



BOOKS FOR KEEPS

September 2004
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the children's book magazine

CHRIS RIDDELL • JACQUELINE WILSON • POETRY

My Friend Mr Leakey

J.B.S. Haldane
Illustrations and introduction
by Quentin Blake

"Mr Leakey is just as funny and extraordinary as ever!"

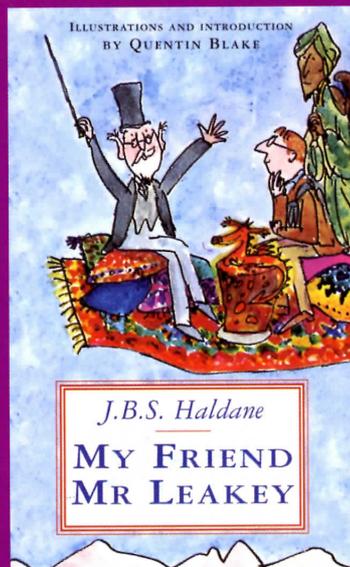
Quentin Blake

Jane Nissen Books brings back into print classic children's books and old favourites, most of which have been unavailable for years. *My Friend Mr Leakey* is a hugely funny book which young children will love. Its author J.B.S. Haldane was a famous scientist who taught at the universities of Oxford, Cambridge and London. His idea was to make science popular and he had many ideas that were ahead of his time. Quentin Blake's numerous illustrations add to the fun.

Mr Leakey is a practical magician. He can become invisible when he needs to. He has a useful magic carpet for travelling, and a small dragon who can grill fish by spitting fire. He's also good at bewitching things!

Published: 2nd September 2004
ISBN: 1 903252 19 9 Price: £7.99

 JANE NISSEN BOOKS



Wings over Delft

Book 1: The Louise Trilogy
Aubrey Flegg

Bisto Book of the Year

"I found myself captivated ... and as for the sequel? Can't wait."

Jamila Gavin

"A wonderful story set in a very exciting time, the quality of the writing is superb and the ending unforgettably moving. A must for the school library."

Pat Williams, School Librarian

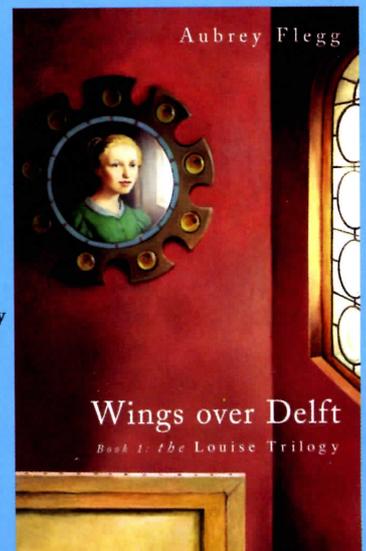
Three centuries of love, conflict and discovery begin with a painting of Louise. As the daughter of a wealthy Dutch family, Louise Eeden knows that certain things are expected of her. When her father commissions a famous artist to paint her portrait, she reluctantly agrees. But lately things have started to move too fast in her life. Somehow everyone believes she is engaged to Reynier DeVries; she is chaperoned and protected, a commodity to be exchanged in a marriage that will merge two respected pottery businesses.

In the studio with Master Haitink and his gangly apprentice, Pieter, Louise unexpectedly finds the freedom to be herself. But someone has been watching her every move, and her deepening friendship with Pieter has not gone unnoticed. Behind the scenes, a web of treachery and deceit is gradually unravelling, leading to a brutal and shocking confrontation.

And fate has yet another surprise in store for Louise Eeden...

Published: 28th September 2004
ISBN: 0 86278 886 2 Price: £5.99

 O'BRIEN



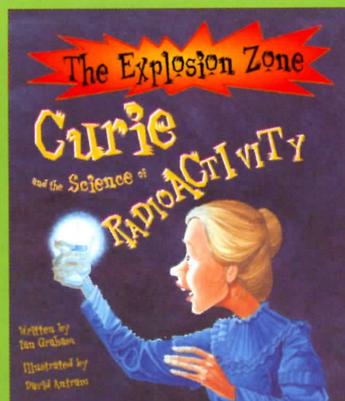
The Explosion Zone: Curie and the Science of Radioactivity

Ian Graham
illustrated by David Antram

The Explosion Zone is a dynamic new series with witty, eye-catching illustrations and stimulating texts that will appeal to budding young scientists! An ideal introduction to the people whose discoveries shaped the modern world.

Marie Curie's pioneering work opened up a completely new branch of science that led to nuclear power stations, radiation treatment for cancer and advanced our understanding of atoms. This marvellous book describes Marie's struggles for funding and material in a predominantly masculine world, as well as her relationship with her husband Pierre and his untimely death. David Antram's full-colour illustrations combine humour with accurate scientific detail while *Here's the Science* boxes illustrate and explain crucial technical information.

Published: 3rd October 2004
ISBN: 1 904642 53 5 Price: £10.99 HB
ISBN: 1 904194 54 3 Price: £5.99 PB



Lizzie Nonsense

Jan Ormerod

"Looking back now, I often wonder how we existed during the next few years. Farming failed as dingoes killed our few sheep and a poison weed that used to come up like young cabbages after rain killed all but three of our cows. To make a living, my husband hunted and shot kangaroos for their skins - and often we ate them too - trapped possums for their skins and dingoes for their scalps. He stripped Mallet Bark and cut Sandalwood. He had to cart the bark and wood to Wagin, fifty miles away, on sand tracks with his team of horses and waggon.

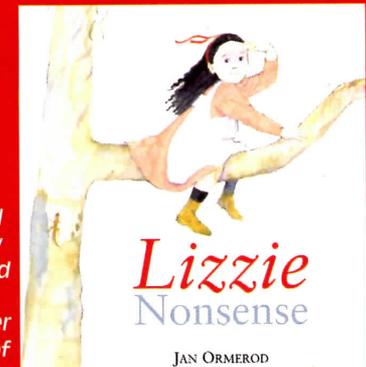
On the very many occasions when my husband had to be away from home, carting the wood and bark or guiding other settlers, I was completely on my own, later with a young baby, sometimes up to a week at a time, and I lived in constant fear."

The above is an extract from Jan Ormerod's grandmother's memories of her life as a young wife and mother living in the Australian bush, far from neighbours, family or friends.

Her "small stern Grandmother" became a heroine to Jan and LIZZIE NONSENSE is an homage to a remarkable woman - and the many others like her. It is also a warm, tender story about mother and daughter.

Published: 2nd September 2004
ISBN: 1 877003 59 X Price: £9.99

LITTLE HARE 



BfK Previews
WHERE PUBLISHERS ANNOUNCE THEIR MAJOR FORTHCOMING TITLES

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EDITORIAL

How strange it is that the business of publishing should be referred to as the publishing 'industry'. Talk of publishing 'product' used to astonish me during my own career as an editor in said industry: 'Product?' I pondered, 'but we're talking about books. Each one is different and unique.' Trade publishing is not, after all, an activity that lends itself to industrialisation.

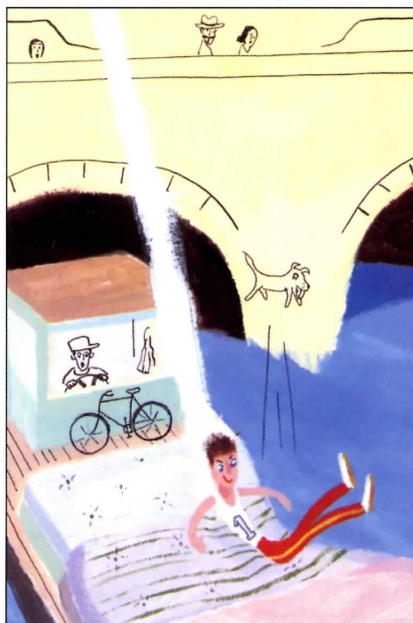
In this issue of BfK we feature two important literary prizes. Julia Eccleshare discusses the Branford Boase Award and Morag Styles the CLPE Poetry Award. Both articles set out what the respective judges were looking for and thereby serve to underline the essential requirement of good publishing – that at least some of the books that result should not only demonstrate a grasp of technique and genre but have something new to say and/or have the capacity to say what is said in a new and original way. It is rightly for the judges of fiction, poetry and illustration prizes to pose the key questions: does this particular writer or poet really have their own voice? Does this illustrator have their own fresh and distinctive style?



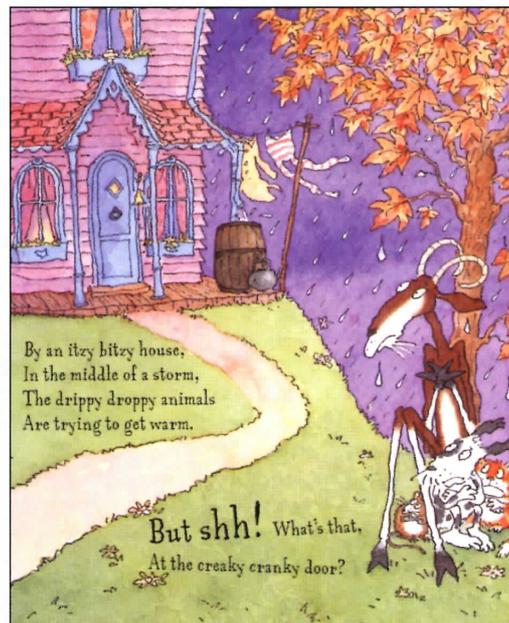
Rosemary Stones

The Branford Boase Award reminds us that the crucial underpinning to the publication of fresh new voices is good editing – as Julia Eccleshare puts it: 'that all important editorial hand'. What is also needed these days, however, is the editor's commitment to stick with and champion an author or illustrator's career through what may be an initial period of disappointing sales. Increasingly in the big publishing houses, editors need political skills to be able to build their author or illustrator until their books come good in the market place.

Rosemary



Left: 'The Great Elastic Marvel did a seat drop into the middle of the mattresses.' from *Boing!*, Editor's Choice with five stars reviewed on page 18. Right: from *Itzy Bitzy House*, with four stars – also reviewed on page 18.



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Everyone longs for a friend – someone who can be counted on and trusted – and none more so than children approaching puberty or experiencing adolescence. A major theme of the hugely popular novels of Jacqueline Wilson is the nature of friendship. But what function does friendship serve for young readers? School counsellor and psychotherapist **Meg Errington** explores.

A few weeks ago, I took Izzy, my nine-year-old niece, to the Polka theatre in Wimbledon, South London. We are great fans of this wonderful theatre she and I, and we have seen consistently brilliant productions there. This time we were going to see a play of Jacqueline Wilson's novel **Bad Girls**. The auditorium looked like a convention of nine-year-old girls; I spotted few boys in the audience. The play was superb. Izzy and I thought it was even better than **Double Act**, another adaptation of a Jacqueline Wilson novel about twins which we went to see last year. As a psychotherapist and a school counsellor of fifteen years, I found myself once again admiring how well Jacqueline Wilson understands the major concerns and anxieties of girls of this age group. What contributed particularly to this play's success was that all the characters were played by adults, like in Dennis Potter's play **Blue Remembered Hills**, and as a result, both the cruelty and the vulnerability of children were highlighted most dramatically.

Friendship and its opposite

All Wilson's books explore the tensions between friendship and its opposite, falling out and the pain of being left out, common themes heard by school counsellors. **Bad Girls** tackles the dilemma facing the chronically bullied child. Poor Mandy White, as pure and innocent as her surname, the child of older, overprotective parents, has rabbits on her school cardigan, on her bedroom curtains and on her duvet cover. The girls at her school cannot forgive her for her innocence and her vulnerability (something they cannot bear to recognise in themselves) and they tease her so cruelly that one day she runs into traffic, not caring what she does to herself. Mandy's salvation comes about through her friendship with Tanya, a bigger, older girl who lives in Mandy's street but who lives with a foster family. Tanya envies Mandy's safe and loving home life despite its restrictions. Mandy admires Tanya's wildness and lack of fear of authority. Both girls complement each other and each has qualities which compensate for what the other lacks, a familiar and recurring motif in Wilson's books. In **Best Friends**, an uncomfortable book in some ways since the two friends Gemma and Alice have

almost lover-like feelings for each other, Gemma is a hopeless grubby tomboy, while Alice is a perfect girly girl with blonde hair and blue eyes and neat handwriting. Again this sense of attraction of opposites is played out, each admiring what the other lacks. Alice defies her mother and stays loyal to her friend, refusing to take on her mother's snobbish values.

Mandy and Alice's transformation into **Bad Girls**, who defy their mother and go into business for themselves, is of course an important developmental achievement. The adolescent developmental task is to psychologically disengage from the family and simultaneously engage in the wider context of society. According to Peter Blos*, the classical Freudian psychoanalyst who specialised in adolescent development, it is inevitable that the young adolescent turns away from the mother and turns to the peer group for what he calls 'contact supplies':

'Contemporaries ease the way to membership of the new generation within which the adolescent has to establish his social, personal and sexual identity as an adult... The group permits identifications as role tryouts without demanding any permanent commitment. It also allows for interactional experimentation as a severance action from childhood dependencies other than as a prelude to any new and lasting personal and intimate relationship.'

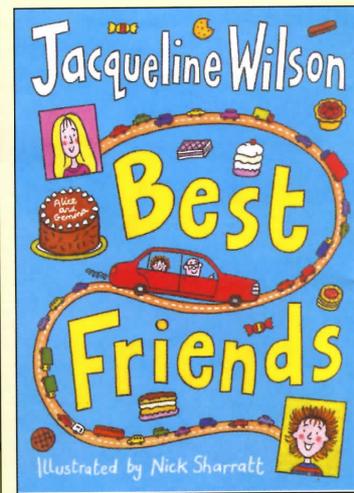
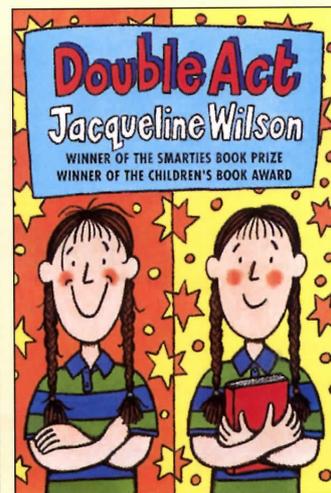
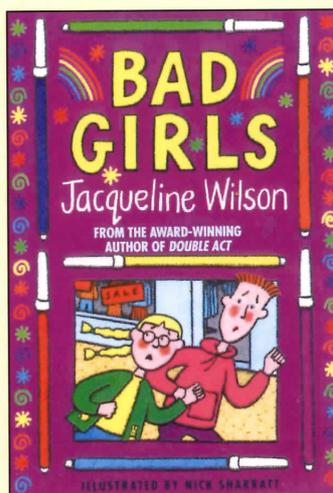
Most writers about adolescent relationships refer to 'peer groups' rather than friends or

***The Adolescent Passage**, Peter Blos, New York Press, p160.

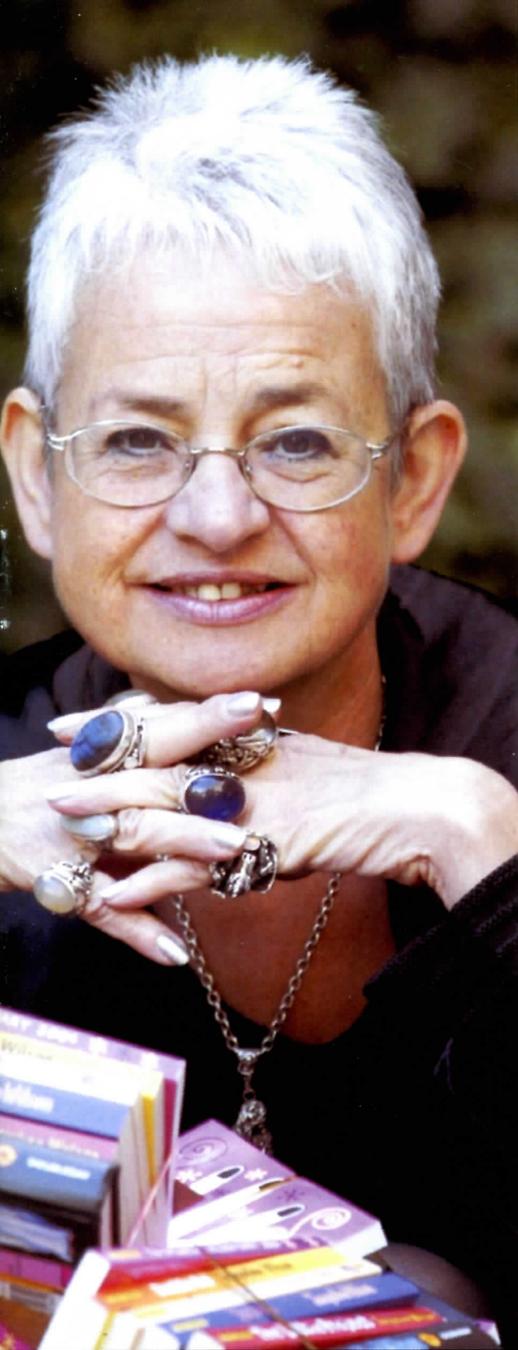
FRIENDS FOR EVER



friendships but my feeling is that friendships for this age group serve the same function of enabling a separation from the parents and the immersion of what Blos calls 'role tryouts', essential for the formation of a new, entering-into-adult identity. Thus Lola Rose, the tragic child of a brutal father who beats her mother, befriends Harbeet, the daughter of a close,



I would like to dedicate this piece to my niece Isobel Sanders who first introduced me to Tracy Beaker. *ME*



tattoos. His mother suffers from migraines, won't leave the house and expects him home straight from school. Oliver needs Dolphin for her unconventionality as much as Dolphin needs Oliver for his intelligence and consistency, something sadly lacking in her life with her troubled manic depressive mother.

Experimentation with gender identity

An interesting theme in Wilson's books is the way oddball girls (often naughty ones) befriend oddball boys (often goody goody wimpy ones). This too is part of age appropriate experimentation with gender identity, what the psychoanalysts would see as bisexual conflict, conflict over feminine and masculine identification. In **Best Friends**, Gemma, who has a very critical mother, refuses to wear dresses and gives away her precious doll to her lifelong friend Alice. Her rejection of femininity is a disguised rejection of her mother. Alice is her receptacle for femininity. It is as though Gemma uses her as a repository until she is ready to take on feminine qualities in her own way. When Alice moves away, Gemma is inconsolable as though she has lost part of herself. In true Wilson fashion, Gemma finds herself and acquires more feminine characteristics from a new male friend, Biscuit, who loves cooking and, coming from a less critical family than Gemma, can more easily experiment with being like his mother and allow bisexual gender roles and tastes to emerge.

Recognising otherness

This recurring theme in Wilson's books of

her characters, often reluctantly, choosing a friend very different from themselves, a definite 'other', is part of the process of making friends and distinguishes healthy development. Bullies do not recognise otherness, usually because it is too painful to recognise qualities they appear to despise in themselves. The bully does not have empathy for others. But the child who befriends another can recognise the other as a distinct person with purposes and intentions of her own. The characters we love best in Wilson's books consider other people's feelings and show a true potential for empathy. The outstanding character in this respect is Tracy Beaker. Tracy lives in a children's home and longs to be adopted and loved despite her neediness and her problems. She has a reputation for being difficult. Yet, a newcomer to the home, another good boy called Peter, becomes Tracy's adoring slave when she catches him in the night trying to hide his wet sheets. Tracy has a shameful secret – she too wets the bed – and she helps Peter deal practically with clean sheets and this catastrophe to his dignity and self respect. And it is Tracy who understands and sympathises with her enemy Justine's pain when her father fails to turn up for a visit. Interestingly, it is Tracy who wants to be a writer. The qualities which make a good writer – qualities of experimenting with roles, of empathy and of putting yourself in someone else's shoes, are just those which make for good friendships. Perhaps that is why Jacqueline Wilson writes so extensively about friendship and why nine-year-old girls look to her for understanding in such large numbers. ■

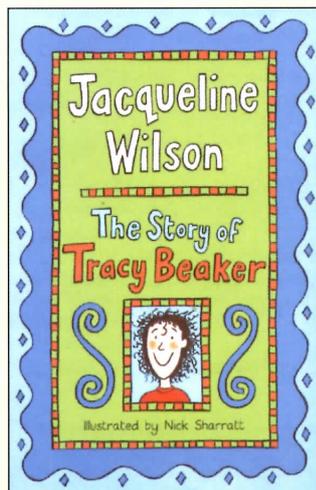
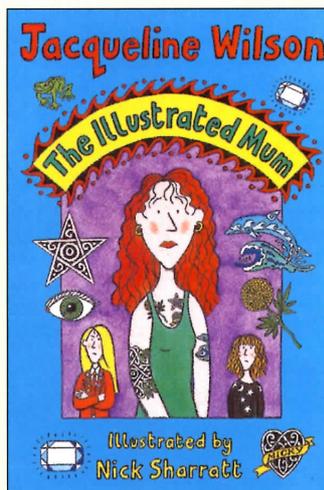
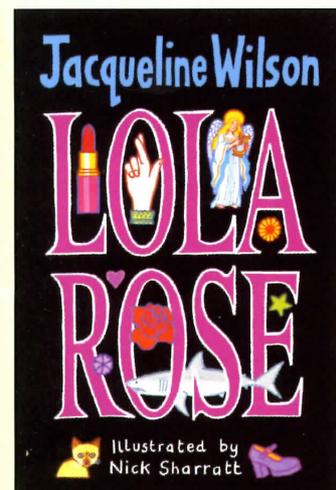
loving, Asian family and experiences vicariously aspects of such a very different family life from her own. But Wilson has sympathy too for the overprotected child who lives a dull and conventional life and Owly Oliver in **The Illustrated Mum** enjoys and admires Dolphin's chaotic but vivid home life with her mother who was married to a rock star and is covered in

Meg Errington is a psychotherapist in private practice and a counsellor in a London comprehensive school.

Books discussed

(published by Random House Children's Books)

- Bad Girls**, 0 440 86356 2, £4.99 pbk
- Double Act**, 0 440 86334 1, £4.99 pbk
- Best Friends**, 0 385 60606 0, £10.99 hbk
- Lola Rose**, 0 385 60184 0, £10.99 hbk, 0 552 54712 3, £5.99 pbk
- The Illustrated Mum**, 0 440 86368 6, £4.99 pbk
- The Story of Tracy Beaker**, 0 440 86279 5, £4.99 pbk



Collecting, Selecting and Anthologising Poetry – the CLPE Award

This year's CLPE* Poetry Award has been won by Roger McGough's anthology *All the Best*. But what does the judging process for the award tell us about the current state of poetry publishing for children? CLPE Poetry Award judge Morag Styles explains.

