Joan Grannam which will bring 'peace' to the region ends in sabotage and



betrayal with Per cutting his teenage bride's throat. After a retaliatory raid, the heads of Grannams dangle from Sterkarm saddles.

Yet, the most shocking thing for this 21st-side reader is that this novel serves as a metaphor for our times – the depravities committed in the name of 'freedom' are familiar to all of us from our television screens and newspapers. The impact of first world weapons on the 16th century evokes contemporary conflicts. Price has written a bold, sophisticated, demanding novel that commands our attention. RS

history is currently being made in a country most will know little about.

NT

### Friends, Enemies and Other Tiny Problems

★★★

Rosie Rushton, Piccadilly, 176pp, 1 85340 777 1, £6.99 pbk

This novel recounts with toe-curling accuracy the bitchiness of teenage girls and how they care desperately to be friends only with those who make them feel good about themselves. Tory is in Year Nine and is part of a close group of four or occasionally six girls who do everything together at school and home. They live on the same street and have been friends from when they were all new in Year Seven. With Ella as their leader, they decide who can become part of their group and are cold towards anyone who isn't one of their 'sort'. That is until Hannah joins the school and Tory's mother orders her daughter to be friends with her, just because she was friends with her mother at school years ago. To any teenage reader's delight, the mothers are portrayed in a quite bad light – partly wanting their daughters to be friends for their own ends and sometimes being downright rude to the girls themselves.

Tory recounts the events of the end of the summer term when her gang and her world began to fall apart, all because of the apparent lies of Hannah. All girls will know a Hannah, the one who manages to twist what others say and never says the same thing twice. Rosie Rushton writes with no qualms about how mean and two-faced girls can be. She conveys in detail how frustrating it is to be 14 and not be able to break free from what your mother does,

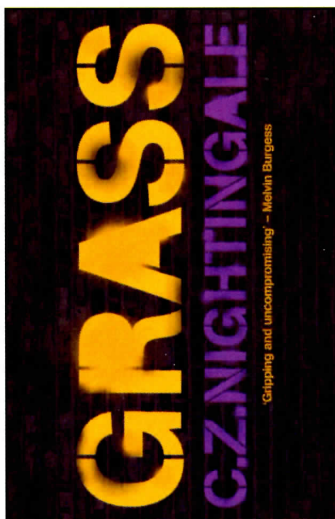
what your friends say and how much you care about it all. Hannah is made human when we learn her father is in prison for fraud and she's trying to make a fresh start, but the ending of the story is a little abrupt with Hannah self-harming. In the Epilogue we are told Hannah is seeing 'this great woman who is making her see that you don't have to force people to like you by manipulating them...' but Rushton would have written a greater book if she'd been more explicit about Hannah's problems earlier on. In her world, the mean girls are simply that way because of problems at home, but she's underestimated her characters and her readers by not really exploring why teenage girls self-harm. OD

### Grass

★★★★★

C Z Nightingale, Penguin, 208pp, 0 14 131634 9, £4.99 pbk

Penguin's website reveals that Nightingale has taught young adults and teenagers 'for many years' in the East End. And it shows. It is incredibly difficult for an adult writer to conjure up dialogue for inner city teenagers which persuades readers – including those of us who live on different planets – that this is the real thing. Nightingale's East End is not made up of mean streets peopled by mean caricatures. Her world includes friendly corner shops, swimming lessons, recreation grounds where you can walk the dog and adults who may be fallible but are not stereotypes; and so the danger of these streets is all the more plausible. I believed entirely in Nightingale's multi-ethnic cast, playing out a grim drama haunted by the bleak spectres of Stephen Lawrence and Damilola Taylor. In the old ILEA, some buccaneering



English teacher would have read the book with teenagers in Tower Hamlets and made space for them to talk about their own world; in the shires, someone might have had the vision to invite readers to look through a revelatory window.

