

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

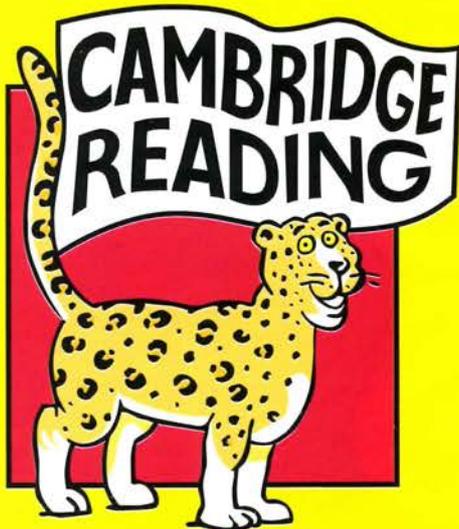
July 1997 No.105

UK Price £2.80

*the children's book
magazine*

CLASSICS IN COLOUR • ENID BLYTON
• CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY •

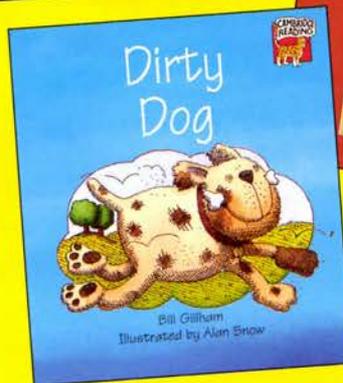
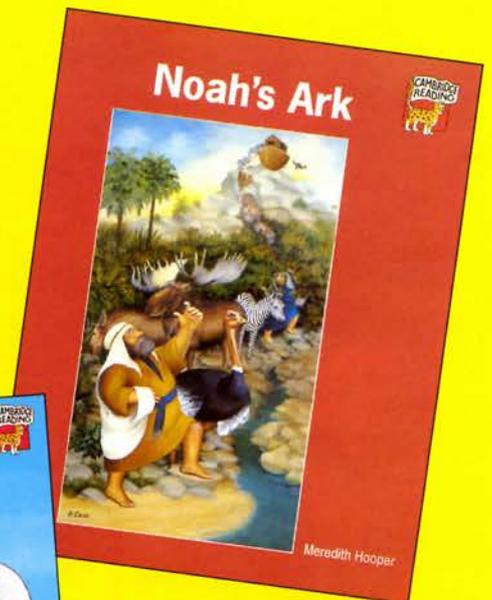
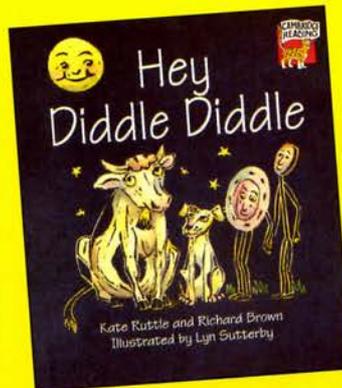
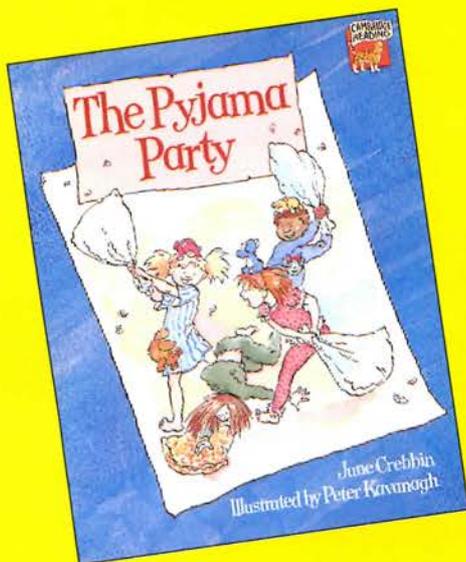




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Helen Levene on *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*



CoverStory

This issue's cover is from the gift edition of Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* illustrated by Quentin Blake and with design and typography by Peter Campbell. The successful collaboration between Roald Dahl and Quentin Blake has played an important part in the popularity of Dahl's work over the last fifteen years. Blake's unmistakable artwork truly complements Dahl's writing. His economical, amiable, illustrative style balances out Dahl's often expansive language. And the liveliness, humour and paths of the drawings offer a softer side to Dahl's sometimes gloriously grotesque, sometimes cruel descriptions of his characters.

Thanks to Penguin Children's Books for their help in producing this July cover which commemorates the thirty years anniversary of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*'s first UK publication.

EDITORIAL

White writer, black characters

Should a white writer write a novel with black characters? Jean Ure (see Letters page) has been told by 'virtually every publisher in London' that it is 'not a good idea'.

In 1970 in an exchange of letters with the then children's book editor of the *New York Times*, George A Woods, the distinguished black American writer Julius Lester wrote: 'When I review a book about blacks (no matter the race of the author), I ask two questions: Does it accurately present the black perspective? Will it be relevant to black children? The possibility of a book by a white answering these questions affirmatively is almost nil.' Lester continued: 'whites can only give a white interpretation of blacks, which tells us about whites, but nothing about blacks ... whites will never understand the black view of the world until they get it straight from blacks, respect it and accept it.'

How much has changed since this exchange took place 27 years ago? Lester was stating his position not many years after the bitter struggles of the Civil Rights Movement with its school boycotts, freedom marches, riots and assassinations. It also followed a time when, as another black American writer, Rosa Guy, has written: 'few publishers were interested in black writings, nor in our concept of what writing should be.' The establishment of the black American novel (Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Alice Walker, etc.) grew out of rage.

In Britain the novel was the beneficiary of our colonial heritage as writers emerged (Timothy Mo, Salman Rushdie, Kazuo Ishiguro, Jung Chang) who could bring together the culture of other societies with the traditions of English writing.

In children's publishing, books by white authors and illustrators featuring black characters (Peter Dickinson, Bernard Ashley, Shirley Hughes, Marjorie Darke,



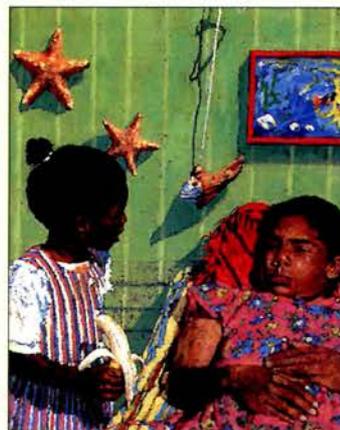
Rosemary Stones

Chris Powling, etc.) have been published for the last twenty years as have books by black authors whose countries of origin were Caribbean or Asian (Errol Lloyd, John Agard, Jamila Gavin, etc.). The last decade has seen the publication of the new generation of British born black poets and writers for children – Jackie Kay, Benjamin Zephaniah, Malorie Blackman and Jacqueline Roy amongst others. Why is there now a problem?

Writers for children are well aware of (and often kick against) the restrictions imposed on them both by society's view of childhood and by the responsibility of introducing notions to young people at the most formative point in their lives. Empathy, knowledge and sensitivity are admirable qualities much hoped for in our children's writers but at the end of the day surely all that a writer can offer is not to be

afraid and not to be subservient in what she or he writes. Whether such writers then have sufficient talent, imagination and insight for young readers to be able to find themselves, each other and the selves and others they may become in their pages cannot become the subject of critical debate if the books they wish to write are not to see the light of day.

Rosemary



'Mek me lie down on me bed quick. Lawd, ah feeling really sick.'
From *Fruits: A Caribbean counting poem*, awarded five stars on page 20.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine

JULY 1997 No. 105

ISSN 0143-909X © School Bookshop Assoc. Ltd. 1997
Editor: Rosemary Stones
Managing Director: Richard Hill
Design and Typeset: Rondale Ltd., Lydney, Glos.
Printed: The Friary Press, Dorchester

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Editorial correspondence should also be sent to the BfK office.

Annual subscription for six issues: £16.80 (UK), £21.00 (Europe including Ireland), £24.00 (airmail)

Single copies: £2.80 (UK), £3.50 (Europe including Ireland), £4.00 (airmail)

CLASSIC CUTS

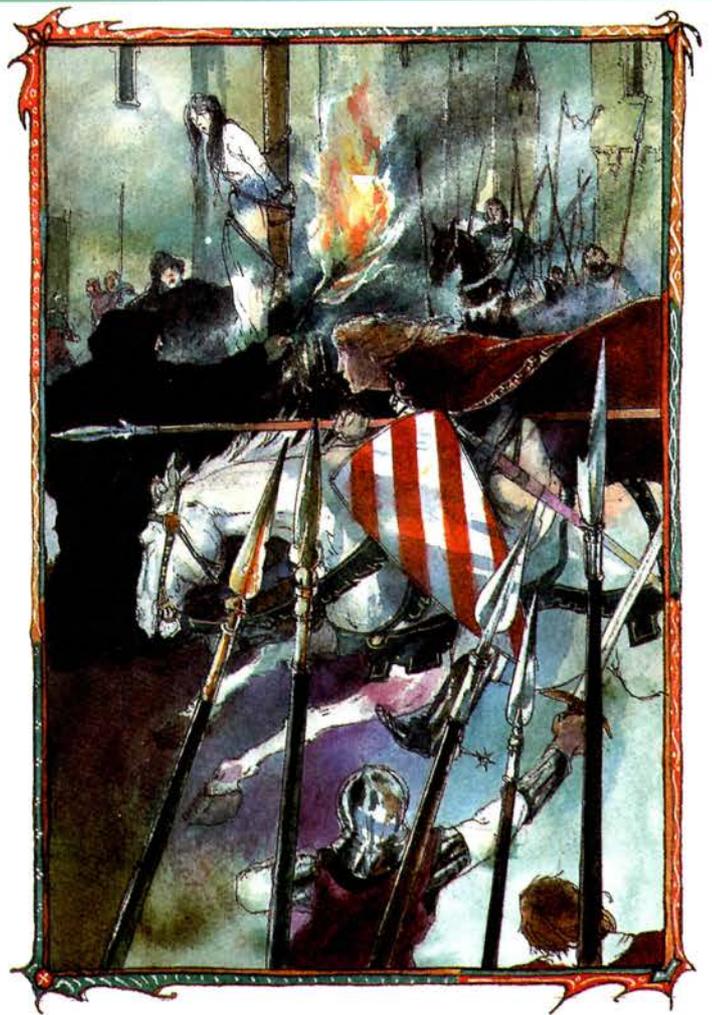
'The name of the game these days is accessibility: and under the banner of accessibility several publishers in the past year have produced, in the format of tall picture books with at most 120 pages, versions of classical texts retold or abridged by well-known authors and illustrated by the stars of modern children's book illustration. How far is this exercise justified? Which stories lend themselves to such treatment? Which, by their original brilliance, make an abridgment or a retelling a travesty?' **Elaine Moss** investigates.