Look around and what do you see?
Everything touches, you're touching me.
(from *Everything Touches*)

It is a cliché to say that it was a hard job choosing the winner of a literary prize, but we had a genuinely difficult task with the shortlist this year for the CLPE Poetry Award which took over the mantle of the prestigious Signal Poetry Award in 2003. The 'we' refers to Michael Rosen and me who judged the twelve shortlisted volumes of poetry for children with Margaret Meek Spencer as Chair. The sifting process is accomplished by tutors at CLPE working with experienced teachers, but the judges can add extra titles from the long-list, should they wish to do so. Several books were winners in different ways this year. Here are some of them.

Winners in different ways

Tony Mitton's *The Tale of Tales*, a mixture of prose and poetry, is his best publication yet for my money; smart storytelling, comical verse with ravishing illustrations which brought Kipling's *Just-So Stories* to mind. I cannot praise Peter Bailey's black and white line drawings and silhouettes highly enough. David Fickling has produced a book to treasure with excellent design, paper, print and cover.

Another beautiful book to look at and handle was Judith Nicholls' thought-provoking anthology, *The Sun in Me: Poems about the Planet* from Barefoot Books. This is not Nicholls' first green anthology, but it is as convincing as her earlier volumes. Working with scratchboard and watercolour, Beth Krommes' exquisite child-friendly illustrations were moving, luscious and in total harmony with the poetry – a winning combination. As well as raising environmental issues and celebrating the natural world, both poet and artist locate word and image within a wide range of cultural settings.

Lines in the Sand: New Writing on War and Peace is another anthology that demands attention and is a winner in terms of powerful prose and poetry about the sadness and madness of war by a wonderful range of international contributors, admirably edited by Mary Hoffman and Rhiannon Lassiter. This book went from conception to production in a matter of weeks due to the commitment of the editors, writers, artists and publishers, Frances Lincoln. It offers an important anti-



war message of peace and hope to the next generation during troubling times.

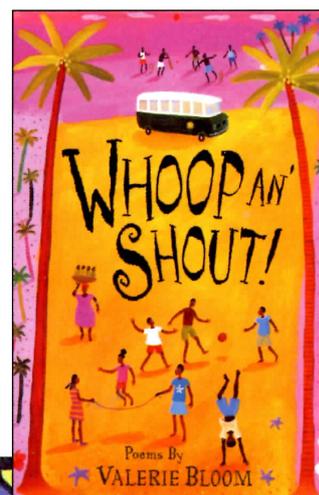
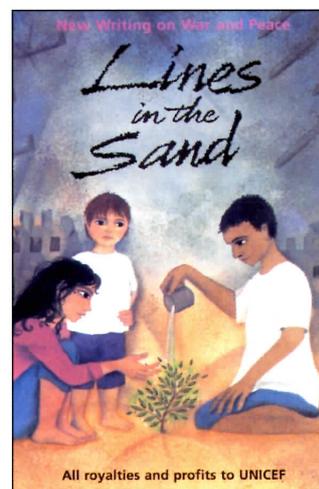
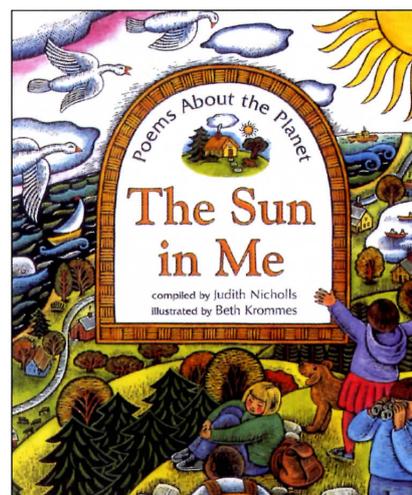
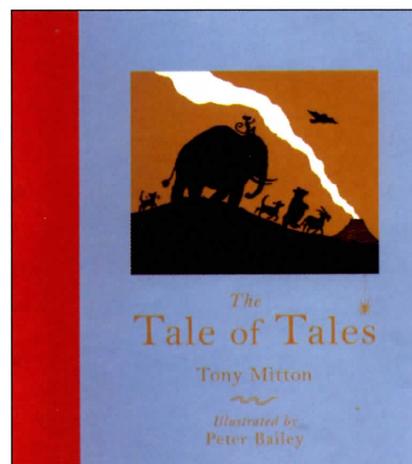
Single poet collections

Our two top single poet collections of the year are by poets who are also superb anthologists. Valerie Bloom was on winning form with possibly her finest collection yet – *Whoop An' Shout!* Don't let the light title fool you; this is a strong collection by a poet writing in her prime who gets better with every book. Bloom shows her range here: she is about as good as it gets at engaging, often amusing, dialect poems, reminiscent (but not derivative) of another great Jamaican poet, Louise Bennett. But Bloom does standard English equally well, with a nice sense of fun, a lightness of touch and at times, a lyrical note ('When dusk is a soft blanket over the land,/ And the moon is brandishing her silver wand...' from *The Whooping Boys*). Bloom often teaches her audience a little Creole before a reading (she is an electric performer of poetry) and the glossary she provides with this book is most welcome. We also liked Valerie Bloom's well chosen, wide-ranging *One River Many Creeks: poems from all around the world very much*; it introduces a young audience to new international voices, opening windows on different ways of looking at the world, while celebrating our common humanity.

Carol Ann Duffy is the outstanding new voice in children's poetry of the last few years. We loved *The Good Child's Guide to Rock 'n' Roll* (certainly the winning title of the year with its ironical nod to early moral verse for children, as well as the current vogue for guides to anything and everything), but we thought Faber let her down a little with presentation. Their poetry books haven't quite got the hang of child appeal. *Rock 'n' Roll* singers (from Elvis to Jerry Lee Lewis) take on a kind of fairy tale status to a new generation of young swingers, as they shake, rattle and roll through the pages, accompanied by Duffy's usual quirky mix of humour, strong women, tender moments, childhood chants, counting rhymes, word play and (this time) references to Scotland (must be good!).

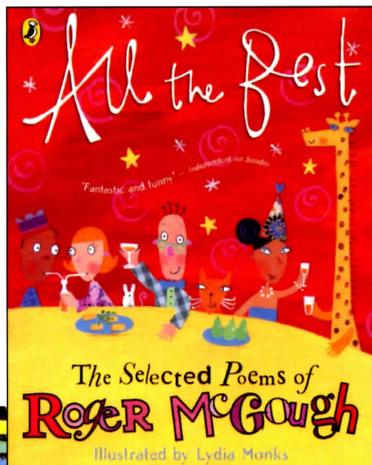
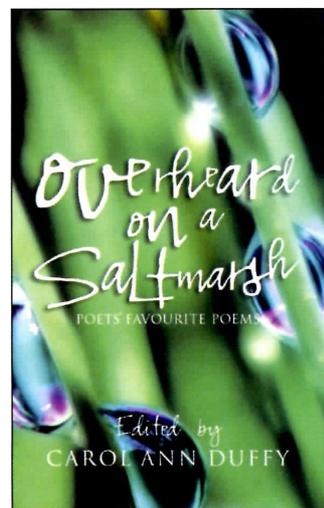
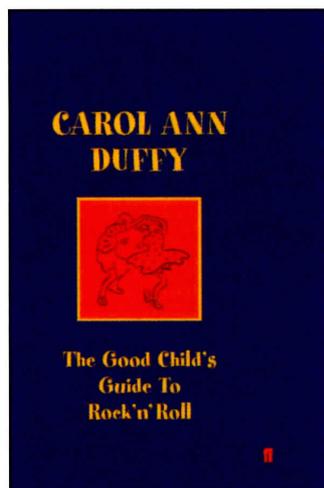
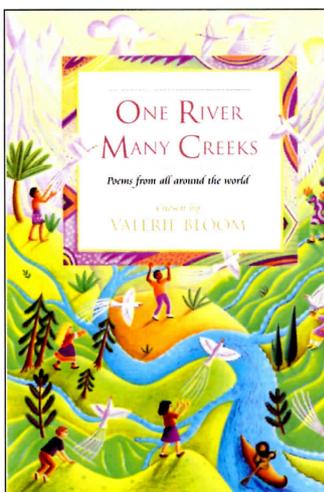
The winners

Carol Ann Duffy is a past mistress of the eclectic anthology and *Overheard on a Saltmarsh: Poets' Favourite Poems* (of childhood) is the official runner-up for the CLPE Award. This nicely presented book without illustrations is clearly calculated to appeal to an older age group. Poems by Robert Louis Stevenson, Walter de la Mare and Edward Lear are better represented than contemporary poetry for the young, perhaps reflecting adult nostalgia whenever



Borders taken from: *The Sun in Me: Poems about the Planet*.

*The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education



childhood is concerned, or just underlining the fact that good poetry is universal – good for everyone and for all time. And it was interesting to note who chose what, leading to some unusual or convivial juxtapositions. Some of the best were Gerda Meyer's own Paper Boat with James Leigh Hunt's Rondeau; Adrian Mitchell's forceful Back in the Playground Blues with The Jumbies and Carol Ann Duffy's Your Grandmother, side by side with Harold Munro's haunting title poem. If you want to know what Wendy Cope, Jackie Kay, Sophie Hannah and others choose, you will have to buy the book!

But this year's CLPE Poetry Award had to go to **All the Best**, Roger McGough's Selected Poems, every one a winner. Readers enjoyed them the first time round in ten or so different collections; now they can savour the poems anew in fresh arrangements. Roger McGough has been writing poems for children since *You Tell Me* (with Michael Rosen, 1979), followed by *Sky in the Pie* (1983) – that's 25 successful years in the business. Carol Ann Duffy calls him the patron saint of poetry. 'The writer of this poem/ Never ceases to amaze/ He's one in a million billion...' (from *The Writer of this Poem*) – and so say all of us.

There are a couple of observations I'd like to make before concentrating on McGough's achievements. During our discussions we were aware that some might think it unusual to select a book with no new poetry in it. (Many anthologies, of course, also fall into this category.) In fact, it was the best poetry book of the year, so our only reservation about McGough's **Selected Poems** was that the publishers didn't follow the normal protocol of letting the reader know which poems came from which collections with dates of publication. Otherwise it's a lovely book in every way and Puffin are to be congratulated on commissioning a timely tribute to McGough, part of their strong poetry list for young readers. Lydia Monks' entertaining, exuberant black and white line drawings on every page ably match the inventive imagination of the poet.

Relentlessly jokey

The single sour note in our deliberations on the poetry books published in the last year is that there are far too many relentlessly jokey books of second rate verse printed on rough paper. I have always defended the widest possible definition of what could be considered poetry; now here I am, turning up my nose at cheap poetry for kids which, depressingly, sells quite well. A dose of the grumpy old women syndrome, perhaps, but such poor quality fare does not sustain young readers or respect them. I want to pay tribute to those publishers who continue to produce quality single poet collections, who look out for new talent, who invite imaginative, well informed editors to compile anthologies, who keep significant titles in print, and who believe children should have the best of design and illustration.

But enough of that; let's get back to talented poets and lovely books. McGough has done so much to make poetry 'sexy', the rock 'n' roll of children's literature. He tells us in *A Good Poem*, that 'If I was a poem I'd play football and get picked for England.' McGough's great gifts in popularising poetry for young readers centre on wit, accessibility and a very special way with words. His control of language is awesome

and his ability to turn well known idioms on their heads while he spins, puns, whirls, somersaults and generally larks around with words is second to none. He makes it look easy, but is very clever indeed; don't ever doubt the sheer craft involved in minting language brand new, as he does.

The wry, terse, bitter-sweet, sometimes aching tender, yet playful poetry that McGough is famous for in his work for adults is also evident in his verse for the young. There is no writing down; quite the opposite, as McGough challenges as well as pleases his young audience. Here's an example:

What I hate about life
is that as soon as you get the hang of it
you run out of time.
(from *What I Love About School*)

He tackles themes of school and family life, comical characters and situations, human foibles and uncertainties, green issues, poetry itself and love in all its guises. These are poems to grow up with – from the agonies of the child who is 'a millionbillionwillion miles from home' in *First Day at School*, to the bullied, friendless Raymond Gough in *The Boy with a Similar Name*; from the exuberant Mafia Cats – Bugsy, Franco and Tony, to Superman's weedy little brother, Batman and Robin in their jim-jams, and lollidollops, sound-collectors, dream-stealers and tongue-twisters a plenty. So raise your glasses and cheer him to the rooftops – 'Five, six, seven, eight/ Who do we appreciate?' (from *A Great Poem*) – 25 years, not out, of McGough's particular brand of magic – an outstanding contribution to children's poetry in the shape of **All the Best**.

You will not fall under a witch's spell
You are not Snow White
Nor am I a handsome prince, but still
A kiss, God bless, good night.
(from *Lullaby*) ■

Morag Styles is Reader in Children's Literature at Homerton College, Cambridge and the author of *From the Garden to the Street: Three Hundred Years of Poetry for Children* (Continuum).

Books discussed

- The Tale of Tales*, Tony Mitton, ill. Peter Bailey, David Fickling, 0 385 60517 X, £10.99 hbk
- The Sun in Me: Poems about the Planet*, compiled by Judith Nicholls, ill. Beth Krommes, Barefoot Books, 1 84148 057 6, £9.99 hbk
- Lines in the Sand: New Writing on War and Peace*, edited by Mary Hoffman and Rhiannon Lassiter, various illustrators, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 2282 7, £4.99 pbk
- Whoop An' Shout!*, Valerie Bloom, ill. David Dean, Macmillan, 0 333 99811 1, £9.99 hbk
- One River Many Creeks: poems from all around the world*, chosen by Valerie Bloom, Macmillan, 0 333 96114 5, £9.99 hbk
- The Good Child's Guide to Rock 'n' Roll*, Carol Ann Duffy, ill. Emily Feaver, Faber, 0 571 21455 X, £12.99 hbk
- Overheard on a Saltmarsh: Poets' Favourite Poems*, edited by Carol Ann Duffy, Young Picador, 0 330 41556 5, £7.99 pbk
- All the Best*, Roger McGough, ill. Lydia Monks, Puffin, 0 14 131637 3, £7.99 pbk
- Other shortlisted books were *Wallpapering the Cat* by Jan Dean, ill. Chambers and Dorsey (Macmillan, 0 330 39903 9, £3.99 pbk); *Giving You the Willies* edited by Graham Denton, ill. Michael Clark (Hands Up Books, 0 9542710 1 7, £4.99 pbk); *How to Make a Snail Fall in Love with You* by Lindsay MacRae, ill. Steven Appleby (Puffin, 0 14 131430 3, £4.99 pbk); and *The Bee's Knees* by Roger McGough, ill. Helen Stephens (Puffin, 0 14 131495 8, £4.99 pbk).

Authorgraph No.148

Chris Riddell

CHRIS RIDDELL
POLITICAL
CARTOONIST

Interviewed by Joanna Carey

'I became an illustrator because I love words,' says Chris Riddell. 'It's all to do with words – as a child I loved reading, I loved words and I loved the idea of making drawings to accompany them. I want to produce the kind of thing I remember from when I was a kid – those books with black and white drawings by artists like Charles Keeping, Victor Ambrus.'

Ever since Tenniel illustrated *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* almost all children's novels had line drawings but it's a tradition that is now dying out. 'It's sad,' says Riddell. 'There's so much fantastic fiction around today, but hardly any illustrations; decorative chapter headings, perhaps, but the visual emphasis now is all on the cover. Obviously there are exceptions, but in general artists have moved away from the tradition of black and white illustrations for novels; it's an area that no longer attracts innovative illustrators – they all look towards picture books, and colour.'

Riddell too does picture books, of course – 'You have to, if you're going to make a living at this,' he says. Astonishingly prolific, he's not only done a large number of children's books, but is also well known for his political cartoons and drawings in the press. But illustrating children's fiction with line drawings remains his first love and he's keen to maintain the 'long, glorious tradition of British black and white illustration that goes right back to the time of Tenniel, by way of Rackham, Heath Robinson, Ronald Searle... and many more.'

He started off in 1984 with two picture books (published by Klaus Flugge at Andersen – 'my publishing father' he says). He then did line illustrations for a variety of books by authors including Philip Ridley, Kathryn Cave, Andrew Gibson, Ted Hughes, Brian Patten: working from the manuscript, he had little contact with the authors. But in 1994 he began to work in close collaboration with the author Paul Stewart and now, ten years on, the success of their best selling *Edge Chronicles* has reached epic proportions.

Meeting Stewart was clearly a turning point. 'Yes, it's the *collaborative* process – that's when the magic happens. I still tell people who ask my advice about becoming an illustrator, "find yourself an author!"' So how did he find Stewart? 'We met at a party in London, found we both lived in Brighton, and travelled back together on the train.' Riddell talked about his love for black and white line and they discussed the possibility of working together. By way of an example, he showed Stewart the Frog and Toad books by Arnold Lobel, and together they produced the Rabbit and Hedgehog series. They then embarked on something bigger – a fantasy novel. To give Stewart something to focus on, Riddell gave him an illustrated 'cast list' – drawings of all the characters, and a map of an imaginary land. Stewart wrote a first draft. But – and this must have been a severe test of their relationship – 'I hated it!' says Riddell. 'I wanted *fantasy*, rather than *fairytale*. The story needed to grow in a natural way – we didn't need magic to smooth things along.' So they talked it through, and for a year notes and drawings flew back and forth as the

CHILDREN'S BOOK
ILLUSTRATOR



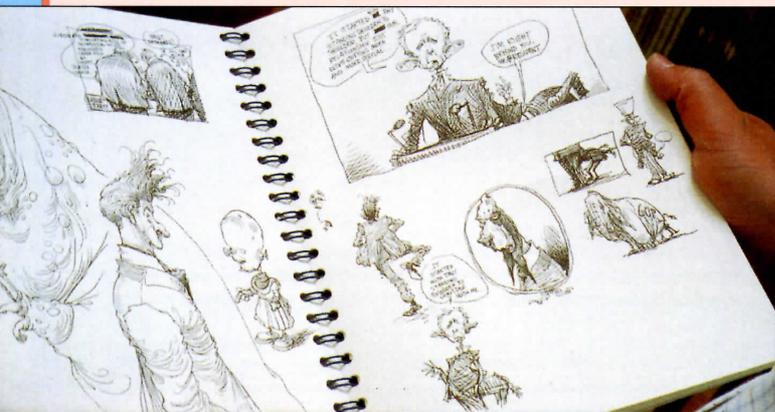
fantasy took shape. Richly illustrated (in black and white, of course) with its Deepwoods, Silver Glades and its treacherous waste lands, its librarian knights, goblins, cloddertrogs and vengeful shrykes, and its myriad interlocking stories Edgeworld became an absorbing, intricately imagined creation. The stories grew and multiplied, says Riddell. 'Transworld, our publishers were intrigued – this was long before trilogies became almost *de rigueur* in children's books'... and they've now published their seventh book in the series, *Freeglader*.

Speaking in his studio, a converted Victorian coach house at the end of his garden, with a Jack Russell terrier on his lap, Riddell vividly conjures up a sense, not just of the vast scale of this imaginary world, but also of the robust reality it has for him. He shows me the notebook he keeps – a sort of Edgeworld 'Bible'. Hand lettered, it meticulously records all manner of arcane facts and details about the stories with drawings of all the characters, complex architectural studies, maps and aerial views of the Edge world. 'For this kind of fantasy you have literally to subsume yourself in the realms of the imaginary place.'

He shares the studio with his wife Jo. She's a landscape painter – so quite often they'll be immersed in their work side by side, but in two different worlds. Riddell's drawings have a curious intensity, worked, even in his notebooks, to a very high degree of finish, no loose ends – even the frequent areas of cross hatching are carefully controlled. 'Yes,' he says. '*Finish*. I have a constant battle with that – I need to loosen up...' But it's that purposefully detailed precision that makes his work so distinctive, so instantly recognizable – particularly in the faces he draws, with their wide apart eyes, which almost invariably show the white of the eye all the way round those gimlet-like pupils. Bone structure, wrinkles and sinews are emphasized, nostrils flare, ears are low set and prominent – particularly in the *Edge Chronicles* (a.k.a. he tells me, *The Forsyte Saga with Pointy Ears*). Mouths are drawn with subtle sensitivity. And while he has the cartoonist's compulsion to exaggerate – *every* knee is a knobby knee – the figures are drawn with an authoritative understanding of human anatomy – and all its imaginable – and unimaginable – variants.

I'd always assumed that Riddell worked with pen and ink, but, I discover, although he might sometimes use a dip pen for hatching, most of his drawings are done with a very fine sable brush: 'it has such flexibility – and it makes such an interestingly sinuous line.' He doesn't work 'same size' – the original drawings are done one third up, so when they are reduced for reproduction, the line 'closes up' a little, further accentuating its intricacy.

He shows me a new book, a 'chapter book' for younger readers, *Fergus*



Crane – yet another Riddell/Stewart collaboration. With an abundance of images – comic chapter headings, caricatures, far fetched ornithological studies, crazy diagrams and full page illustrations which, with their hand drawn borders and bold use of black areas, recall the style of Heath Robinson, **Fergus Crane** again celebrates Riddell's commitment to the tradition of black and white illustrations.

Riddell's style is remarkably consistent throughout his work – he doesn't consciously tailor the drawing to the age of the audience – and he finds no difficulty doing an infants' picture book, like **Platypus**, say, alongside a political cartoon – 'there's no conflict... the one informs the other; in either case, whatever you're trying to say, you've got to catch the eye of the reader, and you've got to entertain.'

He's worked on several national newspapers and periodicals ever since, back in the 80s, one of his early picture books caught the eye of someone at the **Economist** and a weekly cartoon was commissioned. He has a regular spot in the **Literary Review** – 'Illustrations for Unpublished Books': Lady Chatterley's Hoover, for example, and he's currently the political cartoonist for the **Observer**, going to the office in London every Friday to do the cartoon for Sunday. Isn't it difficult, working on the spot like that? Does it ever go wrong? Do you ever run out of time? 'No, I work fast, and I work well under pressure... it's like riding a bike, as long as I don't concentrate on the technicalities I just get on with it ... and I like being among journalists and seeing my work in a political context.'

