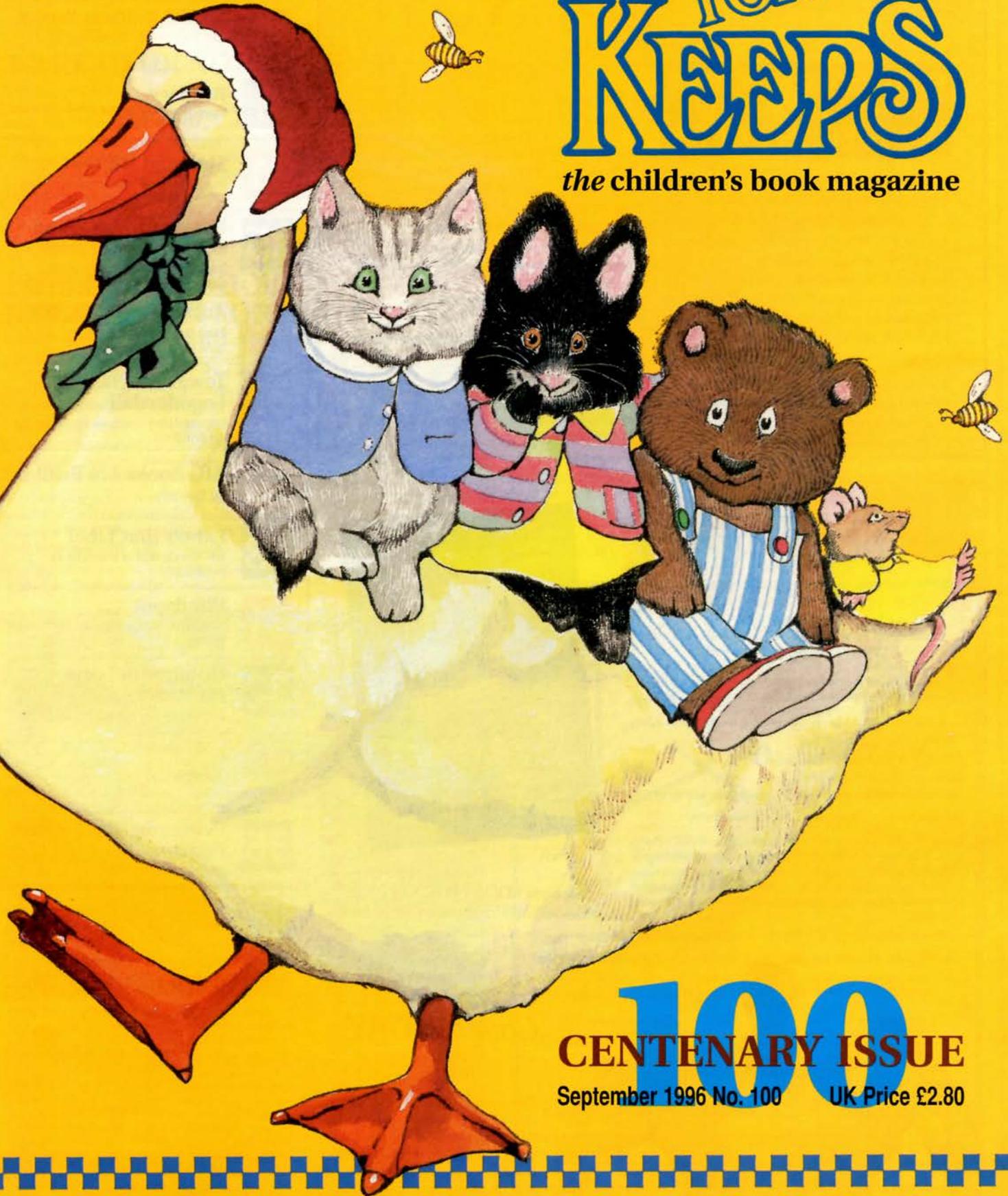


BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine



100
CENTENARY ISSUE
September 1996 No. 100 UK Price £2.80

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A GUIDE TO POETRY 0-13

Co-published by

Books for Keeps & The Reading and Language Information Centre
Edited by Chris Powling & Morag Styles

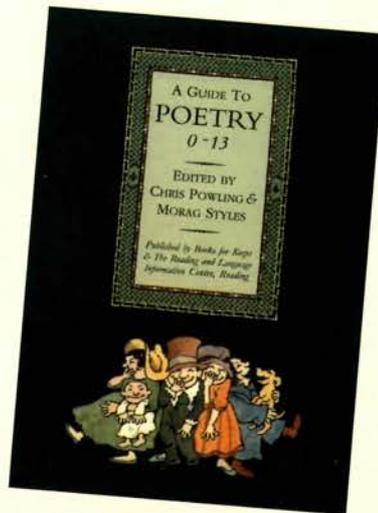
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Chris Powling, Susanna Steele, Morag Styles and Helen Taylor

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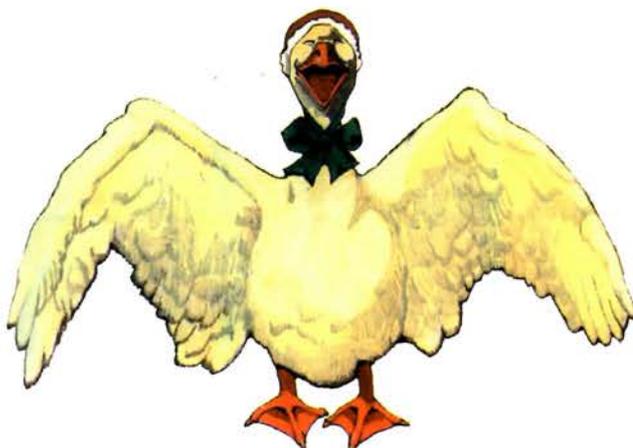
*'Writing verse is so much fun,
Cheering as the Summer weather,
Makes you feel alert and bright,
'Specially when you get it more or less the way you want it.'*

(Wendy Cope from The Orchard Book of Funny Poems)

Poetry: 0-13 is a complete revision and update of BfK's Poetry 0-16, published in 1988, which sold more than 10,000 copies. The new Guide, in a condensed format of 52 pages, incorporates the most successful features of its predecessor while taking account of the wealth of new verse for children published in the intervening eight years.



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CoverSTORY

The cover illustration for our 100th issue is by Rosemary Wells for Iona Opie's latest book *My Very First Mother Goose*. Iona is the subject of our Authograph this month and details are given on page 18. We are grateful to Walker Books for their help in producing our September cover.

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BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine

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A CENTENARY REVIEW

March 1980 - September 1996



Pat Triggs, Editor 1980 to 1989.



Chris Powling, present Editor.

Well, we're still here. This in itself, is something of a triumph if we take note of the commentators who, nearly 20 years ago, doubted if an independent, self-funding magazine about children's books could possibly survive on a bi-monthly basis.

- Written by experts but not necessarily for experts?
- Concerned primarily with paperbacks?
- A useful publication which aimed to be as much fun as the books it assessed?
- A non-specialist forum where *all* constituencies in the children's book world – schools, colleges, libraries, publishing houses, bookshops, homes – could meet and find out more about each other?

Looking back, I'm not sure I wouldn't have conceded the case for caution myself.

Luckily, though, it wasn't up to me. It was the drive and enthusiasm of Richard Hill, BfK's managing director, and Pat Triggs, its founding editor, which carried the day – converting the School Bookshop Association's publication *School Bookshop News*, edited by Peter Kennerley, into the journal you're reading right now. Also there at the beginning were Angie Hill, Jan Powling and Alec Davis, our designer, painstakingly building the company which, when Pat moved on after more than nine years of editorship, I joined in September 1989, along with Eleanor von Schweinitz as non-fiction editor and Carole Newman who looks after our subscriptions.

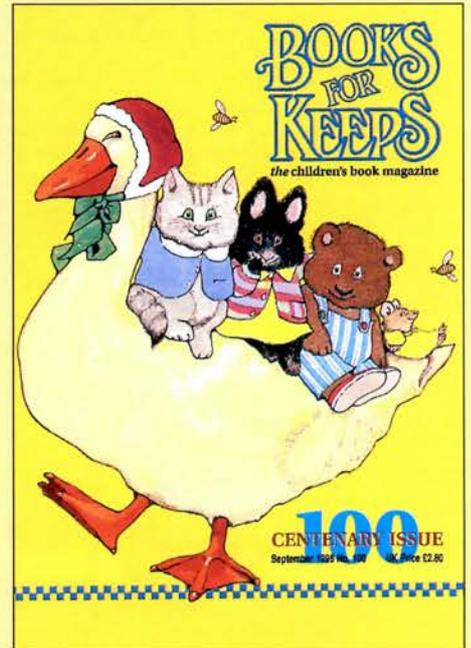


Richard Hill as he appeared in the very first BfK.

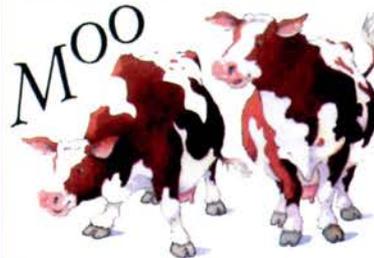
This editorial, then, is the longest in BfK's history and it's shamelessly self-regarding. Still, analysing one's own credentials is all the rage nowadays – what's called, in the current jargon, a Mission Statement. Provided we can remind ourselves that, allegedly, it's when we *die* that our Past flashes before our eyes, some sort of progress review may be no bad thing. So what's BfK been up to over the last decade-and-three-quarters? And where will it boldly go in future, solvency permitting?

REVIEWS

These, from the first, have been the staple diet we've served up for our readers – evaluation which takes appropriate account both of the book itself as a literary/illustratory achievement and the child-reader who's implied, presumably, by its mode of address. All our reviewing team, of fiction and non-fiction, have regular access to children as well as books



Today, any kids confronting the Pic-n-Choose counter for picture books are lucky indeed. What a range of de-luxe confections, what top quality ingredients, what bright colours, what a variety of flavours! Where to start?



going to be milked

From *Cock-a-doodle-doo*.

There'll be books for the absolute youngest, of course. *Cock-a-doodle-doo* by Steve Lavis (Ragged Bears, 1 85714 088 5, £8.99) is a counting book with the usual quota of farmyard noises, but they're in huge bold print that bounds in and out of the exuberantly fluid animal portraits, above one clean line of rhythmic (not rhyming) text, climaxing in a glorious jumble waiting to be uncouncted.

The Friendly Robin
Enid Blyton, ill.
Constance Marshall,
Knight (Jan 93),
0 340 18741 7, £2.50

Once there was a little girl called Elizabeth. Every day she went to Infant School. Her favourite lesson was Nature Study and she specially liked it when her teacher, Miss Cathey, told the children a story out of a big book called *Enid Blyton's Nature Reader*. The stories were all about birds, animals and plants. Quite often the creatures told each other about their lives or sometimes there were some children in the story who helped to look after them. That was all a long time ago.

in the 1950s, so you can imagine Elizabeth's surprise when, one day when she was quite grown up, she was sent a book with some of those very same stories in it! 'Goodness,' she said to herself, 'I remember these almost word for word. How very old-fashioned they seem to be now. I'll take them to read to the children in my own Infant School.' The little girls and boys she read them to liked them very much, and said, 'Can we hear them again?' This really took the wind out of Elizabeth's sails. I can tell you. LW



Badger's Parting Gifts
Susan Varley, Picture
Lions, 0 00 662398 0,
£1.50

This gifted young artist has made a poignant and special picture book about Badger, who dies, leaving his friends with fond memories and 'gifts' he has left them. There are clever reverberations of *The Wind in the Willows* and other childhood tales. Is the writer/artist giving the pastoral tradition a crisp contemporary edge?

The writing is humane, gentle, poetic; the pictures are integral. The telling is slow and not at all morbid. One not to be missed from a talent whose work could become significant.

CM

Above left, Stephanie Nettel 1996; above right, Colin Mills 1986; left, Liz Waterland 1993.

The first 'full-length' novel I ever wrote was a children's book called **Beyond the Silver Surf**. I was about 20 at the time and it was supposed to be my **Alice in Wonderland** with a water scene change. The adolescent heroes were boy and girl mermaids who swam their way through the wonders of the deep, with talking walruses, rhyming eels and octopuses who sang.

The manuscript is still in my filing cabinet with a lot of rejection slips which read, 'Not suitable for our list'.

Fifteen years later, after several thousands of more words, I became a writer of adult novels.

There were two more attempts at children's novels during the first 10 years of my adult writing career.

Then one day in 1988 I heard that the children's writer Diana Wynne Jones was getting together an anthology of stories for Methuen Children's Books. It was 'by invitation only' but I'd met Diana at a writer's workshop, admired her greatly, and cheekily asked if I could submit a story. My gate-crashing worked, because I suspect one or two of her invited writers had failed to deliver for **Hidden Turnings**, and so a belated and desired career in children's books began.

I believe writing for children to be more important than writing for adults. It's a much more serious business having influence over the young. There are far more responsibilities, deeper consequences, and more rewarding results. It's a little frightening in a pleasant way and not a task to be taken lightly. The formative years are a long, heady period in anyone's life, and writers who deal in them must do so with care, working positively against discrimination, bullying, drug-taking, and other evils of our time, without appearing to preach or demand.

By the time I wrote my first children's book I was earning very good money as a full-time writer of novels for adults. You may wonder why I should wish to spend part of my time writing stories and novels for kids when I can earn five times as much in advances for those who've reached maturity.

Well, the truth is that like so many things in life and contrary to certain doctrines of the twentieth century, it's not about money. I've been hooked on children's books since my first passionate affair with Richmal Crompton at the age of 11. Of course, I'd read and enjoyed books before that age, but William was my first superhero and his creator was my unwitting mentor. Richmal Crompton forged a lifelong friendship between William and me, and aroused within me a desire to write about characters like him in my own way.

(Incidentally, Richmal Crompton wrote many serious novels for adults, some 40 or so I believe, but who remembers them,

My Pal William Brown

*Garry Kilworth
on turning to
children's books
after a successful
career as a writer
for adults*



Garry Kilworth at 'William's' age (in foreground, without shirt). Notice the cricket 'stumps' chalked on the wall.



Garry Kilworth today.

who even knows about them today? She said on her deathbed, 'I'm afraid William has obscured all my other writing.' I don't know why she was afraid. If I could create such an enduring character my adult work could go to hell in a bucket.)

In the first of my encounters with William Brown he was reading a thriller book in which the protagonist was confronted by a 'grinning skull' and the absorbed William asked himself, 'Crumbs! I wonder what it was grinnin' at?' I thought this the most brilliant joke I'd ever read and wanted to write just as brilliantly. I cared nothing for, nor even considered, the fact that William Brown was middle-class.

William's household had servants, a father who worked in the City, a brother who went to university and a sister who spent most of her time playing tennis. I was working-class, went to a secondary modern school, and my father was an air force corporal.

Despite these differences I clearly identified with William through our common heritage – we were both kids who enjoyed the same things about life: adventure, the countryside, reading, running with the boys, pretty girls, pranks, inventing games. We were both terrible spellers and hated mathematics.

I would have followed William Brown to the ends of the earth and back again.

I was also reading Agatha Christie and other grown-ups' books at the time, but they had nothing of the sparkling clarity and humour of E Nesbit or Mary Norton. Nor did they have the pace and verve of Mark Twain's **Huckleberry Finn** or the mystery and magic of **King Solomon's Mines** and I was so desperate to be Rudyard Kipling's Kim, I actually got lost in the Hadhramaut Desert for two days, while on a camping trip from Aden where I spent most of my childhood.

William Brown is probably a parent's nightmare, but he also displays the best traits a human being could pass on to his peers. William has honour, he has loyalty, strength of purpose, a fine love of life, passion, and the right sort of honesty – he does tell the occasional lie, but he is honest about his desires – he does not hide the fact that it is his ambition to be a tramp or a burglar when he grows up. Indeed, he proclaims it.

William Brown would not for a moment consider betraying a friend, nor destroying the weak, nor giving up on a project, nor hating without just cause. For him was invented the maxim I once read on a lintel in an old mansion:-

'Love well, hate well, serve God, fear no man.'

If you take the word 'God' in its broadest terms and call it the 'spirit of life' you have William's philosophy.

My love of children's books has never left me. I write them for that reason and

because a special purity of vision is needed when telling the tale. That 11-year-old is still locked inside me, the boy excited by tales of adventure, tales not with a high moral tone, but with rules of fairness which are followed unquestioningly, tales with a strong sense of honour.

These are stories in which the betrayer is punished and the loyal are rewarded. Stories of *true* love. Stories of us adults, you and I, set in that place we used to live in, sometimes bewildering, sometimes vicious, sometimes golden, which we had to leave behind forever once we grew in weight and worldly knowledge.

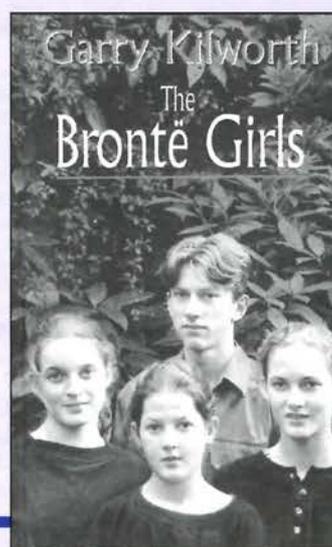
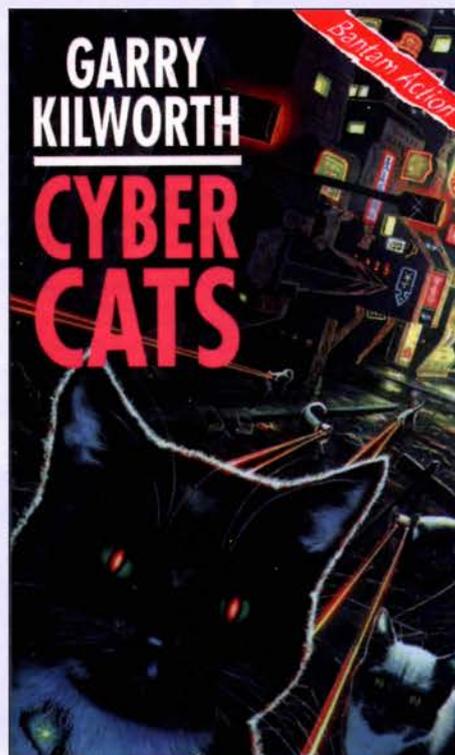
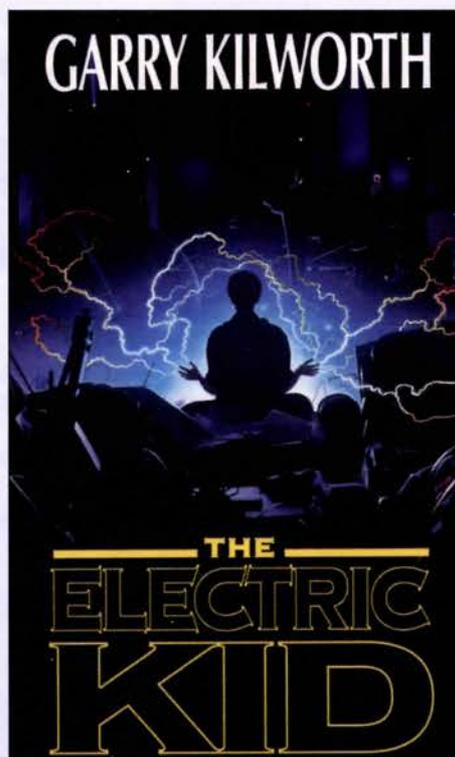
My personal reason for writing them is probably an attempt to go back, to re-enter childhood.

One of the questions I'm frequently asked is, 'What is the difference between writing for adults and writing for children?' The plain fact is, there's very little difference, except the heroes are usually shorter in height and purer in motive. My latest young adult novel, **The Brontë Girls**, was actually conceived as a novel intended for the adult market. I submitted the synopsis to several publishers, but as so often happens in the adult world of publishing, they felt they'd have trouble marketing it – finding a category, a label, a genre – and eventually interest in it dropped away. Then I took another look and saw a more nobler readership there. Methuen needed a little convincing, but eventually the faith of my editor, Miriam Hodgson, prevailed and the novel was accepted. I wrote the same novel that I would have done had I sold it to the adult publishing world. It looks better on the young adult shelves and is more appreciated.

Of course, if one is writing for an even younger age group, such as my novel **Billy Pink's Private Detective Agency**, one has to be less indulgent still as a writer. The prose should be pared down to short sentences, the verbs should be less strained, the philosophical waffle should not appear at all, the description coloured only with the merest tinge of purple, the statements honest and heartfelt. This is what I like most about writing for children: the clean lines, the clear paths. I believe it makes me a better writer, a writer striving for that 'window-pane' prose which George Orwell thought so admirable.

In the adult novel world, *genre* is everything. One's latest work is either science fiction, fantasy, general fiction, literary, crime, thriller, whatever. In the children's book world, each new work is simply one's latest children's novel or collection of short stories. No tags needed, no explanations required. The young readers will either love it, or hate it, or remain indifferent to it, but simply for what it is, not for its marketed image.

The crystallizing of the categories in the adult book world has destroyed a great deal of individuality in its writers, who



have to wear labels whether they like it or not. **Wuthering Heights**, I feel, would not find a publisher in today's world, its style being too bizarre, its content too difficult to categorise in order to find the right shelf.

The children's book world does not suffer so much from this malaise, being smaller and an entity unto itself.

Long may it remain uncontaminated.

I've tried to create my own 'William' in my futuristic **Hotwire** and **Blindboy** books. **Hotwire** is a 13-year-old girl, and **Blindboy** an 11-year-old boy with impaired vision. Together these two rubbish dump urchins from **The Electric Kid** and **Cybercats** make up my William Brown. I try to infuse them with all the best that childhood has to offer.

Of course, it would be difficult to write about the rosy world of my pal, William Brown, today. We need now to be more aware of social issues and to take account of the vulnerability and angst of young people. This need not be overt - indeed, in my opinion should not be - but it must be addressed as an underlying unobtrusive theme.

The Electric Kid is an 'entertainment' but it was born on the rubbish dumps of Manila, where children live and fight for the right to be first at the trash, which I've seen and been disturbed by. One can deal in harsh realities with metaphor and allegory, as well as dishing it up straight. I find the idea that serious writing can only be found in 'realist' fiction, both in adult and adolescent novels, a little threatening to our great heritage of reflective fantastical literature. In this book, **Hotwire** is a genius with electronics (as many kids are today) and **Blindboy** can hear ultrasonic sounds. **Blindboy** is anti-pathos. He regards his lack of sight as an advantage, because it allows him to concentrate and hone his other senses. **Hotwire** never offers him sympathy, only her special tomboy brand of affection.

These two young adults take on the world, a very harsh and cruel world of their time, and despite the fact that they get exploited and are forever struggling for survival they do occasionally manage to come out on top.