Few children today will ever read *The Odyssey* in Greek so there is an obvious case for retelling the ancient stories of the hero's wanderings, the horrors of the encounter with the Cyclops, the episode of the Lotus-eaters, the sailing between Scylla and Charybdis all of which are part of Western folklore. One cannot help feeling, however, that Neil Philip's text for *The Adventures of Odysseus* took second place, in the publisher's pitch for sales, to Peter Malone's glaringly bright hard-edged pictures which appear on almost every page and include three dramatic double spreads. If Philip had been given more space and a freer hand with his usually elegant sentence construction (much of which, here, is simple and clipped) the flavour, rather than just the stories from *The Odyssey* might have reached across the 'wine dark seas'.

BRITISH LEGENDS

Many excellent writers, including Rosemary Sutcliff, have retold the tales of Robin Hood and his Merry Men, so it was clever of Michael Morpurgo in *Robin of Sherwood* to introduce into his retelling an element of dream and mystery that connects a modern boy, experiencing the hurricane of 1987 in which a great oak is uprooted in the forest, with a dream dreamt by Robin Hood in which his death is foretold. Morpurgo is a compelling storyteller relishing the drama, the horror, the humour, the quirky characters of the 'outcasts' as he calls them. The fierce clash within Robin between his love for Maid Marion and the desire for royal patronage which is our hero's undoing, is poignantly explored. Michael Foreman's flowing watercolours in foresty green, midnight blue and dungeon darkness reflect the jovial comradeship, the spirit of the oppressed versus the oppressor and the robust fun that are at the heart of this most English set of stories.

The legends of King Arthur, like those of Robin Hood, have no authentic text so look to the talents of each generation to keep them alive. Geraldine McCaughrean is a storyteller *par excellence* so her *King Arthur and the Round Table* is alive with magic and mystery, dense with intrigue, uplifting in its moments of pure chivalry and romance. For these are sombre tales as well as noble ones, ending in the Age of Darkness that followed the mythical Arthur's death. McCaughrean's writing is fearlessly vivid – 'a banneret ... lolled like a tongue' – and Alan Marks' fluid watercolours bring out the essentially timeless quality of the stories.



Lancelot du Lac comes to the rescue of Queen Guinevere. Illustration by Alan Marks from *King Arthur and the Round Table*.

GREAT CLASSIC TEXTS

The remaining classics-for-all under review are neither myth nor legend but great texts of literature in the English language that modern readers (albeit older than the ones for whom the current 'accessible' texts are intended) can and do read. In a perfect world these should be neither shortened nor tampered with.

Who but Herman Melville can generate the breathless excitement, heightened by the interspersed longueurs about Nature and whaling, of *Moby Dick*? Should not readers wait until they are skilled enough (as adults?) to encounter the obsessed Captain Ahab, gigantic Queequeg, saintly Starbuck, the naive Ishmael and the catalyst Moby Dick in the language of Melville himself? The answer, of course, is yes. But despite my misgivings about the retelling of the classics I must go on record as saying that if anyone is to retell *Moby Dick* (and I still think nobody should) that person is Geraldine McCaughrean. Keeping the rhythms of Melville's prose but shearing from his text the archaisms and reflective passages, she has kept faith with this enthralling adventure story and its theme of revenge at all costs. Melville's crew of colourful characters live and breathe, both in McCaughrean's text and in Victor Ambrus' brilliant pictorial representation of them, in line and wash as well as in colour. The strength of these illustrations, arguably the best set this master illustrator has produced in a long career, bear comparison with Mervyn Peake's for Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. McCaughrean's retelling of *Moby Dick* should capture the same readership.

There are but two good things about the Collins edition of *Oliver Twist* abridged (a profanity surely?) by Lesley Baxter: one is the art work of Christian Birmingham whose soft pencil vignettes and dark pastels strike exactly the right murky note. The other is the passionately enthusiastic Introduction by Michael Morpurgo from which I quote: 'Dickens' triumph is to have written a story so powerful, so universal, so true, that we can learn as much from it now as his readers did in his lifetime ... All through it, we long to call out to him [Oliver], to warn him, to protect

him, hold his hand, hope he'll come through.' As Dickens himself said, 'I did it as best I could' and as Morpurgo adds 'the best anyone could'. Had Morpurgo, I wonder, been asked to write an introduction to **Oliver Twist**, the work of the master, without being given sight of Lesley Baxter's so-called 'abridgment' which is also, as it turns out, an unforgivable textual simplification? Here is just one example from the myriad I could quote: the substitution of 'got up' for 'rose', and 'bowl' for 'basin' in the famous gruel scene which now reads, merely, 'Oliver got up from the table, and advancing to the master, bowl and spoon in hand, said "Please sir, I want some more."' Gone is 'somewhat alarmed at his own temerity', gone is the awed silence preceding the climax – gone, in effect, is the Dickens' **Oliver Twist** that Michael Morpurgo and countless other children have thrilled to under the bedclothes by torchlight. In its place we have this brilliantly introduced, excellently illustrated excuse for the novel – the *story of Oliver Twist* in some of Dickens' own immortal words. An unforgivable sin.

THE WATER BABIES – AGAIN IN VOGUE?

Maybe now that Christian Socialism is firmly entrenched in Downing Street Charles Kingsley's moralistic fantasy **The Water Babies** will again come into vogue. If so, one must hope that it will not be **The Water Babies** retold by Josephine Poole or anyone else but a perhaps abridged edition of the original somewhat overlong and discursive Kingsley text. It is not the story of **The Water Babies** that has made it the classic that it now is, but Charles Kingsley's language that bears with it an authentic evocation of the conditions of mid-Victorian life – its cruelties as well as its virtues. Published two years before Carroll's **Alice's Adventures in Wonderland** and in the middle of a period when didacticism and evangelism were advancing in full moral righteousness against fantasy and the fairy tale, **The Water Babies** was a landmark in children's book history. That Kingsley's paternal storytelling voice is an essential ingredient in its richness is undeniable. Modern children will have seen



'But Starbuck did not flinch, even though Ahab's finger was white on the trigger.' Illustration by Victor G Ambrus from **Moby Dick**.



Illustration by Michael Foreman from **Robin of Sherwood**.

more exciting fantasies unfolding before their eyes on television, so any *retelling* of the mere story, even the capable Josephine Poole's (with Jan Ormerod's somewhat nervous and uneven illustrations) must be measured against what is available *as story* in other media. Way back in 1961 the celebrated Kathleen Lines *edited* **The Water Babies** for young readers: that edition, with near magical line drawings by Harold Jones, is available in libraries and infinitely to be preferred to any retelling, however competent. ■

DETAILS OF BOOKS DISCUSSED

The Adventures of Odysseus, retold by Neil Philip, ill. Peter Malone, Orion, 1 85881 225 9, £12.99

Robin of Sherwood, retold by Michael Morpurgo, ill. Michael Foreman, Pavilion, 1 85793 718 X, £12.99

King Arthur and the Round Table, retold by Geraldine McCaughrean, ill. Alan Marks, Macdonald, 0 7500 1527 6, £12.99

Moby Dick, retold by Geraldine McCaughrean, ill. Victor G Ambrus, Oxford, 0 19 274156 X, £12.99

Oliver Twist, retold by Lesley Baxter, ill. Christian Birmingham, Collins, 0 00 198192 7, £14.99

The Water Babies, retold by Josephine Poole, ill. Jan Ormerod, Macdonald, 0 7500 1756 2, £12.99

Elaine Moss, teacher and primary school librarian now retired, was for 10 years the selector of **Children's Books of the Year**.

Death is no longer a taboo subject in our society. New social forces – the AIDS epidemic, violent crime, the growth of the hospice movement, controversies about euthanasia and assisted suicide – have helped us to move beyond the denial of death and explore its psychological, philosophical and social aspects. But too often, children remain the forgotten mourners, excluded from the grieving process. Adults may shield children from death because they do not know how to deal with their sadness and grief. Can children's books help? Margaret Rustin discusses recent picture books about death.