His interest in politics goes back to his childhood – he was born in 1962 in South Africa where his father was a vicar – 'low church, evangelical' – and a member of the ANC. Both parents were political activists, fighting apartheid. When, with three children, they returned to England, he was brought up in a series of draughty vicarages. 'We moved house – and school – the whole time, up and down the country. Yes it was confusing but,' he says with a smile, 'we were all right – my father always assured us that his frequent moves were guided by the Holy Spirit.' When his father became chaplain at Brixton Prison Riddell went to school nearby – 'a grammar school; all swishing gowns, assemblies and organ recitals and an embarrassingly conspicuous uniform. And we had to bow to the headmaster.' Art wasn't top priority in this particular *grove of academe* – 'the art room was seen as the closest thing the school had to "special needs" but I had a wonderfully idiosyncratic art teacher, a painter who'd also been a newspaper cartoonist. He really taught me to draw and with just two of us doing A level art, he somehow arranged for us to do life drawing at a local art school.' Due to read English at Exeter, Riddell escaped at the last minute and 'ran away to art school'. He studied illustration at Brighton, under John Vernon Lord and Raymond Briggs. 'That was a wonderful time, there was printmaking – etching, lithography and lots of drawing – there was a real sense of the primacy of drawing – everything was allied to the importance of basic draughtsmanship.'

He talks a lot about draughtsmanship. It's no surprise then, that Ronald Searle was an early influence. 'I enjoy the presence of drawing, the evidence of the human hand' – he mentions a number of contemporary illustrators, like Quentin Blake, Tony Ross – 'I love that gestural freedom – or Michael Foreman... have you ever seen his sketch books? What an amazing draughtsman he is!'

Riddell's own sketchbook – 'a repository for all kinds of things – I certainly wouldn't show it to a psychiatrist!' contains some intriguingly disparate images: angry men in overcoats, dragons, babies, strange birds and a Grim Reaper, complete with scythe. And, of course, drawings of politicians: and photographs clipped from the newspapers... Gordon Brown and Peter Mandelson are sellotaped in there – helpless, like butterflies on pins, waiting to be examined, distorted, lampooned.

And there's a glimpse of Tony Blair in Riddell's latest book (which he has dedicated to his father), a retelling of **Gulliver's Travels**, by the 18th-century satirist, Jonathan Swift. Blair's image appears in a passage that suggests ways of dealing with evasive government ministers who don't keep their promises. Riddell has seized with relish all the opportunities offered by Martin Jenkins' excellent retelling of these fabulous adventures. Rich in political satire, and surreal pythonesque humour,



his action packed spreads, skilful handling of scale and attention to period detail make this a real *tour de force*. There are 70 colour spreads – many of them showing Riddell's stunning virtuosity both in colour and line.

This was clearly a colossal undertaking. I wondered how he had set about it? 'There's a tendency in picture books to illustrate the action with a sequential approach, but there was so much going on here that I decided to concentrate on single incidents from the text, and to pick the least obvious ones... And that allowed me to build on the sub text – things like the unreliability of the narrator – there are rumours, for example, in the story, that Gulliver had a love affair with a Lilliputian lady: she denies it, but you can see it in his eyes, as she parades around on his table in a little coach.'

The book opens with an atmospheric full colour illustration, set in a mellow 18th-century panelled room. Full of narrative detail, it's a flash forward to the end of the story: Gulliver, old and exhausted, has been up all night writing his memoirs, his candle has guttered out, his glass is empty. Before him on the table lie the notes and drawings from his travels – a heaving sea of papers – a Hiroshige inspired image, whose formal rhythms continue on the next page,

where, in a tidal wave of black and white cross hatching, the story actually begins – with Gulliver, half drowned after the ship wreck, up to his huge flapping ears in water. And it's after this that he wakes up in Lilliput.

And is Riddell going to put his feet up now, after all that hard work? Apparently not... along with all his regular commitments, he's just signed a new five-book contract with Macmillan AND he's just about to embark on another collaboration with Martin Jenkins. Something light and insubstantial this time? 'Well, not exactly,' he laughs. 'It's Cervantes' **Don Quixote**.' ■

Joanna Carey is a writer and illustrator.

Photographs by Joanna Carey.

Some of Chris Riddell's many books:

Dakota of the White Flats, Mercedes Ice, Scribbleboy etc. (with Philip Ridley) are published by Puffin.

Henry Hobbs titles, William and the Wolves, etc. (with Kathryn Cave) are published by Hodder.

Garbling with Jelly, Juggling with Gerbils, etc. (with Brian Patten) are published by Puffin.

Rabbit's Wish (0 86264 719 3, £9.99 hbk, 1 84270 089 8, £4.99 pbk) and other **Rabbit and Hedgehog** books (with Paul Stewart) are published by Andersen.

Freeglader (0 385 60462 9, £12.99 hbk) and other **Edge Chronicles** titles (with Paul Stewart) are published by Random House.

Fergus Crane (with Paul Stewart), Random House, 0 385 60719 9, £8.99 hbk

Blobheads titles and **Muddle Earth** (with Paul Stewart) are published by Macmillan.

Free Lance and the Lake of Skulls and **Free Lance and the Field of Blood** (with Paul Stewart) are published by Hodder.

Platypus (0 670 89421 4, £9.99 hbk, 0 14 056777 1, £4.99 pbk) and other **Platypus** titles are published by Puffin.

Castle Diary and Pirate Diary (with Richard Platt) are published by Walker.

Jonathan Swift's Gulliver, retold by Martin Jenkins, Walker, 0 7445 8642 9, £14.99 hbk



The excitement of new fiction: the role of

The
Branford
Boase
Award



In the mid 1990s children's fiction was in the doldrums. Publishers endlessly repackaged their best selling authors and series but investment in new talent was rare. How has change come about? **Julia Eccleshare** discusses a prize that commemorates the creative partnership between one prize winning author and her editor and its contribution to changing the face of children's fiction publishing.

Seven years on since the publication of the first Harry Potter, and with the hype about new novels and new novelists piling up everywhere, it's hard to remember just how different the children's book market looked in the pre-Rowling days. In the mid 1990s confidence in the novel – and in children's reading capabilities and commitment – was at rock bottom. 40,000 words were thought of as long for a book and new novelists were officially pronounced impossible to launch as the major bookshops wouldn't stock them. How were publishers and the authors themselves to move forward?

Reading first novels is instructive. It shows how hard it is to write. Just as watching Wimbledon makes tennis look easy so does reading anything written by an established author. But, just as tennis at a lesser level can look very hard so, too, can a first novel. The difficulties of establishing characters and developing them and their interactions credibly, the intelligent or sometime rash use of plot devices (this year we read a number of books in which a child is killed? How often does that happen?), the control of fantasy – all of these can fall apart in the hands of a new author, especially if they are not given creative help.

Giving new authors a chance

But, despite these potential downfalls, new authors must be given a chance and the opening of the doors to newcomers has produced a flood of interesting fiction written in distinctive voices. New writers, mostly by definition younger writers, have learnt their trade from different as well as the same cultural sources. Among other things, they are less hidebound by the 'literary' traditions and more

likely to draw on spoken language; their contemporary teenagers are closer to reality and they are influenced by most recent and increasingly hyped successes. While some of what they do is derivative (the look-alike Rowlings and Wilsons abound though no one quite has the temerity to suggest that they've written a Pullman) of course, there is also a quantity of new storytelling. In different ways, each of the winners – Katherine Roberts, Marcus Sedgwick, Sally Prue, Kevin Brooks and now Mal Peet – has given us a new voice, sometimes in genres we are familiar with such as fantasy and sometimes marking out different territory as Brooks did with his black comedy in **Martyn Pig** and Peet does with the magical realism of **Keeper**.

The role of the editor

The people who make this possible are the editors. The editor's role is vital. Anyone who has had the pleasure – or sometimes misfortune – to read unedited mss will know that on their own, authors can be at best slack and at worst self-indulgent. An editor's stilling hand can be vital in all number of ways. It is usually he or she who bridges the gap between the author's intention in how they want to tell their story or which story they want to tell and their readers. The books that have won the Branford Boase Award have stood out from their competitors just because as a reader you don't find yourself asking 'why?' all the time. Someone has been there before you and asked all the why questions that are necessary to make the book work.

Reading the most recent submissions for the 2004 Branford Boase Award and delighting in this year's winner, the hugely original **Keeper** by Mal Peet, highlighted all of the above and served as a reminder of the inspirations behind the Award. Though the seeds of its inception lie in sadness, every year with each new winner we celebrate the lives of two remarkable women who told us all we need to know about strong new voices and that all-important editorial hand.



Henrietta Branford

Background to the Award: How and why did it all happen?

In April 1998 I rang Walker Books to tell them that Henrietta Branford had won the Guardian Children's Book Prize for **Fire, Bed and Bone**. They were delighted for her but especially so because she had been fighting breast cancer and this was just the cheering up news she needed. The first time I met Henrietta was to interview her about winning the prize. She had been ill but was, she was sure, on the mend. We sat in her garden in weak spring sunshine and discussed everything including where her writing was taking her. She'd been writing for a long time but it was meeting up with Wendy Boase, the editorial director at Walker Books, that had changed the course of her work. Wendy had encouraged Henrietta to write a book from the perspective of a dog – an unusual perspective to say the least and one which most publishers would have shied away from. Now she'd done it, Henrietta was determined to get her strongly held views about freedom, the importance of our natural environment and respect for animals and much more to as wide an audience as possible.

Later that year, Henrietta was well enough to receive the Guardian Children's Book Prize but she already knew that the cancer was back. With her characteristic toughness Henrietta fought it every inch of the way. By early in the following year she was too ill to take her place as a Guardian award judge as even reading had become a real struggle. We had several sharp phone conversations in which she made it clear that what the children liked was all that

really mattered. 'Bugger the adults,' she said once. 'You know I only mind about the children. Books can make all the difference to their lives. It may be the only chance they have to be free.'

On 23 April 1999 Henrietta died. In the months that she'd been known to be ill many people rang me really just to register their grief about Henrietta's illness and imminent death. Some I knew and some I didn't but all desperately wanted to show how much they cared for Henrietta and how much they believed in her writing. Some, like Adèle Geras, had never met her but had communicated frequently with her by letter and admired the spirit of this distinctive fellow author. Closer to her were her agent Gina Pollinger and her editor Wendy Boase both of whom had encouraged Henrietta to pursue her writing recognising the potential from her early books such as **Dimanche Diller** which won a Smarties Prize. Everyone, everywhere was devastated by the cruel irony that an author who had just reached that crucial stage of recognition would never have the chance to move closer to the wide market of children with whom she so much wanted to communicate. Everyone, everywhere wanted to do something that would ensure that her name lived on.

Wendy Boase



The idea of a prize began to be formed. Before she died, I went to see Henrietta and though she was very ill indeed we talked about a prize, something new that would encourage writing for children and that would stand as a memorial to Henrietta.

Making such a promise in private was rash; publicly confirming that it would happen at the meeting to celebrate Henrietta's life was rasher still. But I was only the mouthpiece. I knew that it was what many wanted. It felt completely right. More importantly, there were many who were willing to put all their energies in it, above all Anne Marley (who now administers the Award). As a Children's Librarian in

Hampshire, Anne had known Henrietta for some time and had long championed her. Anne took up the cause of the prize and was instrumental in bringing it into being.

By a cruel twist of fate, Wendy Boase, whose illness had been much shorter, had died on 15 March 1999. Her funeral drew together many of the greatest writers – and illustrators, too – who, like Henrietta, had worked with Wendy at Walker Books. For Wendy had been there alongside Amelia Edwards and Sebastian Walker himself at the very start of the company and in her direct fashion she had shaped the words side of the Walker business. Wendy was as fierce as Henrietta and just as committed to getting every book right. She worked with Jan Mark among others and launched Anthony Horowitz's career. There are stories of arguments and stand offs but Wendy's authors respected her decisions and trusted to her editorial wisdom implicitly.

To celebrate the lives and work of Henrietta and Wendy in one Award made obvious sense and the idea of putting together a prize for an author and their editor was the logical way of doing it. Anne brought in Lois Beeson as the administrator and it was she who was responsible for gathering together all the difficult details that, in the end, move an idea from being merely a pleasing possibility to becoming a reality. It was a role she was to play until her death in 2002, making sure that the vital sponsors were kept on board and that the prize was run in a wholly professional way, despite not being part of a major organisation. In those early days, it was Lois who drew up the plans and – with some temerity – approached David Lloyd at Walker Books. Her ability to think through all the possible problems before we even took it to David played a big part in ensuring his support. For support it he did. It was David who suggested that the prize be named after Henrietta and Wendy, 'two brilliant and ferocious women' as he described them, and from

then on, with the help of money from Walker and many other publishers, the Arts' Council, the Branford Boase Founding Friends and latterly Peters Bookselling Services and Terry Pratchett, the prize was up and running.

The first year

In the first year, there were 20 contenders. Publishers were still playing safe. The market for fiction was flattish and the success of **Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone** had not yet had the trickle down effect with which we are all now so familiar. We were delighted by what we read and especially with the winner – Katherine Roberts whose **Song Quest** (Element) had been edited by Barry Cunningham. While Katherine was a newcomer, Barry most definitely was not. His own place in the Pantheon of editors had been secured when he took on J K Rowling's **Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone**. The fact that he was the first editor winner of the BBA seemed wholly fitting.

In the following five years the prize has grown significantly. This year there were 34 titles submitted, reflecting a level of enthusiasm for new novels which we had never dared hope for. Has it been caused by the BBA or would it have happened anyway? That we'll never know but we certainly take great pride in the part the Award has played in cementing the editor/author bond and in encouraging all publishers to take risks with unknown names – despite the reservations of booksellers. ■

The winners of the Branford Boase Award have been:

2004 Mal Peet for **Keeper** (Walker) edited by Paul Harrison

2003 Kevin Brooks for **Martyn Pig** (Chicken House) edited by Barry Cunningham

2002 Sally Prue for **Cold Tom** (Oxford) edited by Liz Cross

2001 Marcus Sedgwick for **Floodland** (Orion) edited by Fiona Kennedy

2000 Katherine Roberts for **Song Quest** (Element) edited by Barry Cunningham



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USEFUL ORGANISATIONS No.34

The National Art Library

The Victoria and Albert Museum, Cromwell Road, South Kensington, London SW7 2RL
Tel: 020 7942 2400
Website: www.nal.vam.ac.uk

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards the National Art Library has collected children's publications and now holds nearly 100,000 books dating from the sixteenth century to the present day. Acquired as examples of the art of the book, they show the development of children's book production and illustration. The Renier Collection, with over 80,000 books, represents major authors and artists and most subject areas and genres. Other collections are particularly rich in late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century British and North West European imprints; and moderately rich in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British illustrated children's

books. The Library holds a fine selection of Russian (mainly Soviet) books, plus an extensive collection of North American, European and Japanese comics.

The NAL's children's book collections contain much useful source material in publishing history, social history and the art of the book. Areas represented include the Great Exhibition, topography, trade and industry, fable books, emblem books and chapbooks, natural history books, alphabets and printing, and Victorian publishers' bindings. Artists such as Blake, Cruikshank, Doyle, Tenniel, Caldecott, Arizzone and Sendak are represented, as well as lesser-known names.

In addition to individual acquisitions, the Library holds, amongst other collections, material relating to Beatrix Potter, including the Linder Bequest, the Linder Archive and the Linder Collection. All NAL collections are for reference only and 48 hours' notice is needed to access some items.

NATIONAL AWARDS

The CILIP Carnegie Medal

Jennifer Donnelly's *A Gathering Light* (Bloomsbury) has won the Carnegie Medal. Chair of judges Colin Brabazon said: 'A Gathering Light impressed the judges immensely – the striking luminosity of its prose, its tangible sense of place and the integrity of its vision combine to produce an extremely impressive first novel for this age range. It is a book about hard choices and the power of language to free us from the constraints of everyday – outstanding in every way.'

The CILIP Kate Greenaway Medal

Shirley Hughes's *Ella's Big Chance* (The Bodley Head) has won the Kate Greenaway Medal. Chair of judges Colin Brabazon said: 'Ella's Big Chance impressed in so many ways – a wonderful flowing line, an exceptional sense of composition and a gorgeous use of colour. Up against stiff competition, the combination of outstanding craftsmanship and artistic imagination made this book shine through. It exudes quality.'

CLPE Poetry Award 2004

The winner of the CLPE Poetry Award is *All the Best: Selected Poems* by Roger McGough (Puffin). The runner-up is *Overheard on a Saltmarsh* edited by Carol Ann Duffy (Macmillan Young Picador). The 2003 winner of the CLPE Poetry Award was given in BfK 145 instead of the 2004 winner. Apologies to CLPE and Roger McGough.

COMPETITION

Wanted: Schools to help find the next Harry Potter

Schools are being asked to help find the next Harry Potter in the 20th annual Nestlé Smarties Book Prize, Britain's longest-running book prize judged by young readers. Booktrust, the charity running the prize, is inviting schools to take part in specially-created classroom activities this autumn, and to enter a competition to win the chance to attend the awards ceremony and 20th anniversary celebrations in London in December. Classes in the following age categories can enter: five years and under, six to eight years, and nine to eleven years. Schools applying will receive full details in the first week of September 2004. The adult judges will be author Sally Gardner, a gold

medal winner in the 2003 Nestlé Smarties Book Prize, broadcasters Libby Purves and Mark Lawson, and journalists Julia Eccleshare and Geraldine Brennan who will choose a shortlist of nine titles over the summer from the hundreds of books already entered. The final selection of the winners rests with the schoolchildren who decide which authors will get the gold, silver and bronze medals. The winners will be announced on Wednesday 8 December at the British Library in London. For further information contact: Hannah Rutland, Booktrust, tel: 020 8516 2986, e-mail: hannah@booktrust.org.uk

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Carnegie and Greenaway shortlists

Dear Editor

We are a group of 13-year-olds from Bartley Green Technology College. We were very surprised by your comments on the Carnegie shortlist title *The Fire Eaters* by David Almond (BfK No.147). We are an experienced shadowing group and feel that this book lacks a decent storyline and fails to reach a climax. The reviews on the CILIP website clearly show that this is not an enjoyable book for many children: 'Didn't grab you'; 'Insult to literature'; 'Good book to read before bedtime as it sends you right off to sleep.' We also think that some of the judges should be children as we are the ones that have to read these books.

Year 8 Shadowing Group
Bartley Green Technology College,
Birmingham

Dear Editor

I am writing to say how disappointed I was to read your comment about Debi Gliori's drawings being 'painfully bad' (BfK No.147). You can say you don't like her style but you can't say it's bad. I personally dislike

Bee Willey's illustrations but I don't for a moment think they are bad. Such a comment does you no credit.

Gillian Macdonald
7 Abbot's View, Haddington, EH41 3QG

The market for children's books is a broad one and a lack of technical competence in drawing can be unproblematic when the resulting artwork has an appeal to a section of that market. Judith Kerr's Mog titles are another case in point - they are much loved but, like Always and Forever, not candidates for a serious illustration award. Ed.

Chart Toppers

Dear Editor

1. Saw Alex Hamilton's piece in BfK 147 and noted something was missing from the 'All Times Greats' chart - me!
2. A few figures (as of November 03): Puffin total UK sales 11,125,169, including **Each Peach Pear Plum** 1,316,210, **Peepo!** 1,139,238, The Happy Families series 3,392,374; **Please Mrs Butler** (868,942) + **Heard it in the Playground** (406,829) total 1,275,771*
* = poetry! - well, verse anyway.
3. Also, with Heinemann/Egmont: **The Jolly Postman** (3 titles)

5,000,000+, plus 25 years of **Burglar Bill**, etc. = quite a few.
4. Of course, when I say 'me', I mean 'us': Janet and Allan Ahlberg. Janet died in 1994.

Allan Ahlberg
15 Sion Hill, Lansdown, Bath BA1 2UH
Alex Hamilton writes:

I'm sorry Allan feels left out. That can't have happened to him often in his splendidly productive career. The odd inexplicable omission is inevitable, and this is neither the first, nor probably the last of mine. This was the first bestseller list dedicated to children's books and was much harder to collate than the adult lists, whose parameters are long familiar to publishers. But the main point is that it was never intended - indeed couldn't be in the time and space available - as a comprehensive list of the works of all the most successful children's writers. Nor is it a competitive line-up. I hoped to emphasise that by listing the authors in alphabetical order, and not by cash or sales figures. It is poignant to think that Allan would have headed the list. Originally I named this list Jack Horner's Corner, so people could see it was only a sampler, but editors see headlines differently and they all changed it. If every bestselling author would list the performance of their titles in the detail that Allan has done, it would be a great help to me!

PEOPLE

Congratulations to **Roger McGough** who has been awarded the CBE for services to poetry and to **Quentin Blake** who has been awarded an honorary D.Litt from the University of Cambridge.

Kate Wilson has been appointed group Managing Director of Scholastic UK with responsibility for Scholastic's book publishing, clubs, fairs and magazine operations. She was previously Managing Director of Macmillan Children's Books where she oversaw a six-fold increase in sales.

REGIONAL AWARD

Lancashire Children's Book of the Year 2004

Lancashire school children have voted Chris Wooding's book **Poison** (Scholastic) winner of the 18th Lancashire Children's Book of the Year Award.

Hal's Reading Diary

Hal is now three years and seven months and not about to spell out his name. His father, **Roger Mills**, explains.

Quite a while back, when we were still living in London, my wife Jo and I went along to an introductory evening at a local Montessori nursery. One of the teachers talked us through the activities of a typical Montessori day and towards the end of the presentation she showed us how they introduce children to the concept of reading. I realised I hadn't ever really thought about how you learn to read, and my first thoughts were all about how very difficult this must be for a child. How do you get someone to translate a collection of letters on a page into a concept in his or her mind? It is a considerable leap.

The demonstration, however, swiftly revealed all. They start by showing the children a letter and getting them to learn its phonetic sound. The children, for example, are shown an 'A' and they learn that its sound is an 'A' as in 'Apple'. Gradually they build up their store of letters and when they have learnt a few they are ready to make word. A huh ('H'), an 'A' and a ter ('T') are put in a row and the teacher runs through the individual sounds. The sounds are then said together more quickly till they suddenly meld into a word, a word that the child already knows - 'hat'. A picture of a hat is put next to the words and the first tiny step on the road to literacy has been made.

I was fascinated by this demonstration. My thoughts about the difficulties involved had got me identified with the child's pre-literate bafflement and now I had a wonderful sense of the penny dropping which perhaps looped back to 41 years ago when signs on a page first turned into words for me. The main thing I carried away from the Montessori presentation was a sense of anticipation of the time when I would be able to start doing letters with Hal. Which brings us to the present.

At three and a half, Hal is certainly at an age where he can connect a letter to a sound. I've mentioned in earlier diaries that one of our bedtime books is **Babar's Alphabet** and from time to time we look at it and I try to encourage him to say the phonetic sound of each letter.



