

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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the children's book magazine

GARTH NIX • LITERATURE AND SATS • KEVIN BROOKS

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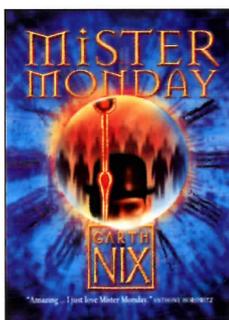
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Cover Story

This issue's cover is from Garth Nix's *Mister Monday*. Garth Nix is interviewed by Geoff Fox on page 6. Thanks to HarperCollins Children's Books for their help with this January cover.



EDITORIAL



Rosemary Stones

For the 58 years of the Arts Council's existence children's literature has managed to soldier on without the benefit of its input. A consultation paper on children's literature, *From Looking Glass to Spyglass*, has now been published. The sparkiness of its title promises well but does not protect the reader from the banality unfortunately characteristic of such productions, viz: 'Childhood is not just a preparation for life, but part of it, and children's development in reading clearly doesn't happen in a vacuum, independently of their development or experience elsewhere.' Astonishingly, the paper makes no mention at all of the impact of the internet and I can only imagine the righteous steam coming out of the ears of, amongst others, Michael Thorn of the Achuka website.

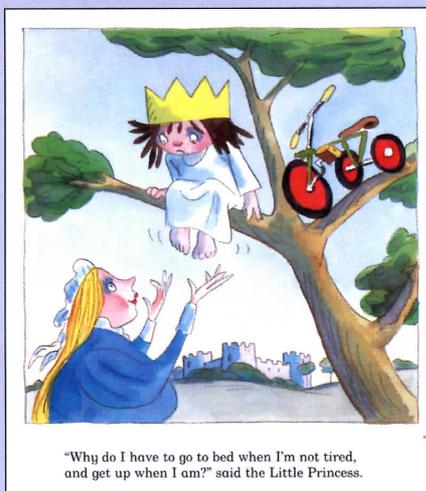
Emphasis is rightly given to the place of children's literature in the education of teachers and to the need to nurture and develop the talents of new children's writers and illustrators, including those from minority groups. But, as with many of the other undisputed pieties included here, this paper seems incapable of thinking through how and why such things might be brought about. Thus, despite 'the sheer plenitude of children's books' which can be 'overwhelming' (10,519 new titles in 2002), we are told there is a need for more books in

translation. The grounds cited are that Aidan Chambers and Philip Pullman hold this view. Perhaps we deserve a more substantive argument.

The consultation paper's paragraph on the role of review magazines is both bland and meagre. It fails to place them (together with literary prizes, other forms of reviewing, etc) as part of the wider critical debate around children's literature which serves, crucially, to encourage high standards in writing and publishing as well as to disseminate information about what is published. One of the most significant ways in which talent is nurtured is critical feedback in the form of independent, intelligent and well informed debate. Knowledge of children's books underpins every aspect of the process which brings child and book together. Debate and the dissemination of knowledge are the core functions of review magazines such as this one.

Illustration workshop

Books for Keeps is delighted to be working in association with the Quentin Blake Gallery of Illustration and The Learning Centre at Somerset House, London, on a one-day seminar and workshop for teachers, librarians and children's book reviewers to explore ways of discussing and writing about the visual aspect of children's books. This will be a wonderful opportunity to meet and share ideas as well as to learn from Quentin Blake and other specialists. Further details on page 15.



"Why do I have to go to bed when I'm not tired, and get up when I am?" said the Little Princess.

Tony Ross's *I Don't Want To Go To Bed* is awarded five stars and reviewed on page 18.

From *Looking Glass to Spyglass* (0 7287 0986 4) is published by the Arts Council England and can be ordered from Marston Books Services (01235 465500) or it can be downloaded at www.artscouncil.org.uk

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Windows into Illustration: Babette Cole

Babette Cole's wittily dynamic picture books with their anarchic energy and often 'unmentionable' subject matter have been influential in broadening the appeal of the picture book. Here she explains the techniques and thinking behind two illustrations, one from **Drop Dead** and one from **The Bad Good Manners Book**.

Despite its title **Drop Dead** is really about life! Two children ask their old wrinkly grandparents why they are so old and the grandparents give them their life history from birth to death and beyond that even. They lived very dangerous lives and escaped death at each moment of it until they just get old and drop dead anyway. This illustration is of one of their student parties which was obviously a dangerous affair indeed!

As there had to be a narrow escape from death on each page, I liked the idea of them being crammed onto the roof of a college building having such a good time that none of them seem aware of the danger. The facing illustration showed them making dangerous chemical experiments and was very much a drawing. I wanted to complement the line on that page by contrasting it with the more abstract and painterly illustration about colour and shape that you see here. In order to do this, I used almost entirely pastel to make this picture soft (yet dangerous). The only

line being the little figures on the top of the building. I scrubbed it on using my fingers and cotton buds (those little woolly things on sticks for cleaning your ears! I find these very useful for putting down pastel.). I cannot think of any influences that made me do it this way, it just seemed the natural thing to do.

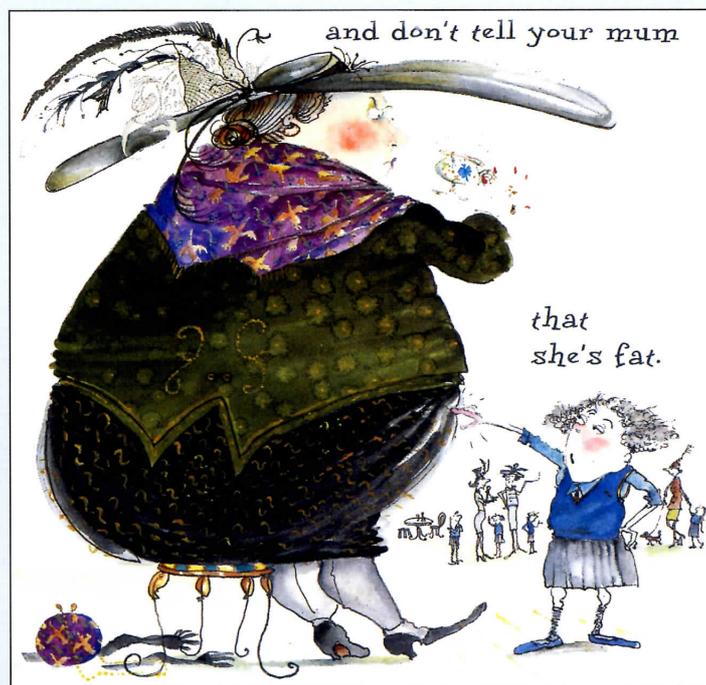
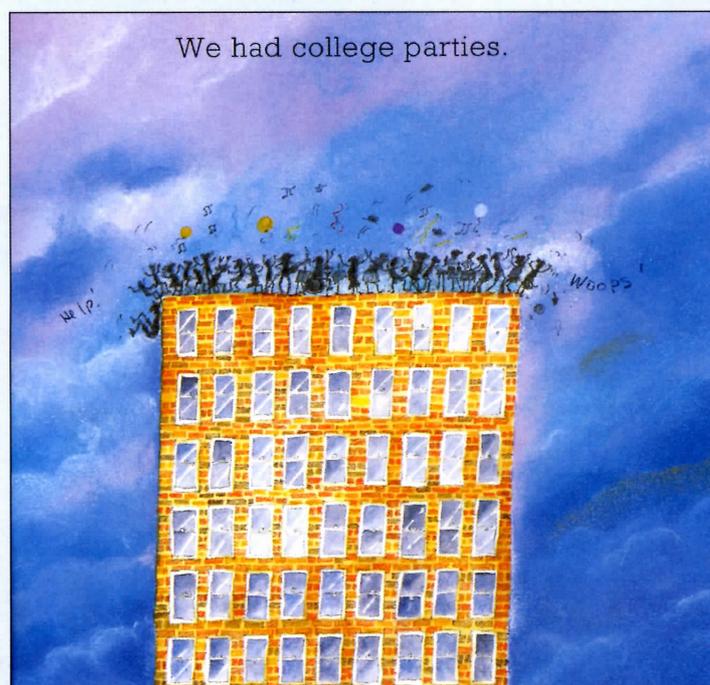
I am very fond of this illustration from **The Bad Good Manners Book**. I like it because it is a very good piece of drawing for me. I wanted lots of changes in texture. Note the soft podgyness of mum where the little girl is sticking her finger in, to the hard little iron legs on the stool struggling to keep mum up. The rather harsh black feathers on the hat, in black ink, set off to the soft netting drawn in grey ink as do the silk scarf against the watermarked velvet jacket and the flimsy overskirt on top of the solid black underskirt. Mum's face is peachy and flushed compared with some hard lines about her hair and hat.

At the very moment she gets poked Mum is so incensed that she gulps and spills her tea unexpectedly. With her cheeks



full, I wanted to make it look as though she might spit it at the rude child! The text reads '...and don't tell your mum that she's fat.' I like the largeness of mum compared with the small, rather spiky little girl who has her mother's podgy face, indicating that she will probably be like that when she grows up anyway. Note the other slimmer, more elegant mothers in the background to make mum look even fatter. The little girl is not embarrassed. She is taking the mick a bit! As for influence, I can definitely see the Searle illustrations from St Trinian's that I giggled over as a kid in there, and a good dose of Mr Shilling about the hat! ■

Drop Dead is published by Random House Children's Books (0 09 965081 9, £5.99 pbk) and **The Bad Good Manners Book** by Puffin (0 14 055480 7, £4.99 pbk). Babette Cole won the 1996 Kurt Maschler Award for **Drop Dead**.



What's reading for anyway?

The teaching of English is becoming a subject of intense debate with many children's writers, some of them also teachers, entering the fray. Three recent developments have put the whole issue of children's reading and writing in the spotlight. Writer and teacher **Alan Gibbons** explains.

The National Union of Teachers has just balloted on a boycott of the national tests (SATs) for 7-, 11- and 14-year-olds. In addition, two initiatives have been launched more or less simultaneously, but independently of each other. After meeting Education Minister Charles Clarke, five of the country's most established and respected writers – Chris Powling, Bernard Ashley, Philip Pullman, Anne Fine and Jamila Gavin – published a pamphlet, **Meetings with the Minister**. Unaware that this was in the offing, at about the same time I established the 'Authors Against the SATs' statement. This was published in **The Times Educational Supplement** supported by more than 100 children's authors and illustrators opposed to the current testing regime.

What's all the fuss about?

SAT testing began under the Conservative government in the early 1990s. The tests were resisted with a boycott in 1993 but they survived and have come to dominate the life of schools. Now, not only do 7-year-olds sit these widely despised tests, but there is a roller coaster of 'optional' tests (which every school does) at Years 3, 4 and 5. Primary schools have booster classes, SAT clubs and mock tests. Swimming, PE and 'frizzeries' such as the expressive arts are routinely cancelled to permit more revision.

Even Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in his 2000/2001 report has voiced misgivings:

'The drive to improve performance in the national tests in English and Mathematics also absorbs more teaching time, particularly in Years 2 and 6. Headteachers report that, when something has to give, it is often extended practical or problem-solving activities in subjects such as science, technology and art that are squeezed out. This represents a serious narrowing of the curriculum.'

Finland is top of the OECD* rankings for reading and writing but has no such system of national tests. Teachers there are given the freedom to decide how to teach the curriculum, a freedom teachers in England can only envy. Even within the UK, Scotland has a different system and Wales is rapidly moving away from the SAT model. Clearly, it is hard for the Government to argue, as did Mrs Thatcher, that: *'There is no alternative.'*

The effect of constant testing

What is exercising the minds of writers for children most of all is the effect of constant testing on the teaching of literature. Excerpts, and the use of them as comprehension materials, have come to dominate English lessons. Some secondary librarians say that many children voice surprise that they are actually expected to read a whole book!

It is in this context, and against a background of squeezed spending on books (16% less spent on primary books and 10% less spent on secondary ones, according to the **Bookseller**) that authors have entered the discussion.

In the 'Authors Against the SATs' statement we argued that *'Children's understanding, empathy, imagination and creativity are developed best by reading whole books.'* We attacked the emphasis on reading excerpts and examining them through tick boxes and one word answers. One author who had her work used for the SATs, Pat Thomson, found she could not answer questions on her own story to the satisfaction of the examiners! We further argued that *'the SATs and the preparation for them are creating an atmosphere of anxiety around the teaching of literature'* and that the resources devoted to testing materials should be redirected into school

libraries. The huge sums spent on the tests would be a significant shot in the arm for book provision.

I had expected a handful of authors to respond to my round robin letter. I was astonished by the response. Over 100 writers and illustrators got in touch within a week. Not only that, they often sent me indignant essays, detailing the negative effect of the tests on children's enjoyment and understanding of literature.

Take this from illustrator Ian Whybrow: *'It's the filleting of books to supply comprehension exercises that I object to... Teachers and their classes need time to enjoy books together.'*

Reading is becoming utilitarian

And there's the rub. It is the very notion of enjoying a book, a poem, a play for itself that is under attack in our schools. Reading is becoming utilitarian. It is done to extract information, to find something out, to be tested. It is not undertaken *for pleasure*. What is odd about all this is that almost any teacher you know understands that the child who reads for the sheer exhilaration of immersing themselves in a good story absorbs, almost by osmosis, the rhythms and cadences of language. It is far easier to teach a reader the principles of grammar. Finally, vocabulary widens immeasurably. A blessed spin-off, in other words, is that the reading child is a successful child.

Since the publication of the statement, authors have addressed numerous meetings of teachers and parents. Pat Thomson, for example, addressed a hugely successful fringe meeting at the NUT conference. I have personally lost count of the number of meetings at which I have spoken around the country, from Bristol to Birmingham, Liverpool to Manchester.

The SATs and the preparation for them are creating an atmosphere of anxiety around the teaching of literature.

Authors Against the SATs

Meetings with the Minister

Just as I was watching the ripples spread I was told about **Meetings with the Minister**. At a reception for children's authors at 10 Downing Street, two of the contributing authors spoke to Charles Clarke, the incoming Education Secretary. Clarke agreed to a further meeting. Their discussions gave rise to the pamphlet. What is astonishing is how the five contributions, written independently of each other, and the SATs statement all concur on most of the major points.

In his contribution Bernard Ashley, a former headteacher, says this: *'We now expect children to analyse books and poems before they've learned to enjoy them. Is this because analysis is easier to teach-and-test than enjoyment? Or, perhaps because a "text" is so much cheaper and more manageable than a book?'*

Philip Pullman is equally trenchant, damning the *'mechanistic approach which seems to have taken hold of the way teachers talk about the process of writing'*. He goes on to criticise the *'brutal, unceasing emphasis on testing and marking'*. Finally, and tellingly, he points out that, in the National Literacy Strategy framework, out of 71 verbs used to describe the process of reading the word *enjoy* doesn't occur once! Philip warns that we may be creating a generation who *'feel nothing but hostility for literature'*.



Photo courtesy of Orion Children's Books.

Anne Fine's piece will also ruffle Government feathers. She argues that there has been a 'disastrous slide in standards of creative writing' and says that she no longer judges children's writing competitions. 'The fact is,' she says, 'most bright children... absolutely HATE planning, drafting and redrafting.' She concludes by asking Government to reverse policy and 'be rid of the results of this ideological tyranny'.

It is Jamila Gavin who directly addresses the SAT tests. She rightly says that no teacher is opposed to testing. But, as she continues, 'there is testing and testing. There is the fun of learning, competing against oneself and trying to do better; and there is the testing to meet targets – with the pressure of a teacher knowing that if targets are met, more money is forthcoming.' SATs 'too easily stultify the teacher' and 'instead of encouraging them with enjoyment, confidence and creativity, rather induce fear, stress and insecurity'.

The pamphlet concludes with an action plan drawn up by Chris Powling. Readers of **Books for Keeps** will recognize much of the agenda: regular reading for pleasure, silent reading in school, browsing in the library, book weeks including the celebration of book ownership, library membership and 'free range' writing in class.

We may be creating a generation who feel nothing but hostility for literature.

Philip Pullman

Vision, commitment and resources

I would add some suggestions of my own. At reading development conferences I have argued that the present post of Literacy Coordinator is useless. Most of the time the Coordinator is drawing up targets for children jogging along the SATs treadmill. The rest of the time they are attending meetings with local authority representatives in an effort to improve their test results and rise up the league table. Teaching to the test is their talisman. How much better it would be if there was a post of Reading Development Officer (the name is negotiable – what about Book Lady or Book Guy?) This person could take small groups of children into the library to browse the best of modern children's literature. They could help tailor each child's reading to their interests. I have no doubt that the number of children reading for pleasure would rise dramatically. Then there is the vexed issue of underachieving boys. I was recently at a conference at the Reebok Stadium in Bolton, Lancashire. It occurred to me that it would be a great idea to bring along these lads, and girls, to meet the likes of Jay Jay Okocha, tour the ground and do a couple of writing workshops with well-known poets and novelists. There could be a rolling roadshow at grounds around the country. But this kind of initiative is dependent on vision, commitment and resources. Sadly, all that is being channelled into the SATs regime, and with inevitably diminishing results. In the last couple of years the improvement in test scores has stalled. No wonder – you can only teach to the test for so long before it ceases to be effective.

Meetings with the Minister is a well-argued and thoroughly stimulating read by some of the top practitioners of their art. It should be worrying for the Government that seven Carnegie Medal

winners and the recipients of many more literary awards have lined up against the SATs and the worst excesses of the National Literacy Strategy. The authors of **Meetings with the Minister** say that Charles Clarke has listened to their arguments. That has not stopped him making very aggressive statements to the press about teachers disrupting children's education. The truth is, it is the SATs which have disrupted children's school lives. A boycott would not mean strikes. It would mean redirecting teachers' energies back to what matters, the drive, imagination and humour which switches youngsters onto the joy of learning. It is a sad

symptom of the present emphasis on raising standards by testing children to distraction that, while visiting over 150 schools a year, I meet English teachers who don't themselves read for pleasure. I don't believe this is their fault. It is the result of a quite appalling system of assessment based on the faulty notion that literacy can be grafted onto the minds of young people.

For years the teaching of English in particular, and the education system in general, has been upside down. It is time we set it back on its feet.

If you want to join the campaign against the SATs and see a change in the teaching of English you could:

- write to Charles Clarke MP, Secretary of State for Education
- lobby your MP
- write a letter of support to the NUT, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1 9BD
- if you are an author or illustrator, support Authors Against the SATs (email: aagibbons@blueyonder.co.uk) ■

*The OECD is the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. It is an authoritative body which ranks the various countries' educational achievements.

**CHRIS POWLING
BERNARD ASHLEY
PHILIP PULLMAN
ANNE FINE
JAMILA GAVIN**

Meetings with the Minister
Five children's authors on the National Literacy Strategy

A word of warning. This is not a conventional collection of essays. It lies somewhere between reportage and cri-de-coeur. What's at stake... is nothing less than the integrity of the novel, the story, the poem... valued for its own sake and on its own terms. We must defend it fiercely against the well-meaning but muddle-headed vandals who want to analyse it, stick labels on it, teach and preach it into a coma... or kill it off altogether with some kind of test.

Meetings with the Minister (0 7049 1472 7, £4.95 inc. p&p) is available from the National Centre for Language and Literacy, The University of Reading, Bulmershe Court, Earley, Reading RG6 1HY, tel: **0118 378 8820**, fax: **0118 378 6801** (cheques payable to University of Reading). It can also be ordered online at www.ncll.org.uk

Alan Gibbons is a full-time author and a regular speaker at schools, libraries and conferences. His latest book, **The Dark Beneath**, is published by Orion (1 84255 097 7, £4.99 pbk).

Authorgraph

No.144

Garth Nix
interviewed by Geoff Fox

For a man who's been at Number 3 on the *New York Times* bestseller list and is published in a dozen languages, there's an engaging modesty about Garth Nix. 'I write well enough to convey my story... I'm not a brilliant stylist, but I really respect writers who are. If I could write three pages as good as the last three pages of Alan Garner's *The Owl Service*, I'd be a happy man.'

Garner was one of the many authors Nix discovered on his daily visits to an excellent local children's library on his way home from school in Canberra in the early seventies. He's always been an eclectic reader, and he's always read fantasy. Many of his favourites were Brits: Tolkien (whom he now consciously avoids imitating), Garner, Diana Wynne Jones, Susan Cooper and, from the States, Ursula Le Guin. To this day, he finds it hard to pass by a clean second-hand copy of one of the treasures he found in that Aladdin's Cave of a library. There is, in the richest sense, something childlike in the way he now talks about his own writing: 'Story – it's what it's all about. We're hard-wired for narrative, beginning, middle and end.'

The apparent simplicity needs a closer look. Sustaining a reader's headlong journey through 'The Old Kingdom' trilogy – from 368 pages of *Sabriel* to 528 pages of *Lirael* with the traveller left hungry for *Abhorsen* – is no naïve skill. Being a fine uncomplicated storyteller is only one of the faces of Garth Nix, for in several aspects of his life, he slips deftly from one register to another. When we met for a couple of hours at HarperCollins, his talk was mostly serious and self-aware; but it was punctuated by conversational forays reflecting the mischievous game-player occasionally evident in 'The Old Kingdom' trilogy and far more obviously in 'The Keys to the Kingdom' series whose first title, *Mister Monday*, appears in the UK this month. He reads widely in children's literature, but also in philosophy, theology and history – especially military history. He is deeply reflective and yet clearly enjoyed the extrovert worlds of part-time soldiering ('we built things and blew them up'), public relations consultant and literary agent. He enjoys solitude, but he's rooted in family too, living a few minutes from Sydney's Coogee Beach with his publisher wife Anna and the infant Thomas.