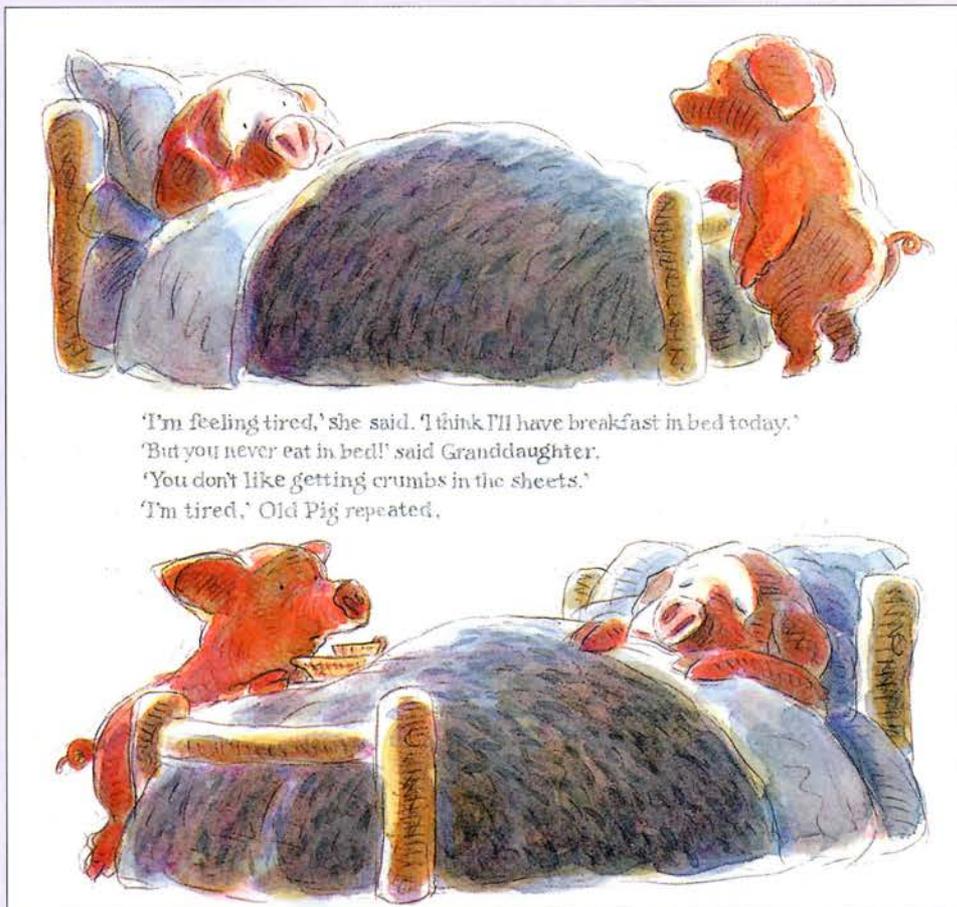
Old Pig, Goodbye Pappa, Drop Dead and Cloudland are recently published picture books which explore ways of thinking about aging, the loss of beloved grandparents and the nature of the anxieties aroused when the reality of death is encountered.

The Death of Grandparents

Two of these titles are explicitly concerned with the death of grandparents. They differ in interesting ways. Margaret Wild and Ron Brooks' *Old Pig* lives with her granddaughter. The peaceful rhythm of their lives is interrupted as Old Pig realizes that she is close to death. 'I'm tired' she says. This is a picture of a peaceful death, as Old Pig prepares to depart, handing over the responsibilities to her granddaughter and saying a tender farewell to all she has loved. The tone is gentle and elegiac. Granddaughter's anxious foreboding and sadness is shared with Old Pig as they live the last days together. There is gentle observation of Granddaughter taking on Old Pig's maternal role as she encourages Old Pig to eat and cares for the house: we can see that though Granddaughter loves to be with Old Pig, she has the resources to care for herself. The last shared walk through the village creates a picture of the natural world's continuity in the face of death – Granddaughter feels that the birds are joining her in mourning.

This very gentle treatment, brightened by the soft warmth of the illustrations, conveys the loneliness of a child facing a family death for the first time. The absence

Making Senses

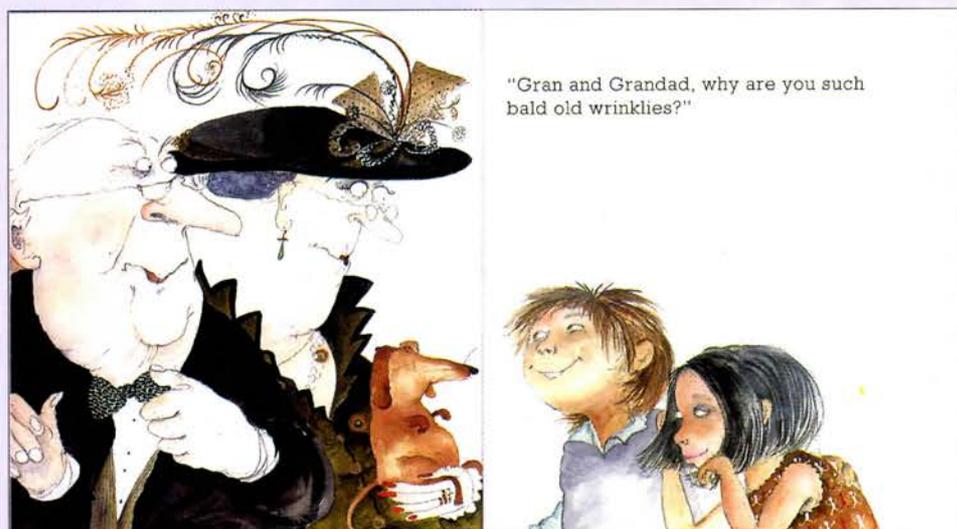


'I'm feeling tired,' she said. 'I think I'll have breakfast in bed today.'
 'But you never eat in bed!' said Granddaughter.
 'You don't like getting crumbs in the sheets.'
 'I'm tired,' Old Pig repeated.

Illustration by Ron Brooks from *Old Pig*.

of an intervening parental generation is a striking device for highlighting the aloneness of emotional experiences which a child may feel others are distant from, or perhaps too close to have anything to spare. Parents preoccupied with their own loss may indeed be unavailable to share a child's mourning of a grandparent. In the tender and idealized pastoral world of *Old Pig*, not many words are required, but emotional reality is shared.

Una Leavy and Jennifer Eachus' *Goodbye Pappa* also explores the death of a grandparent but in a more restricted way. More nostalgic and more literal, it depicts a beloved grandfather's relationship to his grandsons, grandfather's death and funeral and the family's distress. Grandfather is to be remembered for all the happy times shared, advises Mother. This is made too easy, since only delightful moments of companionship have been depicted. The



"Gran and Grandad, why are you such bald old wrinklies?"

Illustration by Babette Cole from *Drop Dead*.

e of Death

children's awareness of their father's tears catches an important note, as the death of a grandparent can provide a strange realization for a child of their parents' vulnerability to emotional pain. But this book does not offer any taste of the turbulent feelings evoked by loss – it is much too sweet, and the soft pastels of the illustrations emphasize this unreality.

☞ Dropping Dead?

A very different tone is adopted in Babette Cole's *Drop Dead*. Here are two cheeky children in conversation with grandparents who are 'bald, old wrinklies'. The old couple tell the riotous story of their lives, full of mischief and fun. As babies they made poo-bombs, as children they ran away, showed off. As teenagers they smoked under the bedclothes, agonized over disapproving parents and finally found each other and excitement as stuntman and film star, respectively. The grandparents of a small child's dream indeed! Picaresque jokes abound: when they became parents they resorted to a ring of fire to put their son to bed. The declining powers of the elderly are gently mocked by the grandparent narrators, whose spirit of adventure still persists. Death is reduced to just dropping dead, and being comically recycled. No fears or sadness are allowed in this vision. While this book catches the ordinariness and inevitability of old age and death, its joking tone might well offend a child for whom these realities are painful.

☞ Mastering Primitive Terrors

John Burningham's *Cloudland* addresses a different theme – a child's fall from a mountain, which could result in death (here it is the parents who are the mourners), is imagined as leading to entry into 'Cloudland', a land of children playing at cloud-jumping, making thunder-music, swimming in the rain and so on. The boy hero one day encounters a plane and begins to miss his home on earth. The Queen and the Man in the Moon, the replacement parents in this child-heaven, arrange for the clouds to drift to a place above his home, and he wakes up in bed – a child waking from a bad dream, or a near-death experience. *Cloudland* embodies an attempt to master primitive terrors; the boy's fall is revisioned as cloud-jumping, the storm as made by the children. There is omnipotence here (the belief that wishing something can make it happen) but in the service of survival, not denial.

One can imagine that these books might be seized on by parents or teachers wanting a child to be helped to understand the profound fact of death. Certainly *Old Pig* could give comfort to a bereaved parent and child reading it together, as it is full of love but not sentimental. Finding the right

tone is no easy task – manic flights of fantasy (as in *Drop Dead*) and the thinness of idealization (as in *Goodbye Pappa*) are poor consolation in the end.

☞ Respecting the Child's Needs

But there is also a question about whether stories offered to children for their message can ever be quite right. Somehow the child has to 'find' the story at the moment at which it can be meaningful, and this may not be the same moment as that intended by the adult who is trying to help. A library or classroom in which such books can be around, maybe read as part of a wide range of titles, provides a less over-determined space, and this might be more respectful of an individual child's needs.

Tackling emotionally complex matters truthfully in books for young children is much to be welcomed, but too didactic a use may be intrusive and over-exposing, particularly in a group situation. The rituals of mourning protect and organize matters for adults, to some degree at least. Delicacy and respect are needed just as much by children. Coming to grips with the reality of our own mortality is after all a life-long task. Such understanding is only gradually achieved.

☞ Children Can Understand Death

While young children have limited capacities to comprehend the final separation which death brings, they struggle all the time with smaller separations which are often unconsciously perceived as total, irretrievable loss. Our impulse to protect them from the facts is misplaced – it only engenders confusion and loneliness. John Burningham's *Albert (Cloudland)* who almost falls to his death is in fact articulating a very widespread, unconscious representation of death – of falling into space. The child who lands on a cloud-cradle is the antithesis of this; the fall is safely broken by a vision of softness. In our dreams and imaginative lives such fundamental facts of dependence, vulnerability and mortality are present, and this is why the idea that children cannot understand death is wrong. Of course each child will understand it in his/her own way, and the understanding will be continually revised. Adults, too, have profoundly different ideas about death and what follows it, as the variety of religious beliefs testifies.