We also have a collection of magnetic letters on our fridge door and a set of rubber ones which stick to the side of the bath. Both alphabets would be ideal for making little words with, but to my considerable disappointment, Hal just isn't interested. Hal's friend Esme, who is a couple of months younger than him, comes round to our house most weekends and regularly sets to spelling her name and her sisters' names on our fridge. But when I try to persuade Hal to follow Esme's example and do his name he gives me a 'you must be out of your mind' look and sweeps all the letters onto the floor.

Which brings me to the uncomfortable thought that I could already have the makings of a pushy parent if I am not careful. None of us escape our upbringings, and mine placed a definite if subtle premium on success. Whilst my parents were never overtly pushy with me and my sisters - their style was not 'Unless you come top of the class you are a failure' - parental talk dwelt often on the failings of the children of their friends. We were always hearing that child x was having remedial maths classes, or that child y was barely capable of getting the ball over the net on a tennis court. This set up an insidious climate of expectation. While you weren't actively pushed, it always felt that achievement was what was required of you.

And now I find myself in danger of doing the same thing with Hal. The instinct to expect achievement of him seems, unhappily, to be alive and well in me. It is, though, something that I can control. With a little effort I am able to mobilise the grown-up part of myself that recognises that if Hal learns to read six months or a year later than Esme does it is utterly unimportant. It matters if he can't read by age 10 of course. But to be pushing him at three and a half? So my mid year resolution is this: I am going to make sure that I let Hal discover letters and words and reading at his own pace. And if he wants to just look at the pictures in **Babar's Alphabet** that is exactly what we will do.

Roger Mills is a Psychodynamic Counsellor.

BRIEFING • BRIEFING • BRIEFING • BRIEFING • BRIEFING • BRIEFING •

I wish I'd written...

Melvin Burgess on a retelling of Norse tales that makes him jealous as hell...

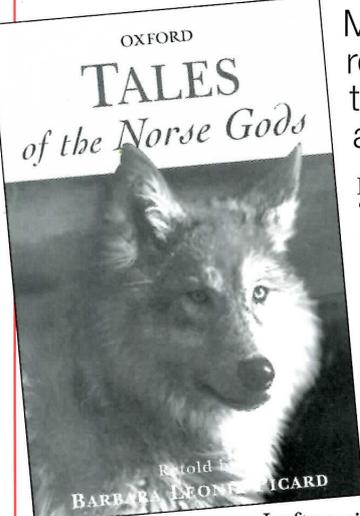
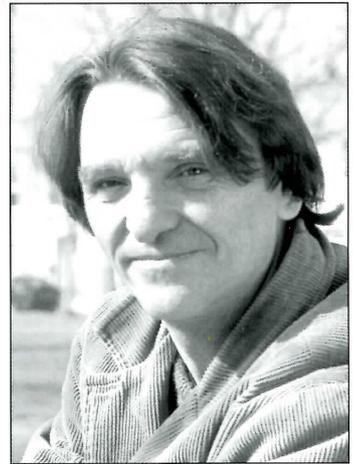
I love the Norse myths and legends. They are our own native myths – we still have days of the week named after these gods – and feel more appropriate than the Greek ones to our northerly mind-cast. Above all, they have that pagan sensibility that lends itself to tragedy, my favourite literary form. The Christian myths are great, but if you have a god who dies and then comes back to life – where's the fun in that?

I often sit down and think about doing a retelling myself, but there are two huge obstacles. One is my inability to read Old Norse; the other is Barbara Leonie Picard.

Tales of the Norse Gods and Heroes was published in 1953 and it's still in print today with Oxford University Press in a truncated form as **Tales of the Norse Gods** – pity, although not a huge loss, except for the disappearance of the Volsunga Saga. I read it as a child and I am so imprinted with it that I can't conceive of another way of telling them. Lucid, bright, colourful – but the main thing as in all myths is the stories themselves. Loki the Trickster, Odin, who speaks to the dead and loves discord and poetry – somehow they still appeal directly to us. The individual tales and the inevitable decline of the gods to Ragnarak, the end of all things, are so clearly told, with no fancy phrases or clever frills to get in the way – just perfect. It makes me as jealous as hell.

Tales of the Norse Gods retold by Barbara Leonie Picard, illustrated by Rosamund Fowler, is published by Oxford University Press (0 19 275116 6, £4.99 pbk).

Melvin Burgess's next book is the sequel to **Bloodtide**, to be published by Andersen Press in spring 2005.



Chosen by Year 8 (12–13 year old) pupils from Mayfield School, Portsmouth

GOOD READS

Thanks to Barbara Nicholson, Librarian, and Jo Webb, English teacher

Screen Kiss

Chloe Rayban, Hodder 'Models', o/p

This book was amusing in so many different ways. It's the type of book that you are dragged into and can't stop reading. A fantastic fictional book written in the first person. It's a series book so I can't wait to get my hands on the next one! The main character is called Christabell and she doesn't think a lot of herself. You might say she has no self-respect. A little bit into the story, Christabell's aunt suggests that Christabell becomes a model as she's very tall and thin.

Christabell is completely turned on by the idea. She meets up with an agency and also makes a few friends whilst there. After quite a while she creates an advert with a male supermodel filmed in Australia! On her holiday in Australia there was detail in almost everything that went on which I thought was great. It's such an imaginative, creative book. There was a picture in my head for all the places and stages that Christabell went through. A great book that I recommend to mainly girls from the age of about 10 years old. I loved this book and I'd say it is my favourite.

Chloe Dixon

The Bird Yard

J Wallis Martin, Hodder, 0 340 68929 3, £5.99 pbk

The Bird Yard is a book essentially about a young boy, Joseph Coyne, who goes missing and is assumed to have been abducted. Detective Superintendent Parker makes a promise to the boy's mother that he will get the boy back alive, but it proves to be a promise he cannot keep, and when another young



From the left: Chloe Dixon, Katrina Samuel, Andrew Todd, George Browning and Hannah Knowler

boy is taken in the same circumstances, Parker is led to an aviary in a derelict suburb in Manchester.

I personally think this book is very good because J Wallis Martin has made the characters exceptionally believable and made them react in a way that I could imagine myself doing as well. The pictures I could create in my head with the help of his descriptive words made the book even more enjoyable because I didn't have to stop to piece the scenery together, it just came. Also his sentences worked like cryptic clues, and if I read between the lines I could guess what was going to happen later on, which would have taken a lot of thought on his side, I'm sure.

The plot stopped me from putting the book down and I actually found myself reading at 2am in the morning during a particularly engrossing chapter! In fact, that is probably the only problem I found with this fantastic book. NO matter how hard you try, you just cannot put it down! I highly recommend This Book to Anyone Who Enjoys a Good Plot.

Katrina Samuel

The Tears of the Salamander

Peter Dickinson, Macmillan, 1 405 02051 2, £9.99 hbk, 0 330 41540 9, £5.99 pbk

Set in medieval Italy, this story is thoroughly enjoyable and gripping from start to finish. The highly original plot was very well constructed and the characters lifelike. The ending was very tense and I had difficulty putting it down. On the whole this novel is a wonderful, well written, very descriptive fantasy which is easily understandable despite the difficult subject of the supernatural. It celebrates the victory of good over evil and highlights the abuse of power. I shall recommend it to my friends and family in the future.

Andrew Todd

The Amazing Maurice and his Educated Rodents

Terry Pratchett, Corgi, 0 552 54693 3, £5.99 pbk

This is a book about a streetwise tomcat, called Maurice, who is training Mice to follow a boy who can play the pipe. This is a scam to make money. Maurice will make a plague of rats invade the city and then lead them out of the city so it looks like they are ridding the city of the rats.

This is a very, very funny book with subtle wisecracks aplenty. I would recommend this book to 12-year-olds and above. I thoroughly enjoyed reading it and

I hope that others will too. It deserves recognition and I am a big fan of Terry Pratchett's books.

George Browning

The Earth, My Butt and Other Big Round Things

Carolyn Mackler, Walker, 0 7445 9077 9, £5.99 pbk

HA! HA! HA! funny name for a book I know, but once you get to the beginning of Chapter 1 the laughs soon turn into tears as you follow Virginia through her problems, her mistakes and her pain. From a good girl to a girl who stands up for herself, you'll feel sorry for her.

Virginia thinks the world of everyone except herself. Then a phone call changes everything... her brother gets thrown out of college accused of date-rape and she realises no-one is perfect. She does what she wants to, instead of trying to make her parents happy, even if that means getting into trouble. This is an excellent read for any girl who feels as if they have the weight of the world on their shoulders and a good read for other girls as well. So stop laughing at the title and get reading!

Hannah Knowler

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

Khalida Alvi was formerly a primary and advisory teacher in Ealing.

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.

David Bennett was Senior Teacher and Head of an English Faculty in Nottinghamshire. He now works as an English consultant and supply teacher.

Jill Bennett is the author of *Learning to Read with Picture Books*. She was Early Years Coordinator and teacher at an infant school but is currently doing freelance and consultancy work.

Quentin Blake is an author and illustrator and was the first Children's Laureate.

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.

Tania Earnshaw is Community Librarian - Early Years, Chatham Library, Kent.

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

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

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

Susan Goodhall is a freelance writer and website producer. She worked at the BBC for 12 years, and spent four years producing children's websites.

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

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.

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

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

Carole Redford is a part-time lecturer in English and children's literature at St Patrick's College of Education, Dublin.

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*.

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

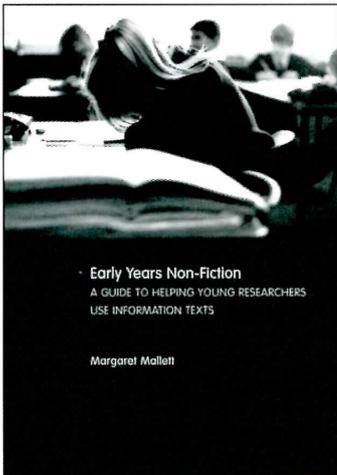
Sue Unstead was a publisher of children's non-fiction for 25 years and is now a freelance editorial consultant and writer.

Verna Wilkins is a writer and publisher of Tamarind Books.
Rob Wood is a Jungian analyst.

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REVIEWS Books About Children's Books



Early Years Non-Fiction
A GUIDE TO HELPING YOUNG RESEARCHERS
USE INFORMATION TEXTS

Margaret Mallett

Early Years Non-Fiction

★★★★★

Margaret Mallett,
RoutledgeFalmer, 208pp,
0 415 32139 5, £65.00 hbk,
0 415 25337 3, £17.99 pbk

An inspirational and perceptive guide which explores children's first experience of non-fiction in the preschool and foundation years. Aimed primarily at the student teacher as well as the busy classroom teacher working to incorporate non-fiction into the curriculum, it is grounded in the world of education, with chapter summaries, copious footnotes and references. Nevertheless there is a wealth of information on how children learn and their ability to distinguish different kinds of writing that would prove invaluable to anyone involved in children's books, whether bookseller, publisher or parent. The emphasis is on helping children to enjoy informational text, and Mallett starts from a viewpoint that reading for information can be just as exciting and imaginative as fiction.

The first-hand observations and case studies, most of which are illustrated, are particularly revealing, and BfK's Hal features among the young children observed. Mallett's selection of books is always valuable and helpful, although the very nature of novelty books for this age group means that some of these items do not always stay in print for long. However she is careful to stress that updating, particularly where reference books are concerned, is a key issue, and gives publishers' websites wherever possible. She sets out her criteria for choosing books, whether alphabet book or dictionary. Does it have clear design, clear layout, humour? Is it appropriate for the age group, and above all does it have imaginative appeal?

The distinction between fiction and non-fiction is often blurred at this young age group and children move freely between the two in speech and observation. Mallett looks at the role of fiction in informational learning and gives examples of stories and even TV series that can act as the trigger to inspire children's own research and writing. She works on the premise that children are best treated as active learners, and their excursions into the world of reference material are more

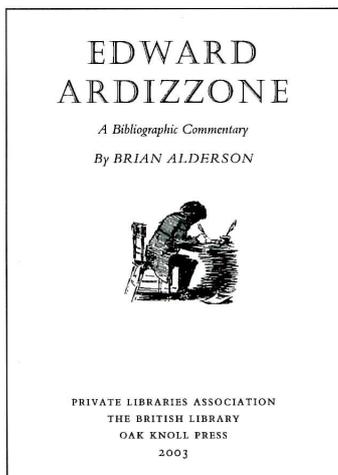
productive if there is genuine desire to find out for reasons they understand.

A useful glossary of terms relevant to non-fiction is included, together with background notes on Early Learning goals and the inclusion of non-fiction in the National Literacy Strategy and National Curriculum. An outstanding resource for anyone involved in early years literacy, this is a worthy companion to the author's *Young Researchers*, for which she won the UKRA author award in 2001. SU

Edward Ardizzone

★★★★★

Brian Alderson, British
Library, 292pp, 0 7123 4759 3,
£45.00 hbk



Gabriel White, in his study of Ardizzone published in 1979, the year of the artist's death, acknowledges his debt to Brian Alderson's *Edward Ardizzone: a preliminary handlist of his illustrated books 1929-1970* (1972). Now, over thirty years later, we have the final work. It lists every book illustrated by Ardizzone in dense staccato detail: publisher, number of pages, nature and quality of paper, number of illustrations and their technique, sequence of editions and translations, and so on. It also surveys Ardizzone's work for independent book jackets and magazines and other one-off tasks. It will clearly be of permanent use to scholars and researchers.

However, will it also be of interest to the readers of *Books for Keeps*? The answer to that question is an unequivocal yes, in large type and ringing tones; because this is not simply a bibliography but a bibliographic commentary. Alderson is a knowledgeable, discriminating, just occasionally acerbic, guide through the gamut of 180 books, explaining on the way, the nature, the history and development of each. For anyone at all interested in Ardizzone there is fascination just in looking at the sequence of productions. First of all *In a Glass Darkly* where the artist, already in his late twenties, shows with the characteristics of his style already well developed, with all the drama of cast shadow; and then, only a year later, *Little Tim* makes his first appearance, and, in 1939, we have the first happy encounter with Dickens in *Great Expectations* as

well as Maurice Gorham's *The Local*. In this last Ardizzone begins to explore that rich vein of appreciation and observation of London life, spreading out through pubs and bookshops and side streets from the drawing desk in Elgin Avenue where the artist sits, slightly raised to avoid the draught, diligently pursuing the way of his imagination.

And we actually see him there, enthroned without pretentiousness, because this bibliographical commentary, as well as being handsomely produced, is well illustrated. There are nearly eighty pictures, some of them in colour, and many chosen with a particular purpose of demonstration. We see, for instance, three parallel depictions of *Tim* at different stages of his (and Ardizzone's) development, as well as other roughs and finished drawings from the *Little Tim* books. We see too, in a sequence of three drawings, the way that Ardizzone worked up a drawing to its final state. Two notes from the artist explain how it is done. What they don't quite explain, of course, is how at the same time there come those feelings of dusk, of nostalgia, expectation and the importance of the moment.

Oliver Simon records how hard Ardizzone found the struggle for recognition in the pre-war years; fortunately his reputation was well enough established to allow him to be chosen as an official War Artist; service which resulted in the many drawings for Ardizzone's own *Baggage to the Enemy* of 1941 – as well as many works, now in the Imperial War Museum, not produced specifically as book illustrations.

The artist's next significant publication was *Peacock Pie* and, looking back to 1946, it might be possible to think of it as some kind of postwar celebration. The facts of its genesis were not quite so simple. As Alderson explains, Ardizzone began work on the book while still covering the Italian campaign. On November 5th 1944 he records: 'Just completed a tremendous month's work here, twenty-two paintings, of which I am destroying five as not up to standard, three Christmas cards and sixteen drawings for *Peacock Pie* done in my spare time after dark.' There may be several morals to be drawn from that note; certainly it brings home to one, as so often in turning the pages of this book, that the immense professionalism worked in favour of, and not against, the intimacy of the vision.

There are more insights into Ardizzone's approach in an essay he wrote in 1957 and reproduced here as 'On the Illustrating of Books'. The artist is illuminating on what he takes to be the distinctive character of the 'born illustrator'; and, though he disclaims any erudition, he has useful things to say about Cruikshank, Daumier, Doré and (in particular) Charles Keene. These words from the artist himself are only one of the attractions of a volume genuinely worthy of his achievement. QB

New Voices in Children's Literature Criticism

★★★

Edited by Sebastien Chapleau,
Pied Piper Publishing Ltd,
144pp, 0 9546384 4 1, £20.00
pbk

This is a collection of short essays, almost all by young critics, many of them recent graduates or current higher degree students. Since they are also an international group, the book provides a very wide overview of current trends in children's literature criticism, and will interest the growing number of academics and other students peddling wares in this new market. Several of the essays are also timely and even important for writers, teachers, librarians and other non-specialist academics concerned with children's reading. These, which I will list, are the essays that have a coherent argument to advance, are not impossibly jargon-ridden, consist of rather more than dogged applications to children's literature of theory drawn from other fields, and are in control of the language they use. Some other pieces here are desperate and pitiful efforts to establish academic credentials by muddled displays of jargon for jargon's sake. They are depressing evidence of the damage being done by the academic industrialisation of children's literature, and are useless to people working for children.

This should not put readers off from chasing the book up for the following essays, all of which are well researched and argued (and for that reason too complex to summarise in a phrase or sentence), and explore questions that matter to everyone working on children's books: 'Messy New Freedoms: Queer Theory and Children's Literature' by Rebecca Rabinowitz; 'All There in Black and White: Examining Race and Ethnicity in Children's Literature' by Karen Sands O'Connor; 'A Publisher's Dilemma: The Place of the Child in the Publication of Children's Books' by Laura Atkins; 'Storytelling and the Adult/Child Relationship in Geraldine McCaughrean's *A Pack of Lies*, or the Dilemma of Children's Fiction' by Virginia Douglas; 'Proposing a Methodology for the Study of Nation(al)ity in Children's Literature' by Dominique Sandis; and (best of all, a truly important essay) 'Children's Literature in Translation from East to West' by Gabrielle Thomson-Wohlgemuth. These comprise about half the book, and make it a worthwhile purchase despite the rest. PH

Animus and Anima in Fairy Tales

★★★

Mary-Louise von Franz,
Inner City Books, 128pp,
1 89457401 X, £9.99 pbk

This book is published in a series entitled 'Studies in Jungian Psychology by Jungian Analysts' under the general editorship of Daryl Sharp.

Marie-Louise von Franz, who died six years ago, was an especially close collaborator of Jung's. They first met

when she was still in her teens and Jung in his late fifties. There was an immediate rapport, as she helped him to prepare lunch at his retreat on Lake Zurich. For his part he recognised in her an exceptional intellect, free-ranging, yet disciplined, as well as an earthiness, and he responded to both with approval. She quickly became involved in his work on alchemy. She also worked throughout her life on dreams, and fairy tales. On several occasions Jung remarked that she was the person whom he most trusted to understand his work (by no means always an easy matter).

Daryl Sharp, the founder of Inner City Books, is a Jungian analyst, and a great admirer of von Franz. He has assembled this book – one of several on fairy tales under her name – from notes taken by someone else at a seminar she gave in 1953 and, as such, it is a moving token of his esteem. It is also coloured by its origin: there is a freshness about it; but it is also didactic and, at times, sketchily simplistic.

Animus and anima are two of the best known Jungian concepts. The animus represents the masculine in the psyche of a woman, while the

anima is its complement – the feminine in the psyche of a man. There have been elaborations by Jung and by Jungians, but the contra sexual aspect is at the heart of both and both, according to the theory, have personal and collective (impersonal) aspects.

The interest of fairy tales for Jungians is mainly for the light they throw on the collective, archetypal nature of the psyche. Von Franz puts this in its starkest form in her Preface where she declares that in fairy tales 'we have just the skeleton of the psyche with the skin and flesh

removed'. She deals with seven stories, and covers a wide geographical canvas, including Africa, Russia, Turkestan, and the Americas. The stories themselves, and their interpretations, are presented in a style which is clear and vigorous. Jung's works may leave readers pondering what he means (which is by no means unproductive); they will not have this problem with von Franz. **RW**

REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant



Maisy's Twinkly Crinkly Counting Book

★★★

Lucy Cousins, Walker, 10pp, 0 7445 5751 8, £8.99 novelty hbk

It's lovely to handle a touchy-feely counting book that glitters and crackles. Maisy we know, and we always like to spot her and her chums out and about. They are amongst animals – the unclothed kind – unlike Maisy and her chums who are clothed and therefore of a higher order. There's one soft and stripy zebra, three silky penguins, and four woolly sheep. The puddles crinkle, the stars twinkle, and the chicken wears a pink ballet tutu. The counting is a bit muddled – when do we count the friends as distinct from the animals? But never mind, some counting gets done and we all have a good time. **SE**

My World, Your World

★★

Melanie Walsh, Picture Corgi, 32pp, 0 552 55055 8, £5.99 pbk

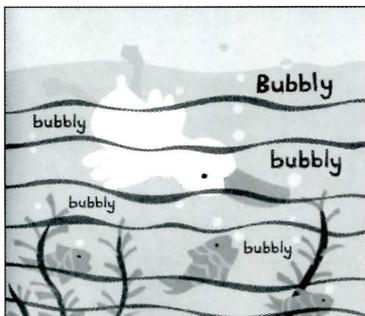
This is a book with good intentions. It is aimed at drawing the attention of the very young to the fundamental similarities of children around the world, while pointing out some of the obvious differences. The illustrations are simple, filling each spread with bold blocks of colour against which the text stands out clearly. Although the blurb invites us to 'spot the differences and similarities between children all around the world' there is little in the way of visual reference to the diversity of their environments. The faces of all the children are the same, their hair and clothes defining their cultural/national identity. So it's not surprising to come across stereotypical depictions: a French

boy in stripy shirt, an Indian boy in a turban riding an elephant... Presumably, the idea is to enable very young children to relate to the children in the book, make some connection; this is hard for children to do if they don't see themselves there. The very young may be drawn to simple, bold colour illustrations but I don't think this title achieves its purpose successfully. It would have been better to go with authentic photographs to illustrate the points being made; at least then the diversity of faces, experiences and environments would provide a useful context for meaningful discussion. **UC**

A Lovely Day for Amelia Goose

★★★

Yu Rong, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 8194 X, £9.99 hbk



A day in the life of Amelia Goose from waking up to going to sleep is described in eleven double-page spreads. Most of her day is spent at the pond where she plays with Frog. Yu's colours are flat and bold and her uncomplicated cut-out type shapes are well-defined matching the simple, explanatory text, making both pictures and story easy for very young children to follow.