What I like about them – as with William Brown – is the way they humble the adult in me. ■

Details of Garry Kilworth's books mentioned:

The Brontë Girls, Methuen, 0 416 19127 4, £11.99; Mammoth, 0 7497 2692 X, £3.50 pbk

Billy Pink's Private Detective Agency, Methuen, 0 416 18754 4, £8.99; Mammoth, 0 7497 1723 8, £3.50 pbk

The Electric Kid, Bantam, 0 553 406566, £2.99 pbk

Cybercats, Bantam, 0 553 503278, £3.50 pbk

REVIEWS

Reviews of paperback fiction are grouped for convenience under teaching range. Books and children being varied and adaptable, we suggest you look either side of your area. More detailed recommendation for use can be found within the review.

Nursery/Infant **REVIEWS**



There is a farm
Down a bumpety road –

What shall I see?
What shall I see?

The Train Ride

June Crebbin, ill. Stephen Lambert, Walker, 0 7445 4701 6, £4.99

We can almost feel the rhythm, sounds and motion of the engine's wheels as we board this steam train. The journey takes us through meadows, past a farm with its 'shiny red tractor / Pulling its load,' through the tunnel, past 'A gaggle of geese / Strutting about,' and into sight of the seaside town with its market square, lighthouse, sand and sea. And who is waiting open armed and smiling? None other than Grandma, of course.

Three vital elements – rhyme, rhythm and repetition – combine to make this a marvellous book for sharing with a class or group of under-sixes. Equally it offers maximum support for beginning readers who may either be reading through the oft-repeated 'What shall I see? / What shall I see?' and 'That's what I see / That's what I see.' or 'playing' the part of the child narrator for the entire journey.

The glowing pictures, with their views outside and inside the train, ride over the wide awake sleepers of a memorable text. Big Book version please! **JB**

Lucy's Rabbit

Jennifer Northway, Picture Hippo, 0 590 13546 5, £3.99

What has happened to all Dad's flowers? Who, or what, is making that chomping sound? Lucy and Alice wonder about all this as they make decorations for a birthday tea. Then, when they discover the stray rabbit and decide to give it to Lucy's mum for a present, there's more than one surprise in store, not to mention some lessons to be learned.

Another lovely story of this mixed-race family told through words and



pictures which are full of warmth and gentle humour. **JB**

You're a Genius, Blackboard Bear

Martha Alexander, Walker, 0 7445 4399 1, £4.99

In seemingly impossible situations Anthony knows he can call on his special friend, Blackboard Bear. Here his enormous, ursine chum comes to life and assists Anthony in building a spacecraft to take him to the moon. When the spaceship stands ready and waiting and he begins to have doubts about the trip, Blackboard Bear offers to make it for him. There's much for the reader to ponder over in the clever narrative – a combination of enchanting pictures and Anthony's (unanswered) words to his friend: What does the bear say to Anthony? Does anyone in fact make the lunar journey? Is the whole thing a dream? And what about those paw marks all over the bedroom floor? ...

A seemingly simple book which offers countless opportunities for making meanings – but they'll be different at every encounter with the story. **JB**

How to Count Crocodiles

Told by Margaret Mayo, ill. Emily Bolam, Dolphin, 1 85881 327 1, £5.99



Eight animal folk tales from Europe, Africa, America and Asia embracing such universal themes as trickery and pride, all featuring crocodiles, cats and coyotes – among others. Each tale is told in a lively direct style with lots of opportunities for audience participation.

Equally lively and colourful are Emily Bolam's humorous pictures which make every turn of the page a pleasure. Strongly recommended for storytelling sessions with the under eights. **JB**

Mr Bear's Picnic

Debi Gliori, Orchard, 1 86039 067 6, £3.99



Mr Bear is less than enthusiastic when sleepy Mrs Bear suggests that as well as baby, he takes the Grizzle-Bears with him on a picnic. First Fred, Ted and Fuzz don't like his choice of picnic spot, next they find he's brought the toy basket instead of the picnic basket and then his efforts to catch fish end in watery failure. However, the Grizzle-Bears' low opinion of Mr B is dispelled by his prowess at honey hunting. The basic storyline is extended through the telling expressions on the characters' faces and the humorous antics of the woodland animals they encounter. **JB**

Over on the Farm

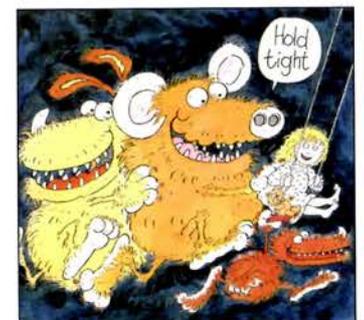
Christopher Gunson, Picture Corgi, 0 552 52832 3, £3.99

Using the form and pattern of a tra-

ditional rhyming nursery favourite, Christopher Gunson has fashioned a blissful exploration of the early morning activities of mothers and baby animals. Thus we have: one stretching kitten, two leaping sheep, three splashing froggies and so on to ten snuggling piggies. Both the rhyme and, in particular, the illustrations in glowing browns, greens, yellows, blues and pinks, are immediately engaging to children and adults of whatever age. **JB**

Snap! Snap!

Colin and Jacqui Hawkins, Mammoth, 0 7497 2766 7, £4.50



The Hawkins are at it again. Not a new theme this time but one that works – Sally is afraid of the dark and hears snapping noises from under her bed. Monsters! As she's carried away into the dark night to be the monster's dinner she suddenly finds hidden strength of purpose and asserts herself as all good heroines should. A satisfying yarn that could help a few would-be heroines. **JS**

Oops-A-Daisy! and Other Tales for Toddlers

Joyce Dunbar, ill. Carol Thompson, Walker, 0 7445 4719 9, £4.99

Joyce Dunbar and Carol Thompson have produced a series of mood snapshots which celebrate the quirks of the three- to four-year-old stage. It's a joy to be able to share it and this book will surely capture the hearts of parents as well as their capricious offspring. The children I tried it with loved it (though some were not too keen on being called 'toddlers,' mind) and, in particular, enjoyed feeling somewhat superior in that *they* understood'. **JS**

Where's My Kitten?

A Hide-and-Seek Flap Book
Michele Coxon, Happy Cat Paperbacks, 1 899248 60 9, £4.99

Another book which works well at a number of levels – give it as a gift to any cat lover and you'll certainly be a favoured friend. Share it with a young child and both of you will enjoy the exuberance of an artist giv-



I Want My Dinner

Tony Ross, Collins,
0 00 664356 6, £4.50

It's great to meet the Little Princess again and this time to witness her lesson on manners. Her 'I want' demands are consistently met with prompts of 'Please' from the Queen, the General and other familiar characters – watch the cat! Older children, as well as younger ones, love to join in with the prompting and teaching, not realising how much they're reminding themselves of their manners, too.

There's more fun and a wonderful complacency when the Little Princess herself confidently adopts the teacher role and, what's more, insists that the big and hungry



"That's MY dinner."

'Beastie' says 'Thank you'. Totally brilliant - just like I Want My Potty and I Want To Be. GR

Wake Up Piglet

Jan Barger, Hodder,
0 340 65670 0, £3.99

Piglet's resistance is amazing – for the chorus of 'Time to wake up, Piglet' became progressively confident, bossy even, and very, very loud as my children joined in. They enjoyed the repetition, the differences in tone prompted by the storyline and the funny, scary, futile attempts of the different animals to wake him. Quite rightly it's Mother Pig's approach which succeeds! With scope for masses of fun, this is a quality picture book with lots of detail in the illustrations. It's neatly sized for the small and eager to handle themselves. GR

ing full rein to whimsy, visual jokes and sheer *joie de vivre* and *joie de chats!* Enjoy! JS

Infant/Junior REVIEWS

Swinging on a Rainbow

Charles Perkins, ill.
Thomas Hamilton, Africa
World Press,
0 86543 287 2, \$6.95
(American edition)

A rapping rainbow ride with Patrice who invites her friends to join her in swinging on a rainbow; but a gathering storm dampens their imaginative play. Sadly, Patrice tramps home only to find a marvellous surprise – the rainbow in her own backyard.

Despite its appearance – boldly drawn Afro-American characters and scenes, and rainbow writing – this is not an easy read. You'd need to be a skilful reader-aloud to do justice to the rap form of the words. JB

Dinosaur Roar!

Paul and Henrietta
Strickland, Picture Puffin,
0 14 055702 4, £4.99



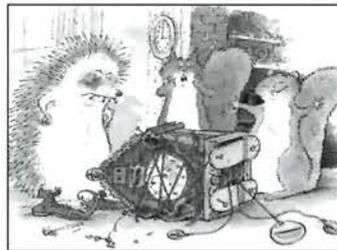
dinosaur slow.

A rhyming book of opposites illustrated throughout with superb dinosaur characters. Gnashing teeth, horrendous claws, tiny but expressive eyes, and a wonderful water-colour technique make them irresistible. The text is brief, patterned and additively re-readable. Guaranteed to be devoured and to inspire children's own versions. JB

Tick-Tock

Eileen Browne, ill. David
Parkins, Walker,
0 7445 4345 2, £4.99

Skip's mum's most treasured possession was her cuckoo clock. Her parting words as she went out were, 'NO JUMPING ON THE CHAIRS! Something might get broken.' But the chairs were too bouncy to resist



with the inevitable consequence. Skip and Brainy take the clock to Weasel's bicycle repair shop, Hedgehog the Cobbler and Owl's Fix-It Shop', with some interesting but unexpected results.

Scientific and technologically minded readers, in particular, will enjoy the detailed alterations affected to the cuckoo clock by its would-be repairers, not to mention the wealth of detail in both the large and small scenes. In fact, the illustrations extend and add to the storyline, much of which is conveyed through lively dialogue. JB

The Little Prince and the Great Treasure Hunt

Peter Kavanagh,
Macdonald,
0 7500 1881 X, £4.99



Illustrations packed with detail and things to find, plus a board game to play, as a fantasy castle with secret passages is explored by two young rivals (a prince and a princess) while readers are invited to join in and take sides. This book held the attention of a group of seven-year-olds of mixed reading ability, all of whom were able

to share together in the fun and games. JB

The Great Book of Picture Puzzles

Juliet and Charles Snape,
Julia MacRae Books,
1 85681 762 8, £4.99

This beautifully produced puzzle book which targets the infant range is an ideal way of introducing children to this genre. The illustrations are appealing, the puzzles themselves range well in type and it's all very well paced. The book works brilliantly in a family situation and delivers so much that teachers will be scrabbling around to find ways in which it could be adapted to a classroom! One or two children could be supported by a volunteer helper or alternatively two copies could be cannibalised, put on card and used with acetate sheets and water-based pens. It's good to see this genre given the respect it deserves by the authors and the publisher – too little attention is paid to quality material which challenges versatility of thinking style in young children. JS

Herbert – Five Stories

Ivor Cutler, ill. Patrick
Benson, Walker,
0 7445 4778 4, £4.99

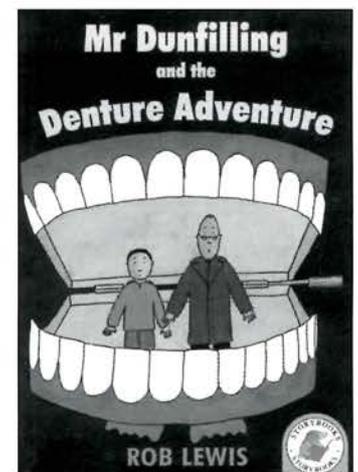
Ivor Cutler specialises in transforming the ordinary into the surreal. Patrick Benson's illustrations give vibrance with the slightly febrile quality of dreams and make this book unforgettable and unputdownable. Others have successfully used the device of a child waking each morning as a different creature but this book, with its exploration of the characters, adds another twist. JS

A First Puffin Picture Book of Stories from World Religions

Annabel Shilson-Thomas,
ill. Barry Smith, Puffin,
0 14 055477 7, £5.99

This is a goldmine for anyone – teacher, parent, older child – who wants to explore stories from different faiths or cultures. Whilst parallels are given and universal truths can be explored, the individual elements of religions are not diluted or compro-

mised. Annabel Shilson-Thomas does not spare her readers and there are many stories that will need careful handling – this is a book to be shared with an adult. The illustrations are excellent but their style could deceive you into thinking the book is aimed at a younger age group and that infants and young juniors could enjoy these stories unsupported – BE WARNED! JS



Mr Dunfilling and the Denture Adventure

Rob Lewis, Macdonald,
0 7500 2126 8, £3.50

Mr Dunfilling, a clever and famous dentist, with a very high forehead because of his large brains, must be one of the most attractive new heroes of recent books. He and his assistant, Ricky, romp through this who-dunnit in great style. The ghastly jokes of his friend, Mr Pinkbottom of Pink Bottom Underwear, have spawned yet another joke craze that as a teacher I love... and dread! The adventure, revolving around terrible jokes about dentists, false teeth and gangs of robbers, is guaranteed to appeal to children who are venturing out on their own with 'chapter books'. The quirky illustrations support the text but also give the story an additional wry twist. Everyone is pressing to read the sequel – wait for it – *Mr Dunfilling and the Cavity of Doom* (0 7500 1843 7, £3.50). JS

Making Faces

Nick Butterworth, Walker, 0 7445 4720 2, £5.99

It's hard for words to convey the magic and power of this book. Nick Butterworth gives children the perfect vehicle to enact situations in a mirror (have a few extra ones handy if you're sharing it with more than one child or they'll start fighting for the book). How do you look when you're feeling sick? Can you make a face like a slug? What do you look like when you're having your hair brushed . . . or when your least favourite aunty is coming to tea? What do you look like when you're trying not to laugh?

This book gives children mastery over a whole variety of situations and allows them to act them out safely. My copy has been pored over at the tea table, taken on holiday and rescued from the bath. There should be a copy in every family and every classroom. JS

Marmaduke the Magic Cat

Colin West, Hodder, 0 340 66094 5, £2.99

Told in the first person, this is an amusing account of how Marmaduke meets and adopts 'Grandma'. It's soon obvious that Marmaduke is no ordinary feline and he's returned to his usual residence as soon as possible, which is none



other than spooky Cobblestone Cottage, home of (good) witch, Muriel. Finally, an arrangement is reached which suits all, and Marmaduke's more extreme magic and mischief can be restricted to out of doors.

With more pictures than print, this is a lot of fun. GR

Willy the Wizard

Anthony Browne, Red Fox, 0 09 953761 3, £3.99

Further adventures of Anthony Browne's unassuming but heroic chimpanzee are always welcome, and this book was no exception when I shared it with a group of seven-year-olds.

The theme corresponds to a well-worn motif: here, the aspirant footballer acquires virtuoso skills after being given a pair of boots by a

ghostly mentor, then discovers that the talent appears to be natural after all. Browne's adeptness as an artist and very economical storyteller infuses new life into the tale. An entertaining book to share with children of all ages. GH

Invisible Stanley

Jeff Brown, Mammoth, 0 7497 2585 0, £3.50

Famously unpredictable, Stanley finds himself in yet another predicament: this time he's invisible. Urged by his parents to resist such antics as spying on people or sneaking up to eavesdrop, Stanley soon uses his invisibility positively by helping a teetering Bill to gain bicycle confidence, and is a necessary cupid to Phillip and Lucia. Then follows fame on television. But despite all the advantages, Stanley knows the loneliness and heartache of being ignored and forgotten - thankfully brother Arthur helps to reverse the condition. This story has well-loved, well-defined characters and a warning - Never Eat Fruit in a Thunderstorm! GR

Flower Street Friends

Diana Hendry, ill. Julie Douglas, Walker, 0 7445 4334 7, £3.50

Lily and Shanta become friends from Shanta's first arrival at the Top Floor Flat of No 12 Crocus Street. Lily is



mesmerised by Shanta's many brightly bobbed plaits and Shanta is fascinated by Lily's customary one red sock, one yellow sock.

These are six highly entertaining adventures for reading aloud. They record developing friendships, create a warm insight into the neighbourhood and locality of Lumpstead so that the reader settles in equally as well as the Salkey family. All the stories ooze spontaneously with child-like and credible antics. This book is sure to become a popular read-aloud and the clear full-page illustrations complement the text perfectly. GR

Junior/Middle REVIEWS

Jet Smoke and Dragon Fire

Charles Ashton, Walker, 0 7445 4741 5, £3.99

Highly imaginative writing and yarn telling in the first of an acclaimed trilogy about Sparrow and his friends. They encounter all sorts of strange, sometimes malevolent, magics in their remote mountain village, where the gadgets familiar to us exist, but nobody there knows how to use them. Powerful forces and parallel worlds, mysterious past events exerting their influences on the present, are all plentifully provided in this satisfying read for kids who like to have their minds bogged. DB

The Bagthorpe Triangle

Helen Cresswell, Faber, 0 571 17805 7, £4.99



The blighted Bagthorpe family lurch into yet more crises as their super-egos and malicious intents spur them to create yet greater havoc and mayhem, both for themselves and

those unfortunate enough to be around them.

No wonder Mrs B has disappeared with a nervous breakdown in the wake of Mrs Fosdyke, herself still in 'Occasional Thurpy'. As for Henry, he's in the cells suspected of his wife's murder, much to the delight of his own mother, who shopped him and has now turned her attention to flower arranging with nettles.

A must for the fans, who'll relish Book 8 along with the rest. My 22-year-old son who was weaned on Bagthorpes, snaffled this one and has subsequently set off on re-reading all the others. DB

Wyvern Fall

Toby Forward, Puffin, 0 14 036563 X, £4.50

This title completes the Wyvern Quartet and sees Thomas Ketch pitted against Weaver (the obsessed local Rector) and his side-kick, Felicity Aylmer, in a race to make the Wyverns fly. This will enable them to regain entry to a lost world, for which they have an insatiable longing. Accidents happen, incidents follow thick and fast, and the tension builds at a cracking speed, but the whole piece will only fall completely into place with knowledge of the other three books. By itself, this may come across as a very odd read. DB

The Night I Was Chased By a Vampire

Kaye Umansky, ill. Keren Ludlow, Dolphin, 1 85881 246 1, £2.99



A short story told in verse, with a howlingly corny ending, that manages not only to be very, very funny but begs the reader to do the most horrendous Pam Ayres impressions! The strange and sinister castle won't fool anyone, yet you're in for the biggest shock of all on the last page.

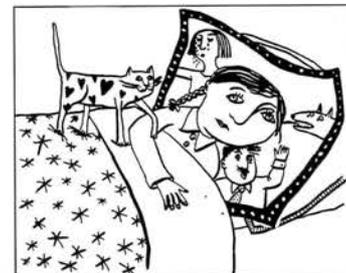
I read this to 115 Year 5s at an end of term assembly and they were so keen I had to read it twice. Powerful stuff, indeed. PH

It's Raining Cats and Dogs

Pie Corbett, ill. Bee Willey, Puffin, 0 14 037180 X, £3.99

A superb collection of poems that explores the private worlds of the animals man thinks he knows best. Some are clever, some witty, some sad or very funny, others poignant and they all sit together quite com-

POETRY



fortably. I loved the catty ones where the proud spirit and dignity of the creatures remains intact and the dog lot where I was moved to tears and giggles within the same page. PH

Pepe's Dog

Helen Santos, ill. Martin Salisbury, Scripture Union, 1 85999 041 X, £3.25

Pepe really does believe most fervently in miracles - a personal miracle would be to get a big, shaggy dog of his own. His faith in God is at times all he has to hold on to when his world seems to be falling apart. First his older brother goes to work in the big city and then his father mysteriously disappears. This book manages to match a Christian theme with a superbly readable story that stands tall in its own right. PH

Street of Tall People

1 85881 193 7

Ganging Up

1 85881 194 5

Alan Gibbons, Dolphin, £2.99 each

Special REVIEW

Spot and His Owner

David Morton interviews Eric Hill, creator of one of the world's most famous puppies

Is he
behind
the door?



With over 28 million books in print world-wide and more than 11 million in the UK alone, it's hard to imagine anyone who doesn't know Spot. Eric Hill's small dog is not only one of the most popular children's book characters with the under-fives – not just for the books, but the videos, plush toys, bed linen, clothing, greetings cards, jigsaws and even cakes – he's also one of the very few characters who, when you mention his name, even those adults who say 'Oh... children's books...' will sigh with fond recognition and tell you how much their niece/nephew or the child-next-door loves him.

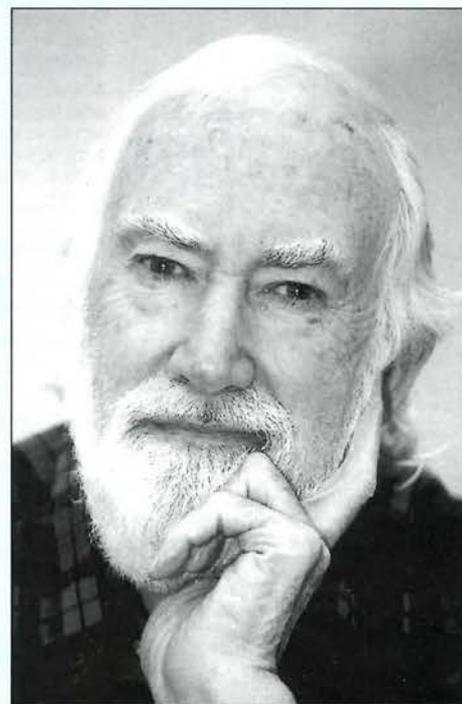
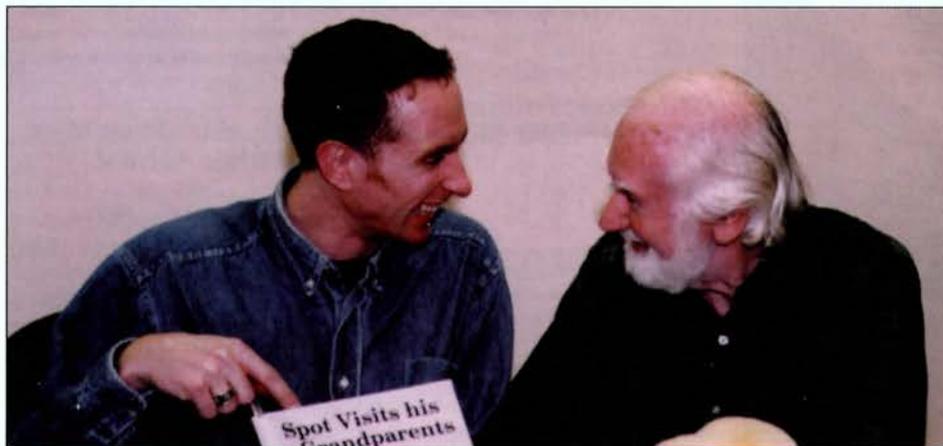
Considering how Spot began 16 years ago, it's a remarkable success. 'Spot wasn't supposed to be a book,' says Eric Hill. 'I was working as a freelance at home, on a series of flaps for an advertising agency, and I noticed that my son was amused by them. So over a period of time I built up a flap book, based on a puppy.' The book was taken by a friend's literary agent daughter to the Frankfurt Book Fair and the rest, as they say, is history. Well, almost. Spot nearly never became a book, due to publisher nervousness and lack of experience with this type of product. 'They were worried about cost and how to do it, because it was the first time a book like this had been presented,' Hill explains. It wasn't until they found a packager who knew how to make it work that Spot got into print.