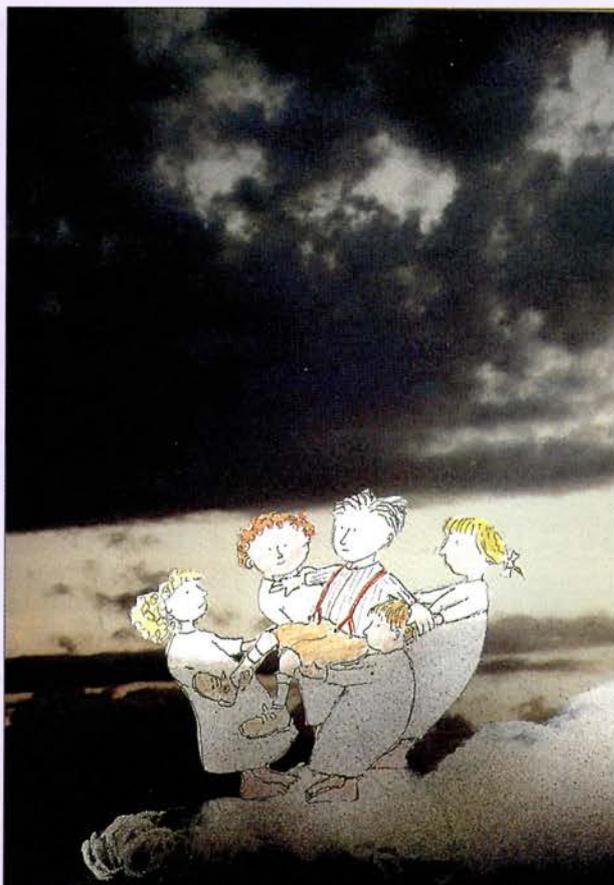


Illustration by John Burningham from *Cloudland*.

Children's books on these matters perhaps have the function of putting things in the public realm, of giving permission for a child's preoccupations to be explored. They can also be a support for grown ups who are shy or doubt their capacity to communicate about difficult aspects of living. The child reader is encouraged through identification with the characters in the story to develop his or her own capacity to think about loss and death, both consciously and unconsciously. Enriching children's emotional range through books which touch on all kinds of emotional complexity is an important contribution to the development of their minds and characters, and the sharing of the reading experience inherent in books for very young children embeds this in their important early relationships with parents and others.

How one envies today's children many of the books now written for them! Luckily there is always the chance to be the adult reader who introduces them to these delights, and thus to be part of this splendid aspect of modern childhood. ■

Books discussed

Old Pig by Margaret Wild, ill. Ron Brooks, Viking, 0 670 86706 3, £10.99 hbk

Goodbye Pappa by Una Leavy, ill. Jennifer Eachus, Orchard, 1 85213 713 4, £9.99 hbk

Drop Dead by Babette Cole, Cape, 0 224 04551 2, £9.99 hbk

Cloudland by John Burningham, Cape, 0 224 04581 4, £9.99 hbk

Margaret Rustin works as a child psychotherapist at the Tavistock Clinic in London. She is the co-author with Michael Rustin of *Narratives of Love and Loss: Studies in Modern Children's Fiction*.

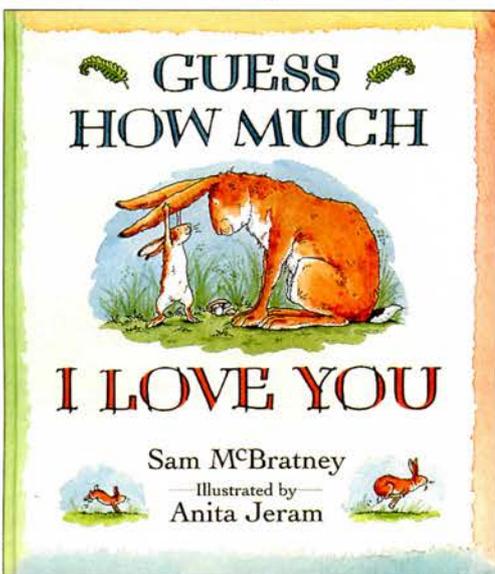
To find out more about the selling side of children's book publishing, I spoke to Fiona MacDonald who is the Export and Library Sales Manager at Walker Books.

The route to carrying the big bag of samples

'I did a general librarianship course at Birmingham Polytechnic (now the University of Central England), but once I got my degree I decided I didn't want to get a job in a library, but wanted to get a job in sales. I had several friends who were sales reps, and I started off selling health food products,' says Fiona. After four years in the health food industry, Fiona wanted a change to selling books. In 1989 she saw an advertisement for sales staff at Walker Books. They were setting up their own sales force after having been distributed by other companies since their inception, so it was very exciting to be in at the beginning of a new sales team. 'I got the job because I had both a library background and sales experience,' says Fiona.

Getting to know Walker

'We had a brilliant induction week as a new sales team. Only one of us had been a book trade rep before, and the others were from bookshops, stationery companies and other sales backgrounds. We talked to every department in the company and I knew I'd joined a great company when I found a copy of the soon-to-be-published *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* in my hotel room, signed with a welcome message from both Sebastian Walker and Helen Oxenbury.'



Sam McBratney and Anita Jeram's *Guess How Much I Love You* – 'a phenomenal seller, appealing across a wide audience'.

Getting to know the book business

'I lived in Birmingham, which was the centre of my patch covering the Midlands and the North of England. I regularly clocked up 40,000 miles driving a year, and had to stay away from home at least one night a week. Within my territory I managed all the accounts, whether they were branches of Dillons and Waterstones or small independent booksellers, but also major customers in the area like Peters, Askews and Holt Jackson library suppliers. Later on I took over selling to the other key library suppliers – Morley Books, Woodfield & Stanley, JMLS and Books for Students – as well as covering all the shops on my territory.' Her library training certainly came in useful, says Fiona, as she understood the workings of her customers. As Walker is a specialist children's publisher, Fiona targeted just the children's buyers in each of the accounts, but it was nevertheless a huge task. 'The trade knew and liked Walker, so I was always welcomed warmly,' remembers Fiona. Walker had just begun to produce paperback versions of their own books, and at the start a separate sales team handled those, but that did not last long and Fiona was soon selling paperbacks alongside the hardbacks.

Moving up the career ladder

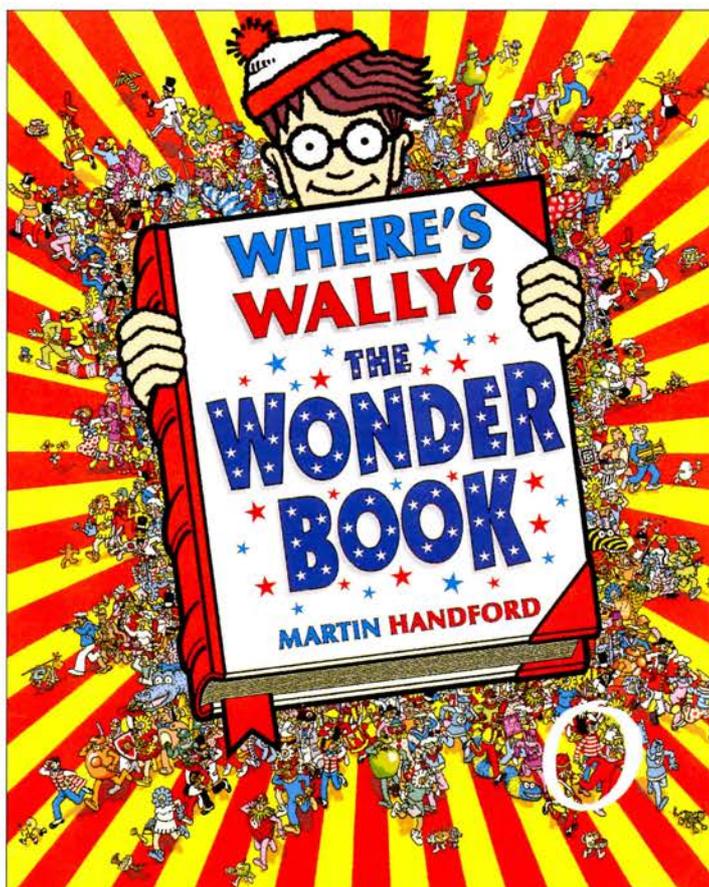
After three years in that job, Fiona was ready for a change. 'It was very hard, lugging big cases around and being on the road non-stop,' she says. Moving house to Bath coincided with the job of Export Sales Manager becoming vacant, so Fiona added export territories to her portfolio of library suppliers, but dropped the regular bookshops. Export means selling Walker's English language books into overseas markets, which are principally Australia and New Zealand (now managed from Sydney), but also South Africa, Singapore and Japan, each of which Fiona visits once a

Publishing Profiles No.4: The Sales Manager

Once the author, illustrator, editor, designer and production manager have done their bit and the book is produced – how is it sold?

Liz Attenborough investigates.

year, to liaise directly with Walker's agents there, and visit bookshops and check on the market for herself. (In addition to the Australian office, Walker have a company in America under the name of Candlewick.) Fiona also visits the English language bookshops in Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam twice a year, and supervises the sales to international schools overseas through a distributor, Baker Books. She does all this by living in London during the week and going home at weekends to her house in a village outside Bath, near the M4. Fiona seems unbothered by all the travelling about, and any physical tiredness seems unlikely to dampen her undoubted enthusiasm for the books that she is selling.