There is an adequate amount here for adult and child to talk about and youngsters will also enjoy looking at the antics of Amelia and Frog as they frolic in the pond. The thick paper is suitable for little hands. While not particularly original, Amelia Goose is a well-produced and balanced book which is very appropriate for its target age group and will I'm sure be asked for again and again. **VC**

Oly and Me

POETRY

★★★

Shirley Hughes, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 9653 X, £10.99 hbk

Hughes is a prolific author and illustrator whose work people either

love or don't. Her latest collection of 14 poems deals with the day-to-day life of Katie and her little baby brother Oly. The poems chug along nicely with no great surprises. The artwork evokes an old-fashioned childhood world of ballet classes, pancakes and farm animals and uses pastely tones. It strikes me as quite a nostalgic view of English childhood which, not being English and working in a town library, I find hard to recognise. But then I tried some of the poems out on a parent and toddler group and toddlers recognised themselves in the poems and enjoyed the safety of the rhyme schemes. If nothing else, its presentation will make this book stand out amongst others aimed at the Early Years sector. But for me it isn't the first book I'd reach for if given a choice. **TE**

Watch Out, Wilf!

★★★

Jan Fearnley, Walker, 40pp, 0 7445 9654 8, £10.99 hbk

Wilf is 'bright as a button and full of fun!' The story fizzles along with this little brown mouse constantly in trouble. Ever-watchful Mum shouts warnings, 'Watch out, Wilf!' but, CRASH, BANG, WALLOP, down he goes, time and again. Mum sighs, telling him there's too much crashing and banging and not enough listening. But sometimes it is Mum who doesn't listen! 'Watch out, Mum!' cries Wilf, but too late, for CRASH, BANG, WALLOP, Mum causes disaster. The delightful illustrations are joyful throughout, from the endpapers showing their plump pumpkin home to the final page, when Mum gives Wilf a great big cuddle. Lots of young readers just like Wilf will love this book, just as the mothers of CRASH, BANG, WALLOP-children will love it too! **GB**

Tiny's Big Adventure

★★★★★

Martin Waddell, ill. John Lawrence, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 9260 7, £10.99 hbk

An inspired decision by Walker to bring together two of our finest talents to create this lovely picture book. Waddell's simple mousey tale of scary things in the cornfield is perfectly accompanied by Lawrence's exquisite pictures. Old and new technologies are smoothly combined here with Lawrence's trademark vinyl-cut prints and hand-rendered textures being sensitively pieced together digitally. The text appears in the form of a

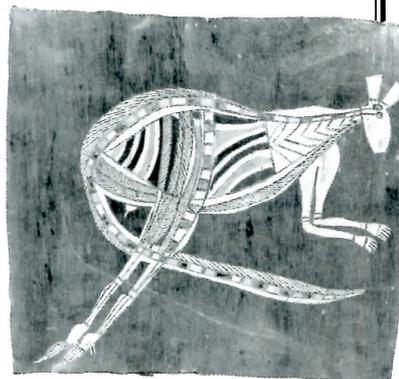
hand-cut font designed and printed by the artist. Tiny Mouse and his big sister Katy encounter many an unfamiliar sight on their intrepid adventure; tractors, pheasants, rabbits and snails are each examined by the curious pair until Tiny gets a little over confident and ventures deep into the corn, only to find himself calling for big sister as the dark shapes begin to frighten. Lawrence's sensitive interpretation of Tiny's battle between curiosity and fear will strike a chord with many a child. The warmth and humour in the characterisation of the mice is never lost among the richly textured backgrounds.

This book is typically well produced by Walker, a handsome edition in a taller than usual format, finished with a mat coated paper that perfectly sets off the prints. Definitely a book for keeps. **MS**

Animals: A First Art Book

★★★

Lucy Micklethwait, Frances Lincoln, 24pp, 1 84507 027 5, £9.99 hbk



Animals is an introduction to art through paintings of animals from across the centuries and cultures. The animals are divided into pairs with appropriately simple descriptions accompanying each full colour spread – Bouncy, Stripy, Feathery, Scaly. The artists, from around the globe, span five centuries and include Renoir, Hockney, Warhol, Stubbs, Rubens, and Hokusai. An index at the back provides some information for adults about the paintings.

Other titles planned in the series feature colours and children. The author's previous books on art for children include *A Child's Book of Art* and *Discover Great Paintings*. I can't help feeling that £9.99 is a lot of

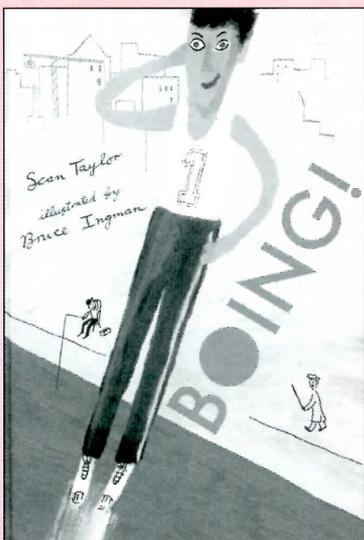
Editor's Choice

Boing!

★★★★★

Sean Taylor, ill. Bruce Ingman, Walker, 64pp, 0 7445 9685 8, £10.99 hbk

Practising a 'deadly difficult, quadruple, headfirst flip', the Great Elastic Marvel (five times World Trampolining Champion) misses his trampoline and plunges out of a high storey window. Absorbed in a TV cartoon, his son Felix does not notice that his father is hurtling towards earth and certain death. But is it possible that the Great Elastic Marvel's gymnastic skills can save him? Boing! Boing! They do, time and again as he bounces up and down in a series of extraordinary feats. This wonderfully entertaining tale with its deadpan, perfectly paced text is illustrated with black line and wash in the French style reminiscent of Bemelmans and



Dufy. Stripey awnings and cursive script at dramatic moments reinforce the Gallic flavour and there are lots of delicious jokes in the illustrations. A triumph that will be enjoyed by everyone from five upwards. **RS**

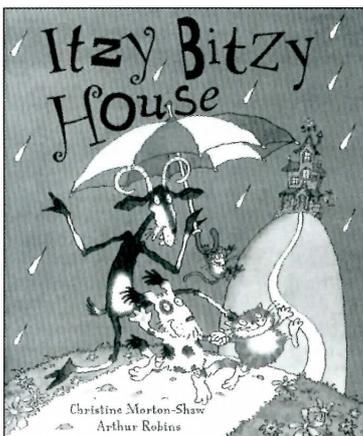
money for just 18 pictures no matter how well chosen they are. It may be best to wait for the paperback version to be published. A more generous approach might have been to have included sections on Colours and Children within one book rather than have separate titles in a series. **AK**

Belonging

★★★★★

Jeannie Baker, Walker, 40pp, 0 7445 9227 5, £10.99 hbk

Australian artist Baker's familiar 'relief sculpture' approach to book illustration is here employed to relate another wordless narrative with socially conscious overtones. The pictorial text is delivered once again through a window that sits in the same position on each double-page spread. Through it we see the effect of time on the neighbourhood outside and, via various visual clues, on the girl whose room we are in. A rather brutal and run down urban environment is seen beyond the little garden in the foreground. An abundance of mini stories unfold before us, telling of the gradual 'greening' of the neighbourhood over the period of time it takes for the girl to reach maturity, marriage and motherhood. This is an extremely positive book, apparently inspired by the true-life story of a street in Baker's home town of Sydney. It is always good to see wordless books published. The activity of reading pictures is only now beginning to be seen as an important and intellectually demanding activity for children. These particular pictures, with their somewhat primitive or naïve approach, may not be to everyone's taste, but the book flows beautifully and delivers a sensitive and relevant message. **MS**



Itzy Bitzy House

★★★★★

Christine Morton-Shaw, ill. Arthur Robins, Orchard, 32pp, 1 84362 072 3, £10.99 hbk

'By an itzy bitzy house down a twisty turny lane, A twitchy witchy mouse Is sitting in the rain.'

These alliterative stanzas Set the soggy scene For a damp concatenation – The best there's ever been?

Mouse, cat, dog and billy goat What a sorry, soggy sight. When comes a flash of lightning Then, another chink of light.

A creaky door's flung open And a broolly there appears, Beneath it stands a bearded gent Whose words allay their fears.

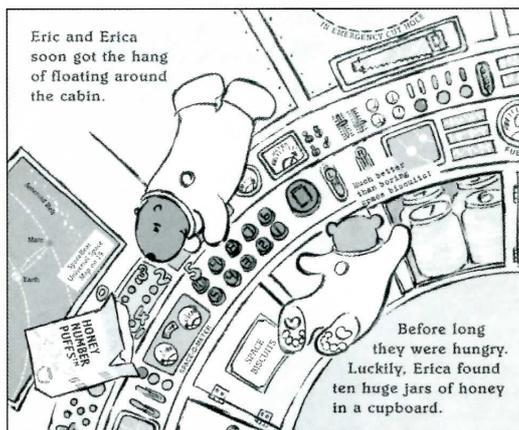
A super dooper picture book By a skilful, clever pair With lots of language lessons Just waiting for us there.

Those 3Rs – rhyme and rhythm And repetition too; Plus onomatopoeia Such fun for me and you. **JB**

Eric and the Red Planet

★★★

Caroline Glicksman, The Bodley Head, 32pp, 0 370 32825 6, £10.99 hbk



Eric and Erica the bears love numbers. They visit the space base where rockets are fuelled by honey. Eric fiddles with the controls and the two bears shoot off inadvertently to Mars. On the way they eat the spare fuel, so can't get back. Fortunately, Mars is full of honey, so they fill up and shoot home. If you believe that, you'll believe anything. Throughout the adventure, there are lots of numbers and things to count, and visual puzzles to engage you. It's nice to have a book that involves complex and interesting ideas about numbers at a simple level. As long as the story doesn't put you off. **SE**

What We Do

0 09 188496 9

Where We Live

0 09 188497 7

NON-FICTION ★★★

Reg Cartwright, Hutchinson, 32pp, £5.99 each hbk

The illustrations in these two bright picture books have the sort of distinctive bold line and vibrant hues which we associate with the best friezes on playroom and nursery school walls. Each page is a small masterpiece of design and

brings out the qualities and characteristics of the different animals in a way that young children will appreciate. The simple text, in clear bold print, explains in **What We Do** how animals move – caterpillars creep, moths flutter and monkeys swing, and in **Where We Live** locates creatures in their homes – moles underground, owls in a barn and lizards under stones. Such a lively approach will encourage audience participation and children will want to return to the books again and again. The books are meant to be enjoyed of course, but they also have much potential for supporting early literacy. **MM**

Choo Choo Clickety-Clack!

NON-FICTION ★★★

Margaret Mayo, ill. Alex Ayliffe, Orchard, 32pp, 1 84362 403 6, £10.99 hbk

We certainly have here a comprehensive first look at vehicles: trains, aeroplanes, cars, racing cars, sailing boats, hot-air balloons, motor bikes, cycles, cable cars, buses and ferryboats each fill a double spread. The bright end pages provide a sort of visual contents list. The illustrations, paintings in primary hues, show vehicles filled with all kinds of people – children, adults, elderly folk and family groups with

babies and dogs, and of course the drivers and other staff who make the journeys possible. The writing bounces along: text about sailing boats waves across the page and that about racing cars winds round the track. Children will like the onomatopoeic effects; for example we read (in sympathetically ascending text) that cable cars go 'Up the mountain, swiftly swinging... Shlump! Whurr-rr! Off they go!' The sharing adult whether at home or in the nursery school (yes the book is big enough to be used with a group or class) will need to be vocally competent to provide convincing impressions of the different means of transport! An enthusiastic group of participants could prove delightfully cacophonous. **MM**

PICTURE BOOKS RELEVANT TO OLDER READERS:

Vote for Duck (see p19)

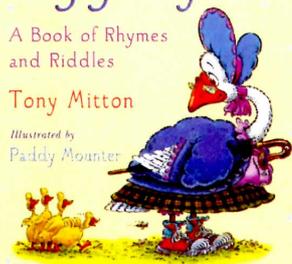
Dali and the Path of Dreams (see p19)

Riddledy Piggledy

A Book of Rhymes
and Riddles

Tony Mitton

Illustrated by
Paddy Mounter



Riddledy Piggledy

★★★★

Tony Mitton, ill. Paddy Mounter, David Fickling, 48pp, 0 385 60416 5, £12.99 hbk

Twenty rhyming riddles, each with pictorial clue and followed by Mother Goose's invitation, 'What's the answer? Let me see ... /Have a think. Now, what can it be ...?' set the scene for the traditional nursery rhyme to be discovered by turning the page. Suitably witty headline

titles such as Soggy Boggy Bag, Splash Crash and Yolk Bloke introduce the riddles and add to the fun.

Clearly listeners and readers will need to know the traditional rhymes for the game to work. Mounter's illustrations provide both clues and the touch of droll sophistication required for the knowing audience, some of whom may well be inspired to try writing their own nursery rhyme riddles. JB

REVIEWS 5-8 Infant/Junior

Little Albatross

★★★

Michael Morpurgo, ill. Michael Foreman, Doubleday, 32pp, 0 385 60149 2, £10.99 hbk

Here's an apparently simple eco-thriller of a picture book. While mother and father albatross are off on a fishing trip a skulking skua has predatory designs on their only offspring, all alone on the family cliff-top. While diving deep, both parents become entangled in fishermen's nets, which also trap dolphins and turtles. Hauled aboard the fishing vessel, the birds are freed and fed by the crew and fly back just in time to skewer the skua and feed Little Albatross. 'That's what we're here for,' says Mother.

Illustrated with Foreman's usual lilac-tinged competence, this is a satisfying adventure-tale of a seldom-featured species, whose real burden is that fishing nets don't only catch fish but dolphins, turtles and diving birds too. TP

Vote for Duck

★★★★

Doreen Cronin, ill. Betsy Lewin, Pocket Books, 40pp, 0 743 48389 8, £4.99 pbk

It's hard to know where best to place this sidelong look at the U.S. political process - the third of Cronin and Lewin's highly praised modern farmyard fables. The story of a duck seeking to escape farmyard chores who eventually ends up as President is carefully structured to keep the attention of children to whom voting is still a mystery. Cronin gives it a folksy rhythm, in which, as Duck makes his inexorable progress, election after election takes a similar, but always slightly different, course: campaign, vote, and the recount, which always finds one or more 'sticky ballots' hidden where they shouldn't be. While Cronin and Lewin provide an entertaining children's introduction to democracy, they also make an affectionate commentary on the myths and realities of American politics for worldly-wise adults. Duck defeats an incumbent Governor who resembles Hilary Clinton, and one of Duck's vote winning ploys is to play saxophone on late night TV shows. Lewin's illustrations (reminiscent of the great Jules Feiffer) work seamlessly with the story, using both slapstick and more subtle characterisation, and acknowledging familiar images from TV and the movies. I loved the

dramatic scene where Duck, facing away from the reader, broods on the cares of state in a sombre blue Oval Office. CB

Dali and the Path of Dreams

★★★★

Anna Obiols, ill. Subi, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 1 84507 282 0, £10.99 hbk

An attractively produced book that seeks to introduce children to the work of the great surrealist by spinning an unlikely narrative around and through many of the painter's familiar visual motifs. The young 'Salvi' shares his dreams with us as we are led through some of those landscapes populated by melting, slithering clocks, stilt-legged elephants and distorted furniture. At the end of the journey we reach Dali's adulthood and are given a brief summary of his life as an artist. The text is delivered in an appropriately dream-like tone, but it is a tall order for any artist to recreate Salvador Dali's combination of vision and consummate technical skill, and here the illustrations, being executed 'in the manner of' suffer from the inevitable compulsion to compare to the technique of the great man himself. MS

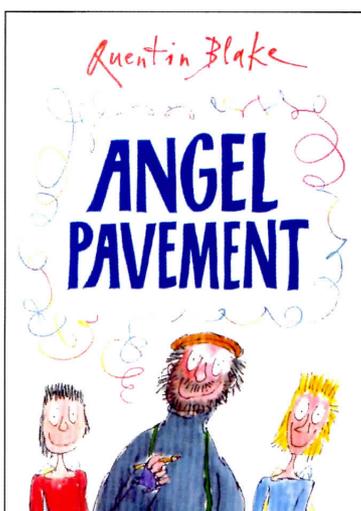
Big Draw, is one of the inspirations behind this book. The other is the proposed Quentin Blake Gallery of Illustration. The latter is still trying to find a home, so let's hope this book adds to the momentum. We are told that some of the people who have helped the author in these ventures appear in disguise in the book, and that some of the drawing is executed with the multi-coloured 'magic pencil' that was produced to mark the recent exhibition of the same name. However, this book stands up brilliantly on its own, whether or not you are in possession of this information. It is a celebration of the magic of drawing, quite literally in this case as the two angels, Loopy and Corky, use their magic pencils to draw shapes in the sky, and to take pavement artist Sid Bunkin on a flying, drawing journey over the rooftops. The author's delight in the graphic contrast between the coloured pencil lines on white and the dark shapes of the rooftops, buildings and spires is evident in these flowing page designs where drawings of drawings are absolutely believable. Another gem from the master. MS

Goldie at the Orphanage

★★★★

Martha Sandwall-Bergström, ill. Eva Stålsjö, Floris Books, 24pp, 0 86315 443 3, £8.99 hbk

This involving story, first published in Swedish in 1986, tells of Goldie's bleak early childhood in an orphanage. Not even an approximate time is given for the events, but there are telling clues which place them somewhere around the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Young readers can be helped to speculate about this and will notice the distinctive long sleeved dresses and white smocks the little girls are obliged to wear and the harsh regime at the orphanage. Comments like 'Lotta and Goldie were now seven years old, and in those days old enough to start work' and the shocking revelation that orphaned boys and girls could be bought at auctions will draw strong responses from some children. Goldie finds the insistence on uniformity in dress and behaviour hard but there are some instances of kindness; a young nursemaid comforts her with a kiss when she has endured having her rather wild golden hair brushed and straightened. The pleasures of friendship also shine through the pages.

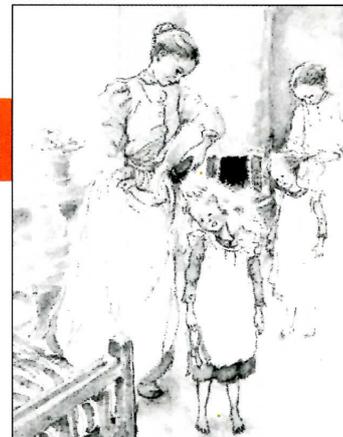


Angel Pavement

★★★★★

Quentin Blake, Jonathan Cape, 40pp, 0 224 07027 4, £10.99 hbk

Blake's close involvement with and support for the Campaign for Drawing and its annual event, The



The delicate and detailed watercolours work with the text to evoke a strong sense of a particular environment and show resourceful children struggling with difficult lives. This compelling tale has no conventional happy ending; the two friends are parted and face an uncertain future after being auctioned. Anticipating that young readers will now be hooked, and some certainly will be, the book ends with a footnote promising that the story is 'to be continued in Goldie at the Farm'. MM

Milly, Molly and Jimmy's Seeds

1 86972 007 5

Milly, Molly and Betelgeuse

1 86972 011 3

★★★

Gill Pittar, ill. Cris Morrell, Milly Molly Books, 36pp, £4.99 each pbk

These two booklets are part of a series of 32 published initially in New Zealand but now in some 22 languages world-wide, promoting diversity and the acceptance of difference. The series presents two little girls, one white and one black, who go to the same school and who share experiences with each other and their friends. These experiences have to do with issues such as loyalty, responsibility, being careful of strangers, etc. In the first of these two books, we see the girls coping with their grief at the loss of a school friend, helped by an understanding teacher who mourns with the children. They find sunflower seeds in his desk and plant them in the school garden as a memorial. The second book is about low self-esteem and a guinea pig who feels unimportant as no one knows what his name means - until Milly and Molly discover that Betelgeuse is a big, bright, twinkly star. The pictures in both books are cheerful and colourful if amateurishly drawn. Parents and schools alike will find the books helpful for discussion with children about important issues. ES

A Gift for the King

Damian Harvey, ill. Martin Remphry, 0 7496 5735 9

Jumping Josie

Anne Cassidy, ill. Sean Julian, 0 7496 5736 7

★★★

Franklin Watts 'Reading Corner', 24pp, £7.99 each hbk

Tom has to carry a special tray of cherry cakes to the king, for it is his birthday. Unfortunately the cakes look just too tempting, and by the time Tom gets there, more than one person has taken a cake from his tray. Will the king like this? Children new to reading, or those who will be read to from this book, will anticipate with enjoyment just what will happen when Tom gets to the king.

Jumping Josie is a frog, who enjoys jumping. One day she jumps too far, and finds herself in a garden from which she cannot escape. Her eventual way out will appeal to children and adults likewise, and her relief at being back home is something that young readers will easily identify with.

The simple pictures, as well as the size of the text in these small format books, are just right for the intended audience, and the introduction from the authors and illustrators at the start of the books is a novel idea that comes off very well. There is also a page of advice for parents and teachers at the back of the book; for parents, this page may well serve to help them when their child is enjoying the book – for teachers I would imagine that the page is pretty well unnecessary. RL

The Dead Letter Box

★★★★

Jan Mark, ill. Anna C Leplar, Happy Cat, 80pp, 1 903285 58 5, £3.99 pbk

The discovery that your best friend is not really interested in you can be very disappointing and this is what happens to Louie when her best friend Glenda moves away from the area. Glenda does not seem to care about leaving Louie and losing touch with her, but then Louie provides a novel way of keeping in touch: a dead letter box in the local library. How this idea leads to Louie making a new friend is told sympathetically and realistically by Mark whose instinct for the feelings and thoughts of young children is always on target. Although the story takes a while to get off the ground it is worth reading nonetheless – losing and making friends is something that all children experience, and children will certainly find much to identify with in this book. RL

Tigress

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Nick Dowson, ill. Jane Chapman, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 8619 4, £10.99 hbk

Why do tigers have ear spots? They may help small cubs to follow their mother or perhaps they are flashed as a warning to other tigers but 'no one knows for sure'. The speculative approach here, the sharing of theories, is likely to encourage young children to think and talk. There are two kinds of print – large and bold for the main story which follows a female tiger and her cubs through

days and weeks – and italic which provides related information and introduces vocabulary like 'camouflage', 'territory' and 'predators'. The use of the continuous present, so favoured by information story writers, works well here. For example, we have the drama and immediacy of a powerful verbal image: 'Like fire the roaring tigress leaps and falls in a crush of teeth and muscle...' matched by a visual image which gives a tremendous sense of movement and energy as the tigress and her cubs are shown hurtling across the pages towards their prey.