In the Old Kingdom, readers find themselves in the dangerous kind of secondary world they have previously explored with Tolkien and Le Guin. When Garth Nix was growing up in the Canberra school system, the cultural bias of the curriculum was still heavily European; he met and enjoyed Shakespeare, Dickens and Austen there. Those schools valued both tradition and excellence – no

surprise in a Commonwealth capital city crowded with influential government employees. He thinks of his work as 'another small branch on a big tree which is firmly rooted in European myth and folklore. I feel I'm connected to the world, part of a worldwide genre which a younger, contemporary Australian would be less likely to travel.' Nevertheless, he would argue that there *is* an Australian quality to his work. It's not so much in the geography as in the 'self-deprecating, sly jokes rather than the outright levity of the sense of humour' (so forget the Aussie Press and the Rugby World Cup).

Seventies Canberra and its schools suited him and his family well. He grew up in a home where books were everywhere, and where mother and father crafted words and images as a matter of course. He speaks of his parents with affection and admiration. His mother was always reading or 'busy with some artwork'; she has become an internationally collected papermaker and water-colourist, devising artworks with the paper she makes herself. His father, a reader of fantasy and Science Fiction – 'well, of everything, really' – worked for the government in scientific research. Father would write his papers at the kitchen table or, to the occasional exasperation of his three sons, in front of the television, looking up every now and again to demand, 'What's just happened?' In such a bookish home, Garth became a reader and, he says, a daydreamer. He resisted, or maybe just ignored, the cultural pressures towards team sports, preferring the more individual pleasures of cycling and fishing. His parents encouraged his exploration of private pathways, for even as a child, he knew he travelled through books.

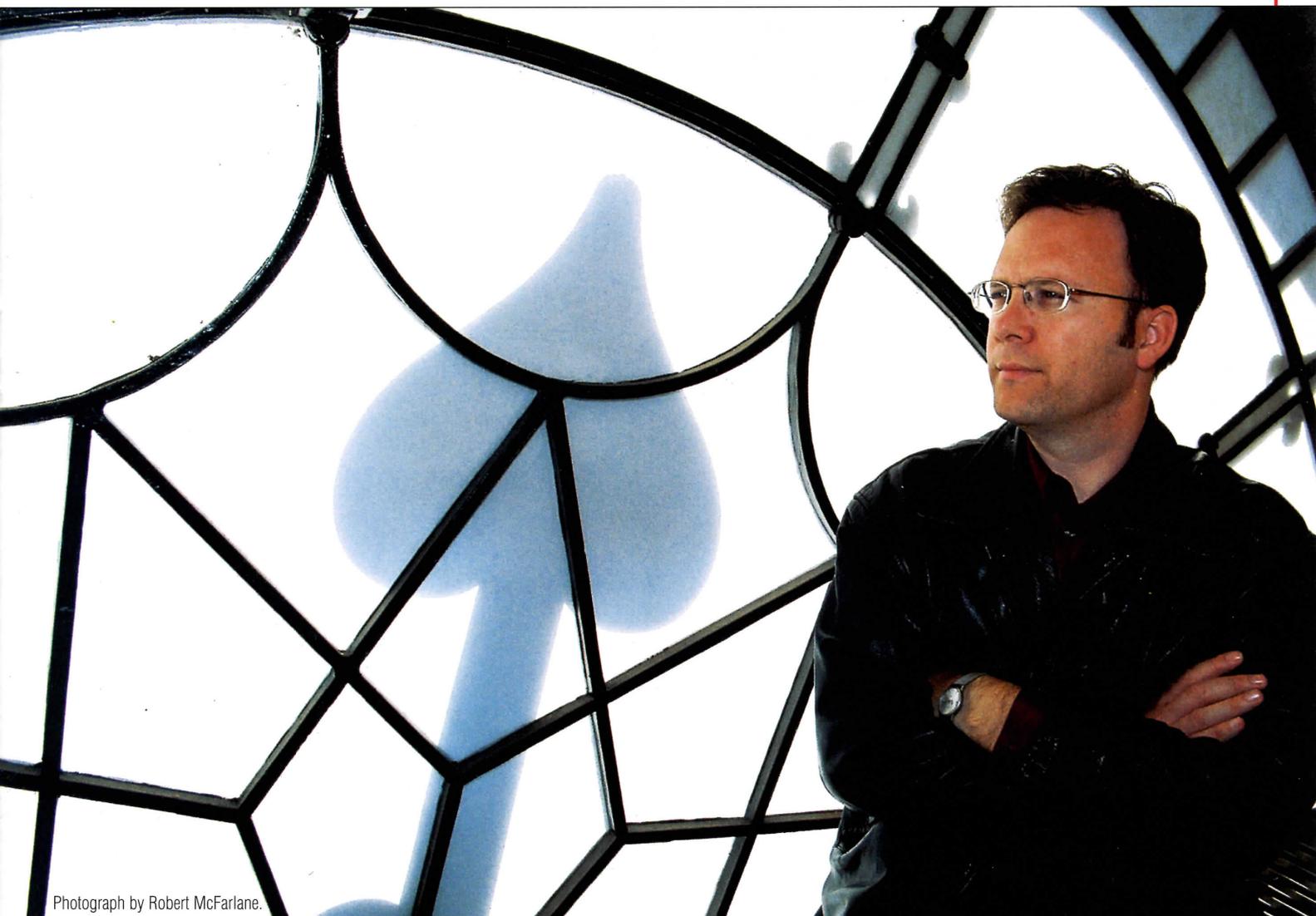
Some of those youthful trails led towards the writer he has become. For three or four years in his teens, he and a group of friends were into 'Dungeons and Dragons', with Garth often as Dragonmaster, devising the scenarios. He sees this as a valuable part of his apprenticeship, learning the craft of tight plotting. Even then, he managed to sell articles about D&D. In 1983, at the age of 20, he sold a story for £90. A golden career beckoned, but the next twenty or thirty stories didn't sell; yet he always seems to have had that impulse common to so many successful novelists, the sheer need to keep writing, keep telling, even when no-one's reading or listening.

In the early 80s, he set off on what was then the traditional Australian pilgrimage around the UK, preferring a battered Austin to the conventional VW Campervan. This was not a search for family roots, however. For him, the trip involved rereading many of his childhood favourites, *in situ*. All through his journey, he wrote, mostly on an old Silver-Reed typewriter which, to his continuing regret, he sold to buy the bus ticket for the last lap to Heathrow. His mother observed that he came back to Australia 'a much more reasonable human being'.

Ragwitch, one of his early novels (not yet available in the UK), partly grew from that early journey around Britain. It was 'my attempt to write a harder-edged C S Lewis'. Though he does not think Lewis stands much re-reading – and he's a committed re-reader – he does love those through-the-wardrobe or down-the-rabbit-hole routes from our world into another. So it's no surprise that in *Mister Monday* we move from a troubled version of our society into the mysterious world of 'The House' and back again. Quirky Suzy Turquoise Blue ends up in the House because she was one of those children who 'followed the Piper', which turned out to be not such a bad idea, given all those rats. The House itself is wholly devoted to paper pushing, in several senses, and there is perhaps something here of Dickens' Circumlocution Office. Nix is particularly fond of bureaucracies gone mad and indeed of little literary *hommages*, from which his editors have sometimes had to restrain him.

By now, he is very familiar with the rhythms





Photograph by Robert McFarlane.

of his own writing process*. He might start with an image. **Sabriel** began with a photograph (discovered when he was looking for something else) of Hadrian's Wall; on one side a lush green meadow, on the other, snow-covered hills. He has learned to trust the 'what if?' questions and to know that, in time, answers will come and connections be made. When his grandfather died a slow death after a series of strokes, he turned with sharpened focus to the nature of an afterlife. Down that road lay notions of necromancy. But then, he wondered, what if there was an anti-necromancer somewhere who dealt with the dead to make sure they stayed dead? When that line of thought came together with Hadrian's Wall, **Sabriel** began to stir.

There might be a year or more's gestation. Then some chapter outlines ('so that I can depart from them'), then 80% of the writing time to draft the first half of the book. The second half comes in just three or four months, with the last third taking no more than perhaps two or three weeks. So he might be 'writing' when he's doing the washing-up, staring out of the window ('but I'm not there at all'). That is balanced by the disciplined daily writing routine he shares with Pullman and so many others.

British readers of fantasy still have only a few Garth Nix titles. But **Sabriel** was first published in Australia in 1995, so that when you come across a boarding school with classes in Charter Magic, you need to remember that, to Garth Nix's satisfaction, he comfortably predates JKR and all her works. British publishers were anxious that the rights in Australia, New Zealand, the States and Canada had already gone – a major reason for the delay. Elsewhere, his readers are very numerous. The books have been prize-winners in Australia and the States and **Sabriel** was nominated for two awards in 2002 in the UK. **Mister Monday** and its sequels **Grim Tuesday**, **Drowned Wednesday** and the rest – the titles came first, stored away in the crowded notebooks from which he works – may well find an even greater readership than the trilogy, given the infectious energy and wit of the narrative.

He receives too much mail to answer, though all of it is read. He's amused and amazed by his correspondence. 'Can you send me a copy of **The Book of the Dead** because I want to learn necromancy?'; 'I'm 35 but I loved **Lirael**. Am I crazy?'; 'I think a film of **Sabriel** would be great, and I'll be ready to play her in two or three years. Please wait.' That last correspondent, typical of many from America, has a point. The books would work wonderfully as film.

There's little risk of success spoiling Garth Nix. He's a listener as well as a talker, self-contained and resourceful. The modesty may spring from the genes and the upbringing, but it also draws upon experience. His work as a literary agent taught him that spectacular success leaves you with further to fall. At the heart of it all for him remains the satisfaction of telling the tale: 'If I believe it while I'm telling it, they'll believe it as well'; 'I'm writing for myself, but I serve the story'; and 'If I can, I like to deliver an emotional charge at the end – if I can make myself feel the emotion at the end of my book, I'm always happier. If I can weep, or laugh, or both, when I'm writing....' he pauses, 'I guess that could be dangerous though, but, well, you know...'

*See <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~garthnix/writing.html>

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

The Books *(published by HarperCollins Children's Books)*

'The Old Kingdom' trilogy:

Sabriel, 0 00 713730 3, £12.99 hbk, 0 00 713731 1, £5.99 pbk

Lirael, 0 00 713732 X, £12.99 hbk

Abhorsen, 0 00 713734 6, £12.99 hbk, April 2004

'The Keys to the Kingdom' series:

Mister Monday, 0 00 717501 9, £5.99, inc. CD Rom

Grim Tuesday, June 2004

Drowned Wednesday, January 2005

Peter Ackroyd's 'Voyages through Time'

'Imagine returning to school for the new term and finding your history teacher was ... Peter Ackroyd.' So runs the press release for the first two titles of **Voyages through Time**, a 10-part history encyclopedia by Peter Ackroyd, published by Dorling Kindersley. An unlikely choice of children's historian on the surface perhaps, for Ackroyd is best known for his adult novels like **Hawksmoor** and **Chatterton**, for his biographies of Wilde, Dickens and Blake, and for his brilliant chronicle **London**. Yet this unexpected marriage between Ackroyd and DK produces a startlingly original new approach to non-fiction. **Sue Unstead** explores.

DK have chosen to launch with what they call 'the bookends' of the 'Voyages through Time' series, volumes 1 and 10. **The Beginning**

opens with the words: 'The Earth came out of fire. The Earth was fire. That fire still burns at the centre of our world, to remind us of the beginning...' This sets the tone of what is to follow. This is writing that has energy and imagination, on a grand scale, almost Biblical at times. 'Darkness gave birth to light,' he writes, describing the formation of the Universe. And in **Escape from Earth** man's dream to explore space is fulfilled with the words 'It came to pass'.

The imagery matches the text in boldness and atmosphere. These are not the signature DK spreads of close-up photography on stark white backgrounds like a museum display. Instead we have saturated colour with a cinematic quality, computer-generated images juxtaposing photographs and artwork. This change of direction was DK's deliberate attempt to update its visual language, to make it less static and more contemporary. Images are chosen to be evocative and compelling as

well as for their informational content. This requires a level of visual sophistication from the audience, but these are children brought up on the realism of computer modelling and deep space photography.

Credit for the commissioning of Ackroyd must go to Children's Publishing Director Miriam Farbey. 'Standing in Waterstones looking through the children's history section I realised there isn't really an outstanding children's historian. I had recently bought **London** and found it full of drama and suspense, so I decided to approach Ackroyd.' His agent was initially quite taken aback at the request for a series for younger readers, but DK was persuasive that cross-over titles could be a way forward for non-fiction, just as in fiction, as demonstrated by Philip Pullman and others.

A narrative approach to non-fiction

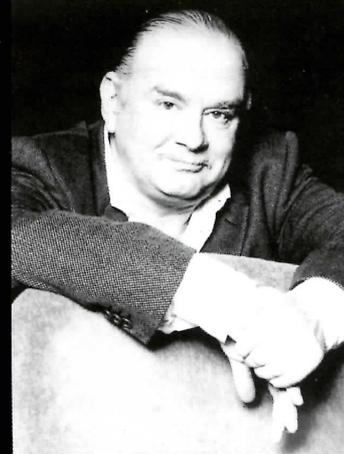
Ackroyd himself relished the challenge, and he wrote the manuscript in one fell sweep. His text flows in a continuous narrative, without headings or

other interruptions for the reader apart from chapter breaks. For DK this was a new way of working, starting with the text rather than planning out a book visually in advance of any writing. 'We learned a lot,' says Farbey, 'about the importance of pace, the need for "quiet times".' The narrative approach certainly makes more demands of the reader but, says Farbey, 'Kids love to read stories, and it is a shame to keep this completely separate from non-fiction. And Ackroyd goes beyond storytelling by introducing philosophy and character.' There was never any attempt at 'dumbing down' his text. 'We don't as children's publishers need to be restrained by simple texts.' Instead they strove to achieve a clarity of structure, only occasionally shortening sentences. There was lots of close debate, but it appears to be a happy partnership. The books have attracted an unusual amount of positive response from teachers, who praise DK for not underestimating an enthusiastic child's ability when fired by a subject. In the end, says Publisher Christopher Davis, 'It is the quality of the writing that is so important, writing that has resonance and poetry, rather than dry as dust factual text.'

Infectious curiosity

There is plenty of hard factual information to be covered in volume 10, **Escape from Earth**, yet Ackroyd always comes back to the human element. Describing the building of the Russian Cosmodrome at Baikonur in the '50s, he focuses on the exhausted men who used only hand tools to dig the enormous pit for the launch pad, in temperatures ranging from -40°C in winter to searing desert heat in summer, plagued by scorpions and spiders and cholera-bearing rats. Ackroyd has the kind of infectious curiosity and love of detail that can spark a child's imagination. He writes with awe of the new vision of deep space opened up by the Hubble Telescope 'unimaginable time and space ... millions of these superclusters, stretching out through billions of light years of space. Immensity is piled upon immensity. The mind and the imagination break down before the enormity.'

Ackroyd is now working on further titles on Egypt and Pre-Columbian America, and is keen next to turn to the fundamental pillars of our civilisation. Classical Greece and



Imperial Rome. China and Medieval Europe are also mentioned, so perhaps the encyclopedia may eventually expand beyond 10 volumes. With its rich visual imagery and ambitious sweep **Voyages through Time** is an exciting new departure, and one hopes that other similar series might follow. 'Good writing is so important,' says Christopher Davis, 'Maybe there are other people who have an attractive voice for children and can stimulate an interest in their subject.' ■

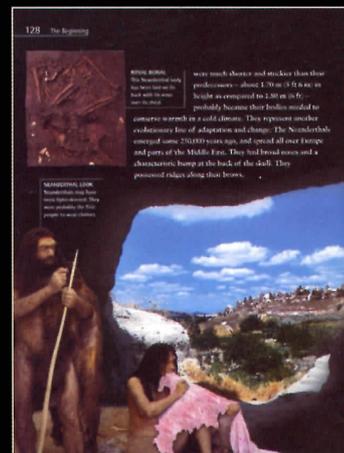
Voyages through Time

The Beginning, 1 4053 0032 9

Escape from Earth, 1 4053 0033 7

Dorling Kindersley, 144pp, £14.99 each hbk

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



Hard to Pigeonhole

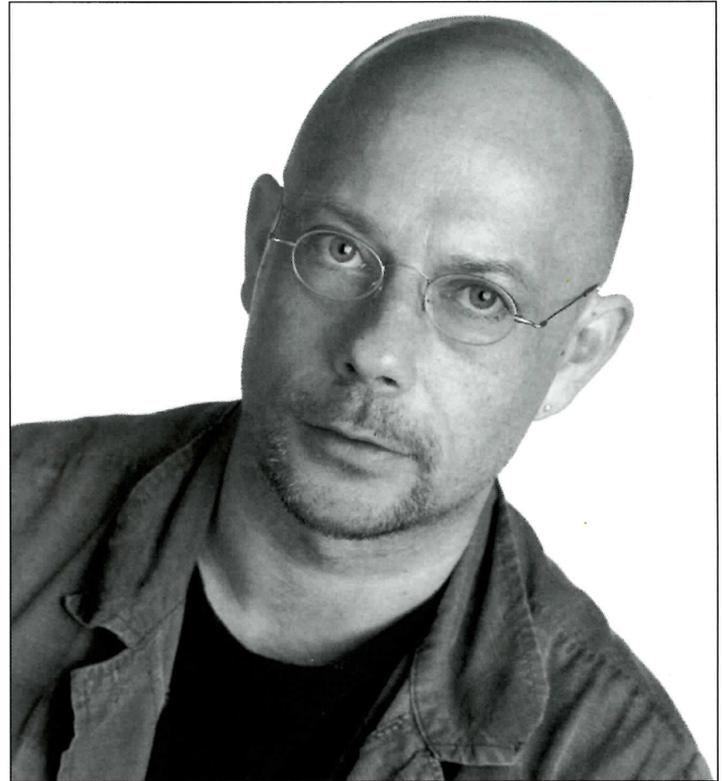
Two novels down and one just published and Kevin Brooks has already become familiar not only with glowing reviews but also with the circus of long lists, short lists and award ceremonies. He has even experienced winning – **Martyn Pig** won the 2002 Branford Boase Award and was short listed for the CILIP Carnegie Medal while **Lucas** was short listed for both the 2003 Guardian Children's Book prize and the Book Trust Teenage Book Award. This is an unusually high profile start for an author and especially for one whose books are so hard to pigeonhole.

Unlikely many other writers, Brooks had not originally thought of himself specifically as a writer. He had tried expressing himself through music and art as well as writing but with little success. He lists his previous occupations as being 'a petrol pump attendant, a crematorium handyman, a civil service officer, a vendor at London Zoo, a post office counter clerk and a railway ticket office salesperson' – the kind of fashionable list of temporary jobs that many writers are now admitting to for no apparent reason but which, in Brooks' case, do at least have the merit of matching the kind of books he writes.

Since Brooks' books fit no tick box it is easy to see why he found it hard to get published and yet, now they are and now that his distinctive voice is so recognisable, it seems surprising. One reason may be because – especially at a time

when literary fantasy is all the rage – his writing is artless. Instead, he adopts an adolescent voice of raw authenticity reminiscent of Iain Banks and Irvine Welsh. Like them, he writes about anti-heroes living un-heroic lives which reveal there is nothing so special about heroism anyway. He writes about what seems like ordinariness in people or places and shows that what is going on inside adolescent heads is what matters, not what they look like on the outside. But ordinariness and boredom, drab surroundings and TV dinners are hard to handle without bogging stories down too much. Brooks mostly pulls it off though he takes his readers right to the brink. Just occasionally, especially in **Kissing the Rain**, the voice is so authentic that, like the adolescents themselves, it runs right up to the wire of being irritatingly dumb with conversational exchanges that grind almost to a halt.

Brooks writes in the first person creating characters whom he appears to inhabit wholly. He favours outsiders, those who are picked on either by their peers specifically or just by society in general, with whom he has a remarkable empathy. To add to their difficulties, he gives them dysfunctional family backgrounds which means that they are largely operating on their own when it comes to interacting with the outside world and working out survival tactics or moral codes. The eponymous hero of **Martyn Pig** is a boy who has led a hard life, largely, it seems, just because he has a terrible name. The bad hand he has been dealt at birth



dogs him long after and leads him to the accident – the killing of his father – that provides the centre of the unlikely and blackly funny story that Brooks tells. **Lucas** – another eponymous hero – is a mysterious stranger who arrives in a closed semi-island community where he is immediately treated with the greatest suspicion despite saving a young girl's life. Brooks tells his story through the eyes of Caitlin, the girl who falls in love with Lucas at first sight. In **Kissing the Rain**, he reverts to telling the story through the eyes of the victim. This time it's Moo, the fat boy whom everyone despises and beats up. When Moo witnesses a road rage accident he finds himself at the centre of a tangled and dangerous intrigue. Very quickly, Moo recognises that the knowledge he holds is power. Brooks' subtle handling of Moo's shift from passive victim to someone who is making decisions is the most sophisticated character development he has yet achieved.

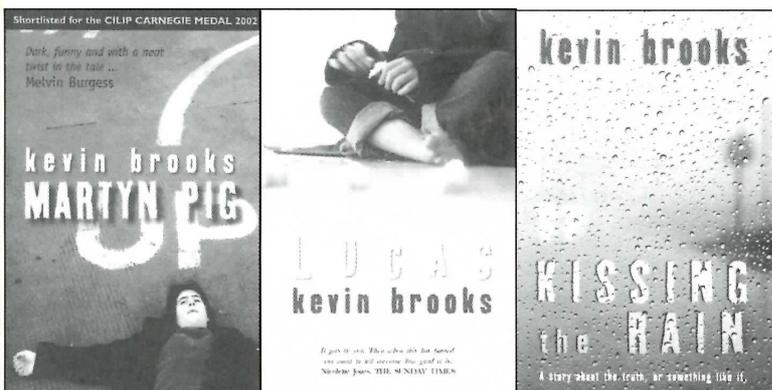
While characters and their narrative voice are central to Brooks' books, location is also important and he has an unusual ability to describe places, giving them a clear physical identity that makes them tangible. His underdog characters live in suitably drab surroundings. There are domestic interiors that are stale and run-down filled with the

lingering smell of cigarettes and the dregs left in abandoned beer cans. Fridges are empty, dads are out of work, mums are absent or passive. Homes are not cosy havens but temporary shelters from what may be a worse world outside. Not that Brooks makes the outdoors seem much more attractive. His landscapes are as forlorn as his interiors. He favours grey skies and muddy foreshores. **Martyn Pig** is set in sleety December, **Kissing the Rain** begins on a wet November day and, though the months pass and some very hot days are described, it is the real rain as much as the metaphorical rain of the title that is memorable. The crescendo of the drama of **Lucas** is played out against a full-scale thunderstorm.