Where's Wally? The Wonder Book, to be published by Walker Books in August 1997.



Fiona MacDonald at Walker Books

Communication between customer and office

I asked Fiona whether all that contact with her customers sometimes meant she might have split loyalties. Did she sometimes side with her customers more than her employers? But she was having none of it, and looked puzzled by the question. 'I have very close links with our customers, who put forward ideas and opinions, and we have always been encouraged to get that feedback to the editors and designers. We all want to get it right, and sales have a voice early on in the production process by such things as the Sales Director, Henryk Wesolowski, being a voice at the cover meetings. There was a great deal of two-way communication before the non-fiction list was launched last year, and I take many rough covers to the library suppliers to get their views.' Fiona also takes editors to library selection meetings, which she thinks is an invaluable learning experience. 'And every month all the sales team write reports on their customers' reactions, and those reports have a wide circulation internally so that action can be taken.'

The sales team

Under Sales Director Henryk Wesolowski, and alongside Fiona, there is a UK Sales Manager who manages the UK area sales team members, a



From Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury's *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, Walker's welcome present to their new rep.

Manager in charge of home and school book clubs and sales to Sainsburys, a Marketing Manager, and a Foreign Rights Director who sells the rights in Walker Books to foreign language publishers all over the world. 'We have sales conferences twice a year when Editors present their new titles and Marketing present the accompanying promotions, but there are interim sales meetings just for UK sales, where we discuss sales targets for new titles, about four times a year.' Fiona reckons to spend about a third of her time out of the office visiting customers at home and abroad, but with telecommunications as they are these days she can be in touch with anyone by car phone or fax from wherever she is.

Nuts and bolts

How does the selling process work? Fiona hears about new titles as soon as they are signed up by the company, and may talk to her customers about big projects anything up to a year in advance. She formally presents the titles three months ahead of publication, by showing proofs, dummies or advance copies, and takes her orders then. For her export customers, whom she only sees once a year, she will present a whole year's books in one go, using colour photocopies of artwork, and copies of the text. 'Customers will sometimes have heard about forthcoming books from our catalogue and things like the Spring and Autumn Bookseller and other mentions in the trade press, and with a new 'Wally' title coming, *Where's Wally, The Wonder Book*, it has been hard to keep the excitement to ourselves.'

Authors and Illustrators

Asked to name favourite authors and illustrators, Fiona does not know where to start or stop. 'I started at Walker just when 'Wally' was beginning, and although we hoped for big things we had no idea of the success that was to come all over the world. And nobody could have dreamt that *Guess How Much I Love You?* ('My favourite six words,' says Henryk) would be such a phenomenal seller, appealing across such a wide audience. The sales around Valentine's Day were extraordinary, with adults giving the book as presents to adults.' Fiona waxes lyrical about the close bond everyone at Walker has with their glittering array of illustrators such as Helen Oxenbury, Jill Murphy, Lucy Cousins and Colin McNaughton, but is clearly as excited about newcomers' work as she is about the tried and tested. 'We are encouraged to meet them in the office, but we also meet at parties, signings and events like the Bath Festival. It's always useful to know something more about authors and illustrators so that you can share that information with your customers,' says Fiona. 'In particular we obviously specially get to know about the authors and illustrators who live in our own territories.'

Current excitements

'Non-fiction is our big investment right now, and it's targeted to grow over the coming years, but we've also been re-using the backlist in things like bookcharts and cards. We've done some merchandise ourselves, but license most of it, so it's exciting to be diversifying when the opportunity presents itself. Our biggest range of merchandise is for Lucy Cousins's *Maisie*. The sales team has an important role to play in early discussions of such things. The company just continues to grow and grow.'

The future

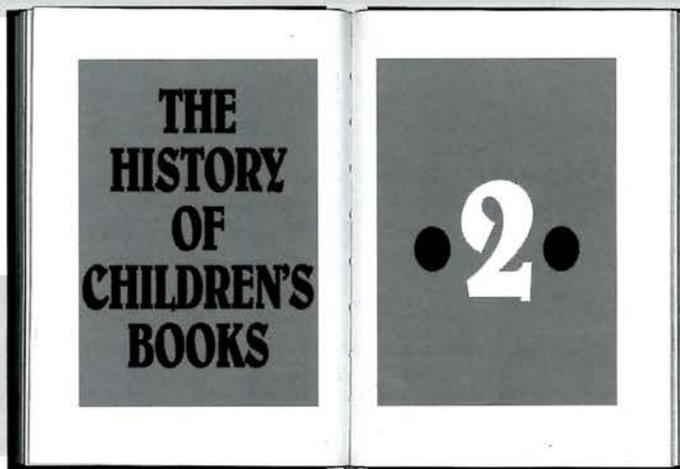
How does Fiona see her role developing in the future? 'Every year the library budgets seem to be cut, and the abandonment of the Net Book Agreement has had a major effect on library buying. The suppliers used to compete on service, but now they have to compete on discounts as well, which is putting a lot of pressure on them. Personally I am looking forward to developing sales in South Africa – another very tough market, particularly as their weak currency makes all imported books very expensive, but also because reading books are not a priority for the government in the same way as text books. And I shall be exploring markets in the Middle East.'

The job itself

Is she glad she married her library training with her selling experience and joined Walker? 'I absolutely love the publishing business. I still get a terrific buzz from seeing the new books, and from finding new customers. And I get the biggest buzz from getting in a really good order!' ■

Liz Attenborough was formerly Children's Publisher at Penguin Books. She now works as a children's book consultant.

Publishing Profiles No. 5
will go behind the scenes in the Rights Department.



From Morals to Magic

After the death of bookseller and publisher John Newbery, whose books for 'little masters and misses' intended for both 'instruction and amusement' were significant in the beginnings of a modern children's literature, a new school of thought that held that children's leisure reading should be used to absorb knowledge and improve their nature was to gain ascendancy. John Rowe Townsend explains.

By the end of the eighteenth century, books for children had arrived and were selling in large numbers. They look primitive to modern eyes, but children loved them and read them to bits, which is why the copies that are still around are rare and valuable. The writer Leigh Hunt was one of many who testified to their popularity. He described in adult life how he and his friends had delighted in 'the little penny books, rich with bad pictures' that came from Newbery's in St Paul's Churchyard. 'We preferred the uncouth coats, the staring blotted eyes and round pieces of rope for hats of our very badly drawn contemporaries to all the proprieties of modern embellishment.'

A 'Monstrous Regiment of Women'

John Newbery undoubtedly meant his little books to be edifying, but cheerfulness kept breaking in. The output of his successors and their contemporaries was increasingly dreary and didactic. Writing stories for children became an occupation for well-meaning ladies who have been described as a 'monstrous regiment of women'. That was an uncalled-for sneer; the people concerned had some talent and not much chance to use it. They produced what was required, and no doubt were glad to earn an honest guinea. But there is no denying that their stories were tame. Often they had very little scope; a publisher might send them a bag of old used woodcuts with instructions to write a story round them.

There was more vitality at the bottom end of the market. Chapbooks, typically priced at a penny, featured old romances, cut-down versions of popular novels such as *Robinson Crusoe* and Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, and contemporary material that might be sensational or scandalous. As in days of old, most of this was not actually aimed at children but reached them just the same. But it was not what conscientious middle-class parents wanted. They wanted their children's reading to teach them something.



Don't aim a gun at your sister: an illustration from 'a tale addressed to children warning them against wanton, careless or mischievous exposure to situations from which alarming injuries so often proceed' by James Parkinson (1808).

Obedient Children

In the eighteenth and well into the nineteenth centuries, children were expected, above all else, to be obedient. The Fifth Commandment – honour thy father and thy mother – stood first in the line. Good children in fiction did as they were told and were suitably rewarded. Naughty children disobeyed, and were punished for their own good, to save them from coming to a bad end. Though the hellfire threatened by the Puritans of earlier years had receded somewhat, it still glowed ominously in the background.

But not everyone believed that children must be beaten into obedience. They could be reasoned with and convinced that good behaviour paid off. In Sarah Trimmer's well known *History of the Robins* (1786), a little boy's mama says to him:

Remember, my dear, that you depend as much on your papa and me for everything you want as these little birds do on you; nay, more so, for they could find food in other places, but children can do nothing towards their own support; they should therefore be dutiful and respectful to those whose tenderness and care they constantly experience.

Sensible children understood on which side their bread was buttered.

There was growing emphasis on rational and prudent behaviour. In Maria Edgeworth's famous story of *The Purple Jar*, first published in 1796, a little girl wants the pretty jar in the chemist's window in preference to shoes. Mother lets her have the jar, and before long her shoes are in such a state that she can 'neither run, dance, jump nor walk in them'. That teaches her a lesson.

The missing ingredient from children's books of the day was imagination, which had long stood at a discount. The old fairy tales were in deep disfavour, regarded as peasant crudities and, moreover, contrary to reason. 'People stuff Children's Heads with Stories of Ghosts, Fairies, Witches and such Nonsense when they are young, and so they continue Fools all their Days,' complained the author of *Goody Two-Shoes*. The classic fairy stories of Charles Perrault had been translated from the French early in the eighteenth century, but even these were seen by many as unfit for children. 'Cinderella,' wrote a contributor to Mrs Trimmer's *Guardian of Education*, 'paints some of the worst passions that can enter into the human breast, and of which little children should if possible be wholly ignorant, such as envy, jealousy, a dislike to mothers-in-law and half-sisters, vanity, a love of dress, etc, etc.'



The elves and the shoemaker: engraving by George Cruikshank from the 1823 edition of *Grimm's Fairy Tales*.