Here, the victim is an Asian boy, kicked into hospital and so to his death by a gang of youths. The only witness is the narrator, Caryn – and the gang knows that she knows who they are. The tension is never relaxed and though the plot takes in the almost obligatory teenlit spats between friends, the reasons for the conflicts in this novel are not at all like the wearisome self-dramatisings of, for example, the denizens of Melvin Burgess's *Doing It*. Caryn falls out with her friends because she will not see the victim as 'just another Paki', and because she is tough enough to consider 'grassing up' the murderers – and so some of her friends abandon her. Caryn is deceived (perhaps the plotting here is a little transparent), isolated, menaced, reduced to her own basic courage and values. She finds out who her friends are. In the end, Caryn and those friends are 'waiting for the trouble to start. And when it comes, we'll handle it.'

This is a very welcome first novel. Watch this space. GF

### Wendy

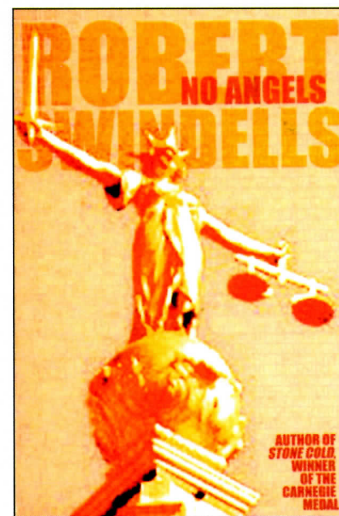
★★★

Karen Wallace, Simon & Schuster, 232pp, 0 689 83747 X, £12.99 hbk

The story, inspired by Peter Pan, recreates an Edwardian world where a veneer of respectability conceals a mass of family secrets – a series of events which puts an intolerable strain on relationships and exposes the shallowness of upper-class morality. Wendy Darling, caught up in her parents' unhappy marriage, escapes into a world of fantasy which is repeatedly and cruelly shattered. The luxuries with which the wealthy surround themselves are sharply contrasted with the privations of the strengthening Suffragette movement and the cruelties which both children and adults inflict on each other, leavened by Wendy's compassion for Thomas, her mentally handicapped brother, and Letitia, a spoiled, lonely and frightened child whom she is forced to befriend.

Perhaps events are layered rather too neatly – a systematic accumulation

of catastrophe followed by an equally swift resolution of the problems. This, however, contributes to the deliberate artificiality of the book and, in addition, ensures a page-turning read. VR



### No Angels

★★★★

Robert Swindells, Puffin, 240pp, 0 14 131462 1, £5.99 pbk

This is two stories of a pair of young people in different centuries, very tellingly compared and contrasted as they try to remain inside the law in London of today and in the 1850s.

Nick Webley is struggling to keep his family from the Workhouse in a hostile Victorian winter when as much luck as wit is needed just to survive. His modern female counterpart, Nikki, is doing much the same. She is a 14-year-old runaway from her mother's lecherous partner.

Their stories are deftly related: Nick's in an engagingly illiterate style and Nikki's in up-to-the-minute lingo, complete with text language. The addition of a few letters from a reactionary contemporary correspondent, Cleasby Nossiter, and some transcripts from Magistrate Solomon Stern's 1853 courtroom add an extra thought-provoking dimension.

Yet another example of Swindells' uncompromising stance as he comments with scalpel incisiveness on his concerns about the ills of our society as he sees them. DB