For all that Brooks should not be thought of as a dark or drear writer. His books are funny and emotional, dramatic and thoughtful. Above all, they are interesting and different and raise important dilemmas without for a moment being defined by their 'issue'. ■

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

Martyn Pig (1 903434 51 3, £11.99 hbk, 1 903434 99 8, £5.99 pbk),
Lucas (1 903434 76 9, £12.99 hbk, 1 904442 12 9, £6.99 pbk) and **Kissing the Rain** (1 904442 19 6, £12.99 hbk) are published by Chicken House.



On Being an Editor

The winner of the 2003 Eleanor Farjeon Award for services to children's literature and the editor of many prize winning children's writers, **Miriam Hodgson** describes the delicate relationship between writer and editor and her view of the editorial task.



When the phone rang to tell me that I had won the Eleanor Farjeon award it was raining hard, the first time for weeks, and I was on the way down to call in our cat Gizmo. He bounded across the lawn, howling in outrage and instead of coming straight through the catflap, insisted on my descending a further flight of stairs to let him in. 'Just like your authors' the bringer of the wonderful news replied, when I apologised for not answering the phone straight away.

But may I beg to differ? I am gratefully aware that it is authors who 'let me in'. They let me in to their books; they not only let me live with the characters they have created but also interfere with what fate has in store for them. But most generously of all, they invite me into their mind, their conscience, their experience of living, their often encyclopaedic knowledge of the subject that has inspired their books. They share their imagination. They allow me to see their vision of a world they want to bring to children, to enrich them and help them understand it. In my authors' company I have travelled in time and place. Jenny Nimmo describes writing fantasy as a means of making children free by taking them several steps out of their lives and worlds where they can feel trapped and unhappy. I think all the best children's fiction gives the reader freedom. I can only single out a few of the authors I have worked with but that does not mean the others were not equally enriching.

With Robert Westall I empathised with children at war, with Michelle Magorian I experienced first love and post-war Britain. Theresa Breslin made me understand what it is to be a child with dyslexia. Anne Fine showed me how being brilliant is also a burden. With Jean Ure I travelled into a dystopic future. With Vivien Alcock, I experienced long before the Human Genome Project was published, the unforgettable creation of **The Monster Garden**. With Jamila Gavin I lived with children abandoned at the time of Partition in India and in 18th-century London and, most recently, with a Venetian boy in Moghul India. With Annie Dalton and Jenny Nimmo I lived with children with magic gifts. With Stephen Potts I discovered the Whitby whaling trade and life in Greenland. Caroline Pitcher took me to the mining community of 18th-century Derbyshire. Carlo Gebler let me see through the eyes of a Jewish boy in hiding in German-occupied France in 1944, the creation of the Golem of Prague four hundred years earlier.

I have been so fortunate to work with writers who take their cue from Plato – 'Come then, and let us pass a leisure hour in storytelling, and our story shall be the education of our heroes.'

The touching of minds

If I have to define editing it is the touching of minds, it is a dialogue. But yesterday when talking to Jenny Nimmo about her new Charlie Bone novel, **The Blue Boa**, she described it poetically as only Jenny would, as a duet. In the duet or dialogue writer and editor are equal, both listening to the other, really listening. Both want the book to be the best it can be. But the editor is the servant of the writer. He never dictates. The editor is the reader but the reader who may not quite understand what the author is saying. The author has to trust the editor to represent his audience. The editor may want more

differentiation between characters' voices. The editor may warn about the domination of the author's voice at the expense of his characters' individuality. The editor wants the pace to be exciting or gentle when these moods are relevant. The editor wants the ending to be totally satisfying even if that means it has to be open-ended. But these wishes are not for the editor's gratification, they are for the author and his reader. The author must feel when that final draft goes for copy editing that he has done what he set out to do. If he wanted to make the reader laugh, or cry, feel compassion, feel excitement, has he done everything he can to achieve it? The editor is there to remind him that he will only be writing this particular book once. The editor is there so that the writer can explore thoughts and feelings and ideas, some of which are only implicit in that first draft. It is then the author's absolute, inalienable right to decide which ideas of his own, which editorial suggestions to follow, which to ignore. Sometimes one can help a writer take a short story and turn it into a novel, which happened with Robert Westall's prizewinning **Gulf**, inspired by his horror at the 1991 first Gulf War and the exploitation of boy soldiers in Iraq. Only Bob could have transformed his story into a novel about brotherly love, about those who are too sensitive to others' pain.

I know editors are awfully presumptuous. However carefully I read, however many times, I know I can miss the point or ask for the wrong change. When editing Robert Westall's **Falling into Glory** I said that the parents of Robbie, the schoolboy hero, rugby player, who falls in love with his Latin teacher, seem to turn a blind eye to what is happening in his life. Bob said that I may have had a life where parents were close to their children but not every child is in that category. Presumptuous, too, because which one of us can write at all, let alone write as well as our authors? Which one of us can write a book that the reader will remember into adulthood and make childhood more tolerable or more fun?

The breath of life

Editors are rarely writers; the exception is the glorious American novelist William Maxwell, originally literary editor of the **New Yorker**, whose correspondence with his prolific contributor Frank O'Connor was published in 1966 as **The Happiness of Getting It Down Right**. One hopes that is every editor and author's experience. William Maxwell's **So Long See You Tomorrow** won the American Book Award. He did not mind about sales: 'Why should I let best seller lists spoil a happy life.' Writing about editing he said what should be inscribed above every editor's desk – 'I tried to work so slightly on the manuscript that 10 years later the writer would read his story and not be aware that anybody was involved but him.' When he became a novelist he said, 'I came, as a result of being an editor, to look for whatever was unnecessary in my own writing. After 40 years, what I came to care about most was not style but the breath of life.' That is surely the prime concern of the editor, too. When necessary prescribe the breath of life.

Always, whatever the first draft looks like, whether it is by a first time writer or a Carnegie winner, the editor has faith in the writer. The editor should always begin by praising the good then the dialogue begins. The aim is to make the good even

better and eliminate the blemishes. A writer does not always know where his writing is coming from, where his characters are going. I never cease to be in awe not only of my authors' achievements, but also of the creative process of writing. It is presumptuous but that is the editor's role, to see as reader not author, where it is all leading. The editor is there to encourage a bold idea and give the writer the confidence to write about every subject under the sun. I am lucky to have edited authors whose view of children's books is visionary. As Carlo Gebler, in an interview on the publication of **August 44** has said: 'It also should be borne in mind we all have this wonderful (God given?) tool which is in us in order that we can find out about that which isn't in our experience, namely the imagination. It's there to allow us to see worlds we haven't known and is a critical part of what makes us human and, incidentally, is critical to our adaptation and success as a species.'

The only condition an editor should impose is to remind the author that he is writing for children, who deserve to keep a belief in good defeating evil. But that does not mean the story can defy reality. The editor is there to make sure the writer's voice, his very self, is in every word of every book and there to listen to, every time we open a page on first reading or rereading years later. The editor's purpose is to make sure that the voice continues to speak even when the real world has changed and the writer is dead.

Nothing to do with a six figure advance

The editor is sometimes privileged, although I suspect it is a rare occurrence now, to live many years with a writer's work. Speaking as an editor who has edited Jenny Nimmo and Jamila Gavin for twenty years, Annie Dalton for fifteen, that long journey together, that long dialogue, is how trust is created and how the editor proves the publisher's faith that the early promise will be fulfilled, however long that takes, and the author will some day write the prize winning and best selling book. May I digress here to tell you that many years ago the agent Gina Pollinger spotted the brilliance of two short stories by J M Koetze sent as unsolicited manuscripts and Murray Pollinger suggested she send them to my brother Tom Rosenthal at Secker. Last week Koetze was awarded the 2003 Nobel Prize for Literature. A good editor-author relationship has nothing to do with a six figure advance.

Children's books are at last being recognised as they have always deserved to be. Last year's winner of this award, Philip Pullman, has blazed a trail which can only encourage others. To read **The Times** Wednesday book section recently and see a review of Martin Amis' new novel and, on the facing page, one of David Almond's wonderful **The Fire-Eaters**, without a dividing 'children's fiction' label is what my generation of editors never thought would happen. Eleanor Farjeon would also be delighted. ■

This is a shortened version of Miriam Hodgson's Eleanor Farjeon Award acceptance speech delivered on 7 October 2003. It is published by kind permission of the Children's Book Circle.

Listening to a good book

Since the era of productions of **Larry the Lamb** and **Jennings and Darbishire** on BBC Radio Children's Hour with Uncle Mac and David Davies, there have been huge advances in the availability and quality of books on tape or CD. Could audio books now have more to offer than printed ones? **Angela Macpherson** explores.

In the first recording of children's stories that I owned the narrator was Johnny Morris reading **Thomas, The Tank Engine** on a long play vinyl record. His storytelling skills, with the timing perfected to emphasise the nuances of the text, put other more ordinary storytellings in the shade. My children wore the record out in their enthusiasm and I became convinced of the importance of audio story as a medium.

Virtuosos leading the way

The most recent bunch of winners at the Spoken Word Publishing Association Awards

(SWPA) highlights the huge advances in the quality of production of stories on cassette or CD that have occurred during the past few years. This year's overall winner of the Spoken Word Audio of the Year, which also won the children's section and a prize for production, was **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time** by Mark Haddon. This remarkable piece of writing has already received much acclaim as a book. The reader, Ben Tibber (aged 12), manages brilliantly, by reading the story in a monotone, to reflect Christopher's autistic mind and inability to express emotion. Meanwhile a cast of actors cleverly interject with conversation, thereby lightening the story and conveying the nature of the relationship between Christopher and the outside world. Normally a story reading delivered in a monotone would be considered lacking but monotonous this is not. The whole production takes the book to a level beyond that which could be reached by reading alone.

Reviews rarely mention the talented people behind these audio productions. Mike Carrington Wood, producer of **The Curious Incident**, tells me that he has been working in children's spoken word since its conception in the early 70s. At that time EMI had excellent recordings on the Listen for Pleasure label. These and other good productions by Argo were sold largely through record shops. Later this market was swamped by cheap productions and EMI decided to withdraw. The public's perception of stories on cassette was being lowered to the level that doing it yourself would be just as good!

Helen Nicoll was a pioneer of quality spoken word productions. She started Cover to Cover Cassettes which was briefly taken over by Puffin and then by the BBC where it is

flourishing. It is Cover to Cover that has made such a brilliant success of Stephen Fry's readings of the **Harry Potter** stories. They are proof that price does not necessarily deter people from buying long spoken word recordings. **Harry Potter** customers return again and again for another 9-12 hours of entertainment at £20-£30 a shot. Stephen Fry's talent is that he can provide a separate voice for every character in the **Harry Potter** stories, and maintain them throughout. This is evidence that the audio book has become more than a reading and is now a performance with some real virtuosos leading the way.

Book publishers who contract out audio production to specialists now dominate the market, and sales are mainly through bookshops. Often the style of production, the choice of reader and so on are left entirely to the producer. Some publishers like to take a closer interest in the process. The producers I talked to for this article all have titles on this year's SWPA prize winners list and they have produced some of the best children's spoken word recordings over a period of many years. Peter Rinne, a freelance producer, and Nicholas Jones of Strathmore Publishing who specialise in spoken word production, both feel that the huge changes in technology have contributed to improvements in both production style and quality. Complicated editing, music production and sound effects can be done with relatively inexpensive equipment and a computer. Production costs have become more viable in terms of sales and the SWPA Awards (originally called The Talkies) have raised the profile of audio books. For Nicholas Jones, 'the best recordings are those where you become unaware of being read to'. The voice recording however is still dependent on the skill of the

actor to make the story sound fresh and 'performed' rather than simply 'read'.

A cast of actors

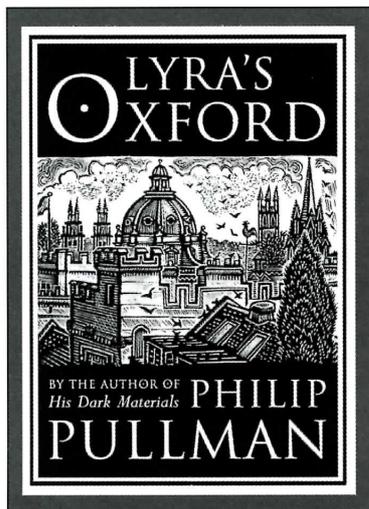
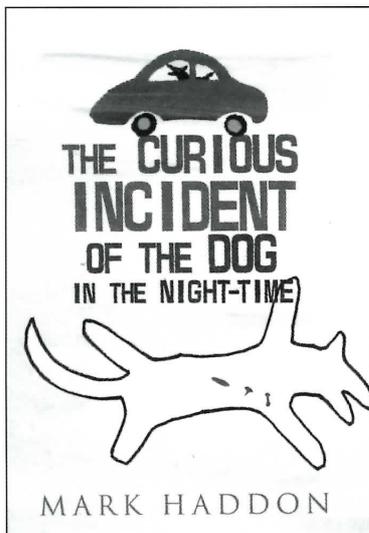
The use of a cast of actors can be very successful. A recent excellent example is Philip Pullman's **Lyra's Oxford**, a short bridging novel between 'His Dark Materials' and a longer forthcoming novel. The printed book is delightful on its own with its wonderful engravings by John Lawrence. On the CD Philip Pullman himself narrates the story with a cast of actors to dramatise the spoken parts. Brilliantly conceived and well cast, the recording adds a further dimension to both the text and illustrations.

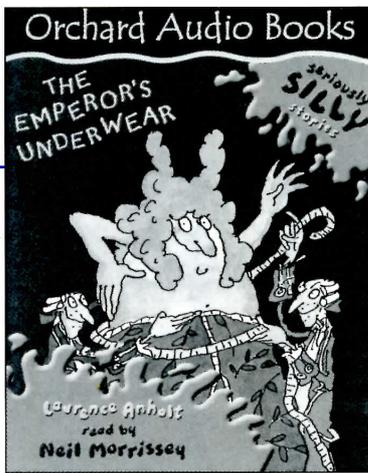
A talented actor who can play different parts may produce an even better effect than a cast of many as he/she can control the pace. An example is Anton Lesser performing **The Ruby in the Smoke** by Philip Pullman. Lesser's characterisations are superb and include an awesome range of voices, both male and female. Unfortunately there are too few actors who can do this.

Younger children's audio

A ground breaking title in younger children's audio is **The Gruffalo** book and tape pack. This brilliant picture book about a mouse scaring a monster is given an extra dimension by Imelda Staunton's inspired reading and the excellent sound effects. Macmillan followed this production with other recordings using a similar format and Julia Donaldson's **Room on the Broom** and **Monkey Puzzle** both won SWPA prizes this year in the under 7s category.

Other notable recent award winners are the recordings of **Horrid Henry** stories by Francesca Simon which have to be heard to be believed! Sound effects and jangling music





recordings of Kevin Crossley-Holland's **Arthur** trilogy is **Arthur, King of the Middle March**. It has been carefully abridged by Kati Nicholl and very thoughtfully produced by Peter Rinne and Nicholas Jones. Evocative music takes the listener straight to the heart of the location where Samuel West brilliantly interprets the text.

Audio in the classroom

It is a pity that the use of spoken word recordings in the classroom has been largely pushed out by the demands of the literacy hour in the junior school. However, there is still considerable demand for good recordings in the early years, where children often use headsets to sit and listen in peace with or without the book alongside. Now that the DfES is realising that listening skills are important, perhaps audio books will become more popular in school. Their use for learning to read or to encourage new readers is an important use of the product. However the quality of production that is now possible should also give audio books the right to exist on their own merits.

Books on radio

Oneword Radio is a digital radio station dedicated exclusively to books, plays, comedy and discussion. There is an increasing number of people who can access it. (If you've got digital TV you can tune in.) It provides another outlet for the spoken word devoting 23 hours a week to children's programmes. Jo Forshaw runs these programmes and selects the best book recordings from the publishers who are leading the field. For example, the early part of 2004 will see serialisations of the 'Alex Rider' series (**Skeleton Key** etc. by Anthony Horowitz), Laurence Anholt's **Seriously Silly Stories** and **The Secret Life of Sally Tomato** by Jean Ure.

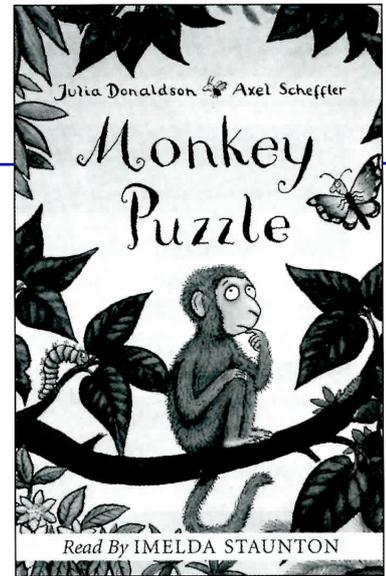
Lots of good recordings are now available on the market. The difficulty for the buyer is having to select purely on the basis of the cover. Reviews like those in **Books for Keeps** can help but overall coverage is thin.

With advances in technology we are likely to see even more innovation in production and perhaps a move into non-fiction, an area that has been largely neglected to date. The BBC has had some success with recording **The Horrible Histories**. Whilst they are well recorded, they do not work as well as the books, which are so easy to dip into.

Absorption in story

Many parents whose children have benefited from listening to good spoken word recordings have nothing but praise for the medium. Some comment that audio books have helped their children change from being uninterested in books to being voracious readers. Audio books can be a lifeline for dyslexic children who can gain an excellent vocabulary and understanding of narrative without the trials of reading. And lots of drivers already know that good recordings can take the tedium out of long car journeys and maybe even cool road rage!

Every teacher wants their learner readers, whether they are listening or reading, to become absorbed in story. And for many children, listening to a story is a lot easier than reading. With all the distractions of deciphering text, holding the book, turning pages etc taken away, the child is left with the



sound of the words and the pictures in their mind. Understanding the text and improving vocabulary become effortless. Sadly, children are often expected to read to themselves as soon as they are able. Family storytelling can be abandoned and some children can find reading a book alone too much to cope with. But listening can be an experience that surpasses reading and it is, after all, where all story originates. ■

Angela Macpherson is a children's book and audio consultant.

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portray the central character in more than just words. Listening, you feel that you are in Henry's house witnessing events. Henry is particularly horrid and Perfect Peter makes you squirm through Miranda Richardson's perceptive narration. **Horrid Henry and the Stinkbomb** won gold in the 2003 SWPA awards for children of 6 and under.

Poetry has always provided good recording material. **The Curse of the Vampire's Socks** is a collection of poems by Terry Jones. Some moralising, others just silly, Terry's performance of his own work sparkles with specially composed musical interludes. As well as winning an SWPA award in the poetry section, this recording is great fun and entertainment for anyone aged 7-70. More great listens for younger children are the **Seriously Silly Stories** by Laurence Anholt. Neil Morrissey is perfectly cast for telling **The Emperor's Underwear** and sound effects and music bring the scenes to life. Set in a country where no one wears clothes, this is a parody of the traditional fairy tale that turns the story on its head and will have listeners giggling.

The most recent of the

Audio books discussed

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time, Mark Haddon, read by Ben Tibber and cast, Random House, 1 85686 788 9, £16.99 six CDs

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, J K Rowling, read by Stephen Fry, BBC Cover to Cover, 1 85549 394 2, £21.99 six cassettes, 1 85549 670 4, £37.99 seven CDs

Lyra's Oxford, Philip Pullman, read by the author and cast, Random House, 1 85686 850 8, £9.99 CD

The Ruby in the Smoke, Philip Pullman, read by Anton Lesser, BBC Cover to Cover, 1 85549 139 7, £13.99 four cassettes, 1 85549 047 1, £29.99 six CDs

The Gruffalo, Julia Donaldson, read by Imelda Staunton, Macmillan, 0 333 90722 1, £7.99 book and tape

Room on the Broom, Julia Donaldson, read by Josie Lawrence, Macmillan, 1 405 00042 2, £5.99 song book and tape

Monkey Puzzle, Julia Donaldson, read by Imelda Staunton, Macmillan, 1 405 00602 1, £7.99 book and tape

Horrid Henry and the Stinkbomb, Francesca Simon, read by Miranda Richardson, Orion, 0 75285 619 7, £4.99 cassette, 0 75285 671 5, £7.99 book and tape

The Curse of the Vampire's Socks, Terry Jones, read by the author, Orion, 0 75285 366 X, £6.99 cassette

The Emperor's Underwear (Seriously Silly Stories), Laurence Anholt, read by Neil Morrissey, Orchard, 1 84362 053 7, £4.99 cassette

Arthur, King of the Middle March, Kevin Crossley-Holland, read by Samuel West, Orion, 0 75286 028 3, £9.99 two cassettes

NEWS

Poet Benjamin Zephaniah hit the headlines in November when he revealed that he had turned down Tony Blair's offer of an OBE (Order of the British Empire). Perhaps Blair hadn't read Zephaniah's poem, 'Bought and Sold' in which he tells us 'Smart big awards and prize money / Is killing off black poetry / It's not censors or dictators that are cutting up our art. / The lure of meeting royalty / And touching high society / Is damping creativity and eating at our heart.'

PRIZES

Nestlé Smarties Book Prize 2003

The winners are: Ursula Jones and Russell Ayto for **The Witch's Children and the Queen** (Orchard) for the 5 & Under age category; S F Said for **Varjak Paw**, illustrated by Dave McKean (David Fickling Books) for the 6-8 age category; and David Almond for **The Fire Eaters** (Hodder) for the 9-11 age category.