Time for Change

Once again it was time for change. Early in the nineteenth century, the Romantic movement was refreshing the cultural atmosphere. Imagination was rehabilitated. Poets turned away from rhymed couplets to new and varied verse forms; classical architecture lost ground to Gothic. The old tales, so long under a cloud, emerged at last into favour, and collections of fairy stories considered suitable for children were made. A landmark was the translation into English in the 1820s of Grimm's *Fairy Tales*. In America Washington Irving retold the old tales of *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. The *Arabian Nights* came to England in a form found suitable for children in 1838-40. Felix Summerly's *Home Treasury*, a famous series of attractively-produced books designed to 'cultivate the affections, fancy, imagination and taste of children', with strong emphasis on the fairy tales, appeared at intervals through the 1840s and was hugely influential. In 1851 John Ruskin wrote his splendid *The King of the Golden River*.



The Cook and the Barber: drawings by W M Thackeray for his own book, *The Rose and the Ring* (1855).

In this freer atmosphere, imagination began to infiltrate fiction specially intended for the young, and the way was open for a longer form, fantasy. In 1844 Francis Paget produced his exuberant *The Hope of the Katzekopfs*, an extended modern fairy-tale based on traditional ingredients. Paget complained in his preface of 'the unbelief of this dull, plodding, unimaginative, money-getting, money-loving nineteenth century'. And in 1855 came the novelist W M Thackeray's 'fireside pantomime', *The Rose and the Ring*, set in the imaginary countries of Paflagonia and Crim Tartary.

But the view that stories should be doing children good remained strong. Felix Summerly had introduced morality even into such stories as that of Jack and the Beanstalk, which might seem notably lacking in it; and Charles Dickens, riding to the defence of the old tales in 1853, found it necessary to credit fairy tales with an impressive variety of moral virtues: encouraging 'forbearance, courtesy, consideration for the poor and aged, kindness to animals, the love of nature, abhorrence of tyranny and brute force'.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

The works with which fantasy took flight were of course Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, published in 1865 and 1871 respectively. Many maintain that these are still the greatest books for children yet written. Whether this is so or not, they are certainly the best known. I hear frequently of children who do not take to them, and there is no point in applying pressure, but sooner or later everyone needs to read them. There are great pleasures (some of which may be more accessible to adults than to children) in the play with words and ideas, the ingenuity and inventiveness, and the brilliant verse parodies; and at the very lowest estimate it is useful to have read the books, if only to recognise the quotations that still come thick and fast in contemporary speech and writing.

So much has been written, from so many angles, about the personal idiosyncrasies of the Reverend Charles Dodgson, about his relationships with Alice Liddell and other child friends, about the possible interpretations and decodings of the *Alice* books, that it seems superfluous to add to the pile of commentary. It may be worthwhile however to point out their subversiveness. In an age when children were thought of as receptacles for moral instruction, Carroll contrived to make it extremely difficult to extract

morals from his work. And there is a wonderful putting-down of the adult world. Grown-up humans have no part to play in the *Alice* books, but the creatures who make up the rich casts of characters are mostly caricatures of adults and adult attitudes. Alice herself is the one rational being. 'You're nothing but a pack of cards!' she tells the King, the courtiers, and the crazy law court at the end of *Wonderland*; and surely she speaks as the wise child in a world of grown-up absurdity.



Alice in the Dent Illustrated Classics edition: a redrawing in colour by Diana Stanley from the original engraving by John Tenniel.

The *Alice* books had broken free of didacticism, but this did not mean that fantasy would never again have anything to do with it. The two best known of the other major Victorian fantasies were value-laden and much engaged with morality. Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* (1863) is a great sprawling mass of story and exhortation, with some good things in it. The opening chapters, full of social urgency, which tell of the wretched working life of Tom the little chimney-sweep, and the following ones which tell how he swims down-river and becomes a water-baby, are excellent in their different ways; but the story loses shape and direction and becomes unreadable. Cut-down versions have been produced in recent times, but the truth is that *The Water Babies* is now not much more than a well known title.

George MacDonald's *At the Back of the North Wind*, published in 1871, also arises out of social concern: a child in working-class London escapes to a dream world which represents a higher reality. More popular than *North Wind*, and still highly readable, is *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872), in which the castle in which Princess Irene lives is threatened by goblins who tunnel beneath it: it is a story rich in symbolism and allegory, and also in action. *The Princess and Curdie*, in 1883, was a rather dark sequel.

Children's literature by now was branching out in many directions. ■



Diamond finds a nest in the *North Wind's* hair – an illustration by Arthur Hughes from *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871).

John Rowe Townsend has been writing, and writing about, books for children and young people for many years. Three of his books – *Gumble's Yard*, *The Intruder* and *Noah's Castle* – have been serialised on television. His history of English-language children's literature, *Written for Children*, published by The Bodley Head at £9.99, is in its sixth and, he says, final edition.

In the next article in this series, John Rowe Townsend traces the various streams of children's books through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Authorgraph No.105

ENID BLYTON

Although Enid Blyton died in 1968, she has returned briefly to earth on the centenary of her birth for this interview by Nicholas Tucker.

NT: I have always marvelled at how you managed to do so much. Not just over 600 novels and weekly editions of *Sunny Stories*, written entirely by yourself, but also the answers in longhand to your readers' letters, sometimes 100 a day. There were too the various clubs you ran, such as The Sunbeam Club, for raising money for blind children, and The Busy Bee Club, the children's division of the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals. On top of all that, there were afternoon games of bridge throughout the week, pre-war cocktail parties, golf, tennis and on most days an hour given over to your own children once they were past the baby stage. You also sewed beautifully, painted, sometimes entertained readers at home and made numbers of school and library visits.

EB: I have always been supremely well organised and also know exactly what I want. I found it easy to compartmentalise my life: writing in the morning, other things later. I also had quite a sizeable domestic staff – gardener, cook, chauffeur, parlour maid and cleaning lady.

NT: But no secretary or literary agent?

EB: I preferred to do all my own business arrangements myself. I had a phenomenal memory, and acted as my own filing cabinet.

NT: But that didn't always work. There was the under-paid Income Tax accumulating over seven years up to 1949, which with the heavy fines incurred briefly threatened to bankrupt you. Elsewhere, critics have pointed out numbers of careless mistakes in your stories – names that alter from page to page, for example, that perhaps a secretary would have spotted.

EB: The tax matter was the result of a misunderstanding. As for the odd slips, these are inevitable when you write as much as I did. I used to pay my daughter Gillian and her friend a penny for each mistake they spotted on the typescript. But if a few got through, what does it matter? Conan Doyle was also sometimes careless in the Sherlock Holmes stories, but everyone always seemed more than satisfied with what they got. When I mistakenly described Syria as a jungle country inhabited by natives wearing loin-cloths in *River of Adventure*, no readers complained. They were all enjoying the story too much.

NT: So what *does* make you so popular with children?

EB: I am a trained teacher; I know how to address children. All the critical fuss about my so-called 'repetitive' use of language



misses the point. Children like repetition! If I put the same word five times on a page, young readers positively relish its growing familiarity. It's the same with my plots. In 16 of my 21 books in the Famous Five series, caves, cellars and tunnels come into play, either under earth or sea. Children soon come to know what to expect; they also know on past form that the Five stuck there will eventually get back to the surface. This is the security children need; much-loved fairy stories often have repetitive plots too. If I continually created new situations in new language, my fans wouldn't know where they were. They like playing the same game again and again; why shouldn't they enjoy reading the same type of stories, especially ones that contain so much action and exciting incident?

NT: But there have been objections to the repetitive, prejudiced depiction of your villains. You often pick on blackness as a warning sign of something dangerous. Or else you concentrate on some physical abnormality: characters with only one arm or one eye, a spotty face, a long nose, or even the 'queer, dwarf-like fellow, with a hunched back that seemed to force his head on one side', up to no good in *Five Get into Trouble*, and nick-named 'Hunchy'.

EB: Oh, fiddlesticks! I *do* have a number of pleasing black characters too. As for the

disabled, remember The Enid Blyton Magazine Club I founded in order to raise money for spastic children, long before they had become a fashionable cause. Besides, someone has to take on the villain's role, and I am not the only one to make bad people look bad too, or at least a bit different. Dickens did the same; think of the dwarfish Quilp in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, or Mr Squeers in *Nicholas Nickleby* whose 'appearance was not prepossessing. He had but one eye, and the popular prejudice runs in favour of two.'

NT: But you are writing for a much younger audience; surely it's important not to encourage cruel prejudice at this early age? Look too at the way you often associate working class characters with a bad smell, as in this passage from *Five Fall into Adventure*: 'Two people came slowly along the beach ... A boy and a man – and what a ragamuffin the boy looked! He wore torn dirty shorts and a filthy jersey ... The man looked even worse. He slouched as he came, and dragged one foot. He had a straggly moustache and mean, clever little eyes that raked the beach up and down ... "What a pair!" said Dick to Julian. "I hope they don't come near us. I feel as if I can smell them from here!"'

EB: But these were *bad* characters. I have plenty of honest, humble folk in my stories who never smell of anything. Not washing is horrible, whoever is guilty. My books have always set firm standards of decency, and I make no apology for this.

NT: Going back to the way you compartmentalised your life, would you say the same thing happened in your books? For example, you wrote over 50 religious books advocating among other things the importance of prayer. Yet the children in your adventure stories never pray, never go to church, and never mention religion. Your many nature books are detailed and knowledgeable, as befits a writer who also wrote the entry on British fauna for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. But in the adventure stories, the world of nature comes over as only the vaguest of backdrops to whatever else is going on.

EB: You clearly don't understand the way I wrote my adventure books. As I have described elsewhere, I sit down at my typewriter and the stories happen in front of my eyes. I simply write down what I see and hear. If the child characters who come alive this way also talked about religion or nature, I would put both topics in, but they don't. And I'm glad! My readers want adventure, and they get it. I don't make them wade through passages given over to education or moralising as other authors sometimes do.