### Small Gains

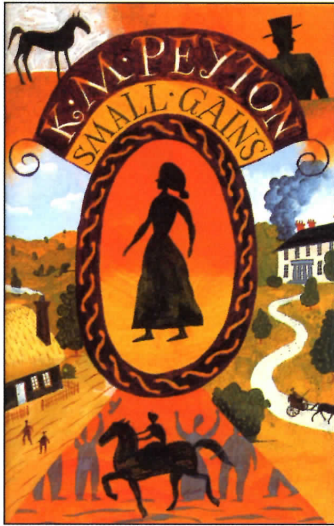
★★★★

K M Peyton, David Fickling Books, 368pp, 0 385 60494 7, £12.99 hbk

Set in the early 19th century, *Small Gains* is centred on the Garland family, and in particular Clara Garland, age 11 when the story opens, and who has developed into a very independent young woman by the conclusion. In many ways Clara is a modern girl, or at least the girl many modern girls would like to be, and in her Peyton has given her readers someone with whose joys and tribulations they will readily empathise. Clara is the middle daughter in a family of four children. Their father is a widower; his wife died of consumption which also affects Clara's beautiful older sister Margaret.

Integral to the plot is the intense





rivalry between the Garlands and the Grovers, a rich farming family who live in the same village. The focus for the many tensions caused by the Grovers is a number of trotting races between their beautiful Crocus and the Garlands' less stylish but very combative horses, Tilly and Rattler. But the enmity goes deeper; Nat Grover, son of the ruthless Ebenezer, has impregnated Margaret whose death occurs as she gives birth to his child, and subsequently he toys with Clara, emotionally and sexually.

**Small Gains** also provides an interesting look at social conditions around two hundred years ago. Clara's older brother gets involved with an outlaw gang that sabotages the new threshing machines which are seen as a threat to employment

and a traditional way of life, and it is also an interesting commentary on the position of women. **Small Gains** is a good read: pacy, well-plotted with some great characters and plenty to keep horse enthusiasts entertained. VC

### Voices

★★★★

Sue Mayfield, Hodder, 288pp, 0 340 86063 4, £5.99 pbk

The backdrop to this tale in five acts is **The Tempest**, which Isabel (Miranda) and her fellow drama students including her rat ex (Ferdinand) are preparing for performance. A slightly incredible contrivance is that she is also involved by e-mail with a Scottish lad who found her message in a bottle, washed up on his Isle of Rimsay.

Shakespeare's play, Isabel's rather luvvy life and Duncan's own real, personal dramas are played out and cleverly mingled in this unerringly sharp, contemporary book, with characters and dialogue that echo exactly my experience of sixth-formers, their concerns and pre-occupations. I wouldn't be surprised if this isn't another award winner for Sue Mayfield. DB

### Excluded

NON-FICTION

★★★

Interviews by Angela Neustatter and Helen Elliott, photographs by Laurence Cendrowicz, Franklin Watts 'It Happened to Me', 48pp, 0 7496 4337 4, £10.99 hbk

One of a series of books on real-life problems using interviews with the children affected. Five young people look back on the experience of being excluded from school and explain how this has impinged upon their subsequent lives. In some cases the exclusion has had positive results, but usually the opposite is true. One lad was excluded at 15 for violent behaviour, another was excluded from primary school, also for behaviour due to a broken home. A girl blames lack of parental interest in her to her constant problems, and a boy with special needs which had not been properly identified blames this on his exclusion. The last boy (an Australian) was excluded for cheating, a claim which he denies. It would be easy to believe that these stories are all true and that schools are at fault for not being understanding. It is up to the last interviewee, a primary headteacher, to make the case for schools, which he does convincingly. There are, however, many thought-provoking discussion points that are raised and which can be usefully used in

schools. Fact boxes give pertinent statistics, and the usual final pages of addresses, contacts and glossary will be useful. Teachers will find several activities for individuals and groups. A worthwhile series. ES

### UNICEF

Steven Maddocks, 0 7502 4336 8

### Greenpeace

Sean Sheehan, 0 7502 4187 X

NON-FICTION

★★

Hodder Wayland 'World Watch', 48pp, £11.99 each hbk

Here are two worldwide life-enhancing organisations anatomised in great detail: UNICEF – about which we always think we ought to know more, and Greenpeace about which we always think we know more than we do. This duo will correct the balance either way, each presenting its subject's history, growth, *modus operandi*, challenges and campaigns, and plans for the future.