The author and illustrator give just the right amount of detail to interest the very young – tigers love swimming, they have a superb sense of sight and hearing but a less keen sense of smell than some other animals and they catch their prey in three out of every ten attempts. This information is not miscellaneous but carefully chosen to give a sense of the kind of creature the tiger is and what its daily existence is like. Female tigers are lone parents and she gives food first to her cubs remaining hungry herself if meat is short. Children are bound to comment on this and can be helped to understand that her apparent 'unselfishness' is a strategy for helping the species survive.

In the short author biography we read that tigers roam in the author's dreams and he finds that they are 'completely captivating and remain mysterious'. This strong interest and knowledge is extremely well communicated to young readers. MM

Oceans

Ill. Mark Harrison, 1 84248 143 6

Rivers & Lakes

Ill. John Norris Wood and Kevin Dean, 1 84248 145 2

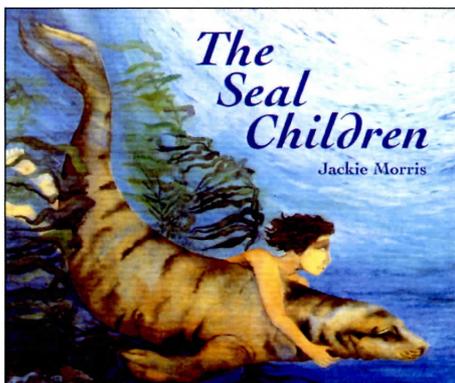
Woods & Forests

Ill. Maggie Silver, 1 84248 144 4

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

John Norris Wood, Mathew Price 'Nature Hide & Seek', 24pp, £6.99 each pbk novelty

This attractive series of glossy paperbacks invites you to play a game of hide and seek with creatures that live in a variety of different habitats. Five wordless, superbly detailed artwork spreads in each book provide panoramic scenes in which animals are camouflaged. Fold-out pages reveal yet more hiding places behind leaves, reeds or coral reefs. On the spreads that follow you discover the tally of animals you should have spotted – 60 or more in woodland scenes – with information and identifying illustrations for each species. It turns out to be much harder than you might expect, but close examination pays dividends in the end, especially when using the little magnifying glass attached to each book. We spotted most of the 84 octopus eggs, but three katydids and several small insects proved very elusive. A good way to learn to recognise animals and to hone observation skills, the quality of the artwork raises these books above the level of similar novelty titles. SU

REVIEWS 8–10 Junior/Middle**The Seal Children**

★★★★★

Jackie Morris, Frances Lincoln, 32pp, 1 84507 040 2, £10.99 hbk

Selkies are half-human, half-seal, and there are legends about them and their inter-relationships with humans all round the British Isles. In this story, a selkie-woman meets and loves a gentle fisherman who lives in a village on the coast of Wales. They have twins, but when the selkie needs to return to her watery life, he knows, sadly, he must let her go. Their children become the catalyst for finding the wherewithal to send the poor villagers off to the New World and a happier life, and ultimately, the boy returns to the sea with his mother. The story has a

melancholy, lyrical tone that fits wonderfully well with the beautifully painted watercolours. These, full of the blues of the sea, the yellows and ochres of the moors and heaths, the strong planes of the faces of the village folk and the love of the family reflect perfectly the sombre tale. A superbly crafted production. ES

Goldkeeper

★★★★

Sally Prue, Oxford, 304pp, 0 19 271950 5, £4.99 pbk

Sebastian Blewitt is at school when he is unexpectedly chosen to become the High Priest's new apprentice. Sebastian and his pet rat leave home and go to live in the Temple of Ora. Sebastian enjoys spending his time being chauffeur-driven in a gold limousine, putting on spectacular shows for the worshippers and eating cream cakes to his heart's content. He discovers the mystery of the sacred divining rods, used to pass new laws, and so he sets about changing some of them to suit himself. But strange things begin to happen. The city becomes a dangerous place, the

citizens begin to rebel and Sebastian's life is put in danger.

Prue's fantasy is ideal to encourage boys who are good readers to enjoy a longer book. Pet rats, chips, football, gangsters and chocolate – boys shouldn't have any problems identifying with the young hero, and the story has a mystery that keeps its readers guessing right to the very end.

Some of the quotes from the Sacred Texts are a bit long-winded, but overall *Goldkeeper* is an enjoyable story with a fair amount of adult humour thrown in. Don't let the connection between Ora and God put you off. SG

The Story of London

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Richard Brassey, Dolphin, 40pp, 1 84255 222 8, £4.99 pbk

An inspiring pictorial history of our capital, as rich and varied as the city itself. Brassey weaves a colourful tapestry as he traces the growth of London from a Bronze Age settlement to the present day, surviving invasion and revolt, plague, fire and rocket bombs. The cartoon-like illustrations are packed with detail and spiked with a witty commentary in speech bubbles. 'Let's all go down the Strand!', chant the earliest inhabitants exploring the river's beach. Bird's eye views of the growing city create 3D maps, imbued with the different character



of each period – the frost fairs by Old London Bridge, John Stow's Tudor London, the elegance of Nash's Regency era or the stench of Victorian London before the sewage system was built. Brassey ends on an upbeat note with the prospect of London celebrating its 2000th birthday, while beneath the city pigeons hop on and off underground trains. Throughout there are lots of details children will enjoy, such as the opening of Hamley's precursor, Noah's Ark in 1760, or the fact that Brompton Cemetery, where Beatrix Potter spent her childhood, has yielded many familiar names upon its tombstones, Peter Rabbett and Jeremiah Fisher among them. Never

mind the lack of an index, just enjoy the story and hope that a children's guide book will follow. SU

Islam

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Alison Cooper, Hodder
Wayland 'The Facts About',
48pp, 0 7502 4590 5, £11.99
hbk

This is a timely publication which helps explain the practices and beliefs of Muslims in a comprehensive and appropriate manner. The most outstanding feature of this book is its clear perspective and direct approach which focuses on the basic facts on which the religion is based. The style

of the presentation is aimed at children and it naturally seems to respond to the questions they might ask. This makes the subject matter easily accessible to them as well as to older readers.

Each double page spread deals with one question and the surrounding issues related to it with the most important aspect highlighted within a separate boxed section. The text is brief and lucid with interesting and varied illustrations including photographs, diagrams, maps and calligraphy. A glossary is also included at the end of the book. In summary this book is a useful reference book to have in any classroom or school library which will help disseminate a broader understanding of a major world

religion. Other titles in the series also by Alison Cooper are *Judaism*, 0 7502 4591 3, and *Christianity*, 0 7502 4592 1. KA

Hunkin's Experiments

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Tim Hunkin, Pelham Projects
Ltd, 128pp, 0 9542266 0 7,
£7.99 pbk

This book contains about 200 simple experiments, mainly using only domestic materials, classified under Biology, Clothes, Electrical, Food, Hobbies, Light, Materials, Maths, Miscellaneous, Objects, Office, Science and Sound. The cover bears the subtitle 'Hundreds of absurd experiments for all ages from 8-80',

which is about right. The experiments are clearly illustrated and explained. They range from the innocuous – How to grow carrot leaves, walk through a postcard, mindread with hands – to the irritating – how to make a door into a sawdust trap, get someone's feet wet, make a musical bed.

Permission of a responsible adult before trying any of them is rightly called for. Those that require additional care and those that do not always work are marked. There is one announced fake, which will never work, but the reader is not told which one it is – s/he must read through the book to find it. Your reviewer thinks he has. FP

REVIEWS 10–14 Middle/Secondary



NICK MANN'S

Fallout

★★★★★

Nick Manns, Hodder, 256pp,
0 340 85567 3, £5.99 pbk

Very contemporary in tone and endowed with a gripping pace and very deft plotting, this is a book well worth promotion.

Greg, a troubled youngster, reluctantly embarks on a Maths project with Inderjit, a new girl in the class. What they unearth about a Government nuclear cover-up leads him into extreme danger and causes the past to re-visit him with fatal consequences.

Manns allows the disturbing facts to unfold with a blend of time-shift and narrative voices in a way that heightens the reading pleasure. Definitely a must have book to encourage teenage boy readers. DB

Snap

★★

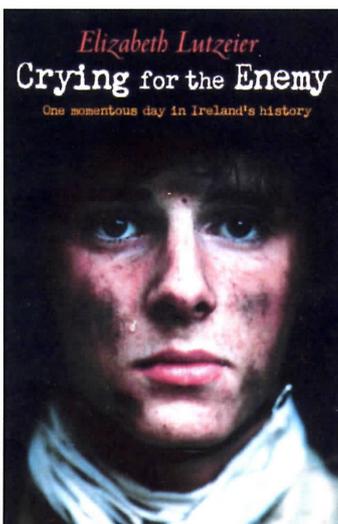
Alison McGhee, Walker, 144pp,
0 7445 9380 8, £4.99 pbk

Edwina (aka Eddie) and Sally are best friends growing up in a small American community. Eddie writes lists to help her make sense of life, and deals with more serious problems by snapping the coloured rubber bands that she wears on her wrist. The story follows the girls' friendship through a difficult summer – Sally's grandmother, Willie, is ill and the girls have to face

up to a changing future.

The theme of change is developed using striking imagery, but is unnecessarily hammered out in the final chapters. The book grapples with some difficult emotional issues. It's a brave attempt to deal with the realities of growing old, illness and death, but ultimately fails to satisfy – only really succeeding in highlighting the strength of friendship.

The book is not suitable for younger children, and although the characters are both 11 years old, the content and style of this book makes it far more appropriate for young teenagers. *Snap* was first published in the US, and while the American spellings add 'flavor' to Eddie's narrative, I suspect the references to V8 Juice, cookies and butternut trees may not appeal to a British readership. SG



Crying for the Enemy

★★★★★

Elizabeth Lutzeier, Oxford,
176pp, 0 19 275258 8, £4.99
pbk

With the hindsight of almost 90 years, historians, both Irish and otherwise, now view the events of Easter Week, Dublin 1916, from a variety of perspectives. What remains unarguable, however, is the significance of these events for the evolution of today's Ireland. Lutzeier's novel, perhaps echoing Yeats's famous response, 'All changed, changed utterly', gives

frequent expression to the transforming effect of what happened during that week. Her story brings together three young teenagers from disparate social and political backgrounds and, by skilful (and largely credible) plotting, interweaves the destinies they share from the day when 'freedom set fire to the city'. The dreams of that freedom are seen to exact some heavy prices; some of the realities to be encountered along the way are extremely painful. It is much to Lutzeier's credit that in the context of a children's novel she succeeds in conveying a convincing sense of the complexities of a key moment in 20th-century Irish history, though readers who come to the book with little knowledge of that history, especially where it concerns Irish-English relations, may occasionally be at a disadvantage. But the lives of the individual young characters – tragically short as some of them are to be – will speak to all of us. RD

The Edge

AUDIO BOOK ★★★★★

Alan Gibbons, read by
Malcolm Freeman and Lucy
Akhurst, Orion, abridged,
3 hrs 45 mins, 0 7528 6139 5,
£9.99 tape

Gibbons's tense thriller encompasses racial prejudice and domestic violence without ever seeming to be dulled down into an issues story. Danny and his mother flee her abusive partner and return to the childhood home she had previously rejected. Danny is delighted with the exchange having watched helplessly as his mother suffered. It's to be a new life: a life away from fear. And Danny's happy to be back staying with his grandparents, despite his grandfather's strangely hostile behaviour. But happiness is harder to find than Danny has expected. The deep-seated and dangerous prejudice that he meets needs confronting. Told as a number of separate, first-person narratives, *The Edge* makes an excellent audio book as between them Malcolm Freeman and Lucy Akhurst provide the contrasting voices of Danny, his mother, the violent Chris, stubborn old granddad and the long suffering gran – all of whom have something important to say. JE

Hazel, Not a Nut

★★★★★

Gill Lobel, Orchard Black
Apple, 192pp, 1 84362 448 6,
£4.99 pbk

Hazel, Not a Nut is, as the name suggests, an upbeat and modern story about a girl named Hazel.

Written in light-hearted 'chick-lit' style, this book nonetheless deals with important issues such as bullying in school, and also issues of self-image and insecurity. Hazel is overweight, and highly sensitive about this. This leaves her open to the pretty (and, to Hazel's mind, popular) Lauren Stevenson, class bully. What is very interesting, however, is that both Hazel and Lauren are under pressure regarding their weight. Lauren has to stay thin to be perfect for her demanding and pushy parents. Hazel has to lose weight to fulfil popular ideas of what a teenaged girl should look like. Interesting too, for me, is the lack of a 'love interest' for Hazel, since so many books about teenagers present 'getting her perfect guy' as the motivation for teenaged girls doing things like wanting to lose weight.

However, in spite of Hazel not living happily ever after with her dream boy after shedding pounds, the book does have a fairytale ending of sorts. The victim rescues the bully from herself and they end up as friends. This romanticism lets the rest of the story down a bit. Still, the novel presents us with a fairly realistic view of weight issues from the perspective of a Year 9 girl. I enjoyed reading it, though it has a tendency to oversimplify Hazel's views, and also the issues involved. I would recommend the book as a good light read for young teens. SP

The Gladiators from Capua

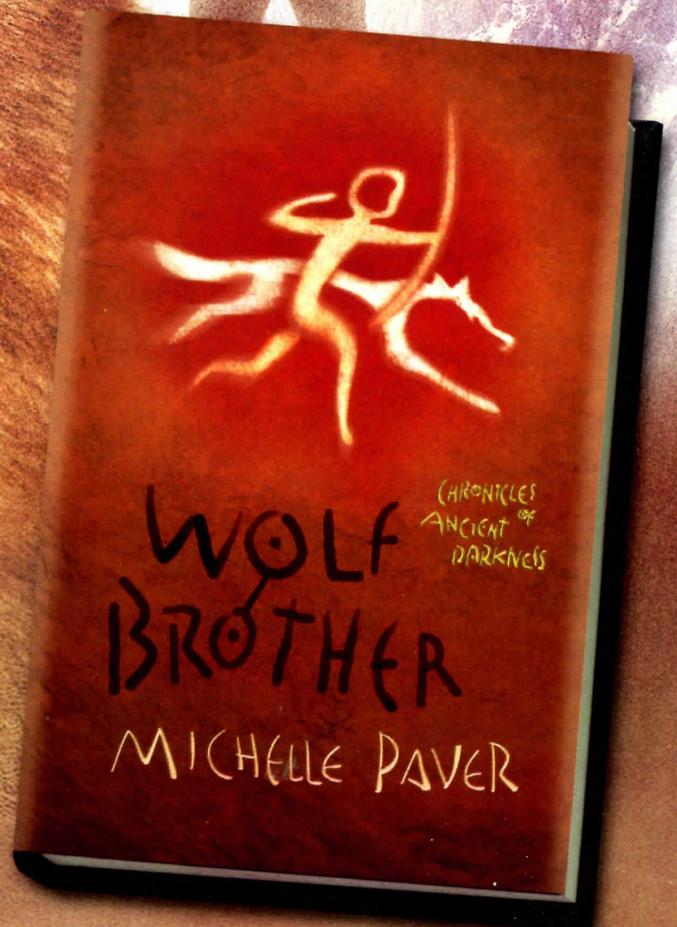
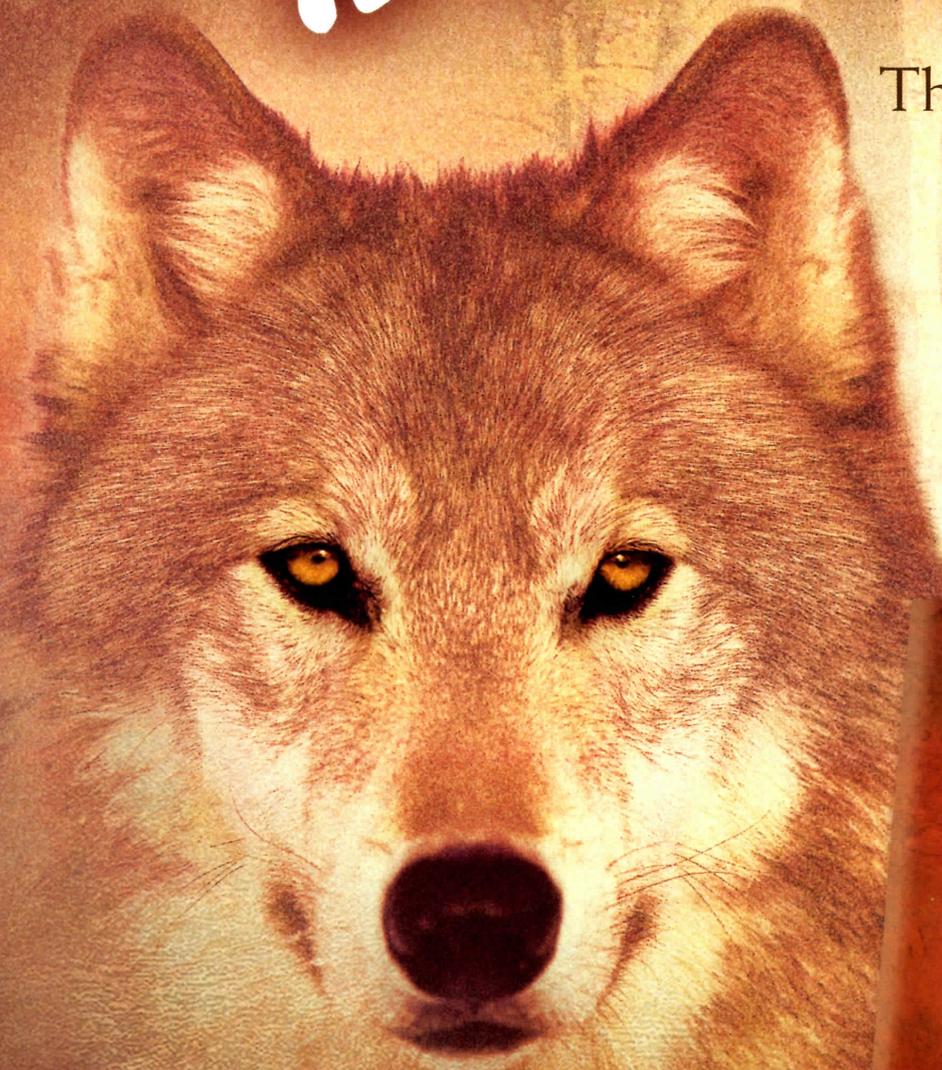
★★★★★

Caroline Lawrence, Orion,
224pp, 1 84255 252 X, £7.99
hbk

This is the eighth title in Lawrence's Roman Mysteries series, with another ten still to go. Written at great speed and making full use of her encyclopedic knowledge of Ancient Rome, these very popular and successful books are already something of a publishing phenomena. Their amazingly energetic author also finds the time

WOLF BROTHER

The adventure begins...



Out now in hardback
Audio read by Ian McKellen

to make highly effective visits to schools, sometimes dressed in full Roman garb. Not surprisingly, she has an active fan club.

As literature, the books are competently written although sometimes falling back on generally tired English. And while the historical details are painstakingly accurate, with a full glossary at the back, the 11-year-old characters around whom these stories revolve, as so often in historical writing for children, are utterly 21st-century in their emotions and attitudes. There is also a lot of violence and gore, which may help explain these books' huge popularity, but on the whole the child characters who witness it are sickened rather than enthused. The description of the fights between child gladiators in this story is particularly and properly horrible. So too are the accounts of those fiendish circus re-enactments of episodes from Roman mythology, where criminals are forced to act out the role of the God about to be slain.

Once readers have waded through so many descriptions of pitiless and pointless human or animal slaughter, they too should feel nauseated by such excesses of human cruelty dressed up as public entertainment. This is obviously the author's intention, since her own young characters often want to look away from the horrors going on in front of them. The fact that they also sometime share in the barbaric excitement raised by such contests makes sense in terms of historical accuracy. But on the whole this book and the seven others that came before it steer away from celebrating any of the cruelties that once took place in times thankfully so different from our own, while still managing to get across some of the drama of the original horrific spectacle. NT

Horace

★★★

Chris d'Lacey, Corgi Yearling, 224pp, 0 440 86445 3, £4.99 pbk

You'd not think that acquiring a bear from a charity shop could cause so much havoc in one family's life. But d'Lacey has constructed an amusing, lively, farcical plot that keeps the pages turning and the smiles forming.

Yes, it is a bit far fetched that any charity shop nowadays wouldn't spot a rare bear as soon as it exited the carrier bag. Yes, the sister from hell and the dodgy antique dealer stereotypes are alive and well here, but you can't help but like Joel and his sidekick Kenny. You are certainly made to sympathise with him dealing with the cash versus honesty dilemma that he lets himself in for when he raids a charity shop skip in the first place.

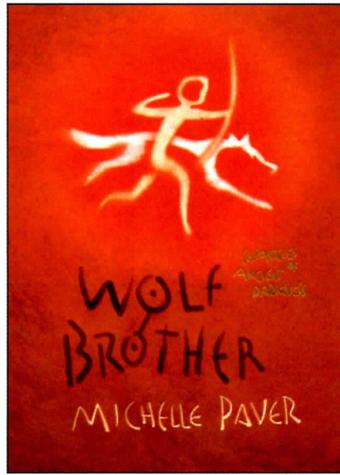
Well recommended for early secondary boys. DB

Wolf Brother

★★★★

Michelle Paver, Orion, 224pp, 1 84255 170 1, £8.99 hbk

Set in the forests of north-west Europe – post-mammoths, pre-monarchs – *Wolf Brother* is the first book of the 'Chronicles of Ancient Darkness'. The opening of the novel is gripping in every sense: hero-to-be Torak's father is savaged, Grendel-like, by a demonic bear. In his last,



guttering gasps, Fa(ther) warns his son that the Bear's power will grow with each kill and instructs his young son to find the Mountain of the World Spirit. Torak accepts. He will do it for his Father. He will do it for the Forest. The orphaned boy is soon befriended by an orphaned wolf cub and, although later accompanied by Renn, a runaway girl from a rival clan, the story's central focus is the growing bond of friendship between boy and baby wolf.

There is plenty of page-turning drama in the story of their adventures – quite apart from the ever-present threat from Torak's beary nemesis. The undocumented world of the clan-people of six thousand years ago is vividly depicted in elegant prose, coloured with kennings like 'smoke-frost' and 'Thundering Wet' and alliterative chains such as 'the Bright-Beast-that-Bites-Hot'. The 'hunter-gatherers' are shown to be great survivors who know the medicinal properties of plants, are able to read animal tracks and can fashion fishing lines out of rawhide. In a world steeped in spirits and superstition, rather than brackened backdrop to the drama, the Forest is depicted as a sentient being.