Spot's deceptive simplicity comes from Eric's training as a cartoonist. 'With cartooning, you draw things in the most economical way possible, but simplicity is hard to achieve and doesn't come from itself,' he comments. Every picture is pared down to show a

clarity of line and colour, almost iconographic illustrations for even the youngest reader. 'Although my style is simple, it doesn't prevent me from including details which give character and to which, I think, children should be exposed.' The text, written initially as a voice-over, is then chosen to 'engineer a situation where there are questions and answers, where you can have a conversation with the child and look closely, so it becomes a very natural thing to do.' When creating a Spot book, Eric is constantly aware of the small child and adult who will be reading it, and insists it should be enjoyable. 'Part of the success of Spot is the play element – a hippo and a pink piano, for instance – I want to keep the idea that reading, that sharing a book, can be fun.' This extends to the phenomenally successful merchandising programme, undoubtedly a major contributory factor to Spot's success – and its logo, FUN WITH SPOT – which Eric Hill controls with an iron fist to ensure that product and image are right, so he can 'protect the children and parents who buy the products – I don't want them to be disappointed.'

Each Spot book is created very much from the point of view of a child exploring the world, with Spot as that child. So *Where's Spot?* was followed by *Spot's First Walk*, and *Birthday and Christmas* and so forth. Everything that happens in the books must be 'based on fact and what might happen to a child', Eric insists. So, for example, Spot will *not Go To War*, despite it, alarmingly, being a favourite request from children; nor will *Spot Go Into Space*; both because they are things which your average under-five would not do and because they are dangerous situations in which a child should not be placed.

David Morton talking with Eric Hill.



In the latest title, *Spot Visits His Grandparents* (Frederick Warne, 0 7232 4334 4, £7.99), the trip comes about because Eric Hill felt the time was right for him to do so: 'I have built up a family, and grandparents were obviously something that would have come at some time. Having done it, it seems perfectly natural.' It's also something of a homage to the grandparents Eric has met on his author tours and signings – loyal fans, many of whom are active in the Pre-School Learning Alliance (formerly the Pre-school Playgroup Association), which has chosen Spot as the mascot for their Child Appeal, an accolade which confirms Spot's pre-eminence as a favourite with this age-group.

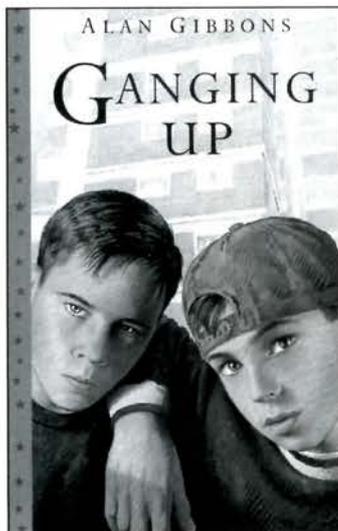
Eric obviously loves Spot. 'He's so close to me and part of me, I sometimes find it very hard to think that he's a character I've just made up.' There's something thoughtful and considerate about this puppy, which is clearly visible in his creator, and which, in turn, is shown in Spot's world, the world as Eric Hill would like it to be: 'protecting the environment, cultural variety, a sense of gentleness'. There seems little doubt that Spot will be around for some time to come. Eric has at least four or five ideas for new Spot books in his 'bottom drawer', all of which will be as carefully and fondly constructed and will therefore, very probably, be as successful and as well-loved as their predecessors. ■

Spot books are all published in hardback by Frederick Warne and in paperback by Puffin. Photographs courtesy of Picture Partnership.

Spot Visits his Grandparents

Eric Hill





These two novels share the theme of friendships tested to breaking point by the stress of conflicting loyalties. In the first, an unlikely alliance develops between Benny, a young Jewish boxer in the East End of the 1930s, and Jimmy, the 'goy' whom he's just beaten in a fight. While Benny's family are steeling themselves against the threat of Mosley's blackshirts, Jimmy discovers that his widowed mum's new boyfriend is one of the fascist leaders. The steadily escalating tension of the book culminates in the Battle of Cable Street, where the temporarily estranged comrades find themselves side by side on the barricades.

Ganging Up is set in a modern, bleak Merseyside estate. A longstanding friendship between football fanatics,

John and Gerry, starts to go wrong when Gerry, in an attempt to escape the domestic disintegration caused by his father's job-loss, joins a gang of local hooligans in their civil war against a rival mob. John, a peace-loving child from a happier family, tries to avoid the conflict, but is eventually pulled in.

Alan Gibbons' adventure stories deal with harsh realities in ways which are sensitive and honest. Both books are very highly recommended for upper juniors and beyond – and not just boys. **GH**

Otherworlds – Poems of the mysterious **POETRY**

Compiled by Judith Nicholls, ill. Shirley Felts, Faber, 0 571 17217 2, £4.99

In the latest of her generous and absorbing anthologies, Judith Nicholls has collected a set of poems exploring those aspects of the natural world that seem to elude rational interpretation. The poems explore dreams and nightmares, birth and death, darkness and wildernesses of sea and forest. The wonderful thing about Nicholls' anthologies is that you can be sure of finding much loved favourites and work that is thrillingly unfamiliar. So here we have meditations from Causley, de la Mare and Shakespeare alongside snippets from Yang-ti, Thomas Traherne and Kobayashi Issa. Together with a wide range of complete poems, there are gnomic fragments from longer works, including some of the less frequented parts of the Bible. This is an indispensable collection. **GH**

Casting a Spell and Other Poems **POETRY**

Compiled by Angela Huth, ill. Jane Ray, Orchard, 1 86039 012 9, £6.99

An anthology of new poems specially commissioned from eminent authors. The title suggests a shared theme of enchantment, though only a handful of the 50 poems hover around the cloudy zone between the everyday world and the supernatural. A very wide range of moods is expressed, from the knockabout humour of Bernard Levin's clever limericks, to the laconic fatalism of Roy Fuller's 'At the Seaside':

'Every day the children crumple up the beach.

And twice a day the ocean smooths it out...

I found the illustrations somewhat lacking in vigour, but this is more than compensated for by the liveliness and variety of the poems. **GH**

Storm Boy
Paul Owen Lewis, Barefoot, 1 898000 39 2, £4.99

A thunderstorm off the Pacific coast of America hurls a chief's son into the ocean and carries him to a realm of giants where he exchanges stories, songs and dances with his hosts. When he begins to long to see his own people again, he's carried back on a magical journey home. The story is spare in its details but mythological in its power. In this entrancing picture book, a short, brilliant text and intensely dramatic illustrations combine to create a tale which held my listeners rapt and left them full of unanswerable questions. An absolutely wonderful book. **GH**

it soon becomes a best-seller. The Princess is in great demand on both arts programmes and TV chat shows and even an appearance on the cover of **Hello**. Rack her brains as she might, though, the sequel will not come until the arrival of Prince Waldo of Glockenstein.

Set in a fairy-tale kingdom with modern reference points this lively story, with scratchy line drawings, will delight young and old alike. **SR**

Dark at the Foot of the Stairs

Eileen Moore, ill. Moira Kemp, Hodder, 0 340 64873 2, £2.99

Beware what might seem a pile of black wool on the kitchen table! The Jamaican spider of this story is HUGE and Moira Kemp's illustrations are hideously convincing. It's no wonder Grandma Cotton fainted and Mr Gumtree ended up in hospital. How could Tommy, Micky and Grandma remain in the same building as a black, hairy, mouse-crunching, 150-frogs guzzling, unpredictable, uncontrollable, ever-growing spider?



Almost too well-written and with credible characters, this is a challenge even to those who profess indifference to, or interest in, such creatures. The cover is enough of a warning to the spider-shy, so why did I read it...? Ugh. **GR**

Skating on Sand
Libby Gleeson, ill. Ann James, Puffin, 0 14 037161 3, £3.50

Through Hannah, Libby Gleeson evokes the hurt, the frustration, the loneliness and the pride (which must be constant) of being the youngest.

"Sue, Leana. Wait for me." They cannot, or will not hear... her sisters... look towards her as if they have no idea who she is.' But Hannah's determination pays off. Not only is hers the only 'magic' name which is the same spelt backwards but she succeeds in skating superbly when both terrain and family attitudes are less than encouraging.

The third-person, present-tense narrative lends non-judgemental objectivity which heightens credibility and pathos. A beautiful and very relevant story. **GR**

The Upside-down Mice and Other Animal Stories

Compiled by Jane Merer, various illustrators, Collins, 0 00 675114 8, £2.99

Jane Merer's compilation is in aid of The Malcolm Sargent Cancer Fund for Children and is a worthy book for the quality of all nine stories within - by Elisabeth Beresford, Roald Dahl, Colin Dann, Rose Impey, Dick King-Smith, Penelope Lively, E Nesbit,

The Dog Who Changed the World

Robert Leeson, ill. Alison Forsythe, Puffin, 0 14 036988 0, £3.50

When Sal's dad loses his job and finds another in a rural area, the hurt of uprooting and the clannishness of country life plunge her in a slough of resentfulness. Her parents buy a dog and, for a while, life improves. But having become so dependent on Dog for her happiness, Sal is all the more desperate when he goes missing. Yes, it sounds like a very trite theme indeed, but Leeson's vivid writing, his ear for the comedy of dialogue and his eye for the small but farcical incident, render this book very enjoyable. It's a must for all dog enthusiasts, but also an amusing read for people like me who would happily exterminate the entire genus. **GH**

The Magic Fountain by HRH Princess Gloriana

Roger McGough, ill. Philip Hopman, Red Fox, 0 09 94339 5, £3.99

This is a telling swipe at celebrity publishing and royal sycophancy. The general public have more sense than to buy copies of Gloriana's 34-word 'masterpiece', but confronted with the choice of

- A: buying a copy of 'The Magic Fountain', or
- B: going to prison for six months'

CONGRATULATIONS

100 ISSUES

I think it's really good... though I can't find the flaps!

Peters

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Brian Patten and Philippa Pearce. There's the sadly misunderstood mythical dragon, a pet dog and pet guinea-pig with amazing traits, a

highly sensible cat called Archie, zoo-residing human animals, a school-visiting lion and a badger and a fox who show true selflessness,

nobility and bravery in the face of danger. Labon, an 87-year-old man in 'The Upside-down Mice', calmly and cleverly brings confusion and

retribution in the first story, which signals accurately the thought-provoking memorability of the subsequent tales. **GR**

Middle/Secondary REVIEWS

Weirdo's War

Michael Coleman, Orchard, 1 86039 231 8, £4.99

Daniel (Weirdo) enjoys his difference – his intelligence, his way of understanding the world – despite being the butt of the bullies. Wanting reasonable answers is what leads him to make an enemy of the PE teacher, too, when he constructs a wonderful argument for not playing games outside in the winter. The book opens with Daniel and the bullies falling down a hole during an adventure week. The background to the bullying is told as a series of flashbacks and the resolution of the story depends on Daniel thinking his way through the problem. His strengths win this war. A book to highlight. **AJ**

The Good Book

Alan Durant, Red Fox, 0 09 942551 3, £3.50



Ross loves violence and plotting it. He also loves reading the Old Testament – the Good Book – for its battles, which is why his gang is called the Judges. A Christian youth group looks like an easy target for the Judges until Ross becomes attracted to Morgan who teaches him something about gentler Christian values. This is a violent book which tries to show how Ross changes and is able to stand up to the aggression in himself, his family and his friends. **AJ**

Pulling the Plug on the Universe

Maggie Prince, Dolphin, 1 85881 270 4, £3.99

Sequel to the award-winning *Memoirs of a Dangerous Alien*, this continues much of the fun. The Aliens are still at it and Mr Batworthy, the computer teacher, has to be found. He has the key to the central computer's plan to destroy the earth – will Dominic and the rest of the Black Star Gang win through?

It's a nice mix of the everyday and the

sci-fi fantastic – bursting out through the roof tiles in a space ship – with a good dose of humour especially when Dominic's practical Aunt and Granny (from Yorkshire) are brain-washed into passive subservience. **AJ**

The Fear Man

Ann Halam, Dolphin, 1 85881 294 1, £3.99

A horror story which succeeds in making the fantastic nastily plausible and tactile. Andrei and her family never seem to settle, they always seem to be on the run. Andrei doesn't understand why until she begins to investigate the deserted house, discovering the identity of her father and her own strangeness in the process. This is a genuinely spooky story where skilful writing conjures spectres out of shadows and rags and really worries at the edge of the normal. **AJ**

Thundering Hooves

Chosen by Christine Pulein-Thompson, Kingfisher, 0 7534 0030 8, £4.99

Kingfisher collections are always good value and worth a place in the teacher's stock, book boxes and libraries. The 'read-everything-about-horses' children have a great many favourites and, with more than half the collection given over to extracts, this is probably a good lead-in to the books themselves. The potential readership should be wider than horse-fans, though, as there's a lot of action and adventure and a range which takes in Dick Francis and Boxer from *Animal Farm*. **AJ**

The Island of Summer

Jenny Sullivan, Pont, 1 85902 351 7, £4.95

The sequel to *The Magic Apostrophe*, in which the good witches must again do battle with the evil Astarte Perkins, what this book does so well is build a serious fantasy, with vivid shifts of shape and dramatic movements between worlds, while retaining a nicely earthy and often humorous tone. So Taliesin is both a great, mythic character and plain Mr Howard while Tanith is both a young witch and the girl with a very annoying older sister. It's fun in its own right but also a good introduction to other powerful retellings of Welsh legend. **AJ**

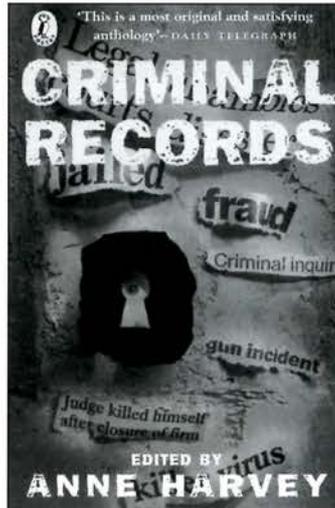
How Come the Best Clues are Always in the Garbage?

Linda Bailey, Puffin, 0 14 037710 7, £3.99

Reading with an ecological slant, since our doughty heroine's mother is a worker for Garbage Busters, who aim to promote re-cycling and less wrapping at the local fast-food joint. When hard-won charity cash is stolen things look grim, until intre-

pid, lively-minded super-daughter, Stevie Diamond (armed with the vicarious experience of her reading of mystery stories) sleuths to the rescue.

Heady stuff in a series that could run forever! It's sure to find some devotees. **DB**



Criminal Records

Edited by Anne Harvey, ill. Peter Viccars, Puffin, 0 14 036550 8, £5.99

The preface states: 'Poems about crime can't provide the answer to the rise in crime, but perhaps they can heighten our awareness and widen our understanding.'

The range of poets here is impressive with many unfamiliar names, mostly writing quite recently. This will make an unusual browse for young readers and demonstrate that poets can speak in many voices about many issues and situations. Worth a library copy. **DB**

Closer, Closer

Steve May, Mammoth, 0 7497 26903, £3.99

Sarah's period of teenage rebellion is somewhat exacerbated by her being a twin. Bobby is the golden girl to everyone and beside her Sarah is pedestrian. But this brightly shining sister is not all that she seems, as Sarah discovers at the Pop Festival, to which she herself has covertly hitchhiked with a gang of dubious friends.

The contemporary style and language should find a willing readership among girls who need a quick and eventful read. **DB**

Wilmot and Chips

Alex Shearer, Red Fox, 0 09 963821 5, £3.50

Alex Shearer has produced a magical blend of weird vocabulary, brotherly love/hate and chips; all the things that are really meaningful when you're young. Wilmot wants to be memo-

rable but having little talent for anything much he uses his true strength – his stomach. A chip-eating record bid seems to be his best bet. However, it's going to take more than a Swaziland squash with extra strangles to convince the World Book of Records. Fame comes through in a way no-one expected – least of all, me. **PH**

Double Act

Jacqueline Wilson, ill. Nick Sharratt and Sue Heap, Yearling, 0 440 86334 1, £3.50

Ruby and Garnet are twins. They are 10, they have lost their mother and they do everything, but everything, together. Their life is uneventful and predictable until growing up overtakes them. Suddenly individuality shows through as Garnet goes to school and Ruby goes her own way. A lovely perceptive story (that won the 1996 Children's Book Award) reassur-

Frances Fairweather –
Demon Striker!
Derek Smith



ing us that being yourself is okay. **PH**

Frances Fairweather – Demon Striker

Derek Smith, ill. Pentagram, Faber, 0 571 17451 5, £5.99

If I had to catalogue this I wouldn't know whether to put it under F for Football or E for Equal Opportunities – neither of which do it justice. A very funny and almost believable book, it was a wonderful antidote to the excesses of this summer's football. Frances plays football with a passion and when grounded by her teacher and her father because she won't work at school she takes desperate measures to play the game she loves. The funny thing is that the text doesn't make us question the validity of the game of football, more the definitions of girl and boy. **PH**

Matt's Million

Andrew Norris, ill. Richard Jones, Puffin, 0 14 036899 X, £3.99

Over breakfast Matt suddenly finds

A

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October

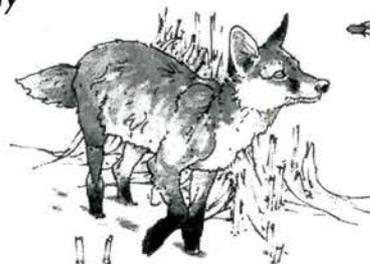
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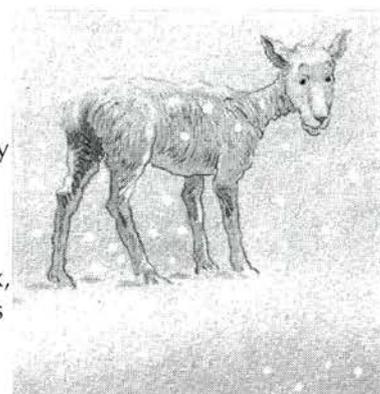
**THE LITTLE REINDEER****Michael Foreman**

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An endearing Christmas story about Santa's magical reindeer from prizewinning artist.

Michael Foreman's last book, *Seal Surfer*, was described as "the picture book of the season" in *The Bookseller*.

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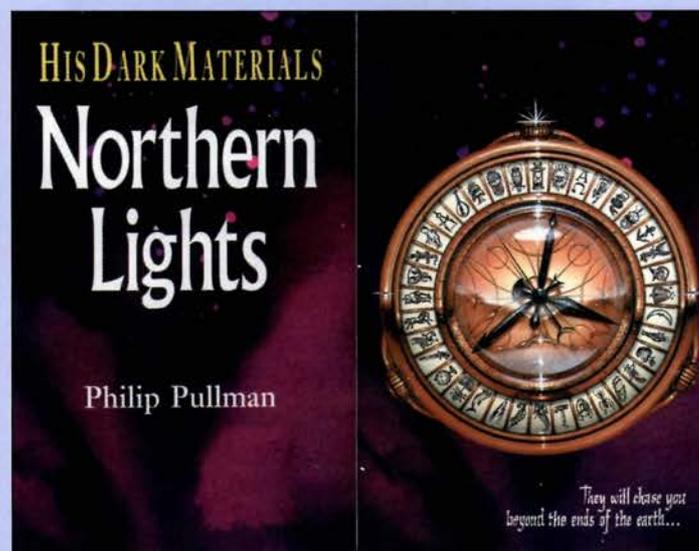
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A successor to the bestselling JIMMY'S SNOWY BOOK which has just reprinted again.

20 years of high quality children's books

NORTHERN LIGHTS AND CHRISTMAS MIRACLES

Julia Eccleshare takes a look at this year's winners of the most prestigious prizes in children's books . . . the Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medals



'Children's books still deal with the huge themes which have always been part of literature – love, loyalty, the place of religion and science in life, what it really means to be human. Contemporary adult fiction is too small and too sterile for what I'm trying to do.'

Fighting talk from Philip Pullman whose magnificent *His Dark Materials: Northern Lights* has just won the Carnegie Medal. 'When you're writing for children,' he says, 'the story is more important than you are. You can't be self-conscious, you just have to get out of the way.'

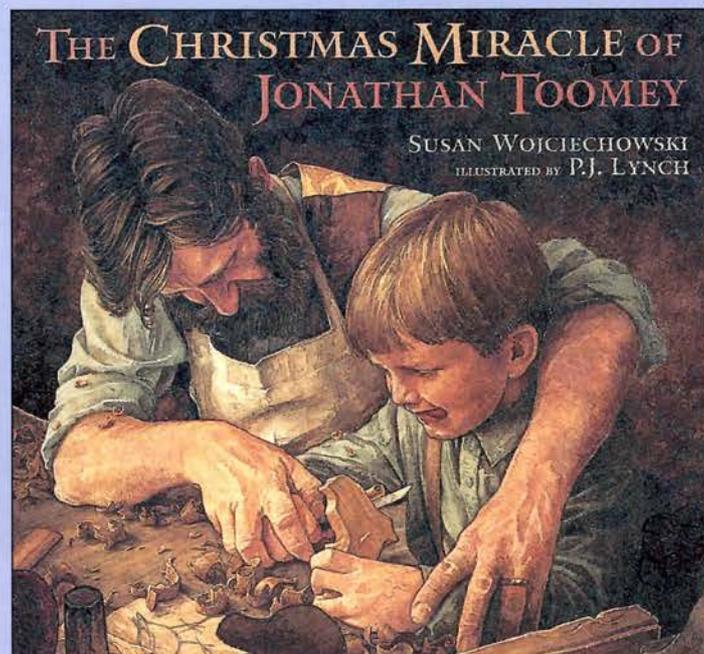
Pullman believes that adult fiction was radically changed by E M Forster and his contemporaries who caused 'story tellers' to move into genre fiction while 'novelists' concentrated on style. 'Luckily, in children's books, story hasn't been damaged in the same way.'

Northern Lights was a hugely ambitious concept. 'What I really wanted to do was *Paradise Lost* in 1,200 pages. From the beginning I knew the shape of the story. It's the story of The Fall which is the story of how what some would call sin, but I would call consciousness, comes to us. The more I thought about it the clearer it became. It fell naturally into three parts. Though long, I've never been in danger of getting lost because the central strand is so simple.' It's that central strand, based on the basic law that actions have consequences, that Pullman is so determined should underpin the best children's books. 'Children lack the understanding that you can do anything but that you've got to be prepared to accept the consequences. Some things cost more than others. Some things involve you in more pain. The language of rights encourages passivity and is not interesting. The language of responsibility is much more interesting. You must be subtle which is why writing is so good at dealing with it.'

The weaving together of story and morality is what makes *Northern Lights* such an exceptional book. Never for a moment does the story lose ground to the message it carries. Philip Pullman's huge cast of characters sizzle on the page. His heroine, Lyra, who, he says, 'just walked in', is cunning, deceitful, loyal and brave – a rich mixture of attributes which make her, above all, a convincing child. The adults who surround her are equally well-rounded while the device of their 'daemons', their animal familiars which reveal their innermost natures, adds a fresh level of perception. His landscapes, from the almost-Oxford where the story starts to the strange Northern wastelands at the heart of the adventure, are superbly realised. Above all, *Northern Lights* reflects Pullman's own love of storytelling. It's an immense tale, richly told and wholly satisfying. Please Philip Pullman, hurry up with volume 2.