Booktrust Teenage Prize 2003

The winner of the newly established Booktrust Teenage Prize, which aims to recognise and celebrate contemporary teenage fiction, is **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time** by Mark Haddon (David Fickling). The prize website www.bookheads.org.uk carries comments and reviews from young readers.

The IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award

The Award for 2004, initiated by the International Board on Books for Young People and sponsored by the Japanese newspaper company, Asahi Shimbun, has been given to the First Words in Print project from South Africa. This project is promoted by the Centre for the Book in Cape Town and is sponsored by local institutions and organizations involved in the production of children's books in South Africa. It has been praised for its ambitious but effective promotion of literacy among South African children and their families and its commitment to the development of a national literature for young children in their mother tongue.

MacArthur Fellowship

Peter Sis, author of **The Tree of Life** (Walker), is one of this year's winners of the US MacArthur Fellowship which gives the recipients \$100,000 a year for five years to spend as they wish.

• OBITUARY •

Charles Causley

24 August 1917 - 4 November 2003

Liz Attenborough writes...

The children's book world was saddened to hear of the death of Charles Causley, aged 86. I first came across him as a junior editorial assistant wanting to make use of one of his poems in an anthology. He was always utterly charming, whether a junior or senior member of staff, and made friends with the illustrators who worked on his books. He was also encouraging to other poets, and must have been an inspiring teacher to the primary school pupils he taught after the war, through until 1976. Charles Causley was born and lived most of his life in Launceston, Cornwall, so our meetings were rare. He wasn't one to talk much about work in progress, but I remember with delight when the completed manuscript for **Early in the Morning** (1986, winner of the Signal Poetry Award) arrived on my desk. His poetry for children is much anthologised, with 'I Saw a Jolly Hunter' perhaps the most frequently reproduced, and he produced over 40 books, including plays, translations and anthologies. He was awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry in 1967, and the CBE in 1986.

USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

No.30

myBOOKSmag
15 Scots Drive, Wokingham,
Berkshire RG41 3XF
e-mail: guy@newbooksmag.com

Subscription is £7.00 for 5 issues, but for a free introductory copy, send or e-mail your name and address.

myBOOKSmag is a 24 page, A4 full colour magazine for 5-7 year olds. With a mix of book-related activities and extracts from recently published titles, it sets out to enhance the reading experience. With reviews written by its readers (sometimes with the assistance of a grown-up) it aims to reflect what children of this age enjoy reading.

my
BOOKSmag

The current issue includes words searches, how to draw cartoon characters, Rita the Rescuer and her adventures saving those in need, **The Secret Life of Ms Wiz** and what her author thinks of her! There are poems from Ted Hughes's **The Cat and the Cuckoo** and a Jez Alborough Q&A where readers ask their own questions. And, of course, there's the review section - where young readers can see what other readers thought of the books they might enjoy.

FELLOWSHIP

Eileen Wallace Research Fellowship in Children's Literature

The Eileen Wallace Research Fellowship in Children's Literature, valued up to \$5,000 (CDN) per annum, invites proposals for research and scholarship using the resources of the University of New Brunswick's Eileen Wallace Children's Literature Collection.

Proposals are welcomed from anyone who can provide evidence of competence and scholarly background and outline a practical and worthwhile project using the resources of the Collection. Application forms are available from the Office of the Dean of Education, University of New Brunswick, PO Box 4400, Fredericton, NB, E3B 5A3, Canada, tel: (506) 453-4862, or on the website <http://www.lib.unb.ca/collections/clc/>.

Deadline for application is 1 March of any year, with fellowship to be awarded after 1 July of the same year.

• OBITUARY •

Tessa Krailing

Felicity Fair Thompson writes...

All those who knew Tessa Krailing will be sad to hear of her death at the age of 68 in October after a long battle with cancer. Tessa started her career as a production secretary at the BBC but found London claustrophobic. Back in Sussex where she had grown up, she began teaching English and art to children. In 1980 she wrote her first book, **A Dinosaur Called Minerva**. With this success Tessa decided to concentrate full time on her writing and moved to the Isle of Wight. Two radio plays and a children's play for the Dramarama series on TVS followed, then **How to Write For Children**, and 'Wellington Square', an educational reading scheme for children with special needs, and over the years countless more books for young readers and teenagers. Children, she believed, are an honest and appreciative audience, and deserve the best. She loved the opportunity to meet them at schools and libraries all over the country, and typically she left some of her royalties to a children's charity. She often said she was writing for the child inside herself and, for me, her success as a person sprang from her talent for sharing and celebrating the laughter and excitement of children.

EVENTS

Words About Pictures

Saturday 6 March, 10.30–16.00, at The Learning Centre, Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 1LA

A one-day seminar and workshop for teachers, librarians and children's book reviewers, in association with the Quentin Blake Gallery of Illustration and **Books for Keeps**, in which participants will explore ways of discussing and writing about the visual aspect of children's books, with Quentin Blake and other artists and specialists. The day will include a visit to the exhibition Quentin Blake: Fifty Years of Illustration at the Gilbert Collection, Somerset House. Fee: £100 including tea/coffee and sandwich lunch. For further information/booking form, please telephone The Learning Centre on 020 7420 9406.

World Book Day 2004

Readers across the world will have the opportunity to chat online with J K Rowling when she launches the second

World Book Day Online Festival on Thursday 4 March. Six specially produced World Book Day £1 books for six different age ranges by leading children's authors will be available and can be exchanged for the £1 World Book Day Book Token. The Tokens will be given out at schools and pre-school organisations across the country, thanks to Book Tokens Ltd, principal sponsor of World Book Day 2004, and to participating booksellers who redeem the tokens at their own expense. Further information on the many events that will take place from www.worldbookday.com

4th Annual National Storytelling Week

31 January – 7 February 2004

Following the success of last year's events (over 350 of them nationwide!) the organisers hope that as many people as possible will join in the celebration of one of the oldest traditions of the world. For further information or if you would like to take part, call Del Reid on 020 8866 4232 or Tina Bilbe 0118 9351381.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

More Christmas Nights

Dear Mistress Editor, ma'am

Not all the books in Whitaker's regularly updated microfiche Books in Print are actually books in print. Their presence is however as it were balanced by the books in print that don't put in an appearance. Among the latter is a version of **The Night Before Christmas** which ought to have been included in my back page article in the last BfK, a pop-up rendering by Robert Sabuda, published in 2002 by Simon & Schuster at £19.99 [sic] – ISBN 0 689 83683 X. Geoff Fox, who is one of your pop-up correspondents, was kind enough to alert me to the volume of which he has a high opinion. It is indeed wondrously elaborate, unusual in its use of white – snow-white – card and with secondary pop-ups opening out from the leading edges of the leaves. The whole of Moore's text is there, but such is the distraction of the movables, which need very careful handling ('Not suitable for children under 36 months' say the publishers, quaintly – 'Due to small parts') that it may get overlooked. Still, perhaps everybody now has it off by heart and it does lend itself to dramatic recitation so long as you avoid the clumping rhythms.

Brian Alderson

unclearly@uk2.net

Hal's Reading Diary

Hal is nearly three and bedtime reading is being disrupted by what look like Oedipal issues. His father, **Roger Mills**, explains.

A colleague of mine was recently telling me how bizarre and implausible she found Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex when she first encountered it. Her experience was pretty close to mine, and I'm pretty sure that if I hadn't become a father or gone into analysis myself the theory would have remained abstract at best, and absurdly far-fetched in more sceptical moments.

In broad outline what Freud argued was that in early childhood there is a pivotal psychological crisis. A child wants to have exclusive possession (and this includes an infantile version of sexual possession) of the opposite sex parent, and to get rid of the other parent who is seen as a rival. If all goes well the complex is resolved by the child who, through fear of retaliation from the parent rival, gives up the desire for the opposite sex parent and opts instead to identify with the same sex parent. So a little boy gives up wanting to have his mother all to himself and starts to see himself as his father's son instead.

So what has this got to do with Hal and reading books? Well simply that Hal seems to be in the throes of what looks exactly like an Oedipal struggle at the moment, and this is impacting greatly on the bedtime reading ritual. Most of the time these days Hal refuses point blank to have me read to him.

'No, Mummy do it,' he says if I try to settle down in the big armchair in his room and pick up a book. In earlier diaries I've described times in his second year when Hal refused to let me read to him and demanded his mother. At that point I suggested that what was going on was an increased anxiety about the safety of the world,

ushered in by increased cognitive powers, which led Hal to seek the security that only his mother could represent. The refusal to have me as bedtime reader now has a different quality. It feels as if he wants to exclude me from something that is special and that he shares exclusively with his mother.

There's plenty of more overtly Oedipal behaviour too. Hal has been coming into our bed in the early morning for some time, but recently he has started claiming some rights there too. 'No,' he'll say to me with great firmness. 'That's not your bed. That's Mummy's bed and Hal's bed.' Time and again Jo and I correct him and most days he will eventually concede defeat and admit that his bed is in his room, and this bed is Mummy and Daddy's. But the next day it is as if the debate never happened and Hal is staking his claim once more. 'You go to work,' he offers as a solution to the potential overcrowding and back we go to putting the record straight.

Hal's suggestion I disappear to work actually raises an element Freud doesn't really look at. I've noticed that at times when I'm around more, and particularly if we have been doing things together in the garden or about the house, Hal can often be persuaded to let me read to him. It is as if an afternoon, say, sweeping leaves together, enables him to identify with me more and he doesn't seek his mother quite so ardently. The power of Oedipal desire for mother is, unquestionably to my mind, a hugely powerful force in a young boy's life. But perhaps anger at Dad's constant absence plays its part too.

Roger Mills is a Psychodynamic Counsellor.



I wish I'd written...

Meg Cabot on a book that makes her laugh...

It's not easy to make other authors laugh – believe me, I've tried! That's why I wish I were the creator of 'the Canadian Adrian Mole' Alice MacLeod, the teen diarist of *Alice, I Think*, by Susan Juby (due out on your side of the pond as *Blame It on the Hobbit* in July 2004, from Collins Books). Alice has managed to provoke chuckles from even my most serious author friends. This is a heroine who has had the grave misfortune of being raised by parents so loving – and clueless – that they allow her to dress as a Hobbit for her first day of grade one (complete with 'a rucksack of cakes' to share with her new friends). It's no wonder she's immediately beaten to a pulp by her classmates. Forced to spend the next ten years being home-schooled for her own physical safety, Alice only agrees to give high school a try out of concern for her therapist's feelings. Through Alice's dry-witted, hilarious

journal entries, we are taken on a riotous ride that includes forays into thrift store fashion; Sea Monkeys; making out in moon boots; and much, much more. And somehow, Susan Juby managed to write a sequel that's even funnier than the first book. Somebody needs to give that author a tiara!

Alice, I Think by Susan Juby is to be published by Collins Children's Books as *Blame It on the Hobbit* in July (0 00 716359 2, £5.99). The US edition can be ordered from Amazon.

Meg Cabot's latest book is *Princess Diaries 5: Give Me Five* (Macmillan, 0 330 42046 1, £9.99).



Chosen by Year 5 pupils (9–10 year-olds) from Abbotsford School, Kenilworth, Warwickshire

GOOD READS

Thanks to Irene Hirons,
Year 5 teacher, and
Anne O'Brien, class teacher

Barry Trotter and the Shameless Parody

Michael Gerber, Gollancz, 0 575 07454 X, £6.99 hbk

Barry Trotter and Lon Measly are in their twenties and still at the famous Hogwash School for Wizards. J G Rollins has written some books about Barry and how a Hollywood film is being made. Some of Barry's admirers, the Muddle Girls, have come to Hogwash to take part in it for souvenirs. Barry must stop the movie and the book is about the thrilling adventures he has while trying to do this. Barry travels to America and meets several exciting characters and the reader is kept in suspense at all times.

In the end, the movie is released but Barry manages to banish the Muddle fans. The headmaster at Hogwash retires and Lon takes his place. I thought this book was a very funny parody of *Harry Potter*. Some of the comparisons between the characters are hilarious. However, you need to have read some *Harry Potter* books to enjoy it thoroughly. *Sam Stern*

Comet

Mary Hoffman,
Franklin Watts 'Pet Pals',
1 86039 613 5, o/p

This story is about a kitten that falls from the sky. Christopher



Left to right: Sam Stern, Naranjun Bhandal, Tyrone Thiara and Emily Parker.

finds the kitten in his back garden: he then takes it to the vet's for a check up. The kitten was lucky that it was not injured and was well.

Christopher named the kitten Comet. Towards the end of the holiday, Christopher and his parents asked the head teacher if Christopher could take Comet to school. This was because Christopher's parents went to work. On the first day back, Mum took Christopher and Comet to school. This is where the fun begins!

I enjoyed reading this book because it was exciting, funny, strange and different to all the other books I have read. At times the book made me laugh especially when Christopher saw Comet flying in the air. Mary Hoffman, the author, has described the story in simple words, which makes it easy to understand. I recommend this book to everyone!

Naranjun Bhandal

Jacqueline Hyde

Robert Swindells,
Corgi Yearling,
0 440 86329 5, £4.99 pbk

If you are getting bored of all the Roald Dahl and J K Rowling books and are in for a bit of adventure, this is the book to read. It is by Robert Swindells. He has been a Carnegie medal-winning author.

It is about a girl who has always been a good girl, until the moment she finds a little glass bottle in her grandma's attic. Suddenly Jacqueline's life changes. Now she is joining in with the town's roughest gang. To get into the gang Jacqueline has to go on to the roof of the school at home time and stick her tongue out at the Headmaster. She has lots of adventures, dreams and nightmares. My favourite characters are Craig, the gang's leader and the Headmaster. *Tyrone Thiara*

Lucy the Lonely Kitten

Jenny Dale, Macmillan,
0 330 37457 5, £2.99 pbk

Lucy the Lonely Kitten is written by Jenny Dale. Jenny Dale writes about animals big and small, but this book is about a kitten who is bought by a girl called Charlie because her sister, Sam, has gone back to University. However, the kitten escapes from Charlie's house and goes back to the Cattery from where she was bought and sneaks under the fence to cuddle up to her sister who is called Rosie.

When Charlie finds out that the kitten is missing she tells her mother who rings the Cattery. Charlie and her mother go back to the Cattery and when they get there they find Lucy and Rosie curled up together in their cage. Charlie realises that Lucy is missing her sister just as much as she is missing her own and she and her mum decide to take both kittens home with them. When they arrive home they find that Sam has returned home as she is missing Charlie.

I enjoyed this book very much because it has a happy ending and it reminded me of my own sister, Lisa, who has just gone to University herself. *Emily Parker*

BfK REVIEWS

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

RATING

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

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

REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

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

Nick Attwood teaches English at the Dragon School, Oxford.

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

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

Jill Bennett is the author of *Learning to Read with Picture Books*. Formerly Early Years Coordinator and teacher at an infant school, she is now doing freelance and consultancy work.

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Adrian Jackson is General Adviser - English, West Sussex.

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

Rudolf Loewenstein is a Dominican friar working in a London parish. He also teaches part time in a primary school.

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

Shereen Pandit is a writer and teacher.

Val Randall is Head of English and Literacy Coordinator at a Pupil Referral Unit in Blackburn, 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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REVIEWS Books About Children's Books

A Double Life; a biography of Charles and Mary Lamb

★★★

Sarah Burton, Viking, 456pp,
0 670 89399 4, £16.99 hbk

There was a famous party at Benjamin Robert Haydon's studio in December 1818 when Charles Lamb, who was happily tipsey, made wicked fun of a pompous guest, a Comptroller of Stamps, in the presence of such luminaries as Keats, Wordsworth, Landseer, and the great connoisseur Thomas Monkhouse. The occasion is emblematic not just of Lamb's

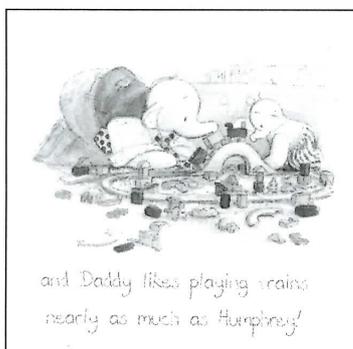
joyous, but not altogether stable temperament, but also of his central position in the cultural goings-on of his time. He and his sister Mary knew everybody and, despite problematic circumstances, extended generous hospitality and friendship across a great swathe of contemporary social and intellectual classes.

The record of these interconnecting relationships, especially as preserved in memoirs and published correspondence, is huge and imposes severe strain on intending biographers. EV Lucas – still the best authority on the Lambs – took two volumes in 1905 for his *Life of Charles* in order fully to examine and display the life that was going on

around his subject. Sarah Burton, in this new attempt at a biography, does not move with such easy freedom, and although she has all the diligence of a graduate student, diligently docketing her sources (40 pages of apparatus to 383 of text), her step by step account of events holds little in the way of a warm authorial response. Undoubtedly – in the spirit of the age – she has set out to redress what she perceives as the comparative neglect of Mary in previous studies, but the unity of the Lambs' 'double life' has always been inescapable and only occasionally, chiefly in her careful consideration of Mary's illness, does she depart from well-trodden paths.

The speed with which she has to pass over many events has been particularly injurious to her treatment of Charles and Mary's writing for children which can be accounted one of the outstanding achievements of their double life. She manifestly has no knowledge of either the bibliography of the books themselves (no Foxon in the references for instance) or of the vibrant contemporary publishing scene, while her remarks on emergent theories about children's reading are a crass reductio. As is usually the case in 'literary studies' children's books are not deemed worth the expense of too much research. BA

REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant



Humphrey's Playtime

0 14 138007 1

Humphrey's Colours

0 14 138011 X

Humphrey's Family

0 14 138010 1

Humphrey's Garden

0 14 138009 8

★★★

Sally Hunter, Puffin, 14pp,
£3.99 each board

First published in a larger format, these Humphrey books are now republished as small format board books. The series presents aspects of childhood experience through the eyes of a two- to three-year-old elephant and his family. This elephant concept works exceptionally well, particularly in displaying the tender clumsiness of early childhood. Each page is a clearly considered portrait of childhood activity. This sometimes gives the impression of a series of overworked studies rather than a book designed for children. This is evident in the author's use of colour, which is at best muted. In *Humphrey's Colours* the images lack the vibrancy required to clearly demonstrate categories of colour. Rather, we are presented with pastel tones and dampened hues. The text is good for children of toddler age but it has clearly been a secondary consideration in the making of these books. Often consisting of a single statement, each double spread cuts the text in half, stalling the flow of text. The style of illustration is also suited to the larger page size as the images occupy only the central area

of each page and therefore become very small.

Overall the Humphrey series provokes delight as a considered presentation of the child's mind. This charming series of books will be attractive to adults and should also be enjoyed by young children. VRE

Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★

Annie Kubler, trans. Qamar Zamani, Mantra, Urdu and English, 12pp, 1 84444 157 1, £6.50 board

Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes is a well-loved and widely used action song and this particular board book both provides clear visuals and text for it.

Kubler's illustrations of babies have clearly been influenced by the style of Helen Oxenbury early board books which I remember enjoying with my own children. Each page features a smiling, chubby baby showing the relevant action (touching head etc.) and it's a nice touch to have their soft toys beside them performing the same. The pages for eyes, ears, mouth and nose feature items relating to these parts of the body – books, rattles, beaker, bowl of food, flowers... The soft pencil outlines filled in rich, warm colours make for appealing pictures to accompany the dual text. A helpful back cover provides the musical score and song in full. This is a title that will be popular both at home and in early year classes. (Available in 14 dual language editions.) UC

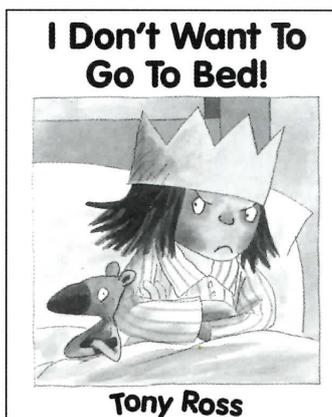
Minnie and her Baby Brother

★★★

Melanie Walsh, Walker, 14pp,
0 7445 9275 5, £6.99 novelty
hbk

Many books have been published which tackle the subject of a new baby entering the family. This one is told from the point of view of three-year-old Minnie. The age gap between Minnie and her brother is one commonly chosen by families and many young children will be able to relate to the observations that

Minnie makes about the differences between herself and her brother. Walsh has made the decision to let the baby remain nameless and this feels somewhat unnatural. The bold illustrations make use of a collage-like effect. They mimic the drawing style of young children in their simple two-dimensional rendering. The comparisons that Minnie makes between herself and her brother are emphasised through the use of a different flap on each page. These work well in most cases but occasionally fail to contribute anything new or exciting to the book. The pages themselves are sturdy and designed to withstand constant exploration. Overall, this book presents the relationship between young siblings in a manner with which most three-year-olds will easily relate. VRE



I Don't Want To Go To Bed!

★★★★★

Tony Ross, Andersen, 32pp,
1 84270 223 8, £9.99 hbk

The demanding Little Princess is back, presenting a perfectly reasonable argument against going to bed in the face of adult certainty that 'Bed is good for you'. Trying all the usual ploys, she finally falls asleep in the cat basket, waking up exhausted and, at last, ready for bed!

Ross long ago perfected the facial expression and body language of our heroine and her household, and the sparse detail which defines the scene. Clear expressive watercolour

and a few confident lines leave no doubt as to who is in charge – the wish fulfilment of the child as the parents buy into her demands, the hint of desperation in the king's confident assertion that there are no monsters in the wardrobe. Aficionados will be glad to see that the King and his admiral remain as childish as ever, the Queen still sports her headscarf, and the Princess's tonsils are still in good working order. One of the best in a long line of successful titles. AG

Goodnight, Sleep Tight!