We learn about the surprising diversity of UNICEF – from salt-iodization in Switzerland to teacher-training in Iraq. We learn, too, of disquiet within the corridors of power at Greenpeace – too many corridors, too little direct action? But despite these books' fact-filled potential for valuable use, the density of their texts and the crowding of their pages makes for heavy going, and only the most dedicated or desperate reader will be inclined to extract their full value. This world watch needs winding up. TP

### PICTURE BOOKS AND POETRY RELEVANT TO OLDER READERS:

The Shape Game (see p20)

A Winter's Tale (see p21)

Overheard on a Saltmarsh: Poets' Favourite Poems (see p22)



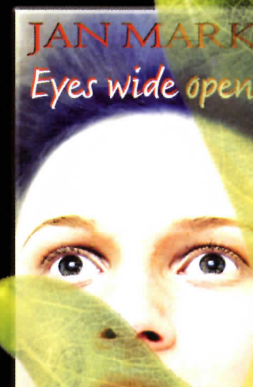
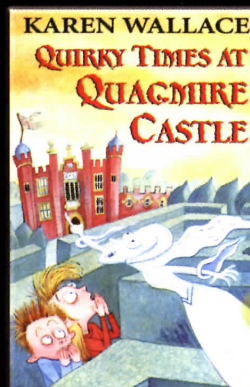
**BLACK CATS**

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## CLASSICS IN SHORT No.42

Brian Alderson

*Now Dasher! Now Dancer! fettle up;  
it's nearly time for St Nicholas to go visiting on*

Ho, Mr Classicist

you've set yourself a problem this time.  
What are you going to do about this one?

You are right, Gentle Reader,

for what we have here is undeniably a classic: a rum-ti-tum set of verses, 56 lines in all, that have been on the go for 180 years and are more widely known now than ever before. But in Britain anyway they have had a lopsided history and have achieved no definitive status. Neil Philip for instance does not include the poem in his *Oxford Book of Children's Verse* (1996) although his predecessors, the Opies, had done so in their edition of 1973.

Undeniably of cultural moment too.

These verses are the first classic contribution by the United States to the canon of children's literature in English, and they stand behind the christening of *St Nicholas* magazine, the greatest of all such productions for children. They are also the probable source of the aerial Christmas reindeer and their sleigh (and hence of such abominations as 'Jingle Bells' and the hateful Rudolph). Further, they contain the first description of that figure 'dressed all in fur' who has come to preside over bran-tubs in a million stores – faithfully represented as to looks, if not temperament, in Raymond Briggs's latterday classic: *'He had a broad face and a little round belly / That shook when he laughed like a bowlful of jelly ...'*

Despite all that, he had unpretentious beginnings.

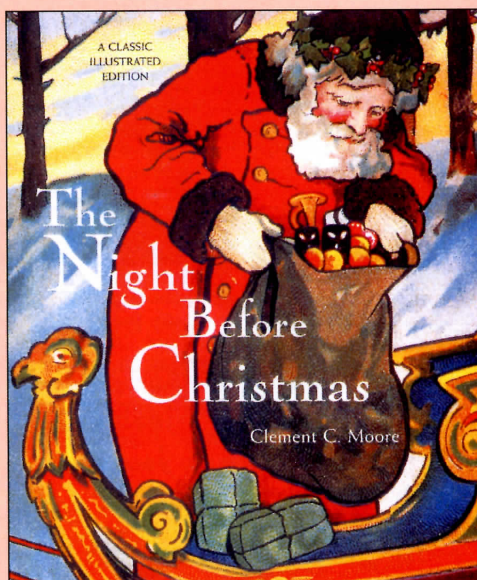
His verses were composed by Clement Clarke Moore, a professor at the General Theological Seminary in lower Manhattan, and he is said to have written them on Christmas Eve in 1822 as a surprise for his family. A friend though, visiting from upstate Troy, copied them into her album and a year later caused them to be published in the *Troy Sentinel* newspaper under the title 'Account of a Visit from St Nicholas'. From that obscure start they made their way through various almanacs and magazines, sometimes with 'Santa Claus' incorporated in the title and occasionally with one or two rough and ready line drawings.