The Kate Greenaway Medal was won by P J Lynch who says, 'even though I'm 34 and have been working for 11 years, I still think of myself as the new boy. Winning the Medal will change all that!'

In fact, PJ (as he's always called) started out in the fast track winning the Mother Goose Award in 1987 for his illustrations of *A Bag O' Moonshine*, a collection of stories by Alan Garner, and has been recognised as a major talent ever since. He's delighted with his work for *The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey* by Susan Wojciechowski. 'I sat on the book for about a year, even though I loved the story. It's the best book I've done so far. It's very consistent and it works as a whole.'



PJ's style is very distinctive with its strong line and painterly representation of photographs. Thus far it has mostly been used in fairy tales and fantasy. Moving into the realistic subject matter of this tender story about an unhappy and crabby man whose relationship with a young boy and his mother unlocks him from his past and brings out his true warmth was a big step to take and involved a great deal of research before the drawing begun.

'I went to the United States and worked in the Vermont Museum of 19th-Century Americana. I looked at cups, saucers, chairs, furnishing – all the background details.'

He then settled down to the process which shapes all his books. 'I always start by doing loads of sketches. Next I plan the shape of the whole book and work with the designers to get the layout exactly right. Then I get the models and the costumes and start work on the photographs. It's like doing a movie. You have to plan the settings and get the drama right. Sometimes it's hard to get the right expressions – especially with kids. Kids are difficult.'

Willing friends model, though they may find details added. PJ used to make up more than he does now, but he found that for real accuracy and authenticity he needed to photograph and work from the clear image that they give.

From the photographs he starts the line drawing onto paper and then stretches it 'so that you can't leave anything out'. 'The fun bit is the painting because hard decisions have been made by then. I mostly use watercolours and then gouache over them. It was hard to achieve the kind of darkness I wanted . . .'

But achieve it he did and the illustrations for *The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey* have an exceptional range of texture and colour which give the book the intensity and warmth that's made it stand out. ■

Book details:

His Dark Materials, Book 1: Northern Lights, Philip Pullman, Scholastic, 0 590 54178 1, £12.99 (the paperback is due in October, 0 590 13961 4, at £4.99)

The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey, by Susan Wojciechowski ill. P J Lynch, Walker, 0 7445 4007 0, £9.99

*Middle/Secondary Reviews
continued from page 13*



out that he's earned himself a million he didn't know about. Everyone's pipe dream (unless you won the Lottery last week). We bite our nails and hold our breath as he spends so much money so quickly. However, it isn't the money that changes his life, but an encounter with a new friend from thousands of miles away. **PH**

Night Fright

Jean Ure, Puffin,
0 14 034758 1, £3.50

I know why the publishers do it, but I still think it's a con. The girl on the cover looks at least 14, yet Daisy, our heroine, is all of nine-and-a-half.

That aside, it's a decent story. Anna and Daisy's favourite game is to make up possible disasters and they play it ad nauseam. The train journey to London to spend Christmas with Gran affords ample opportunity as does the shopping trip to the West End. Then disaster really does strike as Daisy is separated from Mum and Anna in the crush of the Underground and tries to find her own way home to Ruinslip. For the last few stops she's alone in the carriage with a strange man who seems to have been following her. The tension is built steadily though, given the fact that he's a police officer, the man's behaviour towards a lone girl is somewhat odd. **SR**

Molly

Carol Drinkwater,
Macdonald,
0 7500 1840 2, £4.99

This bright, lively book with its cartwheeling episodic style whisks the reader in hectic succession from London to Paris, the French mountains and Gdansk. Molly's parents are splitting up and, from the isolated viewpoint of her mountain school, she resolves to reunite them. Her plans are unsuccessful but she makes her mark in this story which is tailor-made for television where it was recently serialised. She works with friends to create a Cinema and Arts Centre in the French mountains, foils a trumpet thief in Gdansk when he's stolen her father's most treasured possession and learns the value of selflessness in coping with her parents' new relationships.

An energetic and breezy read for pupils with stamina in Years 7-9. **VR**

The Weirdo

Theodore Taylor, Puffin,
0 14 036879 5, £4.99

The insensitivity of the title deliberately reflects public attitudes to Chip Clewt's appearance - he was horrifically burned in an aircraft crash - and to his outspoken attitudes to game hunting in the local swamp. The resistance of local hunters puts him and his co-worker in danger. When the latter is murdered and Chip is threatened he has to draw on his resources and his only friend, Samantha Sanders, to fight for his beliefs.

This is not just a murder novel with a strong dose of political correctness but has a deeply felt concern for the environment. It's a rites of passage story where Chip and Sam must confront their own weaknesses and reservations, and change permanently as a result. An intriguing and entertaining mix which will hold the reader's attention. **VR**

World-Eater

Robert Swindells, Yearling,
0 440 86349 X, £3.50

Fans of *Room 13*, *Hydra* and *Timesnatch* will know just what to expect from this one. 150-odd pages, 36 short chapters, a story that rattles along, constant changes of scene and one or two issues to consider.

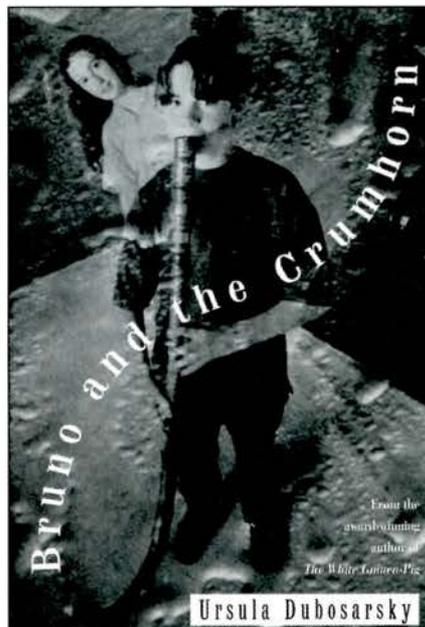
A new planet appears after an enormous storm. Young Orville, a loner at school obsessed by the imminent hatching of his first brood of racing pigeons, slowly comes to the realisation that it's an enormous egg. But what monstrous creature is inside and who can he get to take him seriously? The story travels via a sympathetic local reporter and his contact, an astronomer cum SF writer, on to Jodrell Bank itself. Meanwhile the Russians and Americans are at work - but how can they stop it hatching? It's Orville again who finds the answer and the world is saved by a joint space-venture. There's a nicely downbeat ending as Orville wants no publicity and returns to school and the taunts of the 'lads', secure in the knowledge that 'we all have things to do that aren't easy. And to do them and keep quiet about them is the hardest thing of all. It takes a man.' **SR**

Bruno and the Crumhorn

Ursula Dubosarsky,
Viking,
0 670 86713 6, £7.99

12-year-old Bruno has no hobbies or talents. When four times married, 82-year-old Aunt Ilma begins to rectify this by teaching him to play the medieval crumhorn, a series of unexpected events is set in motion. Bruno falls in love with Sybil - whose mother's boyfriend, Jeremy, sleeps in his butcher's shop refrigerator! - and finds a new confidence in himself. Sybil comes to understand that love and trust must go hand in hand and that Jeremy's protracted absences do not diminish his love for her or her mother.

This is a whimsical story, peopled with eccentric characters. The narrative has a dry, whacky humour - a gentler version of Pratchett's boisterous romps. It's gorgeously produced on high quality paper with a cover in beautifully muted tones. However, it's hard to envisage its audience -



possibly strongly independent readers of 12+ with a highly developed taste for the unusual? **VR**

Blood Dance

Louise Cooper, Puffin
'Dark Enchantment',
0 14 037638 0, £2.99

The characters in this slim volume seem to suffer an excess of shock, horror and grief - not surprising perhaps when you consider that they face an ancient curse. The nine standing stones in the vicinity of Garland and Coryn's homes assume human form to wreak revenge on Coryn for the sins of his ancestors. Garland can save him, but only if she can unravel an old riddle before he's claimed. The cliffhangers come thick and fast but the exaggerated emotional reactions of the characters strain credibility and rob the narrative of light and shade.

The book is only 101 pages but by way of consolation an appetite-whetting sequel to another 'Dark Enchantment' title appears at the end. Readers who demand instant gratification and hysterically-paced narratives will probably warm to this story. **VR**

Uncovered

0 14 036900 7

The Gizmo Again

0 14 037807 3

Paul Jennings, Puffin,
£3.50 each

Uncovered is Jennings' latest collection of short, intense and surreal stories. The writing is as shinningly lucid and as faultlessly paced as ever, and the bizarre humour which makes his previous stories so irresistible is just as outrageous. In 'A Mouthful', for example, a girl and her friend conspire to make a painfully playful parent eat a mouthful of cat dung. But in this collection Jennings seems to be turning to weightier and more risky themes. The first story deals with the relationship between a dying boy and his autistic brother, another deals with incontinence, and the finale is an excruciating account of tormenting adolescent embarrassment.



The Gizmo Again, a sequel to an earlier book about the tiny machine that brings nemesis upon its bearers, contains similar episodes of extreme tackiness: the gizmo shrinks a bully to the size of a doll, whereupon he's peed on by neighbourhood dogs, licked clean by a child, then force-fed a mix of playdough and saliva.

In both books, serious issues are dealt with in ways that are both morally unflinching and hysterically funny. I can't think of a better recommendation than that. **GH**

Authorgraph No.100

Iona Opie interviewed by Nicholas Tucker
Photographs by Richard Mewton



many lesser known rhymes:

*'Our bow's bended,
Our book's ended,
If you do not like a bit
You may mend it.'*

It's unlikely any reader has ever taken this advice; this is a magical book, a suitable gift for any age.

The next children's book, also never out of print since first publication in 1963, is **The Puffin Book of Nursery Rhymes**. The Opies made sure that every rhyme in it, other than the 150 or so best-known ones, was either additional to the 800 rhymes previously listed in the Oxford book or else a distinctly different version. Following the interest raised by their work, the couple were now receiving contributions from all over the world. Sometimes colourful individuals sent in their own versions: George Bernard Shaw, for example, and Robert Graves. For however often the Opies made the point, people remained convinced that the particular version of a rhyme they knew from childhood must also be the standard one for everybody else. One reason for printing deliberately different versions in the Puffin collection was to drive home the point previously made by them in their Oxford collection: 'We have no desire to establish standard texts. Oral tradition recognises no "correct" versions: the only defensible version is how one knows it oneself.'

There followed a number of classic studies more about than for children. These included **Children's Games in Street and Playground** (1969) and Iona's own favourite, **The Singing**

The first thing you hear when visiting Iona Opie at her home in Hampshire is the honking of ten geese strutting around her large, rambling garden. The world's leading authority on nursery rhymes, she's a tall, handsome woman who looks younger than her age. She and her husband, Peter, have been writing about child lore in all its various forms since 1947. Their high reputation for human scholarship, first established with their magisterial **The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes** (1951), has remained unchallenged ever since.

Peter died in 1982, but Iona still forges on. Her next major work, promised for 1999, will be **Games With Things**, a survey of all the games children play with different equipment from skipping ropes to marbles. But before that there is **My Very First Mother Goose**: a selection of 60 traditional rhymes illustrated by the award-winning American artist, Rosemary Wells. The rhymes themselves are taken from the Opies' collection built up over the years. Nursery rhymes often change in detail from one person's memory to another, but the versions recorded in the Opies' books have tended to become those used by other compilers ever since, whether acknowledged or not. Iona can tell if someone has been plundering their work if the punctuation remains the same as their own.

While the Opies have written little themselves for children, they've had a huge influence on the many anthologies of nursery rhymes published since 1950. The moment of inspiration for their life-time work is best told by Iona herself. Shortly after their first baby, James, was born in 1944, 'We were walking along the path beside a nearly ripe field of corn when our future was decided by a ladybird. Idly one of us picked it up, put it on his finger (was it Peter? I don't remember) and said to it: "Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home. Your house is on fire and your children are gone." The ladybird obeyed, as they always do - and yet it always seems like magic; and we were left wondering about this rhyme we had known since childhood and had never questioned until now. What did it mean? Where did it come from? Who wrote it?'

There followed the beginning of delving into libraries and the building up of their fabulous collection of antique books. Also important in this choice of subject were their more general feelings about modern Britain. As an unlikely but highly efficient sergeant in the WAAF (Women's Auxiliary Air Force), Iona heard and agreed with conversations towards the end of the war about the need for change in Britain's rigid social class structures. Recording and celebrating nursery rhymes - the voice of the common people over the years - fitted well into this desire for a new start. The Mass Observation surveys of the time had made sure that ordinary citizens could at last be heard. It's not too fanciful to see nursery rhymes as a poetic branch of Mass Observation reaching into the past for the voices of parents entertaining their children centuries ago.

The Opies' first book for children was **The Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book**, first published in 1955 and never out of print since. In keeping with Peter's fierce spirit of independence, the book arrived at the press as a finished entity down to the last comma. Peter had previously made a small facsimile of the entire volume, showing the order of rhymes on each page, accompanied by illustrations taken from early chap books and toybooks often from their own collection. When no appropriate illustration was available, there were wood engravings by Joan Hassall. Her final little picture shows Iona, Peter and Joan sitting together over one of their

Game (1985). Of the songs in this volume she now says, 'I love some of the wonderful corrupted, loony words in them. They are sometimes quite surreal. They can create pictures in your head of the most alarming nature.' The next collection with a child audience clearly in mind was **Tail Feathers from Mother Goose** (1988). Here, some of the best contemporary children's artists were each given one double-page spread to illustrate some of the unusual versions of nursery rhymes collected by the Opies over the years, together with family rhymes sent in by individuals unable to bear the thought that these might otherwise disappear with the passage of time.

All proceeds of this delightful book went towards the costs of keeping the Opies' collection of over 20,000 items together in Oxford's Bodleian Library. The nationwide appeal was successful, and the collection with its own catalogue is now safe. But Iona is still surrounded by books, together with an amazing collection of toys, pictures and a large working archive of notes for her next book. I asked her what she most valued in nursery rhymes after all these years.

'Life. Their vitality. They are like a short drink, perfect for kicking off at the beginning of a day.' Or as she writes in the introduction to **Tail Feathers from Mother Goose**, the rhymes 'can cure moments of ennui and black desperation, or grace moments of exuberance or tranquillity'. This quotation gives a good idea of the direct, limpid quality of Iona's prose style, also seen to advantage in **The People in the Playground** (1993). This is a delightful selection from the informal notes she kept while observing over many years children playing in her local primary school. But up till Peter's death, it was he who did the writing and Iona who got on with the research. In the early days, weighed down by having to look after three children, she barely had time to appreciate the rhymes she was cataloguing, so great was the pressure. As unfunded scholars, the Opies were always dependent upon what they earned from their books. Times were not easy for some years; she recalls that 'In the spring, when greens are dear, we used to eat nettles from Alton Municipal Park.'

Now she's on her own with more time. Some of this is given to her geese, bantams and garden; much is still preserved for research. A highly resistant contributor to radio and television, she's unfailingly generous when it comes to sharing her ideas informally in conversation. So what does she say to the charge that nursery rhymes are too concerned with violence?

'Violence is part of human nature. Anyhow, comical nursery rhymes often make fun of violence. Laughter is still the best weapon for fighting back.' Peter also wrote about this topic



in the preface to the couple's equally successful survey, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (1959). 'People seemed astonished that we had discovered the "secret world of childhood". Those who had thankfully forgotten the nastiness of their schooldays were amazed when they were recalled; those who recalled them only too clearly were comforted to learn that other children all over Britain had suffered the same cruel indignities.' If nursery rhymes provide any sort of counter as well as preparation for the rough side of life to come, this can only be a good thing. For Iona, they are a reflection not a cause in themselves for some of life's little difficulties of the type sometimes experienced in the playground.

I also asked her whether once nursery rhymes went into print this stopped them developing further.

'Not really. Because the oral tradition always wins out over print. If a baby is screaming its head off, no mother is going to try to quiet it by reading from a book. Instead she'll fish around in her memory for some bit or scrap that immediately comes to mind.' Are there then any modern songs or jingles well enough known to qualify as nursery rhymes if compilers were still looking around for new ones?

'Whenever we were asked this question, Peter always used to mention a once popular song about a chicken. I always chose *Yellow Submarine*. But neither seems to be in any anthology for children now.'

Oral traditions are indeed the staple of parent-child communications. But parents who may remember only the first two lines of a nursery rhyme still need reminding how the rest of the verse goes. In 1951 the Opies made sure such

reminders would always be available by putting nursery rhymes firmly back on the map with the success of their famous dictionary. Since then more nursery rhyme collections have been published than ever before, the best of them designed and illustrated to new levels of brilliance. This tradition continues with the publication of *My Very First Mother Goose*. Its tough little characters, cuddly only on the outside, fully meet with Iona's approval. 'I loved their wicked look. These are not soppy little children. These are fully-fledged fighting people.'

But it's time now for other things. The deceptively gentle-voiced and mild-mannered modern Mother Goose and custodian-in-chief of children's most ancient cultures goes off into her garden. There she is surrounded by hissing, honking geese waiting to be fed, behaving just as they would have done hundreds of years ago. For Iona, children, too, have largely remained the same over the centuries. The nursery rhymes collected so patiently are testimony to how much we all still have in common with a past she and Peter worked so hard to rescue and then make secure. ■



Details of books mentioned:

The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes, Oxford, 0 19 869111 4, £27.50

My Very First Mother Goose, Walker, 0 7445 4400 9, £12.99

The Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book, Oxford, 0 19 869112 2, £14.95

The Puffin Book of Nursery Rhymes, Puffin, 0 14 030200 X, £4.99 pbk

Children's Games in Street and Playground, *The Singing Game*, *Tail Feathers from Mother Goose*, *The People in the Playground*, and *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* are now, sadly, all out of print.

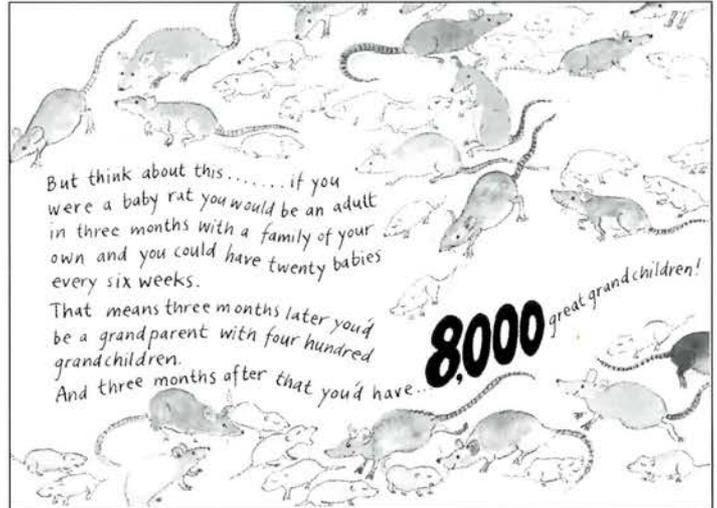
Non Fiction REVIEWS

Plastic

Plastic is waterproof.



8



Left, from *Materials*; above, from *The World is Full of Babies!*

Machines

0 431 06292 7, 0 431 06287 0 pbk

Materials

0 431 06290 0, 0 431 06285 4 pbk

Textures

0 431 06291 9, 0 431 06286 2 pbk

Tools

0 431 06289 7, 0 431 06284 6 pbk

Blue

0 431 06282 X, 0 431 06277 3 pbk

Green

0 431 06281 1, 0 431 06276 5 pbk

Red

0 431 06279 X, 0 431 06274 9 pbk

Yellow

0 431 06280 3, 0 431 06275 7 pbk

Karen Bryant-Mole, Heinemann (Images series),

£7.99 each, £3.99 each pbk

INFANT

Here's a fine example of how inconsistent a publisher's series can be. All these titles deal with the familiar observable world about us. **Machines**, **Materials**, **Textures** and **Tools** do so in a really useful way, showing us familiar objects and by gentle guidance reminding us what we already know about them and telling us more in an encouragingly assembled scrapbook format that will reward sharing. We get hairdriers, concrete-mixers, plastic wellies, woolly hats, knobbly ginger root, spiky cactus, and all kinds of hand-tools, from pencil sharpener to hammer, all making a helpful discussible contribution to early learning.

The books on colour, though, are a severe disappointment, being mere collections of same-hued objects – scrapbooks without the encouragement, logic or practicality of the other four. Not all blues are the same – as Swanstone, McCarron and Morgan memorably established* – but you wouldn't know that from the text here, and if the series should ever extend to Brown, so overwhelming is the monochromy of each volume that it would have to be called 'Death by chocolate'. And a statement like 'Red is the colour of our lips' is not just insensitive, it's plain unobservant.

So this is a curate's egg of a series which underlines the need to distinguish grain from chaff and pigs from pokes.

(*in 'Blues my naughty sweetie gives to me') TP

Tick Tock

0 7496 2329 2

James Dunbar

What's Under the Bed?

0 7496 2330 6

The World is Full of Babies!

0 7496 2203 2

Mick Manning and Brita Granström Watts (Wonderwise series), £8.99 each

INFANT/JUNIOR

Fans of that spirited Glasgow-based daily, the *Herald*, will need no introduction to the Manning-Granström partnership, which for a long time contributed the excellent 'Naturespotter' on the weekend Extra's back page. This was distinguished by its friendly clarity, which has flowered anew in their two 'Wonderwise' titles here. In a 'dramatised documentary' approach not dissimilar to that used in Walker's 'Read and Wonder' series to which Manning was a signal contributor, the two deliver their message in a mixture of clear print and Manning's even clearer autograph.

In *Babies* the message is the diversity of babydom – from elephants to newts – comparing speed of gestation, birthplace, language development, diet, travel and much more, all illustrated by characterful examples on spreads so designed as to have the text weaving in and out of the pictures. Granström does the human animals, Manning the others in this delightfully integrated volume.

What's Under the Bed? lifts up the floorboards, thereby raising the roof of a whole new world of lagged pipes, mouse-nests, centipedes, buried artefacts (it's a groundfloor bedroom), roots, underground trains, coal and, finally, magma. For this is a journey to the centre of the earth – 3000 leagues away from Verne but well worth taking for five weeks in a balloon or on an 80-day global circumnavigation, the passing of which time could, suggests James Dunbar in *Tick Tock*, be measured in heartbeats.

Tick Tock is all about time and its measurement. A difficult subject this, but Dunbar gives us lots of help by relating it all to the rhythm of our own tickers; particularly well expressed is the idea of differing timescales for different creatures and activities and the fact that, as time exists only by passing, it never stands still.

This looks like the beginning of a really good new departure for Watts – definitely non-fiction but touched with the humanity that has made the better members of 'Read and Wonder' and 'Let's Read and Find Out' well worth reading aloud and for fun. TP

Animals

0 7136 4183 5, 0 7136 4405 2 pbk

Landscapes

0 7136 4185 1, 0 7136 4406 0 pbk

Portraits

0 7136 4182 7, 0 4136 4407 9 pbk

Stories

0 7136 4184 3, 0 4136 4408 7 pbk

A & C Black (Artists' Workshop series), £8.50 each, £4.50 each pbk

JUNIOR

Each of these titles features six works of art which have been chosen to provide young people with the inspiration to create their own artistic interpretations of each theme.