★★★

Claire Freedman, ill. Rory Tyger, Little Tiger Press, 32pp,
1 85430 843 2, £9.99 hbk

A splendid bedtime book for grandparents to share with grandchildren, with the 'I don't feel a bit sleepy' issue. Grandma and Baby Bear go through all the tuck-in-with-toys, milky drink, sing lullabies, rocking in arms, but Baby still does not feel sleepy. Here the story breaks away from the familiar, with counting fireflies and walking down to the apple garden. It is only when Grandma starts telling stories of Baby's *Mummy's* not-feeling-sleepy nights that a return to his bed and soft words do the trick. For Grandma remembers that she used to stroke his mother's head, give her a special goodnight kiss... The pictures are gentle, in soft, warm colours, and there is pleasing, comforting security. GB

The Orchard Book of Favourite Rhymes and Verse

POETRY ★★★

Chosen by Margaret Mayo, various illustrators, Orchard,
96pp, 1 84362 305 6, £7.99 pbk

A lively collection comprising some 40 poems, jingles, counting rhymes, action rhymes and songs. There are nursery favourites such as 'The Wheels on the Bus' and Carolyn Sherwin Bailey's 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears', nonsense verse by the likes of Lear, Nash and Milligan, and contemporary poets are represented by, among others, John Agard, Grace

Nichols and Tony Mitton alongside the more classic Milne, de la Mare, Hood and Rossetti. The mood is largely upbeat and many of the choices are highly 'join-in-able', though there is also the occasional more contemplative offering such as Kipling's 'The White Seal'.

With no fewer than 22 illustrators used there is a great variety of style and page layout so, assuredly this makes it a great book for dipping into whenever there are a few minutes to fill. Such are the pleasures to be found therein however, one could easily find those minutes stretching out into much longer sessions. A book to foster a love of language – both verbal and visual – at home or at school. **JB**

So Many Babies

★★★★

Martina Selway, Red Fox, 32pp, 0 09 940769 8, £4.99 pbk

This is a story told in rhyme about the familiar nursery tale figure, the old woman who lived in a shoe, but in this variant she has a surplus of rooms and no children. She's a badger, and she wants babies to look after. She sits in her rocking chair, knitting at her feet: we are in nostalgia land. The first baby she acquires is a ginger tom cat. The number 1 indicates that this is a counting book, and there are lots of single items to count on the page: a grandfather clock, a boiled egg, a curly umbrella... The second baby is a mouse, and the scenario sewing, with two of everything to count (but you have to search for them). Three is a bear and a picnic, four a pig and the seaside. By six we're getting busy with a fox and a rabbit and cake making. Ten is mayhem, then we jump to 20, and double it to 40. There's lots to look at and count, but goodness knows what children make of this never-never land where pigs wear petticoats. **SE**

My First Day at Nursery

★★★★

Becky Edwards, ill. Anthony Flintoft, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 6114 1, £4.99 pbk

This is a delightful book, full of comfort about that first day at nursery. This little girl is nervous, and she wants her mother. She tells

the story herself, and the very gentle illustrations show just how she feels. As the friendly lady takes her hand and leads her away from mum, she cries out, 'I want my mum.' As she is drawn into successive activities, she cries out, 'I want my...', 'I want...', 'I, until she is completely absorbed, sharing all the new experiences at nursery. When mum returns to collect her, she cries, 'I want to stay at nursery.' Once home, she reflects that tomorrow she will be able to go again, and she JUST CAN'T WAIT! A book for every playgroup and nursery collection, and for home shelves too. **GB**

Cluck O'Clock

★★★★

Kes Gray, ill. Mary McQuillan, Hodder, 32pp, 0 340 86604 7, £9.99 hbk

This book tells of a day and a night in the eventful lives of cockerel Colin and the hens down on the farm. Their busy schedule begins at 4 o'clock and 'hends' around midnight for some shut-eye after Colin sees off the marauding fox, Olga, with the aid of a feather and some well-aimed dirt.

The hens' diverting pastimes include strolling, ambushing minibeasts, pooping on ducks and cloud gazing. All are hilariously documented in cleverly constructed rhyme appropriately punctuated with egg-shaped 'clucks'. Using a drag brush finish, McQuillan offers some interesting perspectives on the chubby chickens and the events of their day. **JB**

You Do!

★★★★

Kes Gray, ill. Nick Sharratt, Bodley Head, 32pp, 0 370 32586 9, £10.99 hbk

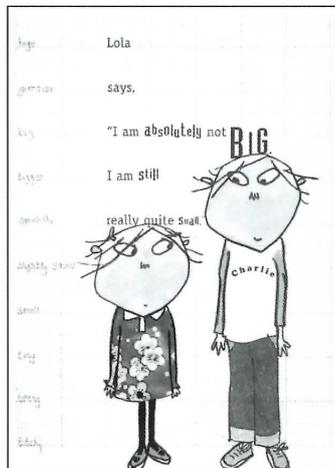
Another book about Daisy, to follow the hugely successful *Eat Your Peas*. Daisy's Mum is keen to teach her good manners, and the book follows a tight format, repeated until the final twist. Mum tells Daisy she SHOULD'N'T do something, and Daisy replies, 'You do.' Each right hand page is a full-page illustration, Sharratt leaving little to the imagination, for yes, Mum is indeed doing all these things! The resolution

is just lovely, showing the close, affectionate relationship between Daisy and mum. A thoroughly enjoyable book, one young children will adore to read with mum and early readers will love to read by themselves! **GB**

I Am Too Absolutely Small for School

★★★★

Lauren Child, Orchard, 32pp, 1 84121 354 3, £10.99 hbk



Lola is deemed 'nearly quite big enough to go to school' but Lola isn't so sure. Concerned big brother Charlie tries to convince her that she will learn a lot, but Lola has answers for all of his arguments: she can count to ten and doesn't need to count any higher as she never eats more than ten biscuits in one go, she doesn't need to learn to write because talking on the telephone is 'more friendly and straightaway'. Eventually Charlie convinces Lola that she must go to school to reassure her invisible friend Soren Lorensen who is also starting school. But after Lola's first day it is Charlie who is anxious. He can't track her down, and eventually finds her at home with a new friend, drinking pink milk.

Child gives a simple story about starting school extra layers of complexity and humour. Some of this will be above the heads of school beginners, but they will enjoy much of the interplay, and the added dimensions make it a book to be

shared with older siblings who will get more of the jokes. Child's post-modernist approach demands that we look carefully at the details in her books, and younger readers are often better at spotting what is textually unsaid. For instance, Charlie discourages Lola from wearing her alligator suit to school, saying 'for school, stripes are nice', and only the observant reader will notice that in the first day at school pictures Lola is wearing stripes. The typography is playful, blending and weaving around the illustrations which incorporate a mixture of consciously naïve hand-drawn figures and objects and coloured paper cut-outs blended together with the aid of computer imaging. This disrupts the reader's conventional, linear method of reading text and image. By doing so, it provides not only an introduction to beginning school, but also an introduction to the playful, parodic and brilliantly disruptive picture books which children will (we hope) encounter throughout their school days. **VC**

The Ballet Class

★★★★

Adèle Geras, ill. Shelagh McNicholas, Orchard, 32pp, 1 84362 095 2, £10.99 hbk

McNicholas's assured draughtsmanship and evident familiarity with her subject matter make for a delightful accompaniment to Geras' text. The movements of the children as they practise their curtsies, pliés and jetés, are beautifully observed, full of humour without ever slipping into 'cuteness' or sentimentality. Their enthusiasm and awkwardness is captured perfectly (complete with bottom scratching) as the children prepare for the big performance in front of their parents.

This is a book full of charming evocation of everyday life, rich in the magic of minor detail – gestures, costumes, mums juggling newborns and first-borns, the haphazard furniture and environment of an anonymous community centre with its cold floors, notice-boards and stacks of chairs. The text is written in the first person, as told by one of the children, and readers will share her nervousness as the big night nears. **MS**

REVIEWS 5–8 Infant/Junior

Cat on the Hill

★★★★

Michael Foreman, Andersen, 32pp, 1 84270 282 3, £10.99 hbk

A stray cat's search for warmth, food and friendship as summer gives way to winter in St Ives forms the basis of this latest Foreman picture book.

His characteristic watercolour and line illustrations flow over the pages, the hill of the title taking centre stage on most spreads, with the cat wandering in and out. Shades of blue and green evoke the sea and the seasons. St Ives is seen from various viewpoints, the cat gradually going further into town as the pickings diminish. Christmas jollity, seen in lighted windows, Christmas trees and bustling streets, contrasts with the cat's loneliness until the various

acquaintances he has unwittingly made on the way come together in an alternative 'stable' scene, ringed with awestruck gulls and rabbits.

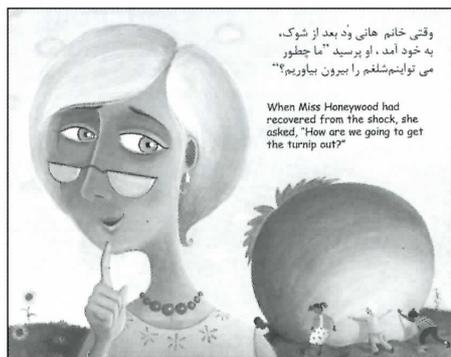
Foreman's illustrations are stronger than the first person text, but it does read aloud well and provides a warmly satisfying story. **AG**

The Giant Turnip

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★

Henriette Barkow, ill. Richard Johnson, trans. Parisima Ziabari-Ahmadi, Mantra, 32pp, Farsi/English, 1 85269 737 7, £7.50 pbk

A good reworking of a familiar tale – transposed to a school setting which will draw young children to relate to it more readily. Miss Honeywood's



class grow fruit and vegetables in the school garden and come back after summer to find a giant turnip. There is a naïve, child-like quality to the beautifully coloured illustrations, some of which go across a double

page spread. I particularly like the fact that there are smaller drawings illustrating details (what they decided to grow this year) and sequences (feeding, watering and looking after the plants). Some of the children's ideas on how to pull the turnip out are illustrated in fuzzy-edged thought bubbles. Of course, at the end, as in the original tale, it's the help of one more little person that

makes the difference. The size of print and layout of both texts in this title is pleasingly unfussy and clear. A lovely book for early years classrooms. (Available in 21 dual language editions.) **UC**

Hot Hot Hot

★★★★

Neal Layton, Hodder, 32pp,
0 340 87326 4, £9.99 pbk

This is a welcome return for the winsome woolly mammoths: Oscar with the striped bobble hat and Arabella with the little pink ears. They already have one picture book adventure to their credit. This time, their enjoyment of the freezing winds and snow of the Ice Age winter is curtailed by an unusually hot summer. They try various ways of keeping cool, all with no success. Then Oscar appears brandishing scissors, a comb and a mirror. It's time for a hair cut, and the shaven look is soon all the rage. Luckily, everyone's hair grows back by the time winter comes around again, except a primitive two-legged creature, who has remained (largely) hairless to this day.

Layton has plenty of fun with the story, his animals are drawn with energy and character, he uses the pages with ingenuity and drama, and the colours make you feel the heat and the cold. Readers will enjoy following the fate of the long-suffering cave man, who is never mentioned directly in the text. CB

David and the Kittens

★★★★

Robert Westall, ill. William
Geldart, Hodder, 32pp,
0 340 74379 4, £9.99 hbk

If you are more familiar with this author having written fast-moving, award-winning thrillers, this picture book for all ages may surprise you. It is a jewel of a book, full of 'awe and wonder'. Known for his love of cats during his lifetime, Westall shows great affection for the mother cat and her kittens, and such a tender relationship between the youthful Grandmother and grandson. Every stage of the cat's late pregnancy is well told, in text and pictures, and the reader is made aware of the miracle of birth, whilst accepting it as a natural event. The child (9 or 10) is curious at every stage, and all his questions are answered precisely. When it is time to dispose of the kittens, the child is fully involved, putting advertisements in the village shops and discussing people's preferences as the kittens are selected. Grandmother tells him: 'You've got to love them and cuddle them non-stop, or else they turn into very dull cats.' Beautifully illustrated and crafted by a masterly hand, this is a book for every cat-loving family to treasure, a must for every library in the land. Well done, Hodder, for this re-publication. GB

The Biggest Bible Storybook

★★★

Anne Adeney, ill. Ruth Rivers,
Orion, 224pp, 1 84255 029 2,
£16.99 hbk

The Biggest Bible Storybook has some excellent features – it is sturdily bound, large format, comprehensive (50 Bible stories from the Old Testament and 50 from the New), and has excellent and plentiful illustrations – although it was a pity that the tar-covered Noah's ark is coloured in brown and red, even on the covert. A special feature of the book is that the stories are

introduced and told by children, and their lives and backgrounds provide an unusual and accurate cultural background to Bible times. The stories themselves are strongly conservative in tone ('All the Bible stories really happened'). But some of the details are inaccurate – the tree in the Garden of Eden was of Knowledge of Good and Evil and not just knowledge; it was a raven first sent out of the ark; Joseph's coat with long sleeves was not a special present so much as the symbol of the heir; quails were not sent to feed the Israelites during their exodus every day; Jesus wasn't praying when arrested in Gethsemane; and so on. The author needed an informed editor to ensure complete accuracy, and one who would avoid (confusingly) putting the Day of Pentecost in the wrong chronological place among the stories. Further, some of the concepts will not be understood. Children in Sunday School might possibly know what the book means when it speaks of being 'saved', that God speaks from His 'word', and that there is a 'Sift' and activity of the Holy Spirit, but it will leave very little meaning for children outside of the church. However, overseen by an informed parent or teacher, this is still an excellent book. RG

Titchy Witch and the Stray Dragon

★★

Rose Impey, ill. Katharine
McEwen, Orchard, 32pp,
1 84121 042 0, £8.99 hbk

One of a series starring Titchy-witch and featuring family members Witchy-witch, Wendel and Weeny-witch, along with Cat-a-bogus, Victor (vulture) and spider, Eric. In this episode it is Cat-a-bogus who comes to the rescue with a timely touch of his own brand of magic when Titchy-witch's longed for pet dragon Dido threatens to outgrow his welcome.

An enticing format and subject matter, enchantments and speech bubbles are just not enough to work the spell when the language lacks sparkle. It is McEwen's full colour illustrations with their touches of humour that provide any lingering images once the book has been put down. JB

Hetty the Yeti

★★★★

Dee Shulman, 0 7136 6435 5
hbk, 0 7136 6442 8 pbk**The Mean Team from Mars**

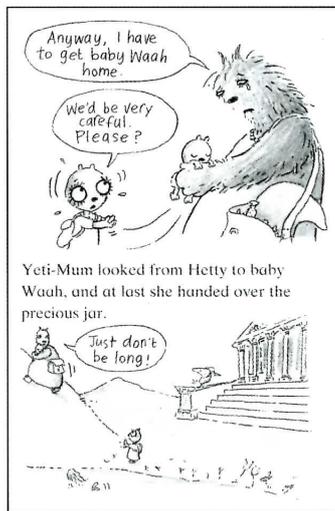
★★★

Scoular Anderson 0 7136 6437 1
hbk, 0 7136 6436 3 pbk**Duncan and the Pirates**

★★★

Peter Utton, 0 7136 6738 9
hbk, 0 7136 6739 7 pbk**Brick-a-Breck**

★★★

Julia Donaldson, ill. Philippe
Dupasquier, 0 7136 6438 X
hbk, 0 7136 6441 X pbkA & C Black 'Chameleon',
48pp, £8.99 each hbk, £4.99
each pbk

Yeti-Mum looked from Hetty to baby Waah, and at last she handed over the precious jar.

Told partly with text and partly in cartoon format (complete with speech bubbles), **Hetty the Yeti** is a delightful story of how Hetty and her friends set out to try to find a cure for Hetty's baby brother. They brave a long journey, cold water, and most frightening of all, a Hydra. Shulman's illustrations are great fun and she knows well how to captivate her readers with this combination of text and picture. There is just the right amount of material in the story to keep the reader turning the pages until things are sorted out. Great fun.

In **The Mean Team from Mars** we meet Rory who is a keen fan of Arden United football club – but he keeps on getting into trouble on the pitch. Enter a man who sells him a duvet cover at the market with surprising results, for Rory is whisked off to Arden one hundred years in the future. Simply told, this book will be an enjoyable read for any child who likes football.

Colour pictures and straightforward text make **Duncan and the Pirates** another fun to read story. Mr Hipstone is a grim faced pirate with a sappy dog called Duncan. But are these two characters really as they seem? The pictures lend credibility to the story, which once again is just the right length for a child who has begun to enjoy reading.

Brick-a-Breck stars a boy who loves cereal and spends most of his meal times eating different types. A television advertisement where there are rather too many takes for the good of our hero's stomach is one of the results of him winning a competition on the back of a packet of cereal, but one of the other results is a surprise that will amuse any child reading the book. Dupasquier captures the humour of the story very well with the facial expressions of the characters in the story. A welcome addition to the library whether at school or elsewhere. RL

Aristotle

★★★

Dick King-Smith, ill. Bob
Graham, Walker, 80pp,
0 7445 8320 9, £7.99 hbk

Bella Donna looks like quite a traditional sort of witch, but she is rather pleased with the idea of having a white cat rather than the usual black, and Aristotle, her new kitten, just fits the bill. Aristotle is a bit of a tearaway and careless with his nine lives, causing no end of concern to Bella Donna who rescues him in the nick of time from the

inside of a milk jug, her chimney, the jaws of a large dog and other places where a kitten has no business being. But just as it seems there is no hope that he will survive to be an old cat, he gets some sense and settles to a life of helping Bella Donna bring her healing potions to sick children.

The story is simple enough and will read aloud well. Graham's pen and ink sketches washed with greeny-browns show Aristotle to be a most engaging fellow, and the square format of this little hardback is appealing. VC

The Amazing Adventures of Girl Wonder

★★★★

Malorie Blackman, ill. Lis Toft,
Barn Owl, 96pp, 1 903015 27 8,
£3.99 pbk

Ten of her favourite stories selected by the author from two earlier publications **Girl Wonder** and the **Terrific Twins** (Gollancz 1991) and **Girl Wonder to the Rescue** (Gollancz 1994). Girl Wonder is older sister Maxine with younger twin brothers Antony and Edward. Their mini capers are entertaining, as we see Maxine's plans to solve various problems, more often than not, go awry. Edward and Antony get involved as Maxine spins into action and enlists their support to impress Mum with a birthday present, or to enter the school talent show, utilising Antony's renowned 'talent' as a rapper. Other escapades involving warm-hearted mum, who has a good sense of humour, include trying to solve the Tooth Fairy mystery and catching a birthday burglar.

Each of the lively stories stands alone but there are some links between them. Each tale is accompanied by atmospheric monochrome pencil illustrations of various shapes and sizes. AK

Septimouse Supermouseill. Sami Sweeten,
1 903285 59 3**Septimouse, Big Cheese!**ill. Valeria Petrone,
1 903285 65 8

★★★★

Ann Jungman, Happy Cat,
96pp, £3.99 each pbk

The seventh child of a seventh child has always been regarded as something special in folklore, so when Mr Mouse (himself a seventh son) and Mrs Mouse give birth to a seventh son in **Septimouse Supermouse** they know they are in for a special time. They are not disappointed – as well as being able to talk to any sort of animal, Septimus is also able to perform magic spells on anyone he chooses. The result: a cheese factory and some surprising friendships!

In **Septimouse, Big Cheese!** the cheese factory is now up and running and doing well, but what happens when Katie's dad loses his job? Septimouse comes to the rescue with a new cheese factory, but all does not go according to plan – at least not at first. These amusing and warmly told books will be much enjoyed. The illustrations lend well

to the stories which are just the right length for children beginning to tackle reasonably long books on their own. RL

The Jamie and Angus Stories

★★★★

Anne Fine, ill. Penny Dale, Walker, 112pp, 0 7445 9086 8, £4.99 pbk

These six short stories about Jamie and his toy bull Angus are delightfully told. Everyday happenings in their lives such as bedtime, and a wedding are related warmly by Anne Fine, who shows that she is equally able to penetrate the minds of very young children as well as any other age range for which she writes. The drawings by Dale are sympathetic and a delight to look at; the length of the stories make them perfect for reading at bedtime, or for any other time. I greatly recommend this book. RL

I am an Ankylosaurus

0 7502 4251 5

I am a Tyrannosaurus

0 7502 4257 4

INFORMATION PICTURE BOOKS ★★★★★

Karen Wallace, ill. Mike Bostock, Hodder Wayland, 32pp, £10.99 each hbk

Both these picture books start with a close-up image of a dinosaur face and invite readers to view the prehistoric world through their eyes. The texts are deceptively simple but complement the stunning illustrations. Author and illustrator have judged what is likely to be just the right amount of detail a six- to eight-year-old needs to get a genuine sense of the lives of the creatures in their landscape.

The pictures give much information not easily expressed verbally – the relative size of the different dinosaurs, the textures and colours of their skin, the way their eggs are placed in the nest. However, written text communicates some kinds of information best – the spiky tail of the ankylosaurus ends in a club 'made of bone', and prey smells – 'the stink of the carcass hangs in the air'. Wallace brings in exciting imagery telling us that an ankylosaurus is 'huge like a tank' and a tyrannosaurus has jaws that 'shut like a trap'. The constant dangers of the prehistoric world are made evident. In *I am an Ankylosaurus* we see the creature building her nest and we care about whether she survives the attack by the hungry tyrannosaurus. A triceratops is devoured by a tyrannosaurus in *I am a Tyrannosaurus* and then the victor is driven away by one of its own kind only to become caught up in a volcanic eruption hurling dust and hot lumps of rock.

I have some misgivings about the occasional anthropomorphism in the books. Creatures feel hunger and fear of course, but I'm less sure about calling dinosaurs 'cowardly' or 'thieving'. The author and illustrator draw on the advice of Dr Angela Milner of the Natural History Museum, London. It is never too soon to start thinking like a scientist and, with this in mind, I would have welcomed an appendix showing some relevant fossil evidence to

support the text – for example of the nests so well described in *I am an Ankylosaurus*.