This would be too much like those dreary sin- and death-obsessed Victorian children's books I detested when I was a child.

NT: Do you actually like children? I ask because your youngest daughter Imogen has described her own childhood as a distinctly unloved time in her life.

EB: Of course I like children! But as an older friend, rather than as an over-indulgent, doting adult. I regard my readers rather as I did my fellow-pupils at school when I was head girl for two years, as well as tennis champion and captain of lacrosse. They are there to be entertained and encouraged, but they also need to follow a good example and learn to be proud to be British. One reason I rarely feature mothers in my books is because too much love and care can weigh down an adventure story, just as it can weigh down a person in real life. That's why we hardly hear anything about Julian, Dick and Anne's mother in the Famous Five stories. She barely has a name, let alone any personality. The children are much better

off away from her, standing on their own feet and fighting their own battles.

NT: Could this maternal absence in your fiction also be because you preferred being an eternal head girl to being a mother yourself and writing about that experience? There are no babies in your adventure stories. Arthur Ransome has the children's mother constantly returning to look after her infant in *Swallows and Amazons*, but your mothers – when they exist – merely seem to cook or play bridge.

EB: What nonsense! Who wants a baby in a children's adventure story anyway – they would be nothing but a nuisance. And parents *do* feature in some of my books. In *Six Cousins Again*, they practically divorce. So much for my claimed 'escapism'!

NT: One of your critics, Robert Druce, in his study *This Day Our Daily Fictions* suggests there is some 'phallic imagery' in your Little Noddy Stories, what with monkeys' tails misbehaving and Noddy squirting his neighbour with a garden hose

or pulling off a Goblin's nose.

EB: How dare you! This interview is at an end. ■

A (small) selection of series by Enid Blyton (see also advertisements on pages 22 and 27.)

<i>From BBC Books</i>	St Clare's
Noddy TV tie-ins	Mystery Series
<i>From Bloomsbury Children's Books</i>	<i>From HarperCollins Children's Books</i>
Enid Blyton Stories for 5/6/7 year olds	Noddy (non-TV)
The Adventure Series	The Barney Mystery Series
Happy Days Series	The Secret Series
<i>From Hodder Children's Books</i>	<i>From Macmillan Children's Books</i>
The Famous Five	The Adventure Series
The Secret Seven	<i>About Enid Blyton</i>
The Naughtiest Girl	Enid Blyton by Gillian Baverstock, Evans 'Tell Me About Writers' series, 0 237 51751 5, £7.99
<i>From Reed Children's Books</i>	
Malory Towers	

Nicholas Tucker is a lecturer in psychology at Sussex University.

NEWS

People

Chris Smith is the new Labour government's Secretary of State for National Heritage, an appointment widely welcomed by the book industry. The minister in Smith's department with responsibility for libraries is Mark Fisher who believes that the public library service is the 'cornerstone of the cultural welfare state'. Tom Clarke will cover heritage.

A coup for Doubleday who have acquired Anthony Browne's next picture book, *Voices in the Park* ('98 publication). Browne was previously published by Julia MacRae.

Gary McKeone has been appointed Director of Literature at the Arts Council of England. He has been with the department since 1993. His predecessor, Alastair Niven, has been appointed Head of Literature at the British Council.

Following Penguin's acquisition of Gollancz children's list, editorial director Chris Kloet has moved with it to Penguin on a six month contract. The list (authors include Dick King-Smith, Hilary McKay and Peter Dickinson) had a turnover in 1996 of £885, 500.

Martina Challis, managing director of Random House children's list, has left the company to spend more time with her family. Following her appointment last year (she was previously at Victoria House), the division is thought to have eliminated its losses in 1996 and returned a small profit.

Alec Williams, formerly of Calderdale Libraries, has been appointed Head of Children's Services at Leeds Library and Information Services.

Waterstone's children's sales development executive Michelle Birch (co-editor of *Waterstone's Guide to Children's Books*) is taking a year's sabbatical. She will not be directly replaced and there is concern from some publishers that impetus in promoting and selling children's books at Waterstone's will be lost.



Charlie Sharp has been appointed Publicity Manager at Walker Books. She was previously at Orchard.

Contributors: BfK team, Keith Barker. Submissions welcome.

SHARP

Prizes

The Children's Book Award

The overall winner of the Federation of Children's Book Groups' annual Children's Book Award is *The Hundred-Mile-an-Hour-Dog* by Jeremy Strong (Viking). This title also won the Shorter Novels category. The Picture Books category was won by *Debi Gliori's Mr Bear to the Rescue* (Orchard) and the Longer Novels category by *Ian Strachan's Which Way Home?* (Methuen). Now in its 18th year, this is the only UK award that is chosen entirely by children.

The Mother Goose Award

The Mother Goose Award (for a first major illustrated book) has been won by *Clare Jarret for Catherine and the Lion* (Collins Children's Books). Runners-up were *Richard Kidd for Almost Famous Daisy!* (Frances Lincoln), *Tiphonie Beeke for The Brand New Creature* (Levinson Books) and *Nick Maland for Welcome Night* (Cambridge University Press). The winner received a bronze goose egg and a cheque for £1,000 from award sponsor Books for Children.

Obituary

Paulo Freire
(1922-1997)

The Brazilian educator and thinker Paulo Freire who died on 2nd May was known for his inspirational approach to teaching literacy which involved working with his peasant students rather than for them. He believed that 'learning to read the word' is related to 'learning to read the world'. His seminal book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, was published in English in 1972.

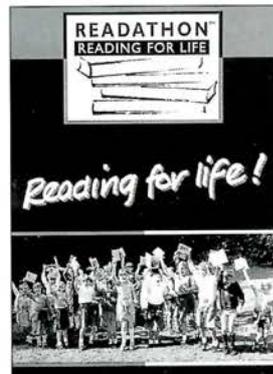
Get Published

Launched in 1996, Heinemann's *Get Published* competition invited school students to write a storybook for 5-7 year olds with a view to being published. The winners are *Hana Baig* of West Hove Junior School, Sussex and *Emily Lines* of Maharishi School, Ormskirk (7-11 year olds category) and *Andrew James* of Gosworth High School, Newcastle and *Ashok Dhillon* of Drayton Manor High School, London (12+ category). The winning mss will be professionally published and the authors will receive royalties.

Readathon Gets Children Reading

Launched in 1984, Readathon is now Britain's biggest reading event involving three quarters of a million children who read three million books between them and raise money for charity by so doing - over £1m last year which will be divided between the Roald Dahl Foundation and the Sargent Cancer Care for Children charity. The flexibility of Readathon is something that greatly appeals to schools and libraries - it can be organised as part of a book week or festival or on its own; it can take place at any time of the year; it can last as long as need be and it ensures that children read.

The idea is simple - children undertake to read books of their choice in return for pledges of money from family and friends. All the money raised is donated to charity by Readathon. 'The important thing,' says Readathon Campaign Director, Brough Girling, 'is that reading is not reduced to a chore - we encourage children to visit their school or public library, to borrow or swap with friends, try the school book fair, shop or club or reread an old favourite. They choose the books.' Readathon is now funded by the Arts Council. Details from Readathon, PO Box 89, Chipping Norton, Oxon OX7 4PR (01608 730335); in Scotland, Readathon, Book Trust Scotland, The Scottish Book Centre, 137 Dundee St., Edinburgh EH11 0BG.



Events

The Northern Children's Book Festival

will run from 3rd to 15th of November to coincide with National Libraries Week. More than 50 authors and illustrators, including Allan Ahlberg, Jacqueline Wilson, Anthony Browne and Brian Jacques will be visiting schools and libraries throughout the north-east of England. Further details from 0131 229 2186.

Pavilion bought by Collins & Brown

Pavilion, the publisher of children's titles by, amongst others, Madhur Jaffrey, Michael Morpurgo and Michael Foreman, has gone into receivership, leaving debts of over £6m. Its assets have been acquired by Collins & Brown which plans to maintain the list's editorial independence and absorb Pavilion staff. Colin Webb, one of the founders of Pavilion, is retained as managing director.

Publications

Children and Young People: Library Association Guidelines for Public Library Services

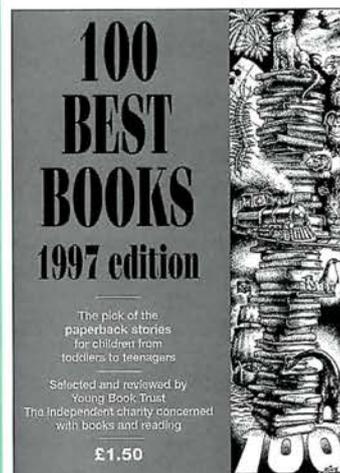
edited by Catherine Blanshard (Library Association, 1 85604 209 X, £15.95) have resulted from the 1995 report 'Investing in Children' and constitute a policy statement on the nature and quality of children's library provision.

The Core Book: A Structured Approach to Using Books within the Reading Curriculum

by Sue Ellis and Myra Barrs (CLPE, 1 872267 09 2, £11.00) relates literature to learning to read. *The Core Booklist* by Ann Lazim and Elaine Moss (CLPE, 1 872267 10, £4.50) is a companion bibliography of books that have been found to work in the classroom.

100 Best Books 1997

(0 85353 463 2, £1.50) is an annotated bibliography of picture books and fiction in paperback chosen by Young Book Trust. It is divided into age categories. From Book Trust, Book House, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ.