Overall, an impressively wide range of artists and techniques are featured from prehistoric cave painters to Picasso and from print-making to photo-montage. Brief details about each of the artists and their work are a welcome bonus. Resourceful and practical follow-up suggestions are cleverly illustrated by examples of children's pictures, sculptures, etc. which have been specifically commissioned for the series. Adult assistance is sometimes required, whether of the practical (help bake the modelling clay in the oven) variety, or something far less prosaic such as posing for an Egyptian mummy portrait.

Amongst the many different projects featured in these engaging and attractively produced titles, there is almost certain to be something which will stimulate and encourage even the least confident reader to 'borrow the artists' ideas' and have a go for themselves. VH

The Original Olympics

Stewart Ross, Wayland,

0 7502 1566 6, £10.99

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

It's interesting to speculate if many of this year's gold medallists in Atlanta could name the first recorded Olympic champion – one Korebos of Elis who was the winner of a sprint race held in 776 BC.

In *The Original Olympics* Stewart Ross explains how the Games evolved, when, where and how they took place and why they played such an important part in the culture of Ancient Greece.

An introductory chapter describes the opening ceremonies and events as if the author had observed them at first hand. Having captured our interest so effectively, he maintains the momen-



'Use bricks to support your clock. Try timing the beats of your clock with a stopwatch.' A pendulum clock from *Time*.

tum with a text which conveys a wealth of fascinating information delivered in a lively prose style, and which is complemented by apposite quotations and illustrations.

There are some intriguing parallels with the present day. Not only was preparing for the Olympics 'a massive task', it seems that Greek athletes took their training almost as seriously as modern sports men and women with the majority having their own professional trainers. **VH**

Space

1 85434 318 1, 1 85434 333 5 pbk

Time

1 85434 359 9, 1 85434 361 0 pbk

Conceived by Andrew Haslam, written by David Glover, photography by Jon Barnes, Two-Can (Make it Work! series), £9.99 each, £4.99 each pbk

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

A quality that seems always to have distinguished Two-Can books has been their resolute optimism. Here this extends to their series title as these two 'Make it Work!' members leave you in no doubt that you *will* make it and it *will* work. And the quality of instruction backs this all the way. It's hands-on physics as, with a simple workshopful of tools we're shown how to build working models that illustrate the facts and principles crucial to their subjects. The making and working provide

the guts of each book, the theory hangs around awaiting painless absorption and almost certainly getting it.

In *Space* we make everything from a simple sundial to a whole planetarium (takes some skill and accuracy, this, with a novel use for a leather-punch).

In *Time* a 1000-year calendar may be achieved; so can candle, water and pendulum clocks as well as a 'seven ages of man' flick-book (the leather-punch again!) And everywhere we can find a new idea or skill - be it the theory of relativity or the use of a bradawl.

Both inviting and satisfying, these are going to come in for some hard bench-usage, for they are workshop manuals, so by spreading the workload, two paperbacks will far outvalue one hardback; but be warned - if you get these you'll almost certainly have to shell out for the ten other series members listed on their backs! **TP**

McDonald's

William Gould, Cherrytree (Business in Action series), 0 7451 5176 0, £9.99

SECONDARY

An interesting case-study of the world's most successful fast food chain whose outlets (I still can't bring myself to call them restaurants) can be found throughout the developed world. An ideal book for beginner economists or GNVQ Business students, with specific examples of McDonald's practice being used to make more general points about how business works. You have to wonder, though, how much editorial independence was given up to secure the co-operation of this notoriously litigious company. Their anti-union stance is mentioned briefly as are some of the conservationist criticisms of the firm but on the whole the book takes an uncritical approach. Also in the series are *Boeing*, *Ford* and *Coca-Cola*. **SR**

Racism

Samidha Garg and Jan Hardy, Wayland (Global Issues series), 0 7502 1173 3, £10.99

SECONDARY

A comprehensive look at this very sensitive subject. After an introduction which makes the point that 'race' has no scientific background, the authors go on to look at racism in Europe, South Africa, the USA and Australia. 'Factfile', 'Media Watch' and quotation boxes add much-needed life to what is often a plodding text.

This 'Global Issues' series has very noble aims in trying to get youngsters to think about world problems but the rather bland, detached style the authors adopt does little to encourage the reader to engage with the text. **SR**

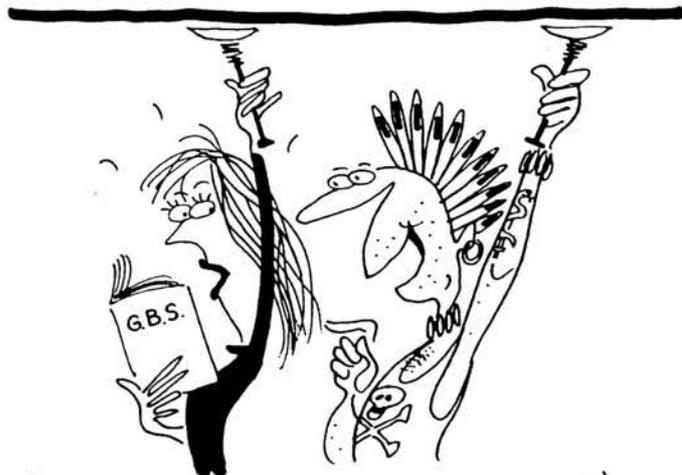
Who Wrote That?

Terrance Dicks, Red Fox, 0 09 963311 6, £3.99 pbk

SECONDARY

Strangely mis-titled paperback. Not, as you might expect, a dictionary of 'great works' more a 'Bluffer's Guide to Eng. Lit.' being a collection of conversational, irreverent biographies of 32 of the great names in the canon from Chaucer to Hemingway via Shakespeare, Pope, Austen, Keats, GBS, Kipling and most of the others you could name. Illustrated throughout with cartoons with the most execrable jokes imaginable - e.g. Chaucer: 'Dad's got me a job as a page - one day I might be a book,' and one crew-cut convict to another whilst long-haired Wilde looks on: 'Prison food's so awful, it can make you feel queer.'

You'll either love it or hate it but with the new insistence on Pre-20th-century Lit. at GCSE it could well prove an entertaining intro to writers your average 15-year-old wouldn't touch with a barge-pole. **SR**



'I've heard of GBH but what's GBS?'

Who Wrote That? - 'Illustrated throughout with cartoons with the most execrable jokes imaginable.'

Non Fiction REVIEWERS

Vee Holiday, Ted Percy and Steve Rosson.

Non Fiction Reviews Editor: **Eleanor von Schweinitz**.

TOWARDS A NASCENT LOGODAEDALI...

George Hunt takes an appreciative look at currently available children's dictionaries

I thought you ought to know that the Finnish word *saippuakivikauppias*, meaning a dealer in soapstone, holds the distinction of being the longest known palindromic word in any language. It should, I think, be welcomed into English dictionaries, to keep company with such delightfully sonorous curiosities as *male-maroking*, *slubberdegullion*, *sastrugi*, *marl*, *numpty* and *aa*. In the course of browsing through some 40-odd children's dictionaries for this article, I sought these words in vain. Now, I don't claim for one minute that such omissions are likely to lead to lexical poverty in the children who use these resources, but they do demonstrate the rather utilitarian approach to our magnificent wordhoard that has been adopted by the compilers. Opening a dictionary should be like the start of a serendipitous stroll through a bookshop. One may enter the premises with a narrow objective in mind, but seductive distractions and irrelevancies should beckon from every corner.

This is one of the very few complaints I have about the impressive range of dictionaries currently on the market for children. If the lexicon is somewhat lacking in richness and strangeness, this is compensated for by a wealth of diversity in formats, coverage, pictorial content, and strategies for definition, all of which represent laudable efforts by the publishers to cater for a variety of target audiences.

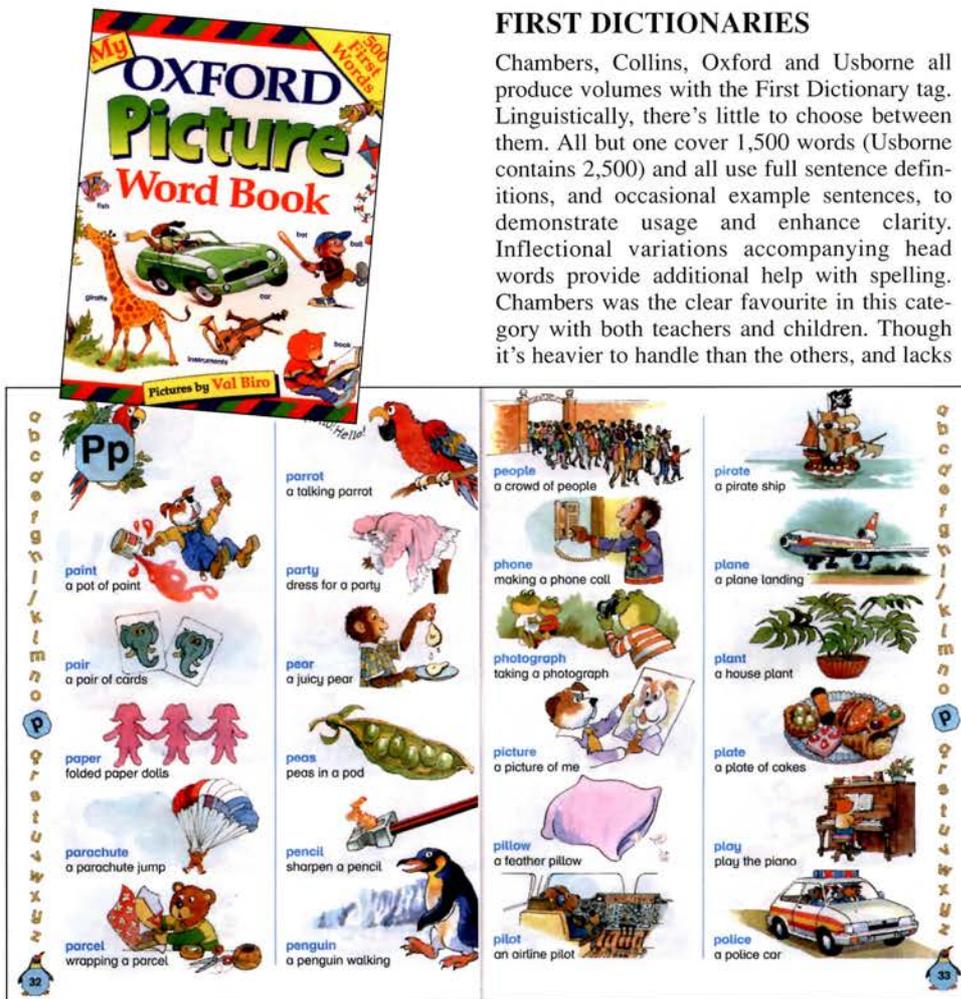
In evaluating this material, I've used the following criteria:

- Is the coverage for the intended age range comprehensive and contemporary?
- Are the definitions clear, unambiguous, innocent of circularity and supported by interesting verbal or pictorial illustrations?
- Does the dictionary have a preface explaining how it is to be used?
- Is such information as pronunciation, etymology, different word forms, related words, alternative spellings, usage and grammar provided?
- Is the book robust, physically attractive and comfortable to use?

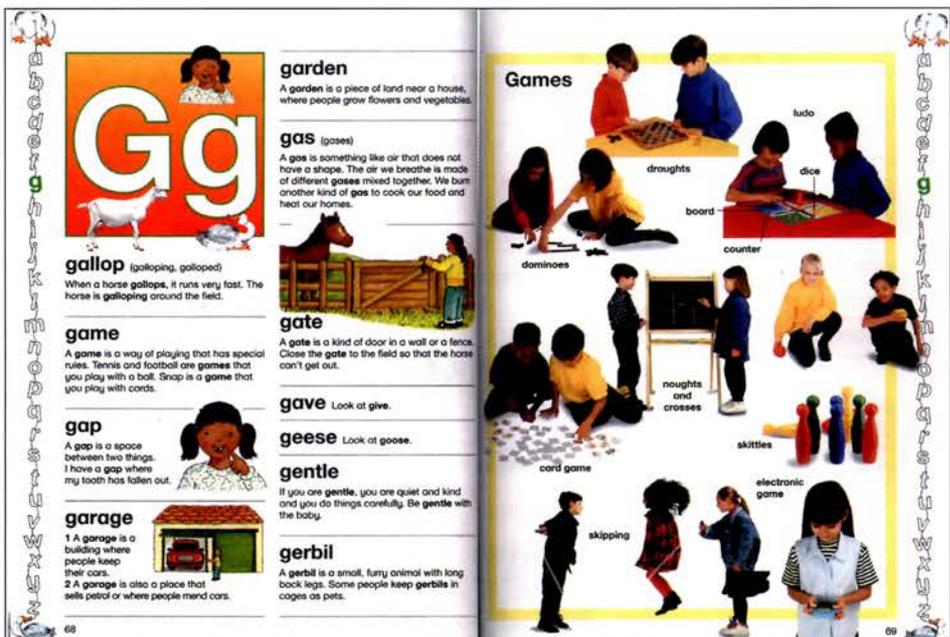
My own judgements have been complemented by those of children from within the relevant age range and their teachers.

PICTURE WORD BOOKS

For the youngest children, both Collins and Usborne provide thematic picture word books, where heavy duty vocabulary clusters around teeming panoramas. Both the *Collins First Word Book* and Usborne's *First Thousand Words* sustained the browsing of nursery children effectively and nutritiously, and teachers approved of their clarity and robustness. The latter presents more than three times as many words for an extra £2, and includes a useful appendix in which all of the words are set out in alphabetical order. Oxford's *Picture Word Book* provides a serviceable bridge between these illustrated vocabulary books and dictionaries proper. Here, 500 words are alphabetically ordered and accompanied by a



Above, from Oxford Picture Word Book; below, from Chambers First Dictionary.



demonstrative phrase. Additional sections contain a 'words we write a lot' list, mathematical vocabulary, and thematic pages. This book is very comprehensive and excellent value for money.

FIRST DICTIONARIES

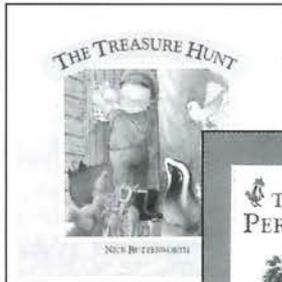
Chambers, Collins, Oxford and Usborne all produce volumes with the First Dictionary tag. Linguistically, there's little to choose between them. All but one cover 1,500 words (Usborne contains 2,500) and all use full sentence definitions, and occasional example sentences, to demonstrate usage and enhance clarity. Inflectional variations accompanying head words provide additional help with spelling. Chambers was the clear favourite in this category with both teachers and children. Though it's heavier to handle than the others, and lacks

guide words at the top of its pages, it is superbly illustrated with pictures and photographs, the headwords are almost radiantly bold, and there are several full page expansions of key concepts (games, animals, the human body, etc.) which introduce subject specific ter-

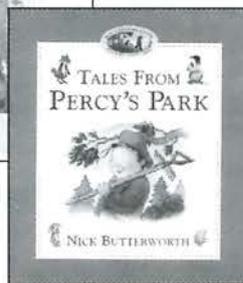
Collins Children's Books

Congratulates Books for Keeps on reaching its 100th issue

AUTUMN HIGHLIGHTS



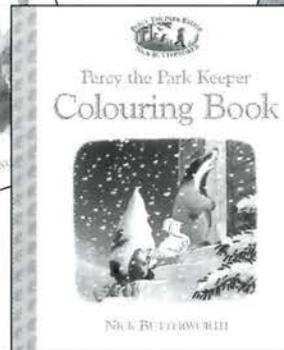
The Treasure Hunt
Nick Butterworth
0 00 198131-5 (HB)
£8.99



Tales from Percy's Park
Nick Butterworth
0 00 198208-7 (HB) £9.99



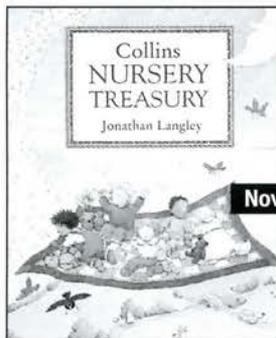
Percy the Park Keeper Activity Book
0 00 136040-X (PB) £2.99



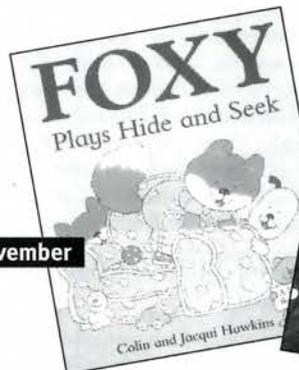
Percy the Park Keeper Colouring Book
0 00 136041-8 (PB) £2.99



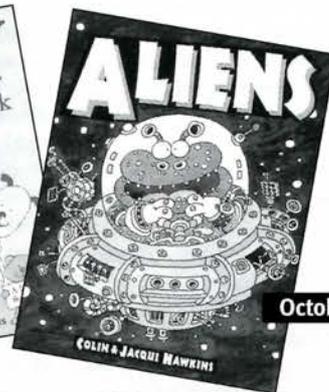
Percy Helps Out Sticker Book
0 00 136042-6 (PB) £3.99



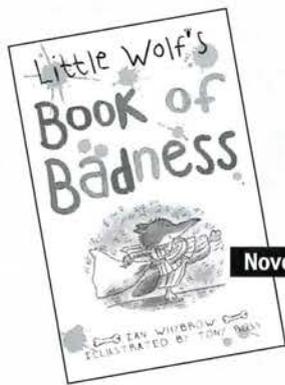
Collins Nursery Treasury
Jonathan Langley
0 00 198179-X (HB) £12.99



Foxy Plays Hide and Seek
Colin and Jacqui Hawkins
0 00 136018-3 (HB) £8.99



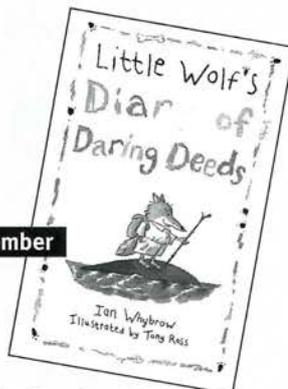
Aliens
Colin and Jacqui Hawkins
0 00 198210-9 (HB) £8.99



Ian Whybrow - Illustrated by Tony Ross

Little Wolf's Book of Badness
0 00 675160-1 (PB) £3.99

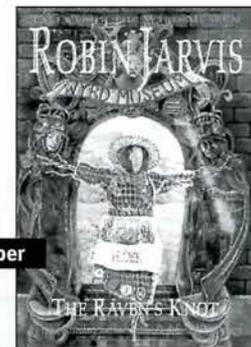
'A howlingly funny book for all the family to get their teeth into.'
Young Telegraph



Little Wolf's Diary of Daring Deeds
0 00 185667-7 (HB) £9.99

'Little Wolf himself deserves a devoted following'
Pat Garratt, SHE Magazine

The Raven's Knot Book Two of Tales from the Wyrd Museum
Robin Jarvis
0 00 185624-3 (HB)
£10.99



October

Collins Children's Books
A division of HarperCollins Publishers

never

(adverb) at no time, e.g. *I never watch situation comedies. They stunt your growth.*

the DK, but lacks the latter's visual abundance and wealth of peripheral information. The heavyweight title in this category goes to the **Chambers Children's Illustrated Dictionary**, a hulking, lavishly ornamented tome which combines the functions of encyclopaedia and dictionary. It leans, however, more towards the former function and, though an excellent book for general browsing, has limited utility as an everyday source of information on spellings and meanings. I enjoyed the **Usborne Illustrated Dictionary** best in this category. This has a more compact format and, with 10,000 headwords, quite a comprehensive, up to date and politically aware coverage. Intricate labelled diagrams act as branching programmes to expand the range of vocabulary beyond that presented by the headwords. Its introduction is extremely helpful to the reader, and incorporates a concise and fascinating history of English.

DICTIONARIES FOR OLDER READERS

Finally, to the dictionaries designed for older readers. Here the honours are shared quite evenly between the Oxford and the Collins School Dictionaries. Though the Oxford has 40,000 head words in comparison to the Collins 20,000, both are well organised resources, and perform well against the criteria I've listed. The high school students who test drove them for me were unable to state a preference, but they appreciated the visual spaciousness of the layout, and the clarity of the definitions and usage notes.

These books provide comprehensive opportunities for developing knowledge about the drier aspects of English, but the gaps in their coverage demonstrate my earlier point that though great strides have been made in the design and accessibility of dictionaries for children and young people, the actual lexicography remains somewhat unadventurous.

The readers I spoke to while preparing this article regarded dictionaries as places where you could either look up the spelling of a known word, or seek the meaning of an unknown one. They were less familiar with the idea that a good dictionary should offer opportunities for idle browsing, or for developing a sense of exhilaration at the vastness, diversity and sheer beauty of the language. This shortcoming is most evident in an almost complete absence of dialect, taboo and slang words from all of the dictionaries. The Durham children took quite a balanced view of this issue, arguing that they'd like to see local terms like *croggy* and *backer* in their dictionaries, but only if they were clearly demarcated as such. Of course, it would be impractical to include a large number of dialectal variants or informal terms in the confined space of a child's dictionary, but a judicious smattering of such terms, properly sign-posted, in the body of the text (*seesaw* accompanied by

teeter-totter, *scarecrow* by *gally-bagger*?) or in a specialised appendix, might help children to appreciate the paths that proliferate beyond the narrow highway of the standard.

(An intriguing little exception to this narrowness can be found on page 414 of the **Collins Shorter School Dictionary**, where the verb *whirdle* (adj. *whirdlesome*) is defined as 'to shake something violently' with the entertaining example sentence 'the musician lost his temper and whirdled his banjo at the band'. I can't find this gem in either Chambers or the OED, and suspect it might be a playful coinage. I certainly hope so!)

A very cautious attitude is taken by all the dictionaries towards contemporary vernacular. While words like *rap*, which are becoming part of the furniture, are included in most of the older age range material, there's no suggestions anywhere that *wicked* could mean anything other than evil or mischievous. The archaic and the merely fusty are also given short shrift. The taunting fragrance of aromatic old dust that haunts the best bookshops is absent, and none of the appendices find room for a list of proverbs, sayings or classical tags (though the **Oxford School Dictionary** does have a helpful list of foreign words and phrases used in English).

Another concern is the degree to which the dictionaries represent how contemporary issues are reflected in lexis. Words like *Aids*, *joyride* and *privatise* are covered in the upper age range dictionaries, but only the **Usborne Illustrated Dictionary** has *ethnic cleansing* (perhaps reflecting the other dictionaries' tendency to focus on single words) and only the advanced **Oxford Study Dictionary** has *quango*. None of the dictionaries mention that pernicious and ubiquitous euphemism, *downsizing*.

Perhaps the lexicographers could select example sentences more imaginatively to convey the sense that words are not neutral tokens, but objects loaded with constantly changing historical, political and emotional connotations. In a recent edition of **Cambridge Language Reference News** (reprinted in **Reading Today**, July 1996), Francisco Gomes de Matos calls for lexicographers to incorporate 'humanising examples' into their dictionaries, citing with approval the **Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary's** use of the sentence 'in nuclear war there are no winners' in entries for both *nuclear* and *war*. The nearest similar examples I could find in my trawl was the sentence that the **Oxford Junior Dictionary** uses in the entry for *increase* - 'the number of children in my class has increased from thirty to thirty-two this year' and the **Collins Shorter School Dictionary's** example for *never* - 'I never watch situation comedies. They stunt your growth.'