It took a quarter of a century

for American publishers to realize some potential here (merchandizing possibilities and character-exploitation not then being a *sine qua non* for acceptable children's books). By 1847 – thanks largely to London influences – there was a healthy trade in picture books and in that year Henry M Onderdonk of New York published the first independently-conceived edition of the poem (dated 1848), illustrated by a local wood engraver, T C Boyd.

With only 56 lines and a theme of seasonal appeal

you'd think that picture-book makers would see the poem as ideal copy. But successors were slow to follow and only after the famous edition of 1869, illustrated by Thomas Nast, did



Commerce really get going and 'The Night Before Christmas', as it came to be called, was all set to take on the character of an American folk-ballad.

Not so in Britain however.

It is one of the mysteries of publishing that, despite the festive reputation of the Victorian Christmas and despite the zest for picture books shown by Victorian and Edwardian publishers, no significant edition of *The Night Before Christmas* appeared in Britain until Harrap published the one illustrated by Arthur Rackham in 1931. Even that seems to have been a bit of a fluke and it's only in the last 30 years or so that the poem has come out with any frequency, and then often in internationally syndicated editions.

So what to recommend?

– a question barely answerable since everything goes out of print so quickly.



(What happened to Michael Foreman's jolly rebus pop-up of 1988? Why do Oxford not keep Tomi de Paola's version regularly in print?) Any judgement on what is most fitting depends on whether you like your Father Christmas to be an artistic creation or a participant in the customary seasonal vulgarities. There's a lot to be said for the latter and its historic range can be glimpsed in a Chronicle Books edition (1) which illustrates the verses with illustrations drawn from over a dozen past publications. Santas jolly, and a few Santas sinister, abound, and if you feel that such figures conform to a natural, rather than a synthetic, excitement that children have for Christmas then you could also try the Award Edition, illustrated by Lesley Smith (2), the pages begirt with busy pictures involving many frolicking elves. Among more self-conscious interpretations you might do well to disregard that of William Wegman (3) who peoples his version (reindeer included) with a bunch of photogenic Weimaraners. Much more acceptable are, first, Christian Birmingham's cosy 'in period' rendering which alternates soft-focus colour plates with monochrome spot-drawings (4), and, second, a wondrous folio album illustrated by Matt Tavares with quasi stipple-engravings *manière de* Chris van Allsburg (5). Every square millimetre is subject to the canons of elegant design – a Christmas Eve for the connoisseur classes. **n**

## Bibliographical Notes:

The numbered books above are all entitled *The Night Before Christmas* with the author given as Clement Clarke Moore, except for (5) which reads *'Twas the Night Before Christmas* by 'Anon'. Mr Tavares harbours doubts about Moore's authorship.

(1) Chronicle Books (San Francisco, 1997), 0 8118 1712 1, £10.99, available from Ragged Bears

(2) Award Publications Ltd (London, 2001), 1 84135 011 7, £2.99

(3) Hyperion (NY, 2000), 0 7868 0608 7, £11.99, available from Turnaround

(4) Collins (London, 2000), 0 00 713398 7, £4.99

(5) Candlewick/Walker Books (Cambridge MA/London, 2002), 0 7636 1585 4, £10.99

Some information on editions and dating comes from Nancy H Marshall's *Descriptive Bibliography* of the poem published in the USA by Oak Knoll Press, Delaware in 2002 (1 5845 6071 1).

The illustrations are taken from the Chronicle Books edition, see (1) above. Top left is by Elizabeth McKinstry from 1928, top right by Joseph Cummings Chase from 1899 and the main illustration by A.E.K. from 1918. The cover artist is unknown, the picture being taken from a postcard circa 1908.

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