BfKREVIEWS

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

TITLES REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE

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Baby's Bedtime: Lullabies and Verse	★★★★ 18	Incredible Plants	★★★ 26
Bag of Bones	★★★ 24	Into the Castle	★★★★★ 19
Be Smart, Stay Safe	★★★★ 23	Irish Sagas & Folk Tales	★★★ 24
Beat the Bullies	★★★★ 23	Letters From a Mouse	★★★ 22
Becky Bananas - This is your Life!	★★★★ 25	Little Bird	★★ 19
Big Puss, Little Mouse	★★★ 23	Little Miss Muffet Counts to Ten	★★★★★ 20
Billy and the Bargleogle	★★★★ 19	Little Pig's Bouncy Ball	★ 21
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Cat That Scratched, The	★★★★★ 21	Olivia	★★★ 27
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Comfort Herself	★★★★★ 25	Red-All-Over Riddle Book, The	★★★ 25
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Cosy Moments with Teddy Bear	★★★★ 19	Small Good Wolf, The	★★★★ 21
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Dancing Through the Shadows	★★★ 25	Splish, Splash, Splosh!	★★★★★ 22
Dibby Dubby Dhu	★★ 25	Sports and Games	★★ 26
Elena the Frog	★★★★ 22	Tenderness	★★★★★ 27
Fog Hounds, Wind Cat, Sea Mice	★★★★★ 24	Toes are to Tickle	★★★★ 19
Freedom	★★★★ 27	Tomcat Takes a Walk	★★ 19
Fruits: A Caribbean counting poem	★★★★★ 20	Tudor Odours	★★★ 24
Fur	★★★★★ 20	Victorian Vapours	★★★ 24
Ghost of Able Mabel, The	★★★★ 23	We Was Robbed: Yet More Football Poems	★★★★ 23
Granny the Pag	★★★★★ 25	World is Full of Babies!, The	★★★★★ 22
Hands Off Our Hens!	★★★★ 23		

RATING

Unmissable	★★★★★
Very Good	★★★★
Good	★★★
Fair	★★
Sad	★

REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

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

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

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

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Rosemary Stones is Editor of *Books for Keeps*.

Liz Waterland is Headteacher of Brewster Avenue Infant and Nursery School, Peterborough.

REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant

Baby's Bedtime: Lullabies and Verse

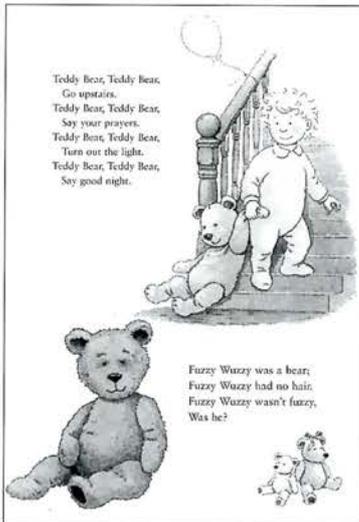
POETRY ★★★★★

Illustrated by Jonathan Langley, Collins Picture Lions, 32pp, 0 00 664637 9, £4.99 pbk

The brand new first time parent who tried this compilation of night time lullabies and verse out with her sporadic sleeper could not praise it highly enough. The soothing quality of the gentle illustrations and the well known lullabies and rhymes worked wonders on a tired and frazzled mother who enjoyed the

inclusion of old favourites from her childhood together with new verses which allowed her to establish the rhythms and make them her own. As to her baby, well, Sara absorbed the wonderful rhythms and tunes that are the fabric of our culture and ... she gained from having a mother who had been soothed and stroked

and reassured that parents and children have somehow survived sleepless nights since the dawn of our time! JS



Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear,
Go upstairs.
Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear,
Say your prayers.
Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear,
Turn out the light.
Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear,
Say good night.

Fuzzy Wuzzy was a bear;
Fuzzy Wuzzy had no hair.
Fuzzy Wuzzy wasn't fuzzy,
Was he?

Above from *Baby's Bedtime: Lullabies and Verse*; below, from *Cosy Moments with Teddy Bear*.



Cosy Moments with Teddy Bear

★★★★

Jacqueline McQuade, David Bennett, 32pp, 1 85602 254 4, £8.99 hbk

I recently visited an infants school during their OFSTED week to find a wonderful teacher in the middle of her pre-planning for a book project on teddies. I lost track counting the number of different teddy titles on classroom display, but in a congested arena McQuade's illustrations deserve special mention. The book is first and foremost a collection of quite beautiful paintings of special moments in teddy's day: in bed with cat, wrapped in a fluffy towel, watching the sunset and more besides. Rarely can an artist have so deftly evoked a living, breathing teddy – just look at the eyes!

The recto pictures are complemented by a thoughtful verso text: simple, bold words for the very young reader at the top of the page, with a slightly longer text below. My own two-year-old has demanded *Cosy Moments* every evening for a month now – and he at least shows no signs of wilting! RB

Little Bird

★★

Rod Campbell, Campbell Books, 24pp, 0 333 63340 7, £3.99 pbk novelty

Little Bird looks out from the nest and sees various other animals doing things she cannot do. At last she realises there is one thing she can do that they cannot – she can fly. The book is illustrated in Campbell's characteristic style – black line and felt pen drawings set in a lot of white space – but without any of his surprise flaps or tabs to pull until the very last page where *Little Bird* rather minimally flies out of the book.

The story certainly spoke to my three-year-old, who is finding it hard to be little at the moment, but I felt this was a poor example of a theme fairly commonly explored in picture books, and without the originality of some of Campbell's earlier work. AG

Toes are to Tickle

★★★★

Shen Roddie, ill. Kady MacDonald Denton, Frances Lincoln, 24pp, 0 7112 1110 8, £8.99 hbk

Nursery and Reception age children fell upon this book about a family's day with instant recognition and plans to make dens with blankets at home as the children in the book do.



A mirror is for making faces.

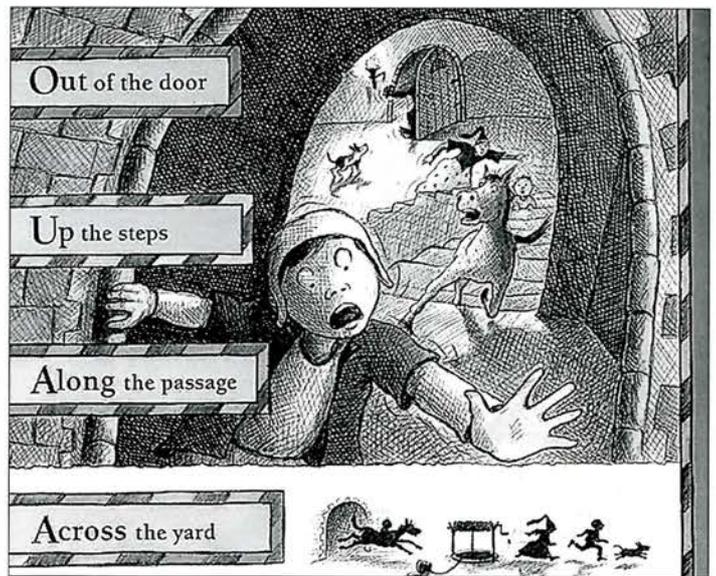
Even I can't pass a mirror (*A mirror is for making faces*) without wanting to pull faces in it! Fast paced, with image chasing image across the pages, this friendly picture book is a catalogue of the more positive sides of family life! This is a book that young children will choose to cuddle up with at home or in a class book corner. JS

An Adventure with Billy Bunny

★★★

Maurice Pledger, Golden Books, 20pp, 1 898784 74 4, £4.99 pbk novelty

Stunning pop-ups are integral to the success of this simple story with its rather conventional greetings card style illustrations. Billy, 'a bouncy baby bunny' sets off to find a butterfly. The children were mesmerised by the paper engineering and loved scanning the pictures to find the ever increasing band of friends who join Billy's hunt. The universal 'aaaahh!' that greeted the climax of the book indicates that whilst this pop-up may not be the great literature it is one of the most popular books we have had to review this time! JS



From *Into the Castle*.

Into the Castle

★★★★★

June Crebbin, ill. John Bendall-Brunello, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 5235 4, £4.99 pbk

Tension mounts as three children plus horse and dog creep across the moat, beyond the drawbridge and down into the dark, dank depths of the dungeon where once languished – or does he still? – the dreaded monster of long ago. The suspense builds slowly as the journey is made and the inevitable encounter with the monster takes place. The sense of relief after the heart-thumping dash back out of the castle and away to safety is neatly shattered by the monster's words at the final turn of the page. The perfectly controlled pacing and tension in the rhyming text are mirrored in each amusing double page illustration. Infinitely re-readable. JB

Billy and the Barglebogge

★★★★

Lindsay Camp, ill. Peter Utton, Collins Picture Lions, 32pp, 0 00 664612 3, £4.50 pbk



Bright and humorous watercolour illustrations are the perfect complement to an original and ultimately warm picture book tale about sibling jealousy disguised as sibling protection. Billy's mum brings home the new baby but another new arrival, in the form of the shadowy Barglebogge, who can't be seen by Mum or Dad, perplexes Billy. When Billy realises the Barglebogge is after the baby and that

he is the person who can protect her, he begins a series of battles with the bogeyman. Billy's assertiveness finally sees off the menace for good, enabling him to concentrate on playing with his baby sister.

A well-crafted, visually attractive and gentle book to be enjoyed on different levels by children and adults alike. The subtle techniques in the loose watercolour illustrations, outlined in soft pencil, make the book particularly appealing. Unobtrusive political correctness is observed, with 'new man' dad donning an apron to deal with a dirty nappy. AK

Tomcat Takes a Walk

★★

Pippa Unwin, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 705 3, £8.99 hbk

When Taffy goes to stay with a friend for a week, Tomcat takes the opportunity to explore his village, hitching a ride in a walker's rucksack