Needless to say, Torak succeeds in his quest, although in achieving his goal he is separated from his wolf cub companion. On the last page, however, in a final (melodramatic) flourish, Torak proclaims the absent animal his 'wolf brother'. And so this taut and ever-compelling book ends as it began – with a journey beckoning for both the living and the dead. NA

Invisible Threads

★★★★

Annie and Maria Dalton, Random House Definitions, 240pp, 0 09 943338 9, £5.99 pbk

The multifarious manifestations of the mother-daughter relationship dominate this novel, determining its very structure. Alternate chapters are narrated by the surprisingly similar voices of 16-year-old Carrie-Anne and her biological mother, Naomi. Carrie-Anne's account reflects teenage angst, burgeoning sexuality and the rift between her and her adoptive mother, occasioned by the wish to find Naomi. At the same age Naomi's youthful circumstances had caused her to flee from her immature and egocentric mother to the security of a loving single mum and her two daughters. Here she was able, in keeping with the book's

theme of woman's choice, to determine the future of herself and her beloved baby. The structure and theme of the novel are interesting and quite original, but the concerns of the young of both generations are not without their clichés. CR

The Monster That Ate the Universe

POETRY ★★★★★

Roger Stevens, ill. Jane Eccles, Macmillan, 96pp, 0 330 41523 9, £4.99 pbk

Okay I admit it. I came to this book somewhat snobbishly thinking 'another cheap paperback aimed at the school market'. How wrong I was and how bad to judge a book by its cover ... Yes this is clearly aimed at ticking boxes on the National Curriculum. And yes it does this but is also a great collection of often deceptively clever poems. In 'Haiku' teachers will find the perfect description of the form. Its wide subject range enables poetry to be used in classes other than English Literature. It drags the reader's attention deeper into the world of poetry by getting them to ask who was William Carlos Williams or Edward Lear etc.

The poems in this book work on many levels, cover many forms and range from jokey pieces to several poems on death. Roger Stevens makes his poetry look effortless but you will close this collection with a head full of scary carrots, snow Buddhas and chuckling chutney. I shut this book grinning and thinking with his wonderful poem 'Six Eggs' humming through my mind. TE

Grass for his Pillow

AUDIO BOOK ★★★★★

Lian Hearn, read by Jamie Glover and Isla Blair, Macmillan, abridged, 4 hrs, 1 4050 0600 5, £9.99 tape

The middle of a trilogy often has a sense of bridging the gap in between the two more vital elements of the story – the beginning and its conclusion. *Grass for his Pillow* suffers slightly from this in that there is a lot of filling in to be done before what one expects to be the dramatic resolution in volume three. But Lian Hearn gets around it surprisingly adeptly by concentrating instead on the development of the characters. This, in turn, makes *Grass for his Pillow* work especially successfully on tape. Jamie Glover and Isla Blair read the two voices well, so that Takeo's dilemma as he weighs up the impossible choice he must make between his two lives, one with the Tribe and the other with the Otori, and the equally dangerous game that Kaede must play to protect her future by seeing off suitors while keeping her secret hidden are played out vividly. JE

The Fugitives

★★★★

Alex Shearer, Hodder, 288pp, 0 340 87573 9, £5.99 pbk

Memo to jacket design: this version you have done with the bright blue background and the comic bomb won't do. The book is about the kidnapping of two boys after a terrorist bombing and yes, it has light touches – the two boys think they caused the bombing with a

firework and accept help from the terrorists because one is a woman and they have been particularly warned about taking lifts from strange men (the woman is the hardened leader), with help only offered because the boys have seen the terrorists' faces. Much of the story takes place in a rural Welsh cottage where the boys only gradually realise what has happened and who their helpers really are, while enjoying the kind of rural holiday unknown to them as city kids, particularly with the male terrorist, a better father to them in many ways than the ones they actually have. It has a lively, contemporary feel with a range of moral issues handled cleverly and lightly and a strong command of dialogue to create character and develop the story. This cover sells a good read short and sends the wrong signals to the range of readers who will enjoy its fast-paced action and dialogue. There's different kinds of 'funny': you've done slapstick – this is irony with a fair dose of sad. (Memo to editor: please can we have could've rather than 'could of?') AJ

The Flame Tree

★★★

Richard Lewis, Simon & Schuster, 288pp, 0 689 86052 8, £5.99 pbk

Isaac, a young American boy, is growing up in Java where his parents are missionary doctors. He speaks Javanese and Indonesian and he has a friend, Ismail, in the community beyond the walls of the mission compound.

Isaac and Ismail are just boys, mucking about as boys do, until the eve of the bombing of the twin towers in New York, which is preceded and followed by the rise of Islamic militancy in Java. This profoundly affects Isaac's relationship, not only with Ismail, but with the rest of the Javanese community. It raises questions for him about the mission's relationship with the society in which it operates, about his relationship with Ismail, about his own faith and about the rights of people of one faith to impose that faith on the people of another.

The book attempts to present a balanced view of the two communities, but doesn't really succeed in doing so. There are good people and bad people on both sides, but whilst the worst of the Americans is a silly boy called Robert the Slobert, a caricature straight from *Boys Own* who merely name calls, the worst of the Javanese are people who riot, kidnap, mutilate and attempt to murder.

The rise of Islamic fundamentalism is presented as mainly militant and hostile, prepared to torture and brainwash a child to further its interests. Little is said about the Christian fundamentalism which has sent the missionaries from their own country to seek converts in a country with an established faith of its own. No mention made of the Christian/colonial history in the East Indies that Ismail's ancestors once suffered at the hands of Christians who came with the bible in one hand and a gun in the other, often using pretty harsh conversion measures and carrying protestors away into slavery in far-off lands. The reader seems expected to accept as a given the right of the missionaries to be

where they are, and to rejoice in the Rambo-style antics of the American military heroes who sweep in to rescue them from the Javanese mob.

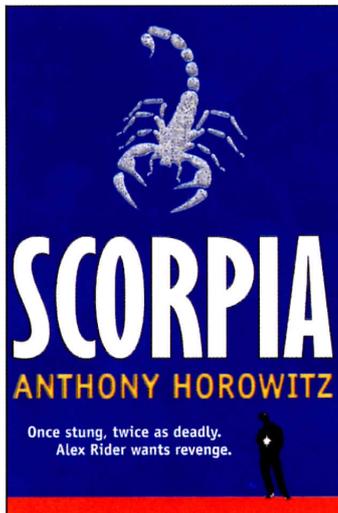
I had a problem with the style in which the book is written, wavering between describing the events from the point of view and in the language of Isaac, a 12-year-old boy, and describing them in the language of and from the viewpoint of an adult with a particular political outlook. Also, had it not been for the Reeboks, cellphones and helicopters, the book often seemed as if it could have been set in the colonial times of yore ie when the empire was British, not American and Robert the Slobert was Billy Bunter. Despite these reservations, I did find the book thought-provoking and would recommend it to young people because of the issues it raises, even if it doesn't address them all, or addresses them unsatisfactorily. SP

The Summerhouse

★★★★★

Alison Prince, Walker, 352pp,
0 7445 9098 1, £5.99 pbk

The Summerhouse is a superb novel. It combines two stories in one. The first is set in the present, around Abby and her friends, who befriend a local writer, Stan. The second is set in the future, with gripping themes of GM, the afterlife and second sight, and is co-authored by Abby, her friends and Stan. The first story gives Alison Prince the chance to write about how she works with children. She co-authored **How's Business** sixteen years ago with children from a Lincolnshire primary school and a visit to that school for three days to work with the present generation of children set off this book. The scenes with Stan and the children are fascinating in terms of how authors choose names and personalities for their characters, how they make the plot move along and how ruthless they have to be with structure. The story that is created, about a GM research site called Massa which tries to control the dreams of its employees while creating dogs with the breath of dragons, becomes more complex and gripping as the book unfolds. Prince interleaves the two stories and although the second one is supposed to be the utterly fictional one, set in the future, you end up caring more for its characters, Cat and Luma, than the down-to-earth children of the present. However, Stan, a Pullman-cum-Grisham figure who usually writes adult thrillers but has now turned his hand to children's fiction, sensitively absorbs the preoccupations of the children (Abby has a fear of death after her sister was killed in a car accident, Chokker was beaten up by his stepfather and lives with foster parents, preferring to play his role-play martial arts computer game than socialise much) so that the empathy for Cat and Luma can be transferred back to the 'real' children. Whichever story you end up preferring, **The Summerhouse** is unmissable on so many levels and demands to be read again and again. OD



Scorpia

★★★★★

Anthony Horowitz, Walker,
368pp, 0 7445 8323 3, £5.99
pbk

The **Scorpia** organization has set in motion operation 'Invisible Sword', an audacious scheme to simultaneously destroy the British and American 'special relationship' and destabilize the world. Yet again, the security of the planet hinges on sassy teenage spy Alex Rider, who has notched up four missions for MI6 already.

Base-jumping his way into Consanto Enterprises, a pharmaceutical front for **Scorpia**, is child's play for the plucky pubescent - he has, after all, only just escaped from a flooded chamber, having earlier gate-crashed the palace of arch-villain and glamour puss Julia Rothman. Now double agenting it, Alex is trained up as an assassin in **Scorpia's** service. His first mission will be a testing one: to kill Mrs Jones, icy matriarch of MI6. His motive is a personal one - she authorised the killing of his father Ian Rider...

The climax of the book has the jaw-dropping scale and OTT spectacle of a Bond movie. With the extortion deadline tick-tocking away, Alex must single-handedly 'disarm' the balloon-borne system that threatens to microwave London's school-children to death. Needless to say, he succeeds. And MI6 is exonerated - Hutton-style - in the double-dealing which preceded the deaths of Alex's parents. But an unexpected and shockingly dramatic event awaits the reader in the final chapter...

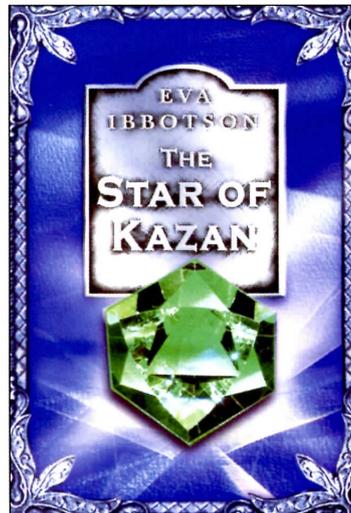
From its bag-snatching start to its balloon-dangling denouement, **Scorpia** is an eyebrow-raisingly, heart-stoppingly pacy adventure story. For those who enjoyed the preceding books in the series, it will not fail to please. NA

The Star of Kazan

★★★★★

Eva Ibbotson, Macmillan,
368pp, 1 405 02054 7, £12.99
hbk

This is a great big fat engrossing read. It draws you in and won't let you go until the last page is turned and the last sigh is sighed. It opens in 1896 in a village in the Austrian mountains when two ladies find an abandoned baby girl. Annika, the baby girl, is brought up by the cook



and housemaid, for this is what the ladies are, in the household of three eccentric professors at the university in Vienna.

When Annika's mother turns up it seems the girl's dream has come true, but instead it is the beginning of a nightmare. Taken to a cold and uninviting house on a large estate in north Germany, Annika at first makes the best of things, overjoyed to be with her missing mother. But gradually it emerges that things are not as they should be; readers may pick up on hints that her 'mother' is not all that she seems to be and when Annika is sent to board in a school run by a tyrannical headmistress we know that it is time she lost her trusting attitude and confronted reality.

Plenty of local colour and exciting incidents build up atmosphere and a sense of place that is not overloaded with historical detail. The professors take Annika to see the famous Lipizzaners at the Spanish Riding School in Vienna and the history of the Riding School is explained to her. But here, as elsewhere, Ibbotson has resisted the temptation to overload with facts a story set at the edge of a major upheaval in Europe. Instead fact blends with imagination in a novel which requires readers to leave disbelief outside its jacket; we are invited to step in and enjoy a captivating narrative which engages the reader right to the very last page. VC

The Supernaturalist

★★★★★

Eoin Colfer, Puffin, 304pp,
0 14 138040 3, £12.99 hbk

Cosmo Hill almost dies in his attempt to escape from the orphanage, the Clarissa Frayne Institute for Parentally Challenged Boys. But he sees something remarkable: blue spectral creatures feeding on his broken body. Rescued and healed by members of a small group who call themselves the Supernaturalists, he is drawn into a crusade against the parasitical spectres, which takes him from squalid streets dominated by adolescent street gangs to the plush offices of a great international corporation; and beyond, into space, to the orbiting computer that controls his world. There is plenty to enjoy in Colfer's action thriller, which draws enthusiastically on recent cinematic visions of a future in which continuing scientific and technological progress is accom-

panied by social and environmental collapse. As might be expected, Colfer exploits the possibilities of future weaponry with inventive relish; and there are some exciting set pieces, particularly a street gang drag race which explodes into violent mayhem. Older readers will appreciate satirical touches like the 'para-legals', a crack troop of armed lawyers who aim to be first on the site of any accident. If anything, there's perhaps too much going on. To my mind, constant combat and mind-boggling gadgetry don't play as well on the page as they might on the screen and, although the central characters are interesting enough, they aren't given enough space to develop convincingly. Colfer doesn't seem to have decided exactly what he wants to do with the story. A rather distant, tongue in cheek narrative voice sometimes breaks out and it's not clear whether Colfer is aiming mainly for thrills and laughs or has something more serious that he wants to say. CB

The Spook's Apprentice

★★★★★

Joseph Delaney, Bodley Head,
336pp, 0 370 32826 4, £8.99
hbk

Well-packaged as horror, this is the kind of storytelling which will catch many readers - full of action with the threat of dark and dreadful deeds but always bound by the ties of family and friendship and the security of things coming right in the end. Thomas is the seventh son of a seventh son (with a mysteriously powerful mother too) now ready to be apprenticed as such children have to be apparently to the local Spook. He is a kind of policeman for the supernatural, sorting out those with dark intent and putting them behind bars, which may of course be bent and broken free from if young apprentices are tricked into doing what they shouldn't. Once past his initial test (suffering a stay in a spooky house over night), Thomas is into his apprenticeship and has to learn how to copy the lessons of his master as well as dealing with the awful tricks of Mother Malkin on his own when the Spook is called away. There is much excitement, including the evil hand reaching out of the water to pull Thomas to his death, and the reappearance of the evil old woman in some other form - Alice, the lively daughter of the same bad family who must surely be tainted, or is it his newly born niece or even his brother? Much excitement. The writing is sometimes plain and creaks a bit but it's a good story where creaking a bit is all part of the awful pleasure of spookery. AJ

The Stratford Boys

★★★★★

Jan Mark, read by Martin
Jarvis, Hodder, unabridged, 5
hrs, 1 84032 972 6, £13.99 tape

Jan Mark's brilliance as a writer is shown to excellent effect in Martin Jarvis's reading of **The Stratford Boys**. A long novel that sensibly hasn't been cut down, Mark's recreation of the young Will Shakespeare's first attempt to put on a play is gloriously witty as it reveals the 'true' story of how **A Midsummer's Night Dream** came about. With an apparently hapless

cast, a potentially disruptive audience and a near-useless script, Will Shakespeare sets to pull off a theatrical entertainment for the people of Stratford. Jan Mark throws in social history, literary background and a great deal of human insight as dud rehearsals, the scrounging around for props and the sudden discovery of an unexpected star – all of which have become time-honoured theatrical tensions – lead up to the unexpected success of the first night. With his unusual ability to capture the nuances of boys' dialogue, Jarvis is able to bring the vast cast of wonderful characters to life in what is not only a terrific story but also a wonderful introduction to Shakespeare. **JE**

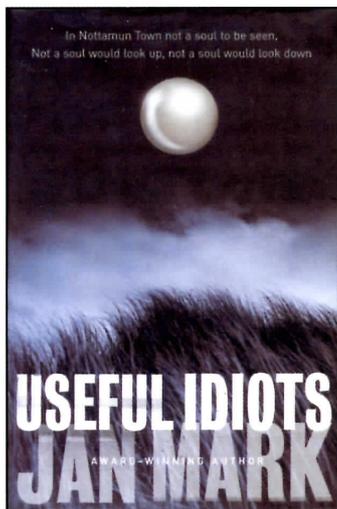
Useful Idiots

★★★★★

Jan Mark, David Fickling, 416pp, 0 385 60413 0, £12.99 hbk

One of the many excitements of this novel is that the reader stands on constantly shifting ground. Even the title is unstable. At first, the 'useful idiots' might seem to be the 'English', the aboriginal people in 2255 who preserve old values and ways of life in the Rhine Delta Islands or, as the region was once called, the United Kingdom. For the land itself is shifting since the melting of the icecaps; and much of this novel occurs in the brilliantly evoked landscape of marsh and waterways through which the English move by punt or, surefooted and swift, by vaulting from patch to patch of firm ground.

There's little firm ground for archaeologist researcher Merrick Korda, who comes to realise that he himself has been a useful idiot, manipulated, exploited and even hunted by different players in a dangerous game. Her innocent yet tenacious protagonist serves Jan Mark well; for we too may well be as mystified, fearful and shocked as Korda yet, like him, become as desperate to trace the labyrinthine plot to its end. Given the small cast of characters, it might be expected that the sources of the malign pressures upon Korda would be transparent; but the climax of the novel – and a climax it is in two more



senses than one – is as unexpected as it is savage and unsentimental. Even the nature of the novel keeps shifting. At first, it seems to be a dystopia, yet this bleak future is not so much a warning or a dark lesson as a pervasive setting for a political thriller. Jan Mark offers no compromises. The text does not flinch from difficult vocabulary or, when the intensity of the plot demands, from violent colloquialism. What she demonstrates through the quality of her writing is that you don't have to go in for relentless pace to generate riveting action.

The book begins with the discovery of a skull, embedded in the peat after a huge storm has washed the sand from Parizo beach. Beneath the skull sits a complete skeleton, with traces of a bullet grooving the eye socket. So who shot Parizo Man and why? As the layers are excavated, levels of deception and intrigue are exposed, laying open the kinds of conflicts we can foresee as we stare into our race's future.

A surface reader will not survive long in a plot as tortuous as the tracks through the marshes. Who will read *Useful Idiots*? Adults and Young Adults, for sure. Mature readers then – ah, but there's the fallacy. For this publisher reminded us, when he published *His Dark Materials* with Scholastic, that some readers as young as 10 or 12 will take on 400

pages of intricate plot and even the challenge of political and sexual complexity. For those readers, this is surely five starsworth of sustained absorption. **GF**

Bullied

0 7496 5387 6

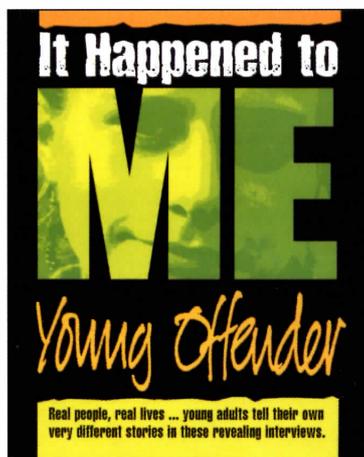
Young Offender

0 7496 5388 4

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Angela Neustatter and Anastasia Gonis, photographs by Laurence Cendrowicz, Franklin Watts 'It Happened to Me', 48pp, £10.99 each hbk

Here are two titles in a series that so far runs to eight 'issue texts'. The style is in the reality documentary/interview mode that is currently so popular on TV. In this instance it works incredibly well and has resulted in two very clear-headed, informative, intelligently formatted and utterly compulsive reads that do their job with commendable skill.



The technique is to interview young people variously affected by the issues and to add input from friends, parents and those directly involved in providing support. Apt photos, fact boxes, talking points, glossaries, contact information and future action advice all add to the worthy usefulness of both books.

The bullying title includes such

aspects as being the victim because of your intelligence, because of being a slow learner and being on the receiving end of that unique brand of female emotional cruelty. But for balance, the bullies do get their say and we get the parents' perspectives too.

Young Offender follows the same format with the crimes quite predictable, though I hadn't anticipated the illegal graffiti artist. The really moving story here was that of Tom, a victim of a beating who has never really recovered and bears debilitating mental scars.

I'd like to see both titles, and probably all the series, in every secondary school. **DB**

Tennis

NON-FICTION ★★★

Venus and Serena Williams, Dorling Kindersley 'How to Play', 96pp, 1 4053 0673 4, £12.99 hbk

A well produced book, full of information and dozens of stunning photographs that clearly states that this is tennis, the Williams sisters way.

The foreword offers inspiration and advice to would-be or beginning tennis players. The sisters explain that in their early years, tennis for them was 'a shopping cart full of worn-out old balls'. Their road to international success, leading to winning at Wimbledon, is clearly defined.

Every stage of the game and the successful techniques involved are clearly set out so that the novice can make easy reference. The photographs are clear and the reader can copy the various moves and positions with ease. Boys and girls of various ethnic groups are favourably depicted, making this an inclusive reference book.

The advice on what to wear, equipment, the basis rules on stretching and warming up are adequate and clear. The Match Tips from the Williams sisters include tips on having fun and 'going for it', essential to encourage the young. The 'useful information' on tennis organisations is also a valuable feature. **VW**

REVIEWS 14+ Secondary/Adult

Sardines and other poems

POETRY ★★★★★

Stephen Knight, Young Picador, 84pp, 0 330 41355 4, £7.99 pbk

Knight's first collection of poetry for young people is stylishly produced, with a great cover and what I guess are sardines on each page. It's aimed at older teenagers and nostalgic adults and could sit easily in either section of a library or bookstore.

It's full of a sense of loss, with the death of Knight's father appearing several times alongside tragically sad poems about lost childhood and lost opportunity. Stalking through the book too is a sense of threat, from cats, the sea, the weather. Or perhaps it's merely the threat of change both personally and in the world and the desire to hide in a

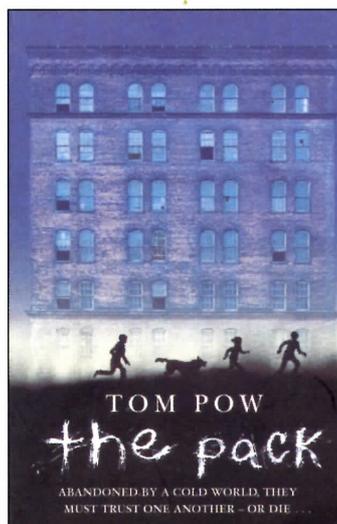
wardrobe and hold back time. Teenage poetry often plays into certain stereotypes of form, language and subject. Knight avoids doing this and offers readers an intelligent collection of beautifully crafted poems. This book will speak to angst ridden, misunderstood teens and those adults who cringe at the memory of what it was like to be that age and in that mindset. **TE**

The Pack

★★★★

Tom Pow, Random House Definitions, 256pp, 0 09 947563 4, £4.99 pbk

The Pack is for those who can take it. They'll need strong stomachs, for the story is harsh in both action and setting, though the courage of its protagonists, human and canine, is equal to their predicament. Readers



will find some optimism in the final pages, but no certainties. This is no didactic tale, but in the spaces left by the lean narrative, Pow invites sombre reflection; not least because the author's Foreword reveals his sources and the evolution of the book.