While CDROMs and software packages use multi-media to bring alive the sounds and movements of creatures, print books of this quality offer a different and equally valuable experience for children by telling a compelling story through words and image. MM

Monster Stones: The Story of a Dinosaur Fossil

0 7136 6251 4

Sun Up, Sun Down: The Story of Day and Night

0 7136 6253 0

A Drop in the Ocean: The Story of Water

0 7316 6255 7

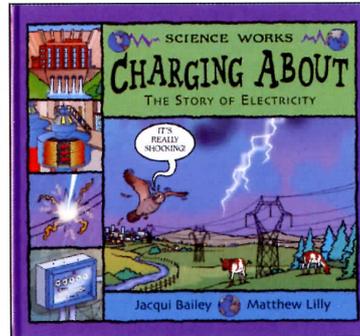
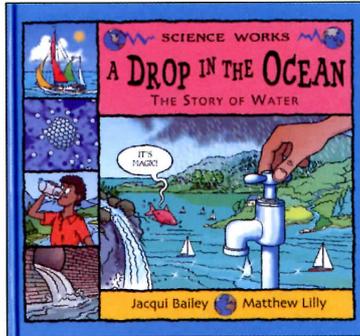
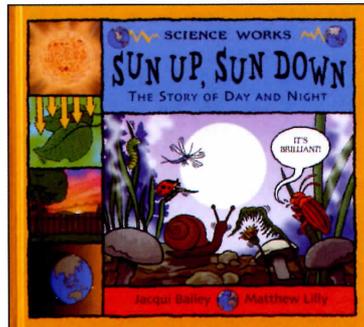
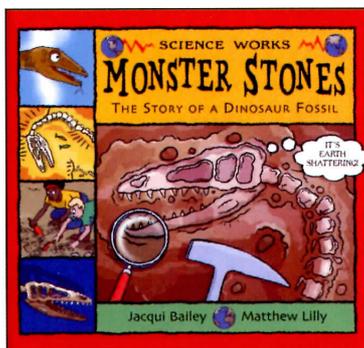
Charging About: The Story of Electricity

0 7136 6257 3

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Jacqui Bailey, ill. Matthew Lilly, A & C Black 'Science Works', 32pp, £9.99 each hbk

Making science accessible and fun for younger readers is no easy task, but the author/illustrator partnership of Bailey and Lilly makes a brilliant job of it in this new series for Key Stage 1. Bright appealing cartoon-style artwork and a continuous narrative text treat each topic in the form of a story. So in *Monster Stones* we learn how the dinosaur fell in the river in the first place, how its bones were transformed into fossils and what happened to them when they were unearthed. Speech bubbles punctuate the artwork with a commentary that is pitched just right for the age group. Similar treatment follows in each of the other titles and Bailey is particularly good at explaining abstract concepts such as the evaporation of water or the flow of electric current. Each book includes a relevant practical



project – how to make your own model fossil for example, or a sundial – and a small selection of recommended websites is also listed. Highly recommended for classroom use or for supporting project work. SU

Materials

0 7496 4863 5

Water

0 7496 4864 3

NON-FICTION ★★

Lynn Huggins-Cooper, ill. Shelagh McNicholas and David Burroughs, Watts 'First-hand Science', 32pp, £11.99 each hbk

A step back in time with these two titles from Watts' 'First-hand Science' series aimed at the lower end of Key Stage 1. You find yourself looking twice at the copyright date to check that these haven't been around for 20-odd years with their extraordinarily dated artwork – warm and fuzzy for the central characters and starkly airbrushed for diagrammatic marginal pictures. Typography too combines a more contemporary style of hand-lettering, tricky to read for the age group, with standard type, frequently surrounded by question marks or exclamation marks. Long wordy descriptions of practical projects take them way beyond the readership. The content itself is sound, but the delivery is offputting and outdated. Plenty of better introductions to science are to be found in the publisher's own catalogue. SU

Franklin's Bear

INFORMATION STORY ★★★★★

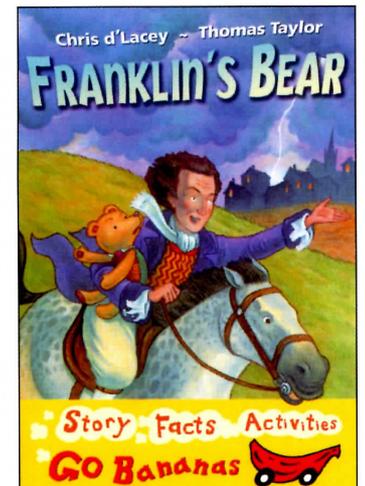
Chris d'Lacey, ill. Thomas Taylor, Egmont 'Go Bananas' (Red), 48pp, 1 4052 0590 3, £3.99 pbk

The 'Go Bananas' series seeks to build the confidence of early readers (Red and Blue books, Key Stage 1) and newly fluent readers (Yellow books, Key Stage 2) by providing lively stories which also contribute to children's understanding of key

topics in the National Curriculum. So *Franklin's Bear* not only pleases as an exuberant, fast moving adventure story, it also illuminates, in an original way, that difficult concept – electricity.

Benjamin Franklin, the inventor – presented as rather a manic if brilliant character – wants to attach a rod to a church spire so that lightning is guided to earth where it will fizzle out, rather than cause the building to burn down. Bear, Franklin's reluctant assistant, bravely flies to the tip of the spire, tied to a kite, to put the lightning rod in place. The story form is used well to show that scientific discovery is not always a matter of careful steps towards a solution, but might be the result of flashes of inspiration and exciting, even risky, hypothesis-testing experiments.

D'Lacey has a good 'feel' for lively language and imagery. Children will love finding and talking about contemporary words and expressions like 'wrath', 'thy fur', 'dumple' and 'twas nothing'. Scientific vocabulary is well contextualised, for example 'circuit', 'transmitted energy' and 'mains socket'. We have lightning 'zinging' through the air like 'a great blue tongue' and Bear's tummy rumbling 'like a little volcano' when his jam supply is threatened. No dreary attempt to control vocabulary here!



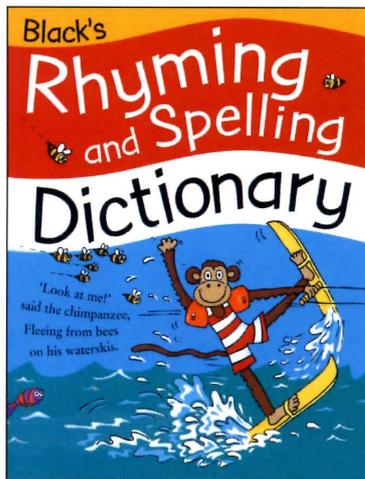
The illustrations, reminiscent of cartoons and advertisements, are splendid too, sometimes in the form of diagrams to show how electricity is conducted and sometimes pictures showing period detail – eighteenth-century buildings and dress. The illustrated end pages have extra information about Franklin's discoveries, steps to follow in an experiment to create static electricity using a balloon and some advice about using electricity safely. Purists who hate genre mixing are unlikely to approve. But I find this book original, amusing and likely to make reading and learning highly enjoyable as well as being good value for money. MM

Black's Rhyming and Spelling Dictionary

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Pie Corbett and Ruth Thomson, ill. Sofie Forrester and others, A & C Black, 128pp, 0 7136 6510 6, £6.99 pbk

The sort of book you never knew you needed till you had it in the hand! For any budding poet or limerick-writer it will be invaluable, with

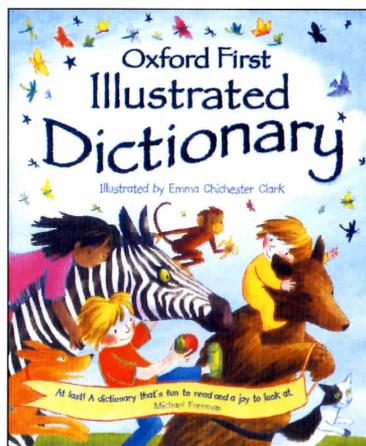


artwork accompanies the zany limericks and verses that are dotted throughout the A to Z listing. Suggestions for rhyming games and descriptions of different types of poetry (from riddles and rhyming couplets to Haiku and acrostics) will inspire lots of ideas for word play and creative writing, and of course it all helps with spelling. Highly recommended for use in the classroom or at home, we are now busy making up verses about all our new classmates. SU

The Oxford First Illustrated Dictionary
NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Compiled by Andrew Delahunty, ill. Emma Chichester Clark, Oxford, 192pp, 0 19 910913 3, £12.99 hbk

This is not only an extremely attractive production, it is a cleverly



conceived introduction to the idea of word definition. The author and illustrator have contrived to produce a dictionary that will be great fun for any child to travel through.

Chichester Clark's illustrations decorate the pages beautifully, but are also full of subtle visual clues to the meanings of the words on the page. A clever narrative thread is woven into the overall structure through the artist's use of six characters, who pop up throughout the book providing more links with the text. The word definitions are interspersed with little snippets of extra information, asides, riddles and puns, celebrating the sounds of words as well as their meanings.

With a marathon job such as this, an illustrator might be forgiven the occasional drop in standard, but Chichester Clark's inventive and varied use of the four-column text layout never fails to surprise and delight. The format of the book and the way the images connect with the text, make it feel like a book to read, to pore over and enjoy, as much as a book to dip into for information. MS

similar sounds grouped together alphabetically and an index to point you in the right direction. Quirky

REVIEWS 8-10 Junior/Middle

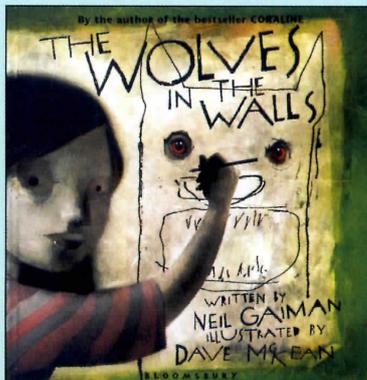
Editor's Choice

The Wolves in the Walls

★★★★★

Neil Gaiman, ill. Dave McKean, Bloomsbury, 64pp, 0 7475 6953 3, £12.99 hbk

This large square picture book for older readers is preoccupied, as is Gaiman's novel, *Coraline*, with the meaning of the house in which the heroine lives with her family. Coraline explores a parallel house with counterfeit parents who have button eyes and whose secret agenda appears to be to control and drain her of life. In *The Wolves in the Walls*, Lucy's pig-puppet is the only one who listens to her. Her distant and preoccupied mother busy making jam and her sceptical father and brother will not heed her warnings that there are wolves in the walls until the creatures burst out and the family is forced to flee in terror. The house is taken over by the wolves who wear the family's clothes (cutting holes in trousers for their tails), turn the TV up very loud, eat toast and jam and generally trash the



place with their partying. This time Lucy ignores her defeatist parents and takes the initiative, first rescuing pink-pig and then seeing the wolves off. A metaphor, perhaps, for the necessity of walls in the internal world against intrusion, this scary and wittily dramatic picture book will have readers of all ages on the edge of their seat. McKean heightens the drama with the contrast between his fluid, scratchy pen renderings of the wolves and the moulded, rather sculptural faces of Lucy and her family. Collage, occasional picture sequences and an expressive use of different typefaces and fonts lend tension as events take new turns. A tour de force that will be enjoyed by both young readers and adults. RS

The Story of Frog Belly Rat Bone

★★★★★

Timothy Basil Ering, Walker, 48pp, 0 7445 8056 0, £11.99 hbk

The story begins in Cementland, depicted in this large format picture book as a desolate, graffiti smeared wilderness, in which a waif resembling Smiffy from *Bash Street* forlornly searches for treasure. He eventually finds it in the form of a box full of seed packets which he has to defend from a trio of robbing vermin. *Frog Belly Rat Bone* is the Golem-like figure he creates from junk to help him.

The story is told in a scrawled script printed over double page spreads of

sludgy paintwork, which eventually brighten into floral glory as the tale of redemption progresses. This is a straightforward but quirky story which unites themes of companionship, salvage and salvation within an optimistic ecological theme. GH

Private and Confidential

★★★★★

Marion Ripley, ill. Colin Backhouse, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 0 7112 2097 2, £10.99 hbk

With endpapers resembling the sides of an airmail envelope (soon to be obsolete?), this picture-book tells a touching little story about a girl who

starts a pen-friend correspondence with an Australian boy who turns out to be partially sighted. It gently makes the point that the degree of acuity of a person's vision need not be the most crucial aspect of their identity, while at the same time strives to raise awareness about the special needs of blind and partially sighted people. A braille message is incorporated into the telling of the simple, optimistic story, and a postscript provides educational information. The cheery, soft-focus realism of the full page pastel illustrations makes this a physically attractive book, which together with the novelty of the braille should ensure a degree of well-deserved attention. GH

Quirky Times at Quagmire Castle

★★★

Karen Wallace, ill. Helen Flook, 0 7136 6572 6

The Gold-Spectre

★★★

Elizabeth Arnold, ill. Gary Rees, 0 7136 6655 2

Planimal Magic

★★★

Rebecca Lisle, 0 7136 6656 0

Eyes Wide Open

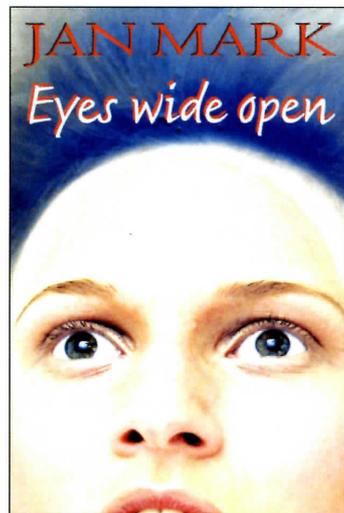
★★★★★

Jan Mark, ill. Scoular Anderson, 0 7136 6717 6

A & C Black 'Black Cats', 96pp, £4.99 each pbk

Four new additions to the 'Black Cat' series, these titles all use elements of the supernatural to deliver the 'Black Cat' promise of fast, exciting stories for fluent readers.

Wallace's *Quirky Times at Quagmire Castle* is a ghost story, though her ghosts are of the non-scary, comical variety. She sticks to a tried and trusted formula: Jack and Emily live with Aunt Tabitha in her crumbling but still stately home. Unfortunately, money is very short and evil bank manager Gordon Gabbit is ready to claim the castle and turn it into a



des-res bungalow village. Luckily, the ghosts of two of Jack and Emily's ancestors come to the rescue – not by scaring the enemy off but with practical suggestions and help on how Quagmire Castle can become a five star hotel. The story bowls along at a great pace, various different storylines concerning the cast of wacky characters are woven in, and it's all great fun. Wallace isn't doing anything she hasn't done before but she does it so well, who cares.

The Gold-Spectre is another reworking of a well used formula – boy befriends boy, who turns out to be a ghost – but not so deftly handled. Joe's mother is ill so he must stay with his grandparents in Scotland, ten hours and a million miles from home. The setting is immediately established – a 'vast green space ... strangely freaky' and it's only when he meets Robbie that Joe begins to feel at home. People have been panning for gold in the area for centuries and soon Robbie enlists Joe's help in reclaiming gold that was stolen from him and which is now guarded by the terrifying Gold-Spectre. The story of this genuine legend of the area and the ghost story at the centre of the book are wound together but it's not entirely successful and some of the impact of the original story is lost.

There's another Joe in *Planimal*

Magic, also sent away from home and a sick mother. He must stay with his cousin and her father, a mad botanist, and it's soon apparent that things are not right in the laboratory. Elements of Frankenstein and James Bond are mixed with the Pink Panther as the tone switches from ghost story to thriller to comedy. Buried beneath it all is an interesting idea: how powerful is the secret life of plants? What if humans could learn to appropriate that power themselves?

Eyes **Wide Open** is remarkably assured; a collection of six superb short stories, all to do with the power of changing perception. In 'Dan, Dan the Scenery Man' for example, young June joins her father in his amateur dramatics and watches as before her eyes he's transformed from dad and shoe salesman into someone totally different. Even more shocking, she discovers that when she's not there, her mum doesn't always choose to be mum either. The stories are full of short phrases, sometime two or three words only, that also illuminate perfectly: sunlight is 'weak but well-intentioned'; someone is 'the sort of woman who looks as though she's been put together out of string'; a memory falls 'grey ... like drizzle'. The final story is genuinely creepy and, fittingly, uncanny, for these stories are all about how almost nothing needs to change for nothing to be the same. **AR**

Where the Sidewalk Ends: poems and drawings

0 7145 3095 6

A Light in the Attic: poems and drawings

0 7145 3096 4

POETRY ★★★★★

Shel Silverstein, Marion Boyars Publishers, 176pp, £9.99 each hbk

These two collections were first published in 1974 and 1981 and they have more than withstood the test of time. Silverstein believed in the symbiotic nature of word and image and would not allow his verse to be illustrated by anyone else; reading these collections tells you why. The

relationship between illustration and poem makes these books very special. His black and white drawings echo and complement the poems which can be funny, cautionary, serious and sometimes surreal. Silverstein's subjects and thoughts are everything and everyone under the sun, plus a few more. There's the 'Skin Stealer': 'This evening I unzipped my skin / And carefully unscrewed my head, / Exactly as I always do / When I prepare myself for bed.' There's the baby bat who 'screamed out in fright, / Turn on the dark, / I'm afraid of the light.' But, there is also the place 'Where the Sidewalk Ends' 'And before the street begins, / And there the grass grows soft and white, / And there the sun burns crimson bright, / And there the moon-bird rests from his flight / To cool in the peppermint wind.'

One, and preferably both, of these poetry books should be part of the canon of children's poetry. **HT**

Dyslexia

INFORMATION PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Althea, ill. Frances Cony, Happy Cat 'Talking It Through', 32pp, 1 903285 54 2, £8.99 hbk

The information in this book is well-paced and instructive, with good coping strategies that may help with the problems brought about by dyslexia. We meet six children, all of whom have some degree of dyslexia, and they tell us about their dilemmas and how they work to overcome them. Nathan and his mum make alphabet letters in play dough; Pippa tells her stories into a tape recorder; Lucy, who has problems remembering things, paints her little finger red on her right hand so she can distinguish between left and right. Upbeat and positive, the book will provide reassurance and support – as well as some really good ideas. There is, though, a problem with the comic-book style pictures. The cheerful children look a tad demented, their grins reminiscent of Halloween pumpkins. Not, perhaps, the best choice for illustrating dyslexic children. **ES**

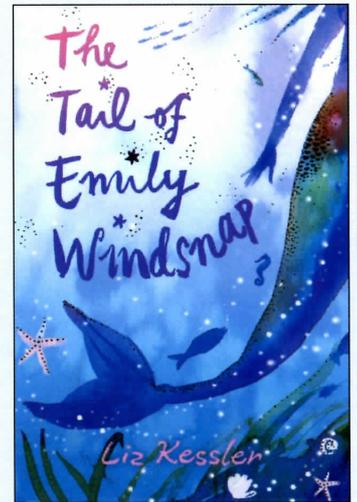
NEW Talent

The Tail of Emily Windsnap

★★★

Liz Kessler, ill. Sarah Gibb, Orion, 208pp, 1 84255 271 6, £7.99 hbk

Emily lives on a boat but has never been in water. When her class first go to the pool for swimming lessons, she discovers an extraordinary ability to swim – but something strange happens to her legs which seem to want to fuse together. Emily finds she is now drawn to the sea and as she explores it she makes a new friend, the mermaid Shona, and discovers the truth about her mixed heritage – part human, part merfolk. The father she has never known has been imprisoned by Neptune for daring to marry a human woman. Can she rescue him and reunite her family? Kessler creates a likeable



heroine in Emily and her relaxed storyteller's voice overcomes occasional creaks in the plot. Each new chapter opening of this agreeable debut novel is attractively decorated with a line and tone illustration by Sarah Gibb. **RS**

Story of the Nile: A Journey through Time along the World's Longest River

NON-FICTION ★★

Dr Anne Millard, ill. Steve Noon, Dorling Kindersley, 32pp, 0 7513 6827 X, £12.99 hbk

The wide screen format suits the subject of this good-looking book. It's a series of double page panoramic historical scenes on the Nile, taking the reader from the river's source at Lake Victoria to its mouth at Alexandria, and covering the events of five millennia.

There is very little text and Noon's illustrations carry most of the information. This is serious **Where's Wally?**, with crowds of people deployed like extras in an epic movie, and the reader often straining to make out what these tiny people are doing. They are labelled, it's true, and there is a single line of text marching round outside the border

of the big picture, accompanied by even tinier snapshots of the main event, but it is not a comfortable experience.

An earlier book in the series, **A Street through Time**, was a deserving winner of a History Book of the Year Award. Its strength was that it took the same scene and moved forward steadily in time, showing the changes in English town and landscape in each era. Here, there is a different location and period for each stop on the river. The book jumps about alarmingly in time, with the funeral of King Khufu in 2500 BC preceding a picture of Salah el Din setting off to war in 1190 AD, which is then followed by a scene at Per Rameses in 1260 BC. You can admire Noon's composition and pore over each picture, even hunting the Dorling Kindersley stork which (memories of the *Usborne* duck) is hiding somewhere, but it's difficult to make sense of the book as a whole and to put the individual scenes into historical context. As usual, with DK, there is a cramped index and no further reading or websites suggested. **CB**

REVIEWS 10–14 Middle/Secondary

The Field Guide (The Spiderwick Chronicles, Book 1)

0 6898 3738 0

The Seeing Stone (The Spiderwick Chronicles, Book 2)

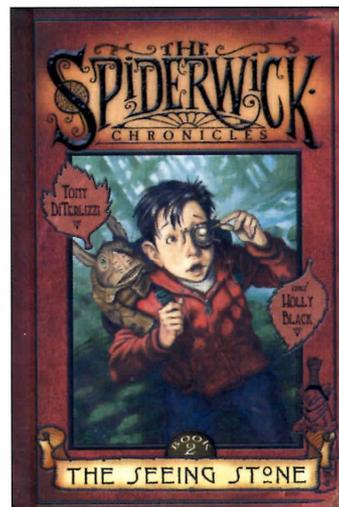
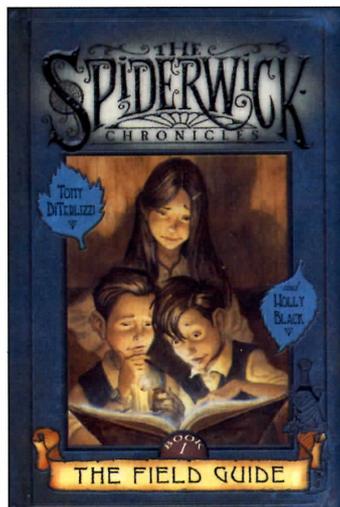
0 6898 3739 9

★★★★★

Tony DiTerlizzi and Holly Black, Simon & Schuster, 130pp, £5.99 each hbk

These two attractive small hardbacks, reminiscent of the *Lemony Snicket* books, form the first two volumes of five, in a format pleasant to hold and a pleasure to read.