With research into language change thriving,

and the lexicographers amassing in electronic corpora a fabulous wealth of examples of language in use, it should be possible to match the visual beauty of these dictionaries with a corresponding measure of linguistic sumptuousness. Our nascent logodaedali deserve nothing less. ■

PICTURE WORD BOOKS

Collins First Word Book, 0 00 197005 4, £5.99

First Thousand Words, Usborne, 0 7460 2303 0, £7.99; 0 7460 2302 2, £4.99 pbk

Picture Word Book, Oxford, 0 19 910299 6, £7.99; 0 19 910346 1, £3.99 pbk

FIRST DICTIONARIES

First Dictionary, Chambers, 0 550 10662 6, £9.99

First Dictionary, Collins, 0 00 197001 1, £7.99

First Dictionary, Oxford, 0 19 910236 8, £7.99; 0 19 910275 9, £4.99 pbk

First Dictionary, Usborne, 0 7460 2348 0, £12.99; 0 7460 2347 2, £9.99 pbk

PRIMARY AND JUNIOR DICTIONARIES

Oxford Primary School Dictionary, 0 19 910335 6, £6.99

Pocket and Mini Dictionaries

Chambers Super-Mini Dictionary, 0 550 10712 6, £2.99 pbk

Collins Pocket Primary Dictionary, 0 00 196475 5, £3.99

Larger Format Illustrated Dictionaries

Chambers Children's Illustrated Dictionary, 0 550 10651 0, £19.99

Usborne Illustrated Dictionary, 0 7460 1334 5, £10.99; 0 7460 1333 7, £8.99 pbk; 0 7460 2129 1, £13.99 luxury edition

DICTIONARIES FOR OLDER READERS

Oxford Shorter School Dictionary, 0 19 910377 1, £8.99

Collins School Dictionary, 0 00 196480 1, £8.99

Collins Shorter School Dictionary, 0 00 196479 8, £5.99

GENERAL

Oxford School Dictionary, 0 19 910377 1, £8.99
Oxford Study Dictionary, 0 19 910312 7, £5.99 pbk

Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary, 0 00 375029 9, £18.00; 0 00 370941 8, £12.50 pbk

Oxford Junior Dictionary, 0 19 910304 6, £5.50

We give details of bookshop editions only - other trade and education versions are available in some cases.

(Thanks are due to the children and staff of Blagdon Nursery and Alfred Sutton School in Reading, and of Butterknowle Primary School in County Durham.)

BIG BOOKS ARE

Jill Bennett on an invaluable classroom asset

As teachers of young children, we know there are many ways in which big books can enhance our work in helping them develop as readers. They are marvellous aids for modelling various aspects of the reading process and for drawing attention to conventions of printed language in a context where that is appropriate and meaningful, and – most importantly – the teacher can focus on both the literacy and the literary aspects of the story.

When sharing a big book with a class or group you can run a finger along the words demonstrating how it is read from left to right and from top to bottom. This can help to make the link between the spoken word and its written form. We can also draw attention to specific features of punctuation, to speech bubbles, individual words, letters and so on . . . *after the initial reading, of course.* For we must remember not to lose sight of what Madeleine Lindley so rightly says in her leaflet listing the books she stocks: 'Shared reading aims to make stories . . . a source of delight.'

Another important point is that big books do make it possible for more children to fully engage, and interact, with the story. For instance, by being able to see the pictures clearly, second language learners can construct their own meanings without necessarily understanding all the words, and can thus participate in a shared reading experience. The latter is particularly important for their self-esteem as it is for less confident readers, since the group aspect provides security and support for them when working on reading the text together.

Clearly the big books we use must be such that they can bear reading many times. When children have become familiar with a particular story it's then possible to focus on its structure, its forms of language – i.e. the particular way it is told. Thereby you can share and discuss a text as an example of a particular genre, something four- and five-year-olds are quite capable of doing as will be seen later.

All these points draw attention to the communal aspects of reading and story, reading as a sharing together linking it with the oral tradition which is vital if the aim of creating a community of readers and writers is to be fulfilled.

So what about the children's point of view; how do they see big books? The title for this article was a comment made by one of my five-year-olds after she and a friend had spent some 15 minutes lying flat on the carpet, completely absorbed in reading and discussing the story, *Where's My Teddy?* 'What is it about big books you like so much?' I asked. 'Well, they help you get right into the story,' was the response. Unfortunately there was no opportunity to further the discussion at that time as the children had to go for lunch, but I followed it up in a circle time discussion after we'd shared another big book. Here are just a few of the children's responses to the question, 'What makes big books special?'

- 'They're so big like you can really be part of the story.' (Simon)
- 'It's easy to read the thinking bubbles.' (Emily)
- 'It makes me feel like I'm one of the characters in the book.' (Amy)
- 'I can lie on the floor and share it with my friends.' (Serena)
- 'So everyone can share it better.' (Lauren)
- 'We can all see it better.'
- 'What can you see better?'
- 'Well, um, the faces really well.'
- 'Yes, can you give us an example?'
- 'Um, in the cave that girl is really scared holding on to the dad and so is the dog.' (Ruth)

Ruth is referring to the book we'd just read, *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*.

'Yeah, and I'm in the cave too and the bear's coming ahhhhhhhh!' (Rajvinder)



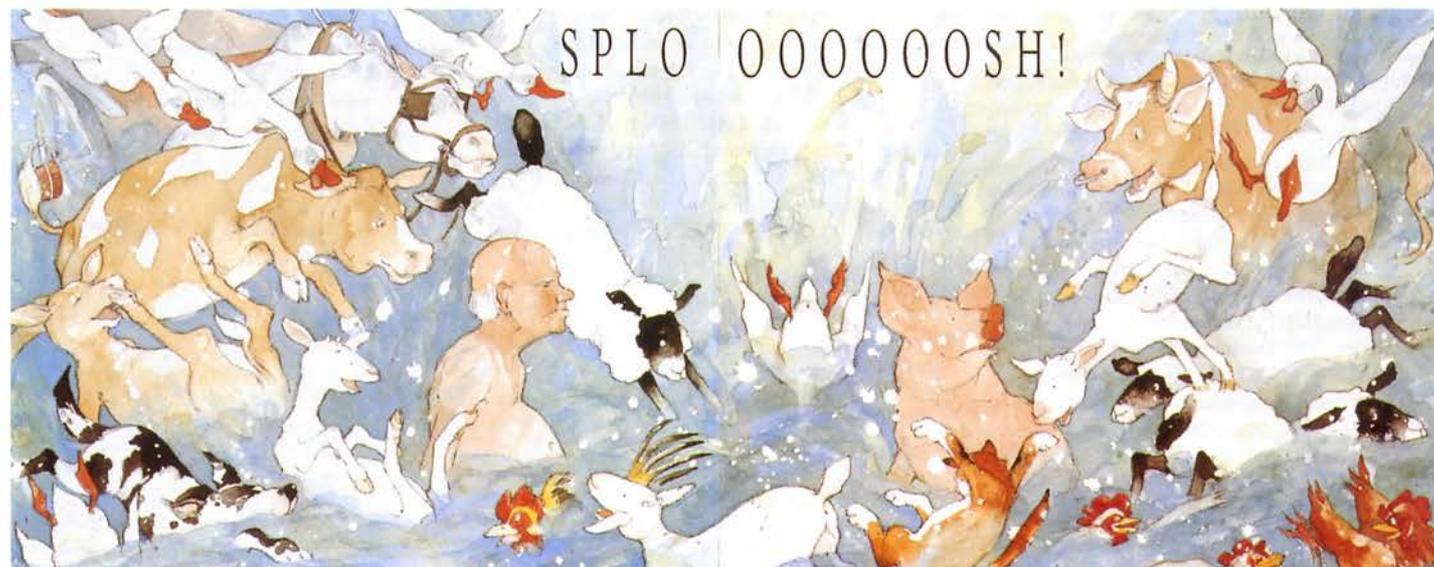
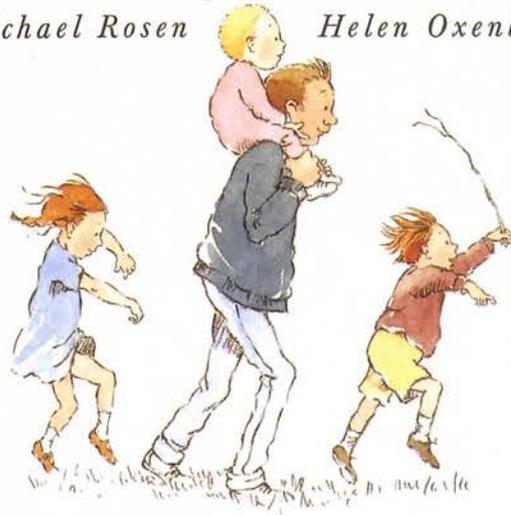
The last two comments also highlight the fact that in a big edition, a book's strengths seem to be enhanced by its presentation in that particular form.

Yet comparatively few favourite books are published in this enlarged form which clearly has so much to offer to everyone. It's marvellous, therefore, to have the new Walker Big Books which are all real winners. In addition to *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* (which, incidentally, I've had to replace as it's been read to pieces) there are six other excellent titles, *Where's My Teddy?*, *This is the Bear*, *The Pig in the Pond*, *Farmer Duck*, and *I Love Animals* (also now available as a wallchart, offering one more way of making the text accessible) and another title which has self-destructed due to its being in constant use, *Can't You Sleep, Little Bear?*



We're Going on a Bear Hunt

Michael Rosen Helen Oxenbury



A large spread from *The Pig in the Pond*.

BRILLIANT!

The latter inspired a number of children (who'd been in school for less than a term) to write letters to Little Bear. Here are some examples:

dear Little Bear
Udot need A grOnup TO Hlp in the nit. Its FUL ov strz. EMiLy.

Dear Li Bear
you dent neeb a gRon up or a Lamp in thedark frm RACHEL

Dea little Bear
sleep niecley Love you lots xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx Serena

Dear little Bear
I hop u do not need Any body to look after u love Amy XXXXXXXX

Dear Little Bear
yuo dnt be scardofthe drk. therez no need. Drkis fun. Lov from Ruth

These they read to Little Bear (a soft toy) after making a display of the book and various artefacts. Clearly I can't say for certain that it was the big book in itself and not the marvellous story which made the children respond as they did, but it was the large version (rather than the ordinary one, also available to them) which they incorporated into their play then and subsequently.

Another series which has much to offer is 'Big Multicultural Tales'. At present this comprises four titles: **Little Masha and Misha the Bear**, a Russian folktale; **The Most Beautiful Thing in the World**, a quest tale set in ancient China; and a Pueblo Indian pourquoi tale, **Coyote and the Butterflies**, together with another pourquoi tale (from Kenya this time), **The Crocodile and the Ostrich**.

These last two in particular, which are so crucial from the oral tradition, have been superb for promoting interactive story reading and for focused discussion on their particular genre, i.e. pourquoi tales.

Shortly afterwards a group of five children came together to make up their own tale about the giraffe getting its long neck. Two things are interesting about this: firstly that such a large number of young children were able to work together collaboratively – again there seems to be a link with the shared, communal nature of big book reading – and secondly that the children had taken on and were using the particular language of the genre modelled in the books we'd read together. Their story began:

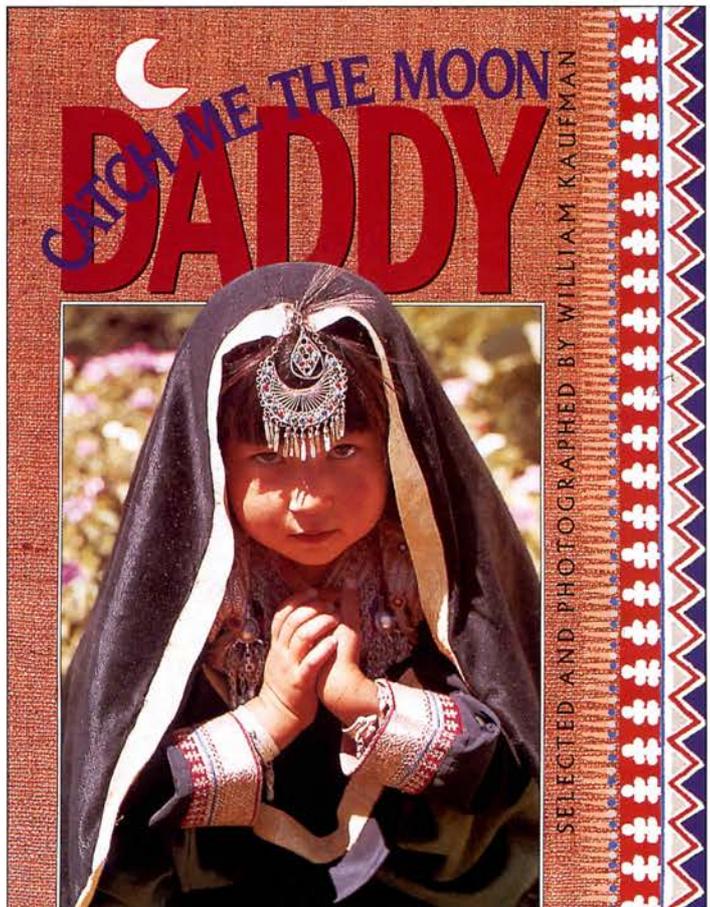
'One day in the dark steamy jungle when giraffes still had short necks and tortoises didn't have hard shells ...'

I understand from Scholastic Publications, who are responsible for bringing 'Big Multicultural Tales' to us from their American parent company, that they're part of a series not sold in bookshops but available by mail order. Similarly in the UK teachers will have to order these books through Scholastic; let's hope they'll soon be able to offer many more such high quality big books (which also have a world map on the back cover and a glossary explaining some of the unusual words from the story) in the future.

With one or two notable exceptions it does seem to be the American publishers (at least where trade book titles are concerned) who have recognised and are fulfilling the need and demand for quality big books. Whenever I visit the States I make a point of looking for them and have been able to find some excellent titles in specialist bookshops there. These include **Mr Gumpy's Outing**, **Don't Forget the Bacon**, a superbly presented Indian folk tale **The Little Brown Jay**, and the only one of the Mondo's Folk Tales series I could track down, **The Cow that Went Oink** – a splendid, funny tale about co-operation and sharing, along with Sue Williams' **I Went Walking**, a book which in its ordinary version has long been popular with various classes I've known. I recently discovered the last two titles can now be purchased in this country through Madeleine Lindley Ltd, a specialist bookseller who makes it her business to help teachers bring the best in children's books to their pupils. Indeed, Madeleine's list of big books includes 18 titles from the USA which are available exclusively through her organisation, among which I'm delighted to find **Rosie's Walk**, **Peter's Chair**, **Polar Bear**, **Polar Bear, What Do You Hear?** and **A Dark Dark Tale**, all of which are indispensable in an infant classroom.

Another find I was recently thrilled to make was on the Willesden Bookshop's stand at the Barnet Multicultural Resources Exhibition. There I immediately seized Gerald McDermott's trickster tale from West Africa, **Zomo the Rabbit**, which had already become a firm favourite in its smaller form (also bought in the USA) with my class. The big book version is again an American import from Harcourt Brace, so here too is another bookseller doing his best to widen the range of quality big books available in the UK.

The other way many big books can be purchased by teachers is through the publishers of reading schemes and programmes. Kingscourt Publishing's 'Literacy Links' have some outstanding titles on their list including **Why Flies Buzz**, **Why Frog and Snake Can't Be Friends** and the brilliant multicultural poetry book, **Catch Me the Moon, Daddy**. Recently my children and I have looked at some big books from 'Cambridge Reading', part of a newly published scheme. One of these is a nursery rhyme collection, **The Cambridge Big Book of Nursery Rhymes**, which was very well received – despite its rather boring title. It has an excellently clear contents page listing the 15 rhymes included, and the children



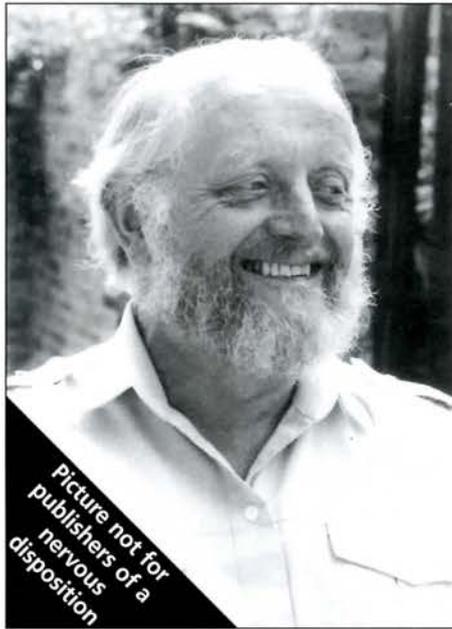
were able to make good use of it to find some of their favourites. Others in the series are two back-to-back books – two stories between a single cover by different authors and illustrators. One pairing, **Walking in the Jungle** and **A Very Hot Day** (each eight pages long), has become very popular. Though neither these nor other titles are of the same literary quality as the books previously mentioned, which were written purely for their own sake and then magnified, they do stand up to numerous readings and offer all the other advantages of big books as a shared experience. ■

Jill Bennett is currently teaching at an infant school in Hounslow, Middlesex. She's also the author of **Learning to Read with Picture Books** and has compiled some 25 poetry anthologies.

See Madeleine Lindley's advertisement on page 17.

Books mentioned:

- Where's My Teddy?**, Jez Alborough, 0 7445 3620 0
- We're Going on a Bear Hunt**, Michael Rosen, ill. Helen Oxenbury, 0 7445 4781 4
- This is the Bear**, Sarah Hayes, 0 7445 3621 9
- The Pig in the Pond**, Martin Waddell, ill. Jill Barton, 0 7445 4391 6
- Farmer Duck**, Martin Waddell, ill. Helen Oxenbury, 0 7445 4779 2
- I Love Animals**, Flora McDonnell, 0 7445 4392 4
- Can't You Sleep Little Bear?**, Martin Waddell, ill. Barbara Firth, 0 7445 3691 X Walker Books, £10.99 each
- Little Masha and Misha the Bear**
- The Most Beautiful Thing in the World**
- Coyote and the Butterflies**
- The Crocodile and the Ostrich**
- Big Folk Tales from Around the World, distributed by Scholastic, mail order only, £9.99 each
- The Cow that Went Oink**, Bernard Most
- I Went Walking**, Sue Williams
- Rosie's Walk**, Pat Hutchins
- Peter's Chair**, Ezra Jack Keats
- Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What Do You Hear?**, Bill Martin Jr
- A Dark Dark Tale**, Ruth Brown
- £14.99 each, available from Madeleine Lindley Ltd (see advertisement on this page)
- Zomo the Rabbit**, Gerald McDermott, £15.99, available from the Willesden Bookshop (tel: 0181 451 7000)
- Why Flies Buzz**, 08015
- Why Frog and Snake Can't Be Friends**, 07015
- Catch Me the Moon, Daddy**, 08025
- Kingscourt, to order use quoted catalogue numbers either direct from the publisher or via a bookseller
- The Cambridge Big Book of Nursery Rhymes**, £14.50
- Walking in the Jungle/A Very Hot Day**, £9.95
- both part of Cambridge Reading, for more information phone 01223 325014



Picture not for publishers of a nervous disposition

LABELS THAT LIBEL

Jeff Hynds on the unhelpful ageing-and-staging of children's books

Just before Christmas last year I received a letter from Brenda Hockett, Librarian at Cippenham Middle School in Slough. She said she couldn't understand why publishers had to put such unsuitable 'recommended ages' on their books. She drew my attention to **M.O.L.E.**, a quite complex allegory on the theme of pollution. It was, said Brenda, a book full of 'adult allusions'. On its back cover a reviewer (in fact, a **BfK** reviewer) had praised the book for its 'wit, humour and apocalyptic vision'. Brenda saw this book as very appropriate and challenging for her upper school readers of 12 or so. But unfortunately something else was on the cover. There was a multi-coloured label which said 'Recommended for Reading Together - 5 years and over. Recommended for Reading Alone - 7 years and over'. Because of this label, her 12-year-olds considered this book 'beneath them'. It was no good saying to them, 'Well, it says 5 years *and over*, so what's the problem?' To a 12-year-old '5 and over' means 5.

A few months later, when I was running a course in Nottinghamshire, the Head of English from the local comprehensive school told me how delighted he was with the books I'd been recommending. He thought they would really appeal to some of his 13- and 14-year-olds. He was about to buy them on the spot (they were on sale) when he noticed that several of the books had off-putting comments on them which he felt his pupils would find insulting. He showed me what he meant. One book was Colin McNaughton's comic verse anthology **Who's Been Sleeping in My Porridge?** On the back a quotation from a reviewer said that 'any child of five would adore it'. The Head of English was sure this would be more than enough to put off most of his pupils. Another book he liked was Barrie Wade's **Give a Dog a Name**. This book is a cleverly extended joke which depends for its success on prior knowledge of the social significance of names. But a label on *both front and back* states that it's a book for 3-6 year-olds.

I had for some time noticed an increasing tendency for publishers to label books in this way, and now here were two teachers actually encountering difficulties because of it. I don't know why publishers are doing this. Perhaps it's a misplaced response to the growing clamour in education for centralized instruction and teaching by numbers. The worst thing about it, however, is that many of the labels are wrong or misleading.

As soon as you put a label like this on a book, you limit its appeal. You rule it out for large numbers of potential readers. Without entering into an elaborate discussion about how we judge books and decide on their quality, I believe it's possible to say that virtually all the best children's books tend to appeal to a wide age range. In fact, most good children's books have *adult* appeal. This is because there are, in the best books, hints and implications that more mature readers particularly appreciate. This is why good quality picture books are often appropriate for, and enjoyed by, teenagers. This is why **I Want My Potty** is a favourite amongst teachers and many other adult readers. (On the cover it is, however, 'recommended for under-fives'.)