First there were newspaper pieces about Ivan Mishukov, the 4-year-old Russian street boy who became a leader of a pack of dogs. Those articles led Pow to website information about the brutalities of Russian orphanages. Then, more immediately, there were the grim tragedies of James Bulger, Stephen Lawrence and Damilola Taylor. Such was the impetus behind this mythic adventure of abandoned kids living like, and with, ferocious yet faithful dogs in an unnamed country. Their dystopic land is divided into poverty-ridden Zones, Forbidden Territories ruled with brute cruelty

NEW Talent

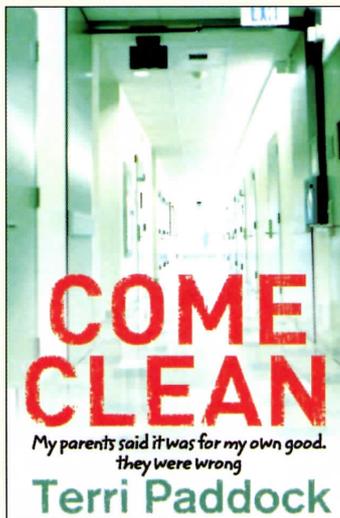
Come Clean

★★★★

Terri Paddock, Collins, 352pp, 0 00 717247 8, £5.99 pbk

In the 1980s in the USA Paddock's sister was sent to a private rehabilitation centre for young drug users. This facility misapplied philosophies borrowed from Alcoholics Anonymous and mixed them with extreme forms of peer group pressure including public humiliations. Such institutions inflicted terrible harm on the young people in their care in the name of 'tough love'.

In her powerful novel Paddock draws on this experience to recreate the abusive environment she witnessed. Twins Joshua and Justine are both sent, at different times, to the same facility and as the story, told by Justine, unfolds we come to realise that her brother has killed himself. The real reasons for this – homophobic bullying and sexual abuse – emerge gradually as the story unfolds. This is a gripping and disturbing novel as the reader experiences how vulnerable and



powerless Justine is in this warped environment in which telling the truth counts against you. Will she too be destroyed by it? Interwoven into this theme are Justine's memories of the childhood she shared with her twin and the bond between them that can never be broken. This is Paddock's first novel for teenagers and she shoots from the hip – as well she might given her personal connection to her subject matter. RS

by ruthless warlords, and the Invisible City where privilege, corruption and suppression maintain a kind of order and luxury for the few.

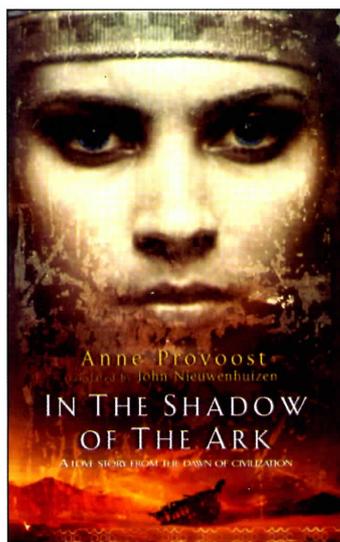
The tension of the plot derives chiefly from the dangers endemic in such a world rather than the events which befall our heroes – an unlikely term for such damaged creatures living at the edge of physical and mental desolation. When they rescue a kidnapped member of the pack they succeed perhaps too easily. Nevertheless, this novel is difficult to put down and difficult to forget. Those ready to make connections will see that we are not dealing with an Africa-at-arm's-length, though there is the savagery of genocide (the elimination of thousands of inconvenient children) and widespread hunger. Pow's sources lend the story echoes from contemporary Russia and, less obviously, from much closer to home. For the central character is no Ivan; his name is Bradley, and the home he revisits in tortured dreams belongs to our familiar, affluent West. So too does the adult betrayal of which he is a victim. Disturbing reading. GF

In the Shadow of the Ark

★★★★★

Anne Provoost, trans. John Nieuwenhuizen, Simon & Schuster, 384pp, 0 689 87269 0, £12.99 hbk

This epic novel re-tells the familiar Noah's Ark story. Provoost rejects the various comic cop-outs by which previous adaptors, such as the writers of medieval mystery plays, tried to dodge the disturbing questions raised by the legend. They are very awkward indeed. If Noah's Ark represents the restricted vengeance of a just and disappointed god (here always called the Unnameable), then must we



suppose that Noah's family were the only righteous and deserving people in the world? If so, were they, the chosen ones, entirely free of sin? And if not, what sort of godly justice was it that drowned all the rest, both good and bad alike? If the flood was indeed such a drastic restart for humanity, why has this ruthless deity failed to punish all the evil done by humans since? Why is unregenerate humankind still here, as yet unflooded? What price justice?

The story is told by a wonderful young woman called Re Jana, the lover and concubine of Noah's son Ham. Her family have left their home community of dark-skinned people in the marshes to seek out the rumoured desert boatbuilding and join Noah's workers. Re Jana's stoic tones of candid, resolute and dignified acceptance tell a story of bigotry, power, deceit and betrayal. It reports, entirely without prurience, both heterosexual and lesbian love, and rapes (including the multiple rape of a paralysed woman), and extremes of hardship and cruelty. It

invites us to question whether any group that believes itself elect and chosen, (whether by race, colour, religion or species) can escape corruption and depravity. The conclusion is inevitably pessimistic. 'The flood did not wipe out evil.' There is little room at the end for faith in the redemptive powers of humans or gods.

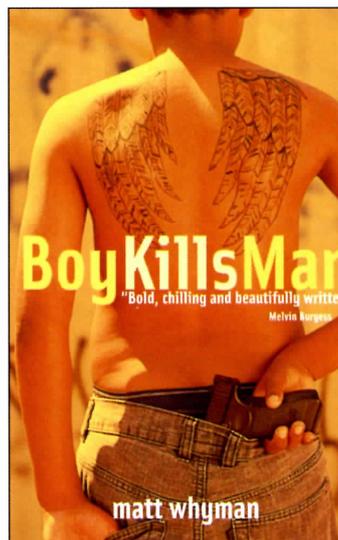
This is a challenging and thought-provoking novel, which asks many tough and pertinent questions. It is also a highly readable and compelling narrative, which puts intimate flesh and blood on the dry bones of Bible story. PH

Boy Kills Man

★★★★

Matt Whyman, Hodder, 128pp, 0 340 88194 1, £10.99 hbk

The brief opening section, in italics, reads like a film catching us expertly at the point just before dramatic and awful action is about to dramatise what the spare and shocking title has threatened. It is titled 'The Boy', followed by the precise location in Columbia and 'right now' – character, place and time. With the same disturbing mix of the title and the book, we have the boy, Shorty, dreaming of playing football, sitting in his 'way too big' shirt in a car with a child-locked door. His gun is also too big for him, he has been injected with just enough drug not to lose 'the natural adrenalin that turned the little ones into live wires', and with laws that won't 'jail a minor for murder', and enticed by the prospect of a football season ticket, Shorty is one of the kids who 'made perfect killers'. It is based apparently in fact. In taking us back into Shorty's life in the chapters that follow and explaining how he has come to be in the back of this car, Whyman cleverly details the 12-year-old's world which is cut into so abruptly by the vicious adult one. The short scenes of brutality are shocking, in the casualness of the cruelty as well as the detail, but brief. What remains is the engaging story of a young boy, told in the first person and layering the detail of his world with his feelings for his family, his friend and football. It's a good and short story, well told, gripping, poignant and easy to read. It's also disturbing and unsettling and perhaps even more so for teachers, librarians and parents wanting to arbitrate, if young readers don't get there first, the maturities required to deal with such a book.

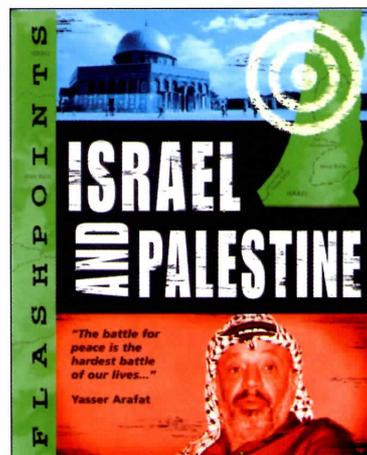


We may debate these moral questions over a book while Shorty's people debate them in action. AJ

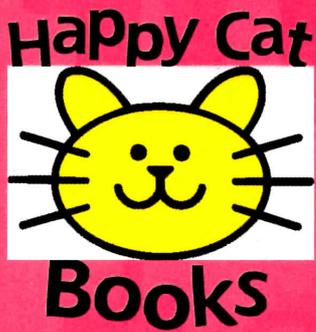
Israel and Palestine

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

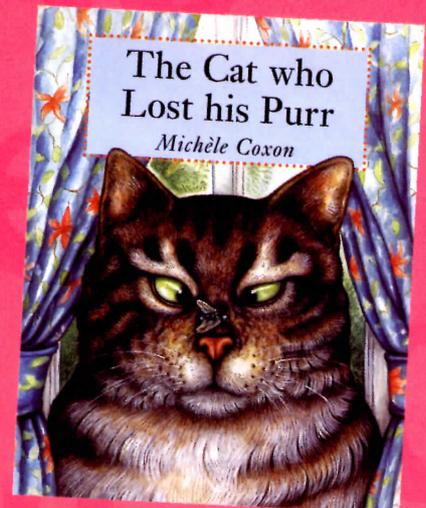
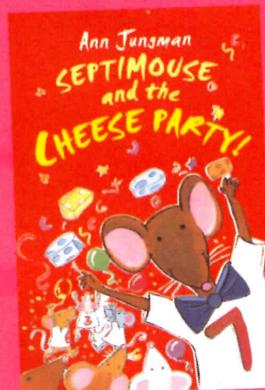
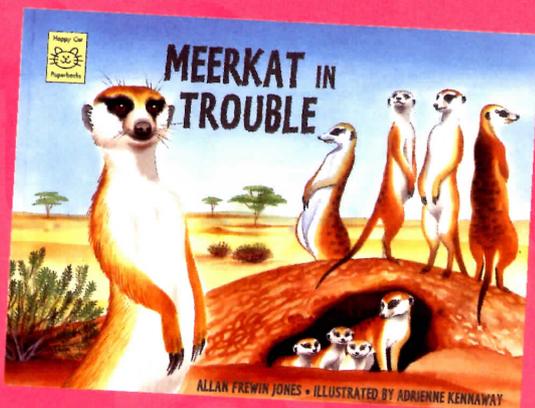
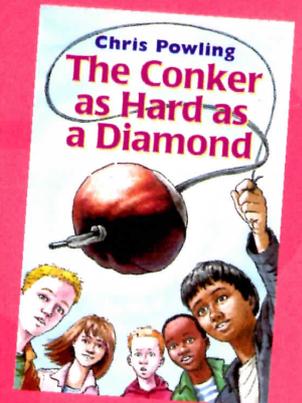
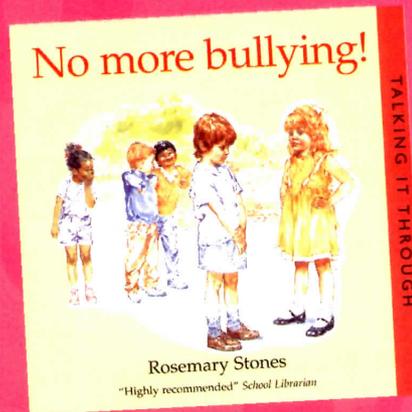
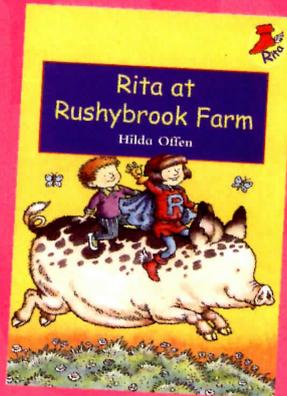
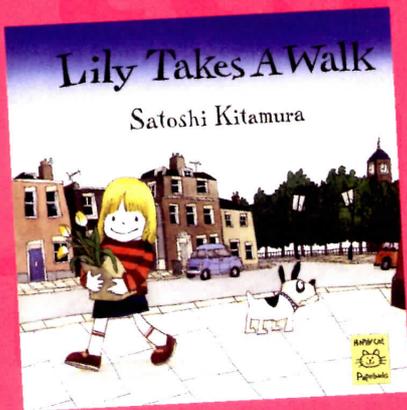
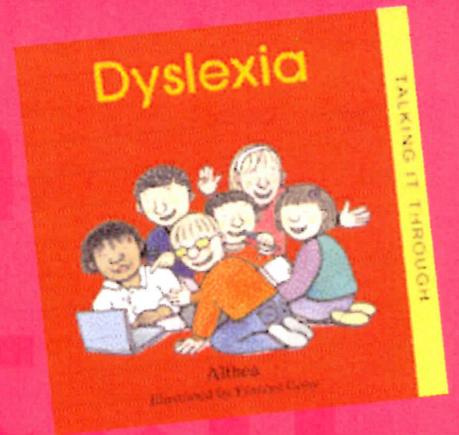
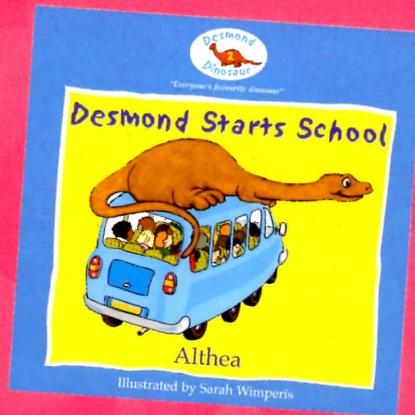
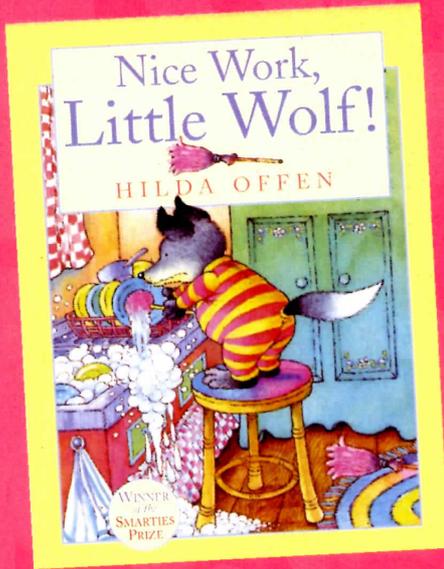
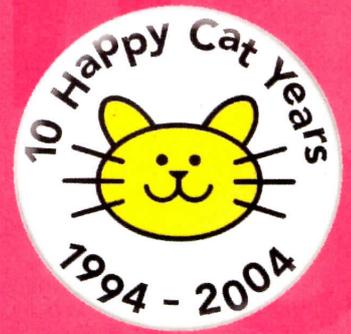
Michael Gallagher, Franklin Watts 'Flashpoints', 48pp, 0 7496 5540 2, £12.99 hbk



So fierce do opinions rage on both sides of this continuing conflict that the presence of a quote from Yasser Arafat on the cover may be enough to convince some that this is not an even-handed book. Actually, Gallagher makes a good job of steering a course for his readers through the history of Palestine without getting blown to one side or the other. Of necessity, given the competing claims for historic ownership of the land, he begins with the ancient past; but he gets properly under way with the rise of Zionism in the late 1800s and the policies of the British in the First World War towards the ambitions of Arabs and Jews for statehood. The account that follows brings us up to the present, examining the involvement of the great powers as well as the struggle on the ground. This is one of a series on international flashpoints, and the format works well here. Within a comfortable double page spread, a heading paragraph in bold briefly sets out the subject of the section's argument and a concluding timeline both sums up the chronology and sometimes relates local developments to international ones. Maps chart the perplexing movement of boundaries; there are potted biographies of the main figures; and some well chosen photographs take the reader from refugee camp and battlefield to the conference table. This is a clear headed political and diplomatic history. There is less consideration of social, economic or cultural developments, and the book's deliberately judicious approach means that the unaligned reader will experience the ferocity of views it engenders only at a safe distance. CB



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CLASSICS IN SHORT No.47

Brian Alderson

Aunt Grizzel and Aunt Tabitha were hardly the fittest playmates for motherless Griselda, but ancient help was at hand from



Geraldine Le Marchant,

heroine of Mrs Molesworth's **The Carved Lions**, is wanly recuperating as Victorian maidens are wont to do. (She has very sensibly run away from Miss Ledbury's seminary but chosen bad weather for her escape.) Along with the sympathy and calves' foot jelly she is regaled with 'a quaint old story-book'.

'It was old-fashioned even then'

she tells us, 'for the book had belonged to [Myra's] mother, if not in the first place to her grandmother. How very old-world it would seem to the children of to-day – I wonder if any of you know it?'

The story-book in question

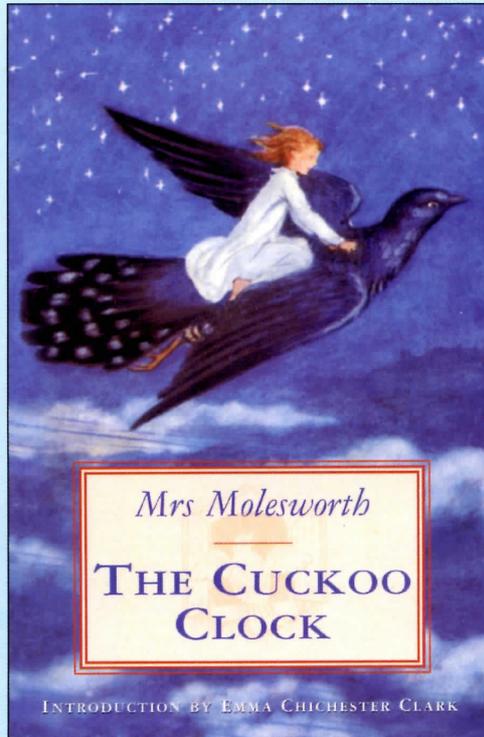
was **The Ornaments Discovered**, first published in 1815*, but Geraldine's observations might well 'to-day' be applied to her own author's **The Cuckoo Clock**, the most famous story to come from Mrs Molesworth's fluent pen. It was the third of her hundred or so books for children, arriving in 1877 hard on the heels of **Tell Me a Story** (1875) and **Carrots** (1876 – a bestseller in its time and notorious for its author's lavish dispensation of baby-talk). It has rarely been out of print in all its 137 years of life and has been illustrated by leading artists of three generations: Walter Crane, Charles Brock, and E H Shepard. It was the third title to be chosen in 1941 at the start of the Puffin Story Books series, and, however old-fashioned it may seem, it is currently vouched for by Emma Chichester Clark (no grandmamma she) in a brief introduction to a photographic reprint of the edition with the Shepard illustrations**: 'the kind of book I read from start to finish, curled up in an armchair or in the back of the car'.

The attractions are discernible.

Mrs Molesworth sets a promising scene with nine-year-old (I think) Griselda arriving at the dark mansion where she is to be cared for by her great-aunts. Her natural sprightliness is somewhat oppressed by the circumambient formalities; she is in need of a playmate; and it is unsurprising that, after a petulant start, she is taken up by the fairified cuckoo in the cuckoo clock. He is a rather sententious fellow (she gets fed up with him saying 'You have a great deal to learn') but he understands her loneliness and undertakes to help.

Thus far so good.

The inherently implausible situation is convincingly set up and although the trials of a refined Victorian young lady are indeed 'old-world' there is dramatic potential in her dilemma. Instead though you get an arbitrary succession



of dream-like episodes that neither relate to each other nor cumulate towards a denouement. There is a party with some nodding mandarins from the house's great saloon; there is a flashback where Griselda sees her great-grandfather making the magic clock and her grandmother, Sybilla, going to a too-early grave. There is a visit to Butterfly Land for a rather irregular botany lesson, and, towards the end of the book, a flight to the dark side of the moon – just one example of how all the many tales of lunar travel have been set at nought by that 'giant leap for mankind' of Neil Armstrong's.



'The sea is so strange, and so dreadfully big . . .'

There is no narrative compulsion about these events (which to my laddish mind frequently descend to sopppiness) and even the arrival of Master Phil to be Griselda's playmate is unsatisfactorily contrived – and gives the author more opportunities for child-speak: 'Nebber mind... we must have comed the wrong way...' etc.

If we were to ask the cuckoo to account for these failings

he might well put them down to his creatrix's impulsiveness. We know*** that she deemed herself a natural storyteller, finding tales in everything, and happily intruding upon her own stories with comments and explanations: 'For fairies, you know, children,... are sometimes rather queer to have to deal with...'; 'It was not "fuzzly" silk if you know what that means...' But the craft of narrative construction – plumbing the depths of the situations that are propounded – often eluded her. How much stronger **The Cuckoo Clock** would have been if the relationship between Griselda, her aunts and the family history had been more fully articulated and the quest for a playmate more naturally developed (at times the story seems like a primitive trial for Frances Hodgson Burnett's **The Secret Garden**). She could do it if she would, for **The Carved Lions** of 1895, with which these columns began, is far more deserving of classic status ('the highest artistic finish and restraint' said Roger Lancelyn Green). The story of Geraldine's unhappy consignment to boarding school and what happened at Miss Ledbury's is said to be drawn from the author's own experience but I sometimes meanly wonder if she hadn't been reading another book by Mrs Hodgson Burnett: **Sara Crewe**; or what happened at Miss Minchin's. ■

NOTES

*By Mary Hughes and published by William Darton junior. The 'ornaments' were 'amiable manners and a well-regulated mind'.

**Jane Nissen Books.

***The prompting for this choice of title for 'Classics in Short' derives from the recent publication of a definitive biography: **Mrs Molesworth** by Jane Cooper, published by the author at Wealden Cottage, Pratts Folly Lane, Crowborough, East Sussex TN6 1HR, xv, 412pp, illus., 0 9542854 0 9, £25. The book won the 2002-3 Harvey Darton Award of the Children's Books History Society.

The illustrations by E H Shepard are taken from the 2002 Jane Nissen Books edition, 1 903252 14 8, £7.99 pbk.

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