The Grace children and their mother



have come to live in their great-aunt's tumbledown Victorian pile, which they discover is also inhabited by 'faeries' of all kinds – toadlike goblins, shape-shifting brownies et al. The children's various strengths are tried in encounters good and bad with the various other residents: in parallel they are coming to terms with their parents' divorce. A mystery linking their great-aunt with the faeries is hinted at, to unfold in subsequent volumes.

The reader is addressed directly by the author through letters, biography and 'what happens next' clues, all of which move us quickly into the story: the writing is contemporary American – colloquial, with short straightforward sentences which again aid our progress to the abrupt ending of each volume.

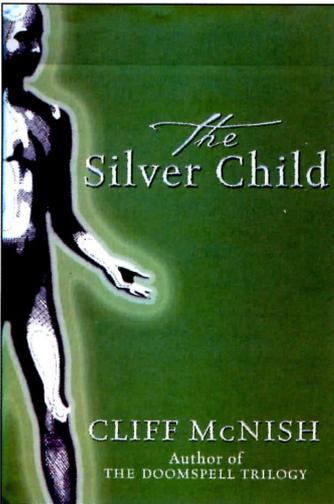
DiTerlizzi acknowledges his debt to Arthur Rackham, evident in the typefaces, borders and chapter heads; the framed pen and ink drawings are nevertheless peopled by suitably modern children, while the style is also appropriate for the depiction of the faeryfolk. Very readable, and definitely moreish. AG

Wipe Out

★★★

Mimi Thebo, Collins, 144pp, 0 00 714277 3, £4.99 pbk

When Billy dreams about his fun-loving mother, surfing champion Kitten Brown, she is bathed in a yellow, shining light. When he wakes, he remembers that she is dead and his world is filled with never-ending grey. Billy is sent to stay with Auntie Mary, a staid and frugal widow, while his father deals with his own grief and makes the funeral preparations. Billy feels that the colour will never return to his life. But perhaps aunt and nephew can help each other more than they realise. Thebo's debut novel deals positively with its sad subject, exploring themes of loss, grief, coping and recovery. Her economical and poetic prose style emotes genuine empathy for Billy, his father and Auntie Mary. Warmly recommended. NG



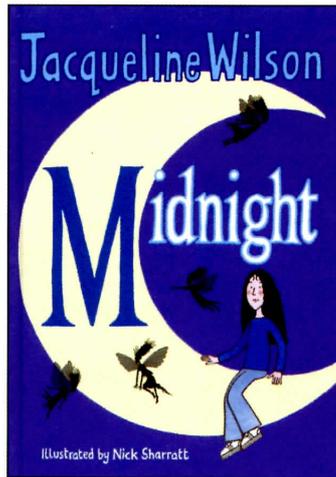
The Silver Child

★★★★

Cliff McNish, ill. Geoff Taylor, Orion, 176pp, 1 84255 259 7, £8.99 hbk

In this strange, sometimes disturbing novel, six children leave the comforts of their separate homes for the hazards of living in Coldharbour – a rubbish-tip refuge inhabited by lawless child gangs some time in the future. What they are all up against is The Roar – an inchoate, floating centre of evil, intent on devouring everything in its wake. But Thomas, the somewhat unpleasing main character, must also conquer his own doubts and fears if the little group is going to survive. The first of a sequence of novels, this is a genuinely original piece of writing, strongly imagined and well written. Young readers with delicate stomachs – if such beings still exist – may find some of the grosser descriptions of physical mutilation too much to take, as one of the main characters slowly and painfully mutates into a different being and shape. Others may well enjoy this part best of all, and will

look forward to the next instalments of this dark but arresting fantasy. NT



Midnight

★★★★

Jacqueline Wilson, ill. Nick Sharratt, Doubleday, 200pp, 0 385 60605 2, £10.99 hbk

16-year-old Will and 13-year-old Violet have, for most of their lives, believed that they are brother and sister. It has never been a particularly easy relationship, a state of affairs certainly not improved when it turns out that Will is an adopted child. In his own terminology, he is 'the changeling... the child who saddens the mother and infuriates the father and terrorises his little sister'. While part of the fascination of Wilson's novel undoubtedly lies in the psychological complexity with which Will – living up to this self-definition – is depicted, her supreme achievement is her creation of Violet, her narrator. Here is a totally convincing portrait of a child whose only release from insecurity and unhappiness lies in her absorption in the fairy dolls she painstakingly designs as a tribute to Caspar Dream, her favourite of all fairy-book illustrators. The arrival at her school of the exotic Jasmine would seem to offer a further release but their friendship, far from diminishing complexities of feeling, painfully postpones Violet's attainment of some measure of emotional growth. This is Wilson on top form, moving with ease between reality and fantasy, darkness and light. Sharratt rises admirably to the challenge of providing the Dream illustrations. RD

Earthborn

★★★★

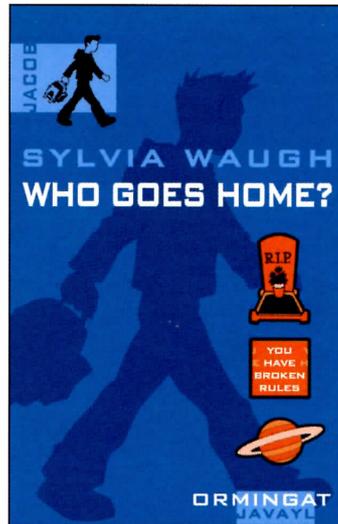
Sylvia Waugh, Red Fox, 208pp, 0 09 943847 X, £4.99 pbk

Who Goes Home?

★★★★

Sylvia Waugh, The Bodley Head, 228pp, 0 370 32576 1, £10.99 hbk

The extraterrestrial aliens of Waugh's 'Ormingat Trilogy' may seem far removed from the rag-doll Mennymys of her earlier books, but what interests her is at root the same. Behind closed doors, ostensibly normal English houses and families may contain exotic beings, fighting to preserve their secrets by appearing ordinary and avoiding notice. The Ormingat space-invaders come from a peaceful



planet and mean no harm. They are merely keeping watch on Earth's dominant and less peaceful species, to protect themselves against the danger that humans may one day invade Ormingat. The observers have a limited posting in human form and must not contact each other; when their term is up, their individual space ships will return to Ormingat, with or without them. One source of possible betrayal threatens their secret espionage: their children.

The first book, *Space Race*, told the story of an Ormingat-born child sent to Earth experimentally, to provide data on Earthling childhood. In *Earthborn* the central character is Nesta, a 12-year-old girl born here on Earth to Ormingat parents, and in *Who Goes Home?* the spotlight is on Jacob, 13, who has an Ormingat father and a human mother. Each book is a variant on the same problems. How will these children cope with knowledge of their double origins and planned repatriation? And what risks do they pose to the secret Earth-life of Ormingat's adult observers? Each child's plight is different, but the dangers are the same.

The books are skilfully interlinked, and told (like the Mennymys books) with lightness and humour linked to genuine tension and suspense, and with an everyday practicality that enhances their imaginative strangeness. They are crisp, deceptively simple, highly readable stories, which can be read separately but come best in sequence. Much the best is *Who Goes Home?*, the only one in which the Ormingat parent is as interesting, proactive and divided as the children, but all three are effective science fiction with a thought-provoking not-quite-human centre. PH

Tell the Moon to Come Out

★★★

Joan Lingard, Puffin, 208pp, 0 14 131689 6, £4.99 pbk

We first meet Nick Torres on a dark, wet night in a French Pyrenean village. It is Spring, 1939. The Spanish Civil War has ended and somewhere beyond the wall of mountains, Nick hopes, is his father – maybe on the run, maybe wounded, maybe dead. Sebastián Torres had left his Scottish wife and son, his home and job in the Highlands, to join the fight against Franco.

The novel maps Nick's risky adventures as he searches for his father throughout the length of Spain. Inevitably, in this raw and wounded country, he finds a mixed welcome, from the kindness of Republican sympathisers to the brutality of Civil Guardsmen loyal to Franco. Along the way, he falls in love with the daughter of the violent Sergeant Morales, Isabel, who leaves her abusive father to join Nick on his quest.

This is a historical novel much in the tradition shaped by Geoffrey Trease – and notably developed by Joan Lingard herself; the young protagonist living by his wits, growing into manhood not least through the quiet courage of a young woman. As with Trease, the geographical and political contexts are well researched. It may be that the edge of excitement is blunted a little in that although Nick and Isabel are in some danger, the war is actually over and we do not ever really fear for their ultimate safety. To ensure young readers become familiar with a relatively little known conflict, characters are likely to *explain* rather frequently ('... but, as you know, the Church was supporting the Fascist Nationalists') and Lingard is at pains to be even-handed about the savagery of both sides.

This is one of those 'for the right reader' novels – someone inquisitive about the past, responsive to a carefully plotted story, told without sensationalism. It will also satisfy those who have wondered just what the significance of 'Guernica' was, or what the guidebook references to a civil war were about when they've visited Barcelona or even Malaga. GF

Mary, Bloody Mary

0 00 715029 6

Beware, Princess Elizabeth

0 00 715030 X

INFORMATION STORY ★★★

Carolyn Meyer, Collins, 240pp, £4.99 each pbk

Mary, Bloody Mary seems initially an ill-chosen title until one is reminded in the Afterword of Mary I's persecution of heretics during her five-year rule. For in this book, which charts the events that *precede* her reign, the quiet but steely Mary presents herself as heroine, a girl whose cosy court life is destroyed by her father Henry VIII's abandonment of her mother, Catherine of Arragon, for Anne Boleyn in order to secure a (legitimate) male heir.

Colourful characters abound. The court is a knot of knee-crooking knaves. Tubby Cardinal Wolsey lurks, a shadowy spin doctor to the monarch, who is later supplanted by the wily Cromwell. Lady Margaret, Mary's lady-in-waiting, is a droll but dutiful confidante. Firmly at the centre of the novel, though, is a powerful sense of the enmity between 'Bloody' Mary and 'Bewitching' Boleyn who, in Mary's eyes, is a 'birthmark-blotted, flat-chested, goggle-eyed whore' that has bamboozled her beloved father.

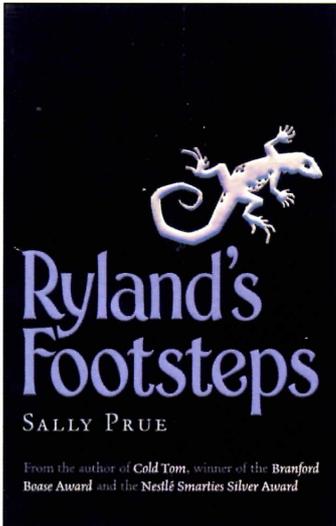
Memorably melodramatic is the King's impromptu audience with Mary, in which the idea of ditching Mary's mother for Boleyn is first mooted. It ends with the egocentric and irascible king storming out with a rattled 'Good day, madam' to his

unimpressed daughter. Memorably moving, given her poisonous influence on Henry and her ruthless fervour to be queen, is the description of Anne Boleyn's execution. Suddenly a pitiful figure, she stumbles up the steps of the scaffold, defiantly sweeping her raven black hair away to expose a marble-skinned neck to her executioner.

Although the Mary/Anne conflict powers the narrative, Henry VIII looms large through the novel and the change in Henry VIII from the athletic hunt-aholic young man of the start to the club-footed bloated-bodied wreck of the end is striking. Indeed, Henry is more metaphor than monarch at the end, his physical deterioration symbolic both of personal corruption and England's declining fortunes, too.

Beware, Princess Elizabeth is set in the messy aftermath of Henry VIII's death where the boy king Edward VI – a puppet of his privy councillors – struggles to maintain any authority. Like *Mary, Bloody Mary* it too is told from the eponymous heroine's point of view, but all too soon Edward is dead and, with monstrous Mary as queen and Catholicism now ascendant, Elizabeth finds herself at the mercy of scheming sycophants and spies. Defiance is dangerous and the pragmatic protestant is forced to submit to her sovereign's will – in outward appearance at least.

With deft use of historical detail and narratives driven by plots and power struggles, these are eminently readable accounts of exceptional lives. Both books present a compelling insight into the insecurities of Tudor times, where marriage was for political needs not pleasure and where apparently pious rulers maintained their power and privileges not by Faith but by fear. NA



Ryland's Footsteps

★★★★

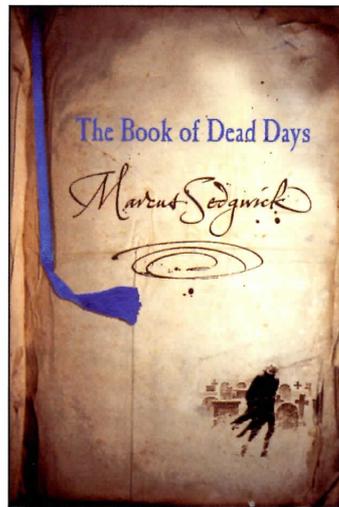
Sally Prue, Oxford, 256pp, 0 19 271949 1, £6.99 pbk

Rye's father is appointed as Governor to a new penal colony on a sub-tropical island. His method of governing his new domain is intolerant and unflinchingly energetic – moulding it to his specifications, regardless of custom or understanding.

Rye forms a tentative friendship with Kris, whose father wants him to become as accomplished a

practitioner of island magic as he is. Both boys are trapped by their parents' assumptions that they will follow the same life paths. When Steff arrives with her father, a prisoner for crimes of environmental terrorism, the picture is complete. However, Rye's father unwittingly destroys the island's landscape and triggers a catastrophic earthquake, Rye discovers he is the result of a cloning experiment, and Kris and Steff rebel against their parents' expectations in order to break outmoded and destructive moulds.

Comparisons with Louis Sachar's *Holes* bear fruit but this is an original thought-provoking story, powerfully and graphically written, which memorably warns of the consequences of blindly following tradition at the expense of communal well-being. VR



The Book of Dead Days

★★★★

Marcus Sedgwick, Orion, 272pp, 1 84255 217 1, £8.99 hbk

'Darkness', the first word of the novel, immediately establishes an atmosphere of menace and brooding evil and the Joyce-like repetition thereafter of 'dark', 'darkening' and 'darkness(es)' foregrounds a sense of death, decay and degradation throughout. Set in 'City', a nameless metropolis of soaring citadels, subterranean catacombs and a labyrinth of streets, criss-crossed by canals, *The Book of Dead Days* is an impressively atmospheric novel.

At the centre of the story is the relationship between Valerian, a seemingly Vaudevillesque magician – the book begins midway through his 'Man in Two Halves' illusion – and his servant, Boy. But Valerian is more than just a stage magician. Part Frankenstein, part Faustus, he is a Natural Philosopher who has made a mysterious pact with a demonic power. In three days' time, he will pay the price for the bargain he struck 15 years previously...

A lot can happen in three days – even 'dead' ones. There is body-snatching. And murder. Even burial alive. And the novel concludes with a gripping chase – *The Third Man*-like – in a monochromatic underworld of waste water. *The Book of Dead Days* is deliciously gothic in atmosphere and gripping to read. NA

No-Flinch Lynch

★★★

Jonathan Kebbe, Corgi Yearling, 304pp, 0 440 86509 3, £4.99 pbk

With his politician father serving a two-month prison sentence and his mother travelling the world campaigning for her environmental causes, 12-year-old Lorcan Lynch is forced to leave his native Dublin to go to stay with a marvellously eccentric aunt in the west of Ireland. Initially, he has to contend with some scornful bullying at his new school, a problem compounded by recurring attacks of asthma. Soon, however, he is befriended by fellow-pupil Blaise, who enlists him in her mission to rescue animals being maltreated on a nearby island. As the story of a boy engaged in several fights for freedom – helped here by inspirational memories of his family's historical links with Ché Guevara – this is an enjoyable read; it is given considerable freshness by the picture of the contemporary Ireland, urban and rural, which serves as its background. RD

Icelfire

★★★★

Chris d'Lacey, Orchard, 352pp, 1 84362 373 0, £10.99 hbk

David, student and fledgling writer for children, lodges with Liz, a maker of clay (but not lifeless) dragons. The quiet magic of the dragon's existence is the prelude to an ancient mythology of the last dragons and their arctic allies the bears and the tussle to reclaim the dragon Gawain's fire tear. When the terrifying Gwilanna appears (no one believes her alias as Aunt Gwyneth) the present and peaceful world becomes a vicious battle where clay dragons all have roles alongside the humans. The fantasy creaks a little early on as if it may be mumbo jumbo but, by the end, the reader is in that cold snowy wild, exhausted from the ordeal. The essential grip on the real world may be what is missing and even confusing at times, or is it the undercurrent of humour – so dangerous if you're trying to take fantasy seriously? An intensely imagined fantasy world where richness of plot and range of characters may require sequels. AJ

Lionboy

★★★

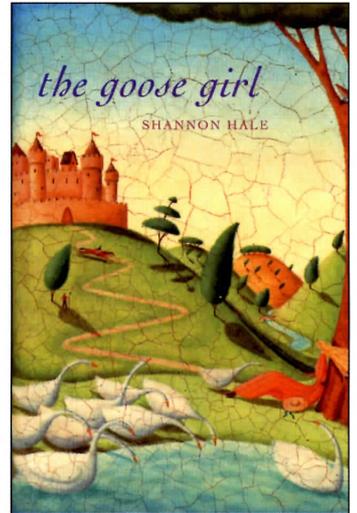
Zizou Corder, ill. Fred van Deelen, Puffin, 352pp, 0 14 138024 1, £12.99 hbk

Lionboy's eponymous hero, Charlie Ashanti, has an amazing gift – he can speak Cat – the language of cats wild and domestic alike. And, like Harry Potter, whose heroic zigzag is emblazoned on his forehead, this hero's fleshwound is branded on his forearm, where he was scratched by a lion as a child.

Charlie's adventures begin when his parents are kidnapped, having discovered a cure for asthma, and his quest to find them leads him to stow on board a circus ship bound for Paris. The circus setting provides a colourful cornucopia of characters from Madame Barbu the bearded lady, to Sigi the acrobat, to Maccomo the lion tamer who enrolls Charlie as his apprentice. It is then, in 'servitude' to Maccomo, that Charlie resolves to not only find and free his abducted elders,

but to liberate the circus lions, too.

Setting the story in a futuristic London, when cars are banned and governments kowtow to multinational conglomerates – 'the Empire' – seemed unnecessarily right-on while the later sections aboard the Orient Express with King Boris of Bulgaria were cringingly quaint. But this is a delightfully old-fashioned adventure story at heart, with its Tintinesque hero pitted against blundering baddies, and it will not fail to please. More pacy than Potter, *Lionboy* is a rollercoaster romp of an adventure from the mother/daughter writing partnership that is 'Zizou Corder'. NA

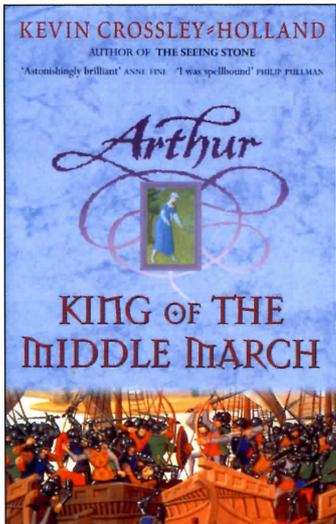


The Goose Girl

★★★★

Shannon Hale, Bloomsbury, 400pp, 0 7475 6419 1, £12.99 hbk

This impressive first novel by a new American writer typifies the growing tendency for classic folktales to find new life in the full-length modern children's story. Drawing on traditional romance and magic with its potential for thoughtful allegory, *The Goose Girl* creates an imaginary medieval world. Here a betrayed and dispossessed princess discovers magical powers, wars are fought with swords and javelins, and royal journeys take months on horseback through vast empty forests. But important modern parallels are there for those who look. Crown Princess Anidori of remote little Kildenree, intuitively able to communicate with animals and natural forces but inept at 'people-speaking', is deprived of the succession by the queen her mother and instead sent to a political marriage with the heir to powerful and warlike Bayern, the neighbouring kingdom. En route she is betrayed by her lady-in-waiting, who displaces her, and is forced to earn her living as a goose girl in Bayern until she can reclaim what is rightfully hers. Her experience as a lowly goose girl makes her a wiser and more confident princess. She is finally able to stop the war which militant Bayern, misinformed by the false princess and its own warmongering prime minister, is about to launch against harmless Kildenree. This is a highly readable, suspenseful and captivating novel. No doubt unintentionally, it also becomes a striking allegory about powerful, violent, trigger-happy countries which use fabricated dangers to justify pre-emptive warfare against faraway weak nations. PH



King of the Middle March

★★★★★

Kevin Crossley-Holland, Orion, 416pp, 1 84255 060 8, £12.99 hbk

'Away east over the thousand-tongued sea, with all its sweet promises, its stabs and sudden rushes, one silver-gold blade of light.'

A sword. No! A scimitar. That's what I saw when I lifted the salt-sticky flap of our tent.'