Since I consider it very important that we do not allow children's reading to be limited by the unfortunate and misleading practices of publishers, I decided I ought to find out how extensive the problem was. I could not, of course, examine all 30,000 children's books currently available, but it so happens that I have selected (for Jeff Hynds Books, see below) about 750 of what I think are some

BADGER'S PARTING GIFTS
Who's old?
But grade
treasure to
This some
death of

I Want My Potty
Tony Ross

PLAYTIME BOOKS are:
Ideal for sharing
Lively and entertaining
Perfect for introducing the pre-school child to new words and concepts

Puffin Picture Story Books are:
Perfect for reading aloud
Ideal for readers who still need the interest that colour illustrations provide

The FROG PRINCE
In all the world there is no more magical or better loved fairy tale than the story of the prince and the frog prince. It tells of a promise lightly made but reluctantly kept, of enchantment, endurance and love. There have been many versions, but none more lyrical than this.
"Beautifully retold with illustrations that are stunningly effective... A book that will be treasured and enjoyed by all 4-to-8-year-olds with a taste for fairy tales."
Practical Parenting
"Very attractive... So attractively made, and so full of levels..."
Books for Keeps

Give a Dog a Name
"Professor Dipson is the proud owner of one treasured collection. When his 'Infernal Friends' in his rickshaw, murder one fine morning, the subsequent hide and seek makes a wonderful suspense story."
JANE MAR.
"Cookbooks must be the funniest and subtlest cooking book, so funny even expert anyone: terrible! dull, devastatingly dull."
THE GLEANER
"There has never been, and probably never will be, a cooking book as funny and delightful as this... one of the best picture books of this, or any other, age."
BOOKS FOR YOUR CHILDREN.
"Buy it! No other class library or home bookshelf is complete without this book!"
BOOKS FOR KEEPS

A RED FOX PICTURE BOOK
Based on the well-known rhyme "The House That Jack Built", Ruth Brown has created a powerful picture book about the destruction of the environment.
"I'd award this book top marks for content, artistic impression and anything else going... Best book so far."
BOOKS FOR KEEPS
"A striking book: the story is clear to very young children; the pictures are

A RED FOX PICTURE BOOK
"While a group of children prepares for a party, Jim just one job. He must pass the jam. As the pages fill with piles and piles of food, the jam is still missing. Gradually, it becomes apparent that Jim will not be able to pass the jam - some has been eaten, some has spilled and quite a lot is covering the walls, floor and Jim. 'Pre-school children and infants will find much to amuse them.'
JUNIOR BOOKSHELF
"Marvelously memorable... very funny"
SCHOOL LIBRARIAN
"Great fun to read aloud"
BABY MAGAZINE

of the very best children's titles in paperback. Paperbacks are what teachers and parents mostly buy, so this seemed an appropriate 'sample' to look at. Moreover, I wouldn't be in any danger of exaggerating the situation, since my sample only included individual 'trade' books, rather than reading schemes or books from 'series', most of which *are* labelled in one way or another.

My findings are as follows. Of the 750 books I looked at, about 180 carried inappropriate or unhelpful labels. This was about one quarter of my sample, and it included some outstanding books. (That might mean that a quarter of *all* children's books in print are inappropriately labelled, i.e. about 7,000-8,000). I found, furthermore, that not all but only *some* publishers were guilty. In fact, there were really only five main offenders. But they were all major children's book publishers.

I also discovered there are three main ways of labelling and hence prejudicing the appeal of a book:

1 The publisher displays an actual age-range label on the front or back of the book, or sometimes on both.

The worst examples of this I found were from Collins, Red Fox and Scholastic. Consider, for instance, *Badger's Parting Gifts*, a subtle and involved text dealing with death and immortality. This book is stamped with the label of the Pre-School Learning Alliance and bears the words 'Recommended for under-fives'. The ubiquitous torpedo-shaped label of Red Fox seems to be on almost every book they publish. It recommends a 'Reading Together' age and a 'Reading Alone' age (perm any numbers from '2 and 4' to '5 and 7'). So *The Garden*, a mythic tale of an earlier civilization, is recommended for 4-year-olds 'reading together', though they will have to wait another three years to read it alone. And *Big Panda Little Panda*, about sibling rivalry, is okay if you are between 2 and 5, according to Scholastic's large red label on both front and back. (Presumably rivalry subsides after this.)

2 The publisher comments in some way about the suitability of the book for some imagined stage of reading development.

Although these comments are printed on the cover of the book they're actually intended, not for the reader, but for the reader's teacher or parent. They are frequently very patronising about the actual reader. Moreover they're liable to contain various crass assumptions about reading and how it is learnt. The worst examples come from Collins, Hodder, Puffin and Red Fox. Thus we find that Hodder's 'Read Alone' books are 'Stories for children who are just beginning to enjoy reading with short chapters, large type and lots of pictures'. A nice put down for any reader! It lets children know just what we think of them. They are really being told they're not very good, and that they accordingly need large type and lots of pictures. Moreover they are only *just beginning* to enjoy reading. (The last few years have been drudgery, presumably.) Collins 'Storybooks' and Red Fox 'Beginners' also carry messages like this. Red Fox has 'fun stories told in large print with colour illustrations'. Puffin goes a step further and really rubs it in. Pick up *The Rascally Cake* and you'll find that it's 'Ideal for readers who still need the interest that colour illustrations provide'. (Sorry, Miss, we are trying, and we hope we'll soon grow up and not need pictures any more - even Korky Paul's.) Similar patronising nonsense of this kind is on the back of several other Puffin books, including *The Patchwork Quilt*, a finely wrought family saga by Valerie Flournoy. Then there's *Andrew's Bath*. I can hardly bear to read the drivel on the back cover. It is a 'Playtime Book . . . perfect for introducing the pre-school child to new words and concepts! You wonder if publishers understand their own books.

3 The publisher quotes from a review which inadvertently or unfortunately limits the appeal of the book in some way.

This can happen because of what the reviewer actually says, or because of the name of the publication in which the review originally appeared. Publishers have little or no control, of course, over what reviewers say about their books, but they do have control over the reviews they decide to quote from, and the publications they select from. I found that Red Fox and Walker Books, were the most likely to quote inappropriately from reviewers. For example, when a reviewer declares that 'No infant class library' should be without Quentin Blake's *Cockatoos*, I would hesitate to quote it because I wouldn't want to do anything that might suggest this ingenious, prize-winning book was only suitable for infants. (I recently spent a very satisfying time reading and discussing this book with a group of adults.) And on the back of a book manifestly appropriate for juniors or older, I'd be careful before I quoted from, say, *Baby Magazine*, *Mother Magazine* or *Nursery World*, as Red Fox does on Hilaire Belloc's *Algernon and Other Cautionary Tales*. I find example after example of this kind of thing, like 'Pre-school children will find much to amuse them' on *Pass*

the *Jam*, *Jim*. Of Ruth Brown's powerful *The World that Jack Built*, an *Observer* critic observes, rather less powerfully, that 'the story is clear to very young children'. (Is it, I wonder? I'd be very surprised if it is. Let the young children begin by explaining the presence of the black cat and the blue butterfly, for instance.) Rosemary Sutcliffe's *The Minstrel and the Dragon Pup* is 'A lovely picture book for anyone of five upwards' according to the *School Librarian*. (I'd like to meet this five-year-old. And it might be lovely but it isn't a picture book.) Everyone admires Jan Ormerod's splendid version of *The Frog Prince* based on the original tale by the brothers Grimm. I agree with the publisher's lyrically expressed blurb that 'It tells of a promise lightly made but reluctantly kept, of enchantment, endurance and love' (and a bit more as well, if the truth be known). I thus wonder whether it was wise to quote the reviewer from *Practical Parenting* who thought it would be 'treasured by all 4- to 8-year-olds'. I can hear Brenda Hockett sighing.

It is not, of course, that I want to stop young children encountering any of the books I've mentioned. I just don't want the older ones excluded by thoughtless labelling. So, Publishers, may I make my plea! Either get it right or stop it altogether, though as it's hard to get it right I would in fact *prefer* you to stop it altogether. It's unnecessary and it's counter-productive. You don't realise the harm, not least to your own sales. ■

LEAGUE TABLE OF PUBLISHERS

Main Offenders	Main labelling method(s) used
Collins	Age labels and publisher's comments
Puffin	Publisher's comments
Red Fox	Age labels and reviews
Scholastic	Age labels
Walker	Reviews

Occasional Offenders

Frances Lincoln	Mainly 'Key Stage' labels
Hodder	Mainly publisher's comments

Not Guilty (or only very rarely)

Child's Play • Gollancz • Heinemann • Macmillan • Orchard • Oxford • Transworld • Usborne

Ed's Note: I'm surprised you're into League Tables, Jeff . . .

RECOMMENDED READING FOR HUMAN BEINGS INCLUDING THOSE WHO HAVEN'T LIVED VERY LONG . . .

<i>Algernon and Other Cautionary Tales</i> , Hilaire Belloc, ill. Quentin Blake, Red Fox, 0 09 996480 5, £4.99
<i>Andrew's Bath</i> , David McPhail, Puffin, 0 14 055362 2, £4.50
<i>Badger's Parting Gifts</i> , Susan Varley, Collins, 0 00 664317 5, £4.50
<i>Big Panda Little Panda</i> , Joan Stimson, ill. Meg Rutherford, Scholastic, 0 590 55423 9, £3.99
<i>Cockatoos</i> , Quentin Blake, Red Fox, 0 09 996490 2, £4.50
<i>The Frog Prince</i> , Jan Ormerod, Walker, 0 7445 1787 7, £3.99
<i>The Garden</i> , Dyan Sheldon and Gary Blythe, Red Fox, 0 00 950171 6, £4.50
<i>Give a Dog a Name</i> , Barrie Wade, ill. David Perkins, Scholastic, 0 590 13104 4, £3.99
<i>I Want My Potty</i> , Tony Ross, Collins, 0 00 662687 4, £4.50
<i>The Minstrel and the Dragon Pup</i> , Rosemary Sutcliffe, ill. Emma Chichester Clark, Walker, 0 7445 4308 8, £5.99
M.O.L.E., Russell Hoban and Jan Piefkowski, Red Fox, 0 09 932111 4, £4.99
<i>Pass the Jam, Jim</i> , Kaye Umansky and Margaret Chamberlain, Red Fox, 0 09 918571 7, £4.50
<i>The Patchwork Quilt</i> , Valerie Flournoy and Jerry Pinkney, Puffin, 0 14 055433 5, £4.99
<i>The Rascally Cake</i> , Jeanne Willis and Korky Paul, Puffin, 0 14 055472 6, £4.99
<i>Who's Been Sleeping in My Porridge?</i> , Colin McNaughton, Walker, 0 7445 2361 3, £6.99
<i>The World that Jack Built</i> , Ruth Brown, Red Fox, 0 09 978960 4, £3.99

Jeff Hynds has run Reading and Writing Roadshows for some years. They've now been attended by over 20,000 teachers. More recently he's formed a book-supplying organization known as Jeff Hynds Books, which aims to select and categorize only the very best children's books that help with the teaching of reading and writing. If you'd like to organise a Roadshow in your area, or would like to know more about Jeff Hynds Books, write to 6 Alexandra Road, Biggin Hill, Kent TN16 3NY or fax 01959 540162.

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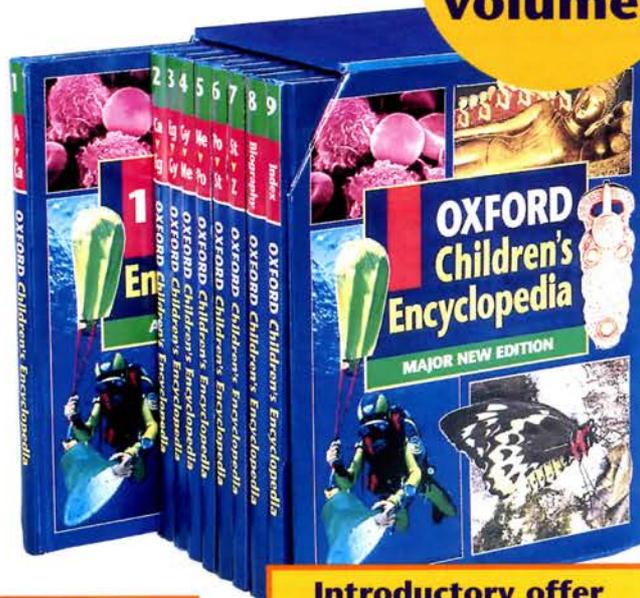
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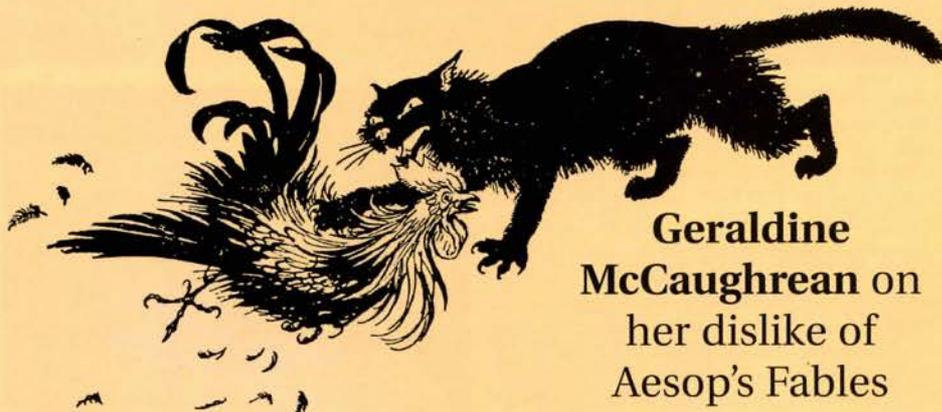
Don't get me wrong. This is only a partial blindspot – a scorchmark on the retina, as it were. I know of people who keep the Fables by their beds, like the Bible, to swear by. Anyway, one can't help but appreciate a writer who's gone to such mortal lengths to be out of copyright. But I've recently had cause to read the complete works, unselectively, at a go, and I'm left not liking Mr Aesop one little bit. I don't care whether he was Phrygian or Lydian, deformed or handsome, a plauger of ancient Egyptian papyri or just plain mythical. The man is as dour, uncharitable a misanthrope as anyone could ever wish to avoid at a publication party. His philosophy of life is one I would not commend to Machiavelli's Prince, let alone a child of tender and trusting disposition.

On displacement of water by stones and the absorbercy of sponges, he can't be faulted, but his Thatcherite worship of thrift and self-reliance is surely a horrible glimpse of society post Welfare State. No room for charity in the industrious ant! No arts funding for busking grasshoppers in the winter of a market economy! How did a sixth-century, pre-Christian become so riddled with the Protestant work ethic, that's what I want to know?

In case you have momentarily forgotten what other advice Aesop has to give us: don't rub shoulders with people outside your own social class; put up with the blood-sucking parasites you know – there are plenty worse waiting to suck you dry; never attempt anything ambitious; right and reasoned arguments always lose out to might; never look for loyalty or enduring kindness from your fellow men (because they'll kick you in the head the moment you weaken); 'hope can only delude you'; never travel abroad; your friends will always let you down – or quite possibly tear you in pieces at the first opportunity; serious quarrels can't ever be made up; 'even the kindest treatment can't tame a savage nature'; never do anyone a kindness because they will instantly take advantage of you. Oh, and 'the Arabs are the greatest liars and deceivers on earth. Their tongues know not the truth.'

In fact, prolonged reading is rather like standing in a post office queue behind that splenetic OAP who chunters continually about what dreadful times we live in.

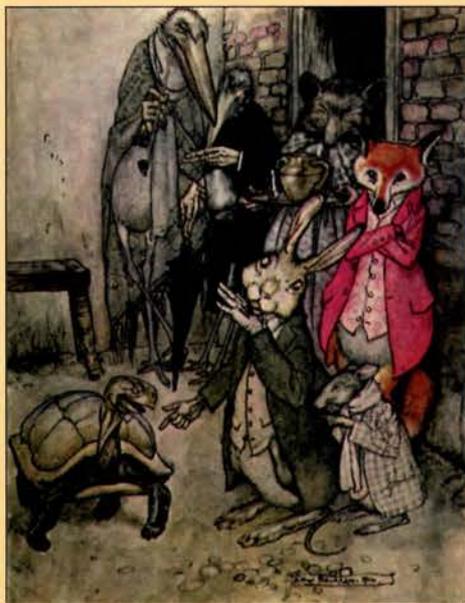
Nasty, Brutish and Short



Geraldine McCaughrean on her dislike of Aesop's Fables

Admirers will argue that Aesop was writing for gullible adults in a wicked world, rather than advocating a Design for Living. But the Bible was written in similarly hard times, and not primarily for children. Compare the parable of the reapers or the Prodigal Son with the Ant and the Grasshopper, the Good Samaritan with the Dog who gave up her Kennel. I've looked, but I've looked in vain for any real *charity* in Aesop.

Of course, it may be that all the really offensive pieces of snobbery and misanthropy are late accretions by different authors. Nobody has attracted such imitation as this mythical Phrygian Quasimodo. There seems to have been a time in the eighteenth century when everybody with a few hours to spare from grinding the faces of the Poor felt free to run off Fables of their own and add them in anonymously to the Complete Works.



As for the annotators who added 'conclusions' longer than the Fables themselves – well, they remind me strongly of people who explain jokes. I once sat on a tube listening to someone explain the Punchline 'Along the M4'. 'Well, you see, there's "to Wales" and there's "two Whales" ...' It took from Paddington to Waterloo, and I've never felt quite the same about saving the whale or the Welsh ever since.

Final agony

The number of animals in Aesop has always made him a must for children's anthologies. But it might have been nicer if all those cuddly animals could have undergone their 'final agony' off-stage, in keeping with the traditions of Greek drama, instead of bleeding all over the

page. If it crops up once, it crops up 20 times – 'he bethought himself, in his final agony ...'. I realise Nature is bloody in tooth and claw; I acknowledge that human life can be – like fables – nasty, brutish and short. But Hobbes doesn't make it into too many children's anthologies, whereas it takes bouncers at the door to keep Aesop out.

Either Aesop was one of those people who invited persecution, or else he had an almighty persecution complex. (I maintain he was freed from slavery in a desperate effort to cheer him up.) But if he really lived according to his own advice, he surely kept his back to the atrium wall at all times and never gave anyone so much as the time of day, for fear they stole his sundial.

Socrates, in prison, had apparently started a verse version just before he died. Perhaps that's what drove him to the hemlock.

I do not love thee, Aesop dear;
The reason why, I'll tell thee here.
Thou dost not like thy fellow man,
Thou see'st a flash in every pan,
A wasp in every outstretched hand,
In every smile a grin of fear;
I do not love thee, Aesop dear.

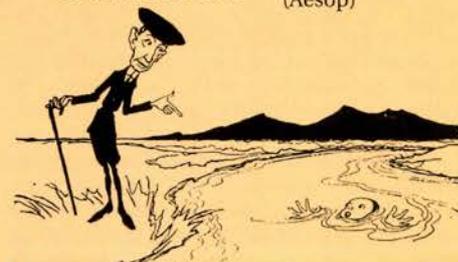
Of course, Aesop was proved absolutely right. Reputedly he was thrown off a cliff by a bunch of hooligan Delphians. I can almost hear the dying diminuendo of his wail –

I told you the bastards would get me in the end!

Not reasoned critical comment, no, but I can't help thinking those Delphians had a point.

My apologies to all admirers of Aesop, but kindly note:

'Nothing is so good that some fault cannot be found with it.' ■ (Aesop)



Illustrations on this page are by Arthur Rackham from an edition of *Aesop's Fables*, originally published by Heinemann in 1912.

Geraldine McCaughrean's latest book, *Cowboy Jess*, is reviewed by Stephanie Nettel on page 32 of this issue of B/K.

HUNDREDTH-ISSUE HARDBACKS

Stephanie Nettell's selection of new publications which have caught her eye

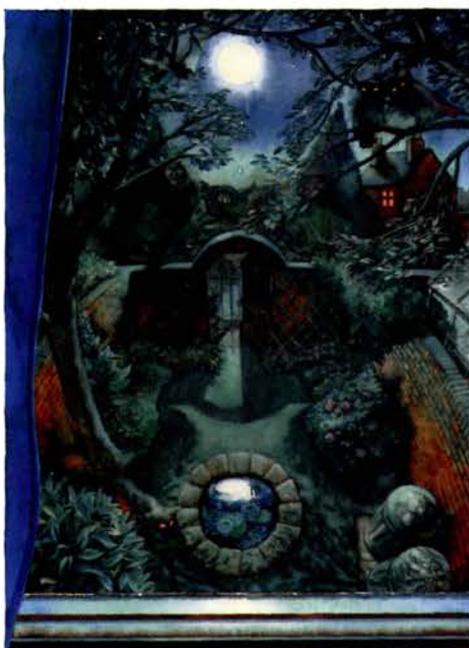
Some books make your heart sing. It's a creative energy, I think, a zest for language, for living, for humanity. They don't have to be particularly worthy (and they are never, ever, solemn), but they always leave you feeling richer.

Even the simplest can do it. Who would expect to be enchanted by another monster pop-up? Paul Stickland's *Swamp Stomp!* (Ragged Bears, 1 85714 106 7, £9.99) has only seven spreads, but all are knock-outs, with startling but jolly dinosaurs – especially a lovely gormless green chap with his mouth full of grass – being lured to a riotous party by one line of rhythmic text. An old idea fizzing with new life.

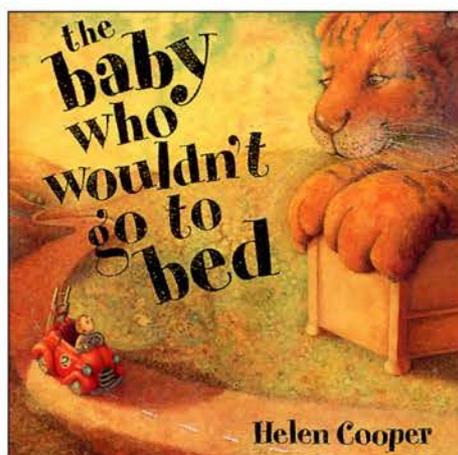
Others are quieter, but the premise is the same: the most familiar concept can sparkle in the hands of a craftsman. I thought *Cowboy Jess* (Orion, 1 85881 227 5, £8.99, illustrated by Lizzie Sanders) was going to be a tongue-in-cheek parody of Western clichés, but Geraldine McCaughrean's short class-reader has such warmth and gentle suspense that we're purring with satisfaction when her foundling baby matures into a modest young hero who wins his Indian maid and saves her tribal lands from the railroad. Classic ingredients and skilled, straight telling give a book intended for an unsophisticated audience a universal appeal.

This is also true of two marvellously evocative stories of the English countryside. Gene Kemp's fictionalised memories of her family's introduction to life in a high Devon valley, like Paul Howard's soft drawings, are full of movement and humour. *Dog's Journey* (Collins, 0 00 675137 7, £3.50) is a 'A Goosey Farm Story', which suggests more to come: Kemp has set herself a daunting benchmark, for through this cheerily told story of everyday country life, of school and picnics, puppies and snowfalls, she recalls some strong, truthful emotions, like grief and anger, friendship and young love. *Our Field* (Collins, 0 00 185510 7, £8.99), also centred on the love of a dog, is a beautifully produced picture-storybook, a perfect team job between Berlie Doherty, adapting a nineteenth-century story, Robin Bell Corfield, whose pencil and water-colour paintings have the freedom and sweetness of an idyllic long-lost summer, and their publishers. A one-plot tale of how poor children, by good fortune bordering on magic, manage to keep their golden stray, it leaves behind it perfect contentment.