The final part of the trilogy opens into this vividly seen gathering of the Fourth Crusade armies in Venice where Arthur is at 'crossing places' in even more complex ways than before: here physically crossing between cultures, between boyhood and manhood and, as before, between the story of King Arthur and his own 14th-century replaying of its themes. There are dramatic set pieces of battle and re-imagined Arthurian legend threaded through with the continuity and parallels of the two 'Arthur' worlds – his and our own. Finely written, it has the same short chapters as the other books (just over a hundred here), often as spare and intense as the scenes of

sometimes ordinary, sometimes awfully real medieval life and death that they depict. Arthur re-sees the tragic breaking up of the Arthurian romance in mud and blood, as his own romantic views confront the vicious brutality of warfare where he can loathe and love the 'enemy' and his fellow 'Christians'. This is a trilogy to grow up with, now in this third part, like the Arthur legend, more darkly toned with death and doubt. It is Arthur's journey, a growing up and growing into understanding. The crafted narrative is made of a montage of scenes that will finally take Arthur home for Easter, returning to the world of the earlier books. He is the same but different, wiser now, a knight-of-the-head-and-heart with questions still to be resolved (the troubling similar look of the eyes that Winnie shares with Guinevere and gritty Gatty's unfinished story). A beautifully produced book, a treat to hold and to read: a wonderful achievement. AJ

The Blood Stone

★★★★

Jamila Gavin, Egmont, 416pp, 1 4052 0927 5, £10.99 hbk

The Blood Stone begins and ends in the Venice of some unspecified bygone era and moves across to Hindustan of the same period. The story follows young Filippo as he ventures through many dangerous and enchanting lands in a desperate bid to save his family from his treacherous brother-in-law by rescuing the father who disappeared before he was born. In his skull Filippo carries his father's ransom – a diamond of astounding beauty with magical properties, his father's marriage-gift to his mother, the matriarch who has striven to hold her family together and keep alive the dwindling hope of her husband's return. The diamond is a 'blood stone' which both endangers Filippo's life because others will kill him for it, and enables him to survive because it allows him to see people and things as they truly are.

The Blood Stone is an enjoyable read because it is a story of adventure,

love, courage, hope and friendship. It also provides a strong feel of what Europe and the East were like in times past, of the very different relationship which they had then from the one they have now. Despite all this, I frequently found my attention wandering from Filippo's adventures or the developments back in Venice during his absence. The novel somehow lacks the effortlessly compelling drama of its predecessor, Gavin's justifiably highly acclaimed **Coram Boy**, which raised many interesting and important issues. This is perhaps unfair – using the masterpiece **Coram Boy** as a standard for judging all Gavin's subsequent work. Suffice it then to say that those who loved **Coram Boy**, will find this semi-fantasy a very different type of story altogether. SP

10 November 1989: The Fall of the Berlin Wall

Brian Williams, 1 84234 199 5

21 July 1969: First Man on the Moon

John and Hilary Malam, 1 84234 201 0

11 November 1918: The World War I Armistice

John Malam, 1 84234 200 2

12 October 1492: Columbus reaches the Americas

John Malam, 1 84234 198 7

11 September 2001: Attack on America

Brian Williams, 1 84234 202 9

NON-FICTION ★★

Cherrytree 'Dates with History', 32pp, £7.99 each hbk

These are five of the twelve books that make up Cherrytree's series of 'Dates with History'. They include both the earliest and the latest in the series: Columbus's arrival in the New World in 1492 and the attack on the World Trade Centre on September 11. They are short narratives, not

only of the events on the dates themselves but also of historical developments of which they were a part. **The Fall of the Berlin Wall** is part of a discussion of the Cold War; and **The World War I Armistice** offers an account of the whole conflict, including its causes. Only **11 September** is largely restricted to the events on the day itself.

These are introductions which, although in double page format with an illustration to each page, have the feel of continuous text. They go into no detail, and are simply and directly written. There are virtues to this approach, perhaps for the reader who has only a casual interest in the event, but there's also the feeling of a lot left out. This is particularly true of the captions on the illustrations. These often don't comment on the content of the illustrations, nor give their provenance or date, and sometimes even fail to point out whether they are artists' impressions or photographs. This cavalier attitude to historical evidence is possibly not something that schools would want to encourage.

It may be that these authors are experts in their fields. However, there is very little impression of enthusiasm for the subject, or of a greater knowledge lurking below the surface of the text. The series format makes the books all look and read the same. Although they may serve as starting points for the study of their subjects, their readers will need to go elsewhere to get a fuller picture. Unfortunately, although there is a timeline, glossary and index in each book, they offer no suggestions for further reading. CB

PICTURE BOOKS RELEVANT TO OLDER READERS:

The Wolves in the Walls (see p22)

The Story of Frog Belly Rat Bone (see p22)

REVIEWS 14+ Secondary/Adult

A Jetblack Sunrise. Poems about War and Conflict

POETRY ★★★★★

Compiled by Jan Mark, ill. John Yates, Hodder, 160pp, 0 7502 4293 0, £10.99 hbk

There isn't a shortage of anthologies of war poetry for young adults, but this is an outstanding collection. Mark restricts her choice largely to poems originally written in the English language, and the conflicts are largely British or American. Nevertheless, there is a wide experience of war here, from Agincourt to the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and, while there are some predictable poets and poems, many more are surprising and thought-provoking, reflecting the depth of Mark's reading and the subtlety of her approach. She is as much concerned with the causes and repercussions of political violence, both social and individual,

as with the direct experience of the battlefield.

Her arrangement is as original as her choice of poems. As she admits in her foreword, few readers are likely to read an anthology as they would a novel from the beginning to the end, but those that take the hint, and do exactly that, will find themselves on a dramatic journey. We begin with aspirations for peace, pass through a growing clamour of incitement and exhortation, are caught up in battle, faced with the aftermath and casualties of war, and finally left in an incomplete peace. In this last condition, as in the last 50 years in Britain, war and the threat of war remain constant, even if the fighting may be in the news rather than in the next street. Individual poems will make demands on the perception and empathy of any reader of whatever age, but this is in the nature of the subject matter. The final line of the anthology, from a Margaret Atwood poem, puts it succinctly: 'for every year of peace

there have been four hundred years of war.'

It's a pity that the book's production does not do justice to the text. To a generation familiar with the harrowing photographic images of modern war reportage, and in the context of the poems, John Yates's black and white illustrations may seem inconsequential. The cover does the book no favours. It's a collection that will need promoting to young people. CB

The Opposite of Chocolate

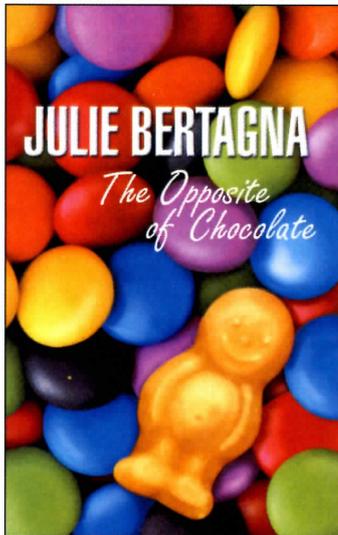
★★★★★

Julie Bertagna, Macmillan Young Picador, 196pp, 0 330 41345 7, £9.99 pbk

Tensions implicit in parent-child relationships underpin Bertagna's novel. At the centre, there is Sapphire, aged 14 and pregnant. Her parents have different views about what the outcome of the pregnancy

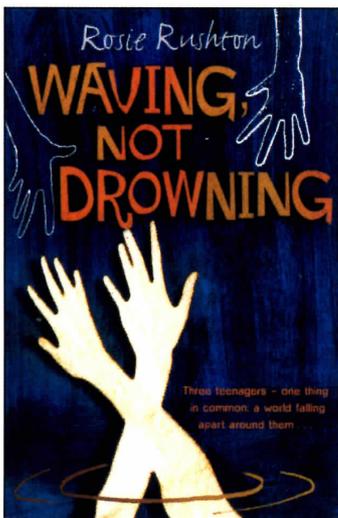
should be, and her father's experiences of his own parents influence his attitude. Then there is Gil, a schoolboy who starts fires as release from the memory of his mother who deserted him when he was very young, and whose father has had difficulty coping with the ensuing situation. And there is Grace, the smooth 'chocolate girl' who seems to have everything but the love of her mother, and the television presenter desperate for a child, who is prepared to give Sapphire a lot of money in return for her baby. Even the zealous nun, Sister Pi, is influenced in her campaign to save Sapphire's baby from abortion by her own founding status as a baby.

All of this is set against a hot summer in the suburbs. The opening scenes are the strongest in the book. Bertagna has carefully built a feeling of overwhelming heat and a stifling atmosphere where almost anything might happen as young people congregate together on the outskirts



of the town waiting and watching for the latest outbreak of fire.

Bertagna works hard to show the different directions in which Sapphire is pulled as she tries to come to terms with her own previously barely understood sexuality and its consequence. At times her efforts to present all these different perspectives, and those of the adults involved too, strains the narrative and narrowly avoids didacticism. Overall this is a brave novel which sharply captures the turmoil of a young girl caught in a terrifying situation. VC



Waving Not Drowning

★★★★

Rosie Rushton, Andersen, 224pp, 1 84270 237 8, £5.99 pbk

Rushton cleverly reverses the title of the famous Stevie Smith poem to suggest that these are stories of hope, not despair.

The lives of three teenagers occupy the narrative: Lyall, who is in long-term foster care after the death of his sister and the departure of his mother; Jay, who is struggling to cope alone with the stress of his grandmother's Alzheimer's affliction; and Fiona, who fears she is pregnant and wants only to be loved by the baby's father in a way she feels she has never been by her parents.

This sounds like an overload of doom but the three narratives run parallel to each other and the twists and turns alleviate the pessimism which might otherwise drag down the book. The stories have a

credibility gained through their strong characterisation, their pacy structure and their realistic teenage dialogue.

The neatness of all three endings jars a little after the carefully constructed realism of the rest of the book but there is always reader satisfaction in seeing characters who have become familiar being justly served. VR

A Crack in the Line

★★★

Michael Lawrence, Orchard, 288pp, 1 84121 166 4, £12.99 hbk

A Crack in the Line is the first volume of Lawrence's much trumpeted 'brilliant and unpredictable trilogy *The Aldous Lexicon*'. 16-year-olds Alaric and Naia discover that they are each living the other's life in alternate realities, even though Alaric is a boy and Naia a girl. The story is set in 2005 in a county in the UK which 'does not officially exist' – all we know is that it's a county hard to place in the south of England in which it snows heavily over half-term. Alaric and Naia both live at Withern Rise, a big nineteenth-century house on the banks of a river.

In Alaric's world, his mother died in a train crash two years earlier and his father has hooked up with another woman. The house is a mess, he's doing very badly at school and over half-term he has to put up with his aunt, the mad older sister of his mother. In Naia's world, her mother – the same Alex Underwood who is Alaric's mother – survived the crash and then won the lottery so the house is newly decorated and they have a new car. The aunt doesn't exist as she was aborted before birth.

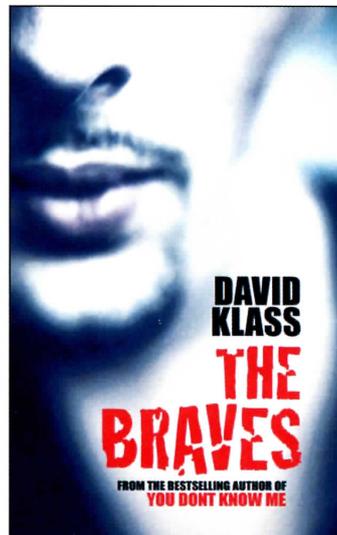
Lawrence creates many inviting and intriguing worlds in this novel, some of which overlap and occasionally confuse but which will surely become clearer and more real as the trilogy develops. There's the two versions of the twenty-first-century Underwood family, one with a warm and stylish house and the other with a broken boiler and dust everywhere; the stories about 'Bishop Underwood', the Victorian patriarch who built the house and seduced the local women; and the third and fourth alternate worlds that Alaric stumbles upon, one with murdering burglars and the other with another Alaric. The mysterious character Aldous Underwood, who gives his name to the trilogy, is perhaps the key to these many worlds but readers will evidently have to wait for the second and third instalments to find out. Lawrence also leaves readers waiting for more revelations when he writes two alternative endings – do Naia and Alaric swap lives or not? OD

The Braves

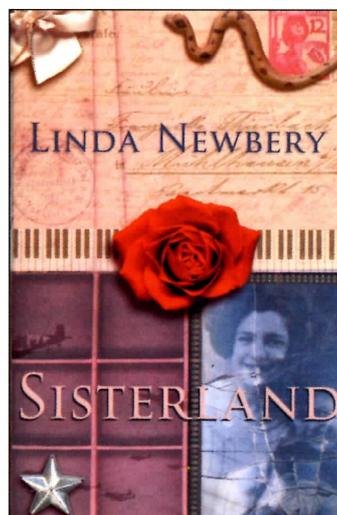
★★★★

David Klass, Puffin, 304pp, 0 14 131678 0, £5.99 pbk

Joe captains the 'Braves', the not-very-good school 'soccer' team. It's America and the game we know, although they play with some of the terminology, and Joe is their sweeper, usually their brave last defender against the odds until the 'phenom' arrives – a Brazilian magician of a forward. Simple stuff at this level but only part of more serious things Joe has to tackle and where his defending has to be much



more deeply brave. The 'phenom' takes the girl that Joe has never been daring enough to turn from girl friend to girlfriend. The simmering antagonism of opposing factions boils over within the school forcing Joe to defend a friend against the violent and rough justice of the school yard and the tough 'Bankside' kids (who make up the successful 'football' team) bussed into this Lawndale school. It's a physical fight that Joe bravely takes on, like his dad before him, but is he brave enough finally to turn away from it and learn from what has happened to his dad? A worthwhile future requires him to show his intelligence. It's a great mixture of adolescent tensions of the fist (or boot), the heart and the head. AJ



Sisterland

★★★★

Linda Newbery, David Fickling, 384pp, 0 385 60470 X, £10.99 hbk

Sisterland is Newbery's most ambitious and complex novel to date. It opens with 16-year-old Hilly writing a letter to someone whom she misses so much it hurts and urging them to 'Go carefully now. Mind the corners'. The quotation, one of her grandmother's sayings, leads her to reflect on J B Priestley's play *Dangerous Corners* which revolves around a pivotal moment when one can choose to move in one direction which leads to the difficult questions and disclosure of unsettling revelations or move safely in the other direction – a dangerous

corner. *Sisterland* is about one such moment in Hilly's life.

As with her previous novel *The Shell House*, Newbery explores the intertwining of the past and the present. When she gets Alzheimer's disease, Hilly's German grandmother Heidigran, moves in with her family. As the disease progresses and her mind becomes more muddled, secrets buried in her past start to emerge. The second time frame is set during and the immediate post WWII period: a young Jewish girl Sarah Reubens is transported for safety from Cologne to England. Sarah is the young Heidigran who has over the years developed her own racist agenda. Hilly's growing love affair with a Palestinian boy Rashid further complicates the story.

Newbery explores with great sensitivity displacement, alienation, belonging and racism, skilfully pulling together the ideological issues with the personal story. She writes convincingly and tenderly about adolescent love. At times the issues seem too large for exploration in one novel but *Sisterland* will repay a second reading. NG

Autism

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Sarah Lennard-Brown, 0 7502 4370 8

Solvents

NON-FICTION ★★★

Karla Fitzhugh, 0 7502 4374 0

Hodder Wayland 'Health Issues', 64pp, £12.99 each hbk

Two further books in the important 'Health Issues' series aimed at teenagers. The amount of textual information is impressive, and the explanations while clear are often complex. Individuals' stories add greatly to the impact of the information, as do photographs and graphics, and parents and carers will find the books of vital interest. *Autism* presents a discussion on whether Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism are the same thing; spectrum disorders and conditions similar to autism are also explained. We learn about the 'triad of impairment': social relationships, verbal and nonverbal communication, and imagination. There are chapters on the causes, therapies (very detailed), and living with the condition at home and at school.

Solvents is equally detailed, and, because it is about substance abuse, is often painful. The pull-no-punches approach is essential, particularly because the section on 'deliberate abuse' gives very exact information about how abusers go about sniffing glue, paints, aerosols, etc. This could be considered a 'how to' manual, and in using the book one must weigh carefully the fact that this information is included. It is certainly true that there is huge emphasis on sudden death, even at the first time of using, and the individuals' accounts of their experiences should put most teenagers off. The fact that so many substances capable of being abused are readily available in the home is a matter for real concern. A history of substance abuse and statistical patterns around the world are included, and there are chapters on the risks of inhalants, addiction, and how family and friends can help. Both books include indexes, glossaries, and lists of resources such as websites, books, and organisations. ES

CLASSICS IN SHORT No.43

Brian Alderson

'Stand and Unfold Yourself.' Opening the
Tales from Shakespear by Charles and Mary Lamb.

Is this a record?

Can any of our erudite readers name a children's book by a British author that is with us now and has been continuously in print for longer than *Tales from Shakespear*? So titled, they were first published nearly two hundred years ago, and although some traditional literature and some works like *Little Goody Two-Shoes* or *Songs of Innocence* have a greater longevity they do not fulfil the conditions laid down up there. The *Tales* are great survivors.

The history of their publication is a tale in itself,

events being set in train (though unbeknown to everyone) with the tragic death of Mary Wollstonecraft following the birth of her daughter Mary. Her husband, and Mary's father, was the radical philosopher William Godwin, who had been a central influence on 'the first romantics' and who was a good friend of Charles and Mary Lamb. He was not altogether of this world though (who is?) and was hardly the chap to be single father to a new-born child and to one other little girl who had been the result of Wollstonecraft's liaison with Gilbert Imlay.

So along comes 'the Bad Baby'.

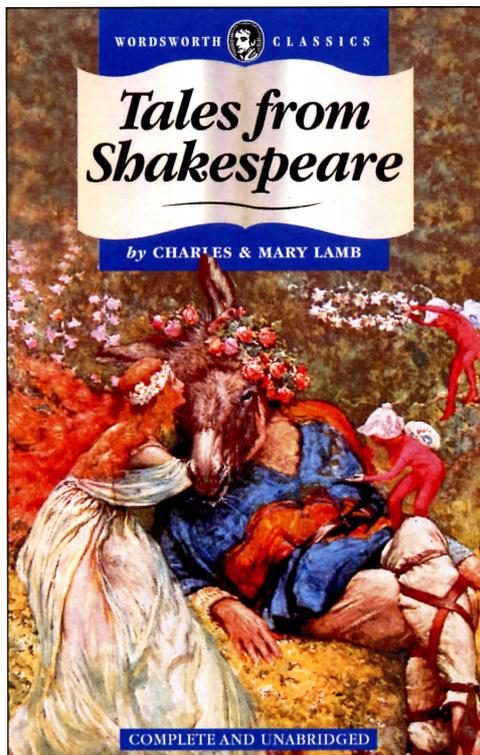
Perhaps flattered, and certainly seduced, by a neighbouring single mother – Mary Jane Clairmont – poor old Godwin found himself enmeshed in a second marriage (with two further children instantly attached). The new Mrs Godwin was by no means appreciated by his old friends, but – having some literary pretensions – she persuaded the philosopher to take up a business career as a publisher of children's books and in 1805 they set up 'The Juvenile Library' behind the facade of their employee Thomas Hodgkins (the name of William Godwin was thought too redolent of subversion to be connected with books for youth).

In setting up their list

the Godwins relied upon themselves for some copy (William wrote as 'Edward Baldwin') and called also upon their literary friends. Despite antipathy towards Mary Jane, for whom they invented the sobriquet 'the bad baby', Charles and Mary Lamb were willing enough to try to earn some pin-money by writing for the new publisher and Charles's picture-book version of *The King and Queen of Hearts* was one of the first works to appear under the Hodgkins imprint. With that done, Godwin then broached the idea of a prose retelling of some of Shakespeare's plays and the *Tales* were commissioned.

Twenty stories in all

were completed and these were published in 1807 in two volumes with an engraved plate for each tale. These were probably designed by the youthful William Mulready, who worked closely



and penuriously with Godwin at this time, but the optimistic idea that they were engraved by William Blake is reprobated by the Blakeans. Charles Lamb was also scathing about the fact that the pictures were probably done direct from the plays since they included images not sanctioned by the text of the *Tales*. It's also worth noting



There upon a heath, exposed to the fury of the storm on a dark night, did King Lear wander out

that Godwin – who turns out to be one of the most imaginative and inventive of all children's book publishers (hence his failure) – decided to issue the stories individually as picture books, each illustrated with three hand-coloured plates. Only eight of these came out however and they now figure among the rarest of all English children's books.

'An old literary Darby and Joan'

– taking snuff and groaning – wrote Mary about their joint labours on the twenty tales. She was the prime author, dealing with fourteen plays, while Charles tackled six tragedies. The intentions behind the venture are given in their Preface – the first half by Mary, the second by Charles – the idea being to offer children, especially girls, a way-mark to Shakespeare's often contorted and factitious plots so that a later reading, or sight, of the real thing will allow a readier appreciation of the dramatic texts. (Such a procedure is still approved in works like *Kobbe's Opera Book*.) Boys, 'generally permitted the use of their fathers' libraries' earlier than girls, were put in charge of bringing along the Bardic education of their sisters.

Whatever amusement – or outrage

– Darby and Joan may inspire today by such explicit purposes, the classic status of their writing is still to be respected, although it is often traduced in 'educational' editions. They admit the inherent difficulty of abridging often complex dramatic verse into a plain prose narrative ('faint and imperfect stamps of Shakespear's matchless image') but the job has rarely been bettered, though many have tried. If the *Tales* do not speak to readers today it may well be that we no longer desire our children to approach Shakespeare's plays through the dignity of carefully-crafted prose, which may demand undue readerly effort. Better far to damn the dignity and reduce everything to strip cartoons, or two-page synopses, or Shakespeare Without the Boring Bits. That's as we like it. ■

The illustrations are taken from the Wordsworth Classics edition (1 85326 140 8, £1.25 pbk). The cover is Titania and Bottom by Edith Nesbit (1858–1924), courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library, and the line drawings are by Arthur Rackham. Also available is a Puffin Classics edition (0 14 036677 6, £4.99 pbk).

Brian Alderson has published an essay on Godwin's Juvenile Library: "Mister Gobwin" [sic] and "his interesting little books, adorned with beautiful copper-plates" Princeton University Library Chronicle LIX, 2 (Winter 1998) pp. 159–189. He is founder of the Children's Books History Society and children's book consultant for *The Times*.