Night-time is a common theme in picture books, but Christopher Brook, a fresh talent with a lively imagination and a fondness for excitingly angled viewpoints, banishes the weary old monsters and replaces them with real-life creatures pottering about their business. In *Monsters in the Garden* (Andersen, 0 86264 577 8, £8.99), a small boy and his Gran search for ginger tom Caruso through the gathering dark, finding nothing to fear until an unnerving shriek – and an ingenious piece of fold-out perspective – locates a lovesick Caruso on the roof. Helen Cooper is a long-standing success, but *The Baby Who Wouldn't Go to Bed* (Doubleday, 0 385 407959, £9.99) is wonderful even by her standards. As the Baby pig-headedly sets off into his own night adventure, text and

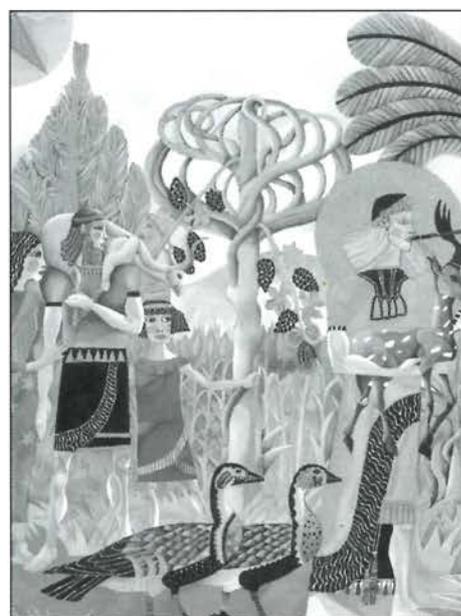


From *Monsters in the Garden*.

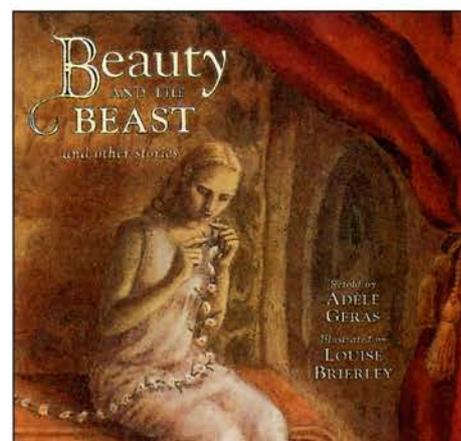


pictures are inventively surreal, funny and loving, with a perfectly judged *almost-scary* climax and a snugly conclusion that doesn't quite banish the Baby's magical world. A meaty book, with touches of brilliance, that enters an infant mind without a hint of sentimental condescension.

Artists can make past cultures pulse with life for today's lucky kids. *Ishtar and Tammuz*, a 'Babylonian myth of the seasons' that predates Persephone's, adapted and retold by Christopher Moore and illustrated by Christina Balit (Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1090 X, £9.99, pub. October), is a gorgeous picture book. Each page has jewel-patterned borders, the stylised pictures hauntingly rich and atmospheric – it's easy, perhaps, to make bright joyful scenes lovely, but Balit creates a desolate beauty out of gold and black, blue and brown. One can't beat ancient myths for narrative power, of course, and Pavilion has added another volume to their handsome collections: *The Songs My Paddle Sings* (1 85795 244 7, £14.99). It's a substantial book of North American legends that offers insights into a lost way of life; collector James Riordan writes with grace and a for-

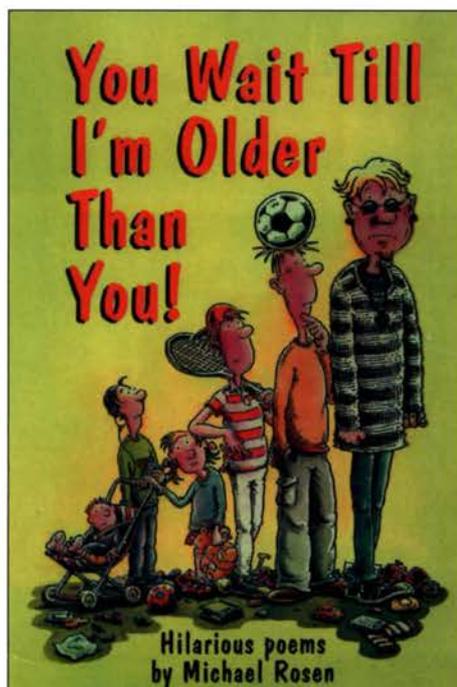
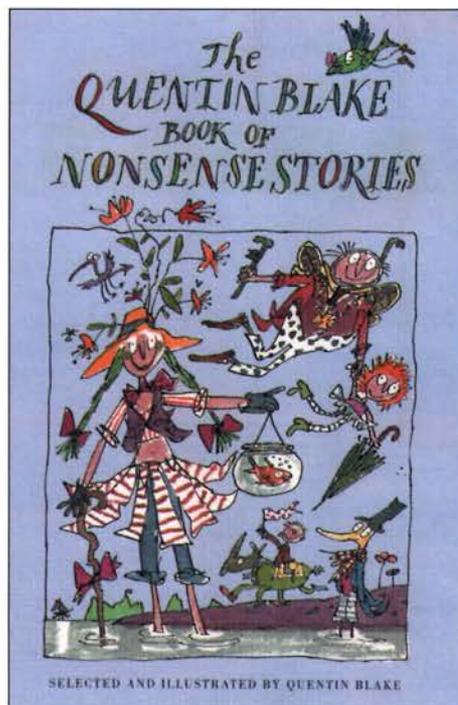


From *Ishtar and Tammuz*.



mal vitality, and Michael Foreman's paintings have both tenderness and grandeur – one is left grieving all over again for the white man's crimes.

We know that fairy tales resonate through Adèle Geras's older novels, so who better to retell some classic ones for young readers? In a striking picture-storybook, *Beauty and the Beast and Other Stories* (Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 15533 8, £12.99), her calm prose stands firm against Louise Brierley's mysterious illustrations, lit up as if they were on stage yet with a soft-focus soapstone texture. No such clouds of unknowing linger round the splendidly sturdy *Quentin Blake Book of Nonsense Stories* (Viking, 0 670 86982 1, £14.99, pub. November). Time to remind ourselves that Blake is not just a consummate artist, who has already illustrated every nonsense writer you can think of (Aiken, Hoban, Yeoman, Mahy, Freud, J P Martin and Dahl are all here, enlivened again with fresh drawings), but a writer and anthologist of wide literary experience (so there's Allais from France and a teenage Austen, a Waugh letter and a surprising Richard Hughes). A delightful book, but one to sip from: guzzling greedily at one sitting spoils the taste.



Everything's new in *You Wait Till I'm Older Than You!*, illustrated by Shoo Rayner (Viking, 0 670 86729 2, £9.99, pub. October) and I loved it all: 'hilarious poems by Michael Rosen', and so they are, but also wise, precise and compassionate – windows on to family life. So, knowing what he thinks of idiots with fixed ideas about poetry, I'll enrage him (he's awesome when he's roused) when I say I still can't see why many of these anecdotes should have been broken into short lines and called poems: they're rhythmic, yes, but so is much speech and all good prose. And Rosen's a master of both. But perhaps no one would publish anecdotes, no matter how funny or wise . . .

I is for India, by Prodeepta Das (Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1056 X, £9.99) is an iceberg – there's a lot beneath the surface of that neat alphabet formula. The exotic photographs, ranging from dazzling umbrellas to family groups, reveal more each time they're studied, and the captions offer a wealth of social detail. So simple, so engrossing: the travel

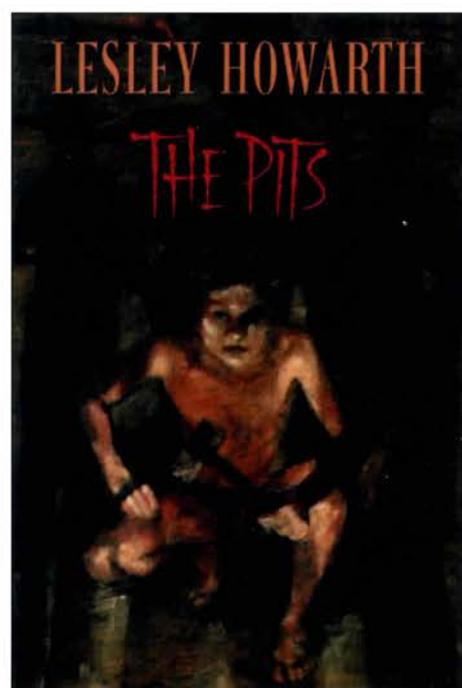
industry should take note. Indeed, children's books often outshine adult guides for adventurous design and clarity, even, or perhaps especially, those for the very young, like Moonlight's luminous 'First Discovery' series. Their new 'Atlases' – *The Earth* (1 85103 246 0), *Space* (/245 2), *Animals in Danger* (/244 4) and *Civilizations* (/243 6), £6.99 each, pub. October) – are, as we've come to expect from this technique, literally revealing in a spectacular way, as the sea rolls back from its underwater mountains and the coliseum springs to life again.

A Hostage to War (Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13585 4, £10.99) is an autobiography, told quite without rhetoric, which grips like a thriller. In 1942, when she was 15, Tania Vassilieva was taken from her mother and little sister by Nazi troops to labour in the fields and factories of Germany, although the family had already suffered unthinkably in Russia's occupation. Her tragic young memories are translated by Anna Trenter, with an historical commentary. Despite its horror, the book shows with amazing gentleness the depths and heights that individuals can reach, and is gloriously uplifting – unlike such novels as Gudrun Pausewang's *The Final Journey* that also desperately want new generations to learn from the evils of the past. Yes, Tania survived (her post-war everyday courage is equally astonishing) while millions perished, but the young are not served well by our snatching hope and inspiration from them, even in the cause of truth. Happy endings may be impossible, but hopeful ones are essential.

Hope is hard to hang on to in Anne Fine's *The Tulip Touch* (Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13578 8, £9.99, pub. October), but it is there. The jacket gives a handhold: 'No one is born evil. No one.' The violent despair of Tulip's home inexorably moulds her fate, and the outside world can't, or refuses to, see. Only the narrator, powerless through youth, and in whose life this strange child becomes almost an incubus until she breaks free of their mutual obsession, feels guilt for Tulip's betrayal. This is far more than the story of a pre-teen friendship: the emotional detail of the girls' games and fantasies, the peerless intellectual vigour of Fine's writing, and the provocative question of whether our society is even trying to catch its 'evil' ones in their headlong fall, make this an extraordinarily powerful novel.

Provocative, too, and teasingly self-conscious, is Russell Hoban's *The Trokeville Way* (Cape, 0 224 04651 4, £12.99 – is it Cape's or Hoban's name that adds quids to a short novel?). Narrated by a 17-year-old remembering a turbulent mental period before his 13th birthday, it hovers on the brink of adult knowingness as it examines the mixed-up pieces that constitute the jigsaw of the sub-conscious. A mysterious painting sucks young Nick into its Daliesque world, where he meets (in a Lewis Carroll sort of way) not just his own fears and dreams but those of its creator and previous owners. The novel plays with language and time, space and reality, and with how we see ourselves – a puzzle, an adventure and a challenge. I haven't untangled it yet, and it hasn't let me go.

I've long admired Philip Pullman for his rollicking inventiveness: a prolific storyteller, he experiments endlessly and unpredictably with style and technique, putting as much energy into his 'minor' tales as his award-winning epics. *Clockwork* (Doubleday, 0 385 40755 6, £9.99, pub. October) is a jolly



little metaphysical fairy-tale-cum-horror story set in a typically Pullman German mountain village (vaguely 18th century), where a clockmaker's apprentice sells his soul for fear of failing and the kind heart of a pretty little girl saves the day. Opinionated chorus-like commentaries pop up with Peter Bailey's pictures, and great time is had by all.

Mortality, death and love, with humour and mystery thrown in, are all in the brilliantly conceived *The Pits*, Leslie Howarth's best novel yet (Walker, 0 7445 4108 5, £8.99). A cheeky 9,000-year-old teenage ghost – and why, indeed, should the teenage spirit have changed? – records the true story of his life, and that of a newly uncovered Iceman, on the computer of an archaeological lab. Eerie, touching and intriguing, his story, slowly surfacing like the Iceman within Howarth's, concerns universal human needs and the arrogance of experts, growing up and dying. Just packed, in fact, with creative energy. ■

AUTUMN ACTIVITIES FOR SCHOOLS . . .

Schools looking for a new reading/writing initiative for Children's Book Week (5-12 October) and beyond may like to consider the following:

TO READ OR NOT TO READ?

The Listening Library (Talking Books for the Disabled and Hospital Patients) have launched a new campaign to encourage the reading habit in schools throughout the UK. Schools (both Junior and Secondary) are being asked to take part in a Read-On (a sponsored read) which it's hoped will provide a real incentive to keen as well as reluctant readers whilst at the same time raising funds for other children who cannot read.

The Library aims to raise £18,000 this year towards providing their service for children and will give full advice and support to schools who wish to participate. Contact Dawn Roberts, the Listening Library, 12 Lant Street, London SE1 1QH (tel 0181 977 5478 or fax 0181 977 3137).

PUBLISHING BOOKS BY CHILDREN FOR CHILDREN

A new competition invites school children across the country to write a picture book for 5-7 year-olds with a view to being published and sold by Heinemann Library in 1997. The winning authors from two age categories will see their books in print, their ideas brought to life by top-class illustrators, and they'll even receive a royalty on their sales!

The judging panel comprises four eminent professionals committed to children's literature - children's authors, Nigel Hinton and Pippa Goodhart; reading consultant, Cliff Moon; and children's librarian, Professor Judith Elkin of the University of Central England.

The winning schools will each receive £500 of books for their library and will be invited to Heinemann to be shown the processes involved in publishing a book. The top 100 entries will all receive a £5 book token to further their research into literature.

Closing date for the competition is 1 December 1996. Further details from Julia Philip on 01865 314157.

Letters

Keith Barker of Westhill College, Birmingham writes:

It looks as if the Carnegie selection panel can't win. When I was chair of the selection panel a couple of years ago, a Times journalist (female) accused me of being browbeaten by the forceful female panel. Now Nick Tucker is suggesting that an all-female panel is too deferential and, suggested but not stated, genteel. I think Nick is being deliberately naive here. He has been in the children's book world long enough to know it is peopled mainly by women. After all, the books he so dearly wanted to get on the shortlist were almost certainly edited by women and promoted by women. Male children's librarians are rare and to expect a strong proportion on the selection panel is the same as expecting a strong proportion of women on a Rotary Club committee.

He could be on surer ground with criticism of the way librarians examine the books on the list. Selection of an award is very different from weekly book selection. However, criticism of plot details is something young people themselves indulge in and the Carnegie selections were often criticised in the past (not least from BfK) for selecting books far removed from the type of material children themselves read. So surely the selection panel were just responding to these criticisms?

Mike Rouse, Director of the Resource Centre at Soham Village College, Cambs, writes:

Reading Nicholas Tucker's piece 'Carping about Carnegie' made me realise that I am not the only one concerned about a possible link between boys and their failing reading habits and what is actually being published for them.

I polled 104 boys in Year 7 here at Soham Village College about the types of story they enjoyed reading. Adventure stories were the clear favourites with 78% of the replies, this was followed by Funny stories 73%, Ghosts 68%, Horror and Suspense 64%, and Sports 62.5%. The Classics, School and Family stories all failed to poll double figures.

Children understand the clear simple rules of behaviour that once epitomised boys' adventure stories. Has political correctness killed the hero?

As a society we need qualities of courage, honesty and truthfulness. They don't seem to be around much in real life at times, so it's even more sad that they appear to be in danger of disappearing from children's literature.

Editor's Note: Clearly a topic to be continued. . . responses to the comments of Keith Barker and Mike Rouse (themselves responding to Nicholas Tucker's article in BfK 99, July 1996) will be very welcome for publication in our next issue.

BfK News

NOVEMBER CONFERENCES

Stories of Night and Day - Folk tales and myths, legends and fairy stories

Saturday, 2 November at the Institute of Education, University of London.

Speakers include Allan Ahlberg, Margaret Meek, Chris Powling and Nicholas Tucker. Workshops will be led by Louise Brierley, Adèle Geras, Keven Graal, Naomi Lewis and James Riordan.

Fees are £55 including lunch, and further details can be obtained from Cathy Bird, Institute of Education, University of London, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL (tel. 0171 580 1122 or fax 0171 612 6230).

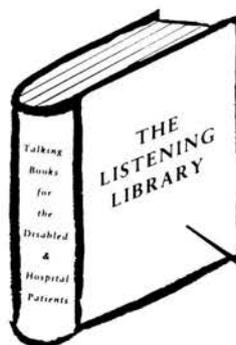
No Batteries Needed

Kent Arts and Libraries' fifth annual conference on children's literature.

Friday, 8 November to Sunday, 10 November at the Jarvis Marina Hotel, Ramsgate.

Speakers include Anne Fine, Michelle Magorian, Michael Morpurgo and Philip Pullman, with workshops run by Julia Eccleshare, Robert Hull and Michael Morpurgo. Fees for the whole weekend are £119 (local authority delegates) or £140 (non-local authority delegates).

Contact Lindsay Prestage at Herne Bay Library, 124 High Street, Herne Bay, CT6 5JY (tel. 01227 742443 or fax 01227 741582) for more information.■



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They CAN hold books
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Library's Christmas **Read-ON**

Encourage the reading habit in
your school. * Raise funds to provide talking books
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Please complete if you would like to take part at a different time of year.

Return to: Dawn Roberts, The Listening Library, FREEPOST, 12 Lant Street,
London SE1 1BR. Tel: 0171 407 9417 Fax: 0171 403 1377.

* Full details of sponsored read supplied, including guidelines, reading lists, sponsor forms, press releases, etc.



*'I'll tell you, shall I, something I remember,
Something that still means a great deal to me,
It was long ago . . .'*

With those lines Eleanor Farjeon leads us immediately into the childhood she cherished as 'one of the States of Eternity'.

Born in 1881 her earliest memories were of the Hampstead nursery where she and her brothers, Harry, Joe and Bertie, invented games and rules, read avidly, wrote copiously, listened to their American mother's sweet singing, and went frequently to the theatre but never to school. A governess was warned 'not to teach them anything they don't wish to learn'. Nellie filled notebooks with stories, poems and plays, could type at seven, and browsed short-sightedly amongst the 8,000 books in her writer father, B L (Ben) Farjeon's, library.

'Magic casements were opened through which I looked out on other worlds and times than those I lived in . . . It would have been as unnatural not to read as not to eat.'

*'What worlds of wonder are our books
As one opens them and looks,
New ideas and people rise
In our fancies and our eyes . . .'*

Her shelves were crammed with fairy-tales and 'The Greeks', and when she was ten Papa gave each child a new book every Sunday after dinner.

'My first was *In Memoriam*, bound in real Morocco with gold edges and a red silk marker. I already knew Longfellow, now I knew Tennyson and liked him even better. But in Poetry there was no-one like Shakespeare . . . Papa never told me I must read anything, but when he had read me a bit out of a new author or poet, he had wound up the watch and it went of itself.'

Eleanor was shy and awkward outside the family, growing up proved painful. TAR, a game of intense play-acting, absorbed her late into adolescence, although looking back she realised that . . . 'if it was a harmful check on life itself, I owed to TAR that flow of ease which makes writing a delight'.

At first that delight was mingled with strain. Her early published work was derivative and indulgent. But though uneasy with herself she found a place among a group of writers and musicians that included the Meynell and Bax families, Rupert Brooke, D H Lawrence and Edward Thomas. Her literary know-ledge and gift for friendship were valued, and maturity came through her love for Thomas and sadness at his death in Arras in 1917. She was jolted into independence.

When Eleanor was 15 Ben had predicted: 'I have hopes of you, Nell; I think you'll make a writer

Remembering Eleanor Farjeon

Anne Harvey met Eleanor Farjeon once only, but through researching her life and work and 'playing' her in dramatised programmes she finds her a lasting influence and thinks of her especially when the annual award given in her memory occurs . . .

NURSERY RHYMES of LONDON TOWN

Eleanor Farjeon



Illustrated by Macdonald Gill

someday.' He could not have foreseen such a bright future. Eleanor Farjeon's output of nearly 50 years remains unparalleled in originality, wit, spontaneity and invention. She approached all genres - short stories, plays, poetry, autobiography and journalism - with equal skill and sparkling individuality.

'Don't write down to children,' she advised would-be authors in 1935, 'don't try to be on their level. Don't be afraid of words and things you think they can't grasp . . . be yourself; into your work will go then what nobody else could have put into it.'

Early successes were *Nursery Rhymes of London Town* (1916) and *More Nursery Rhymes* (1917) which amusingly made play of place-names:

*'Get up, Kensal! Kensal, rise!
'Little Boy, Little Boy, eat up the Batter-see!
'King's Cross! What shall we do . . . ? Leave bim alone
for a minute or two!'*

These were equally popular with soldiers at the front and children, and it's a delightful coincidence that Cassell are re-publishing them in September in time for the Eleanor Farjeon Award to Books for Keeps. An award for 'Distinguished Services to Children's Literature' would have surprised the modest author (winner of several major prizes) who described herself as 'like a cheerful suet pudding'. This year's choice of winner would have brought beaming smiles and her famous cushiony hug. 'Books for Keeps! . . . but, of course!'

*'Each book is a magic box
Which with a touch a child unlocks.'*



On the left, Eleanor Farjeon as a young girl. Above, photograph of her in later years by Helen Craig.

*In between their outside covers
Books hold all things for their lovers.'*

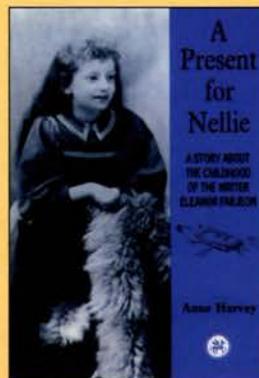
'In my youth,' she wrote, 'I dreamed of being a "real" poet, but half-way through my life the dream died, and whatever figments remained went into writing songs and verses for children . . . And there are hundreds of these, funny and serious, many exquisitely shaped, a handful still anthologised.

*The tide in the river,
The tide in the river,
The tide in the river runs deep.
I saw a shiver
Pass over the river
As the tide turned in its sleep.'*

Although children still repeat 'Cats Sleep Anywhere' and sing 'Morning is Broken' neither her masterpiece *The Little Bookroom* nor a *Selected Poems* remains in print. Good news, then, that Walker Books publish her own favourite, *Elsie Piddock Skips in Her Sleep*, illustrated by Charlotte Voake, next spring; that this autumn, in Japan, Koguma publish Mrs Malone with the Ardizzone illustrations of the Eleanor-like old lady 'whose heart was so big it had room for us all'; and in February '97 Sutton Publishing re-issue her fine book on Edward Thomas, *The Last Four Years*. Her final piece of writing was an introduction to a selection of his poems for young readers, *The Green Roads*. Reading it, one would not guess that she was ill and tired and 84.

'In my old age I live forward as well as in a present still teeming with interest: with the excitement of beginning and ending a piece of writing . . . and I live backwards, too . . . in my memories.' ■

Nursery Rhymes of London Town, by Eleanor Farjeon with illustrations by Macdonald Gill is published by Cassell (0 304 34899 6) at £9.99.



Anne Harvey has edited many poetry anthologies and in 1992 won the Signal Poetry Award for *Shades of Green*. Her book, *A Present for Nellie* (a story about the childhood of the writer Eleanor Farjeon), is illustrated by Victoria Cooper, published by Pegasus, 0 9520369 0 8, and costs £2.50. For a review of Anne Harvey's *Criminal Records*, see page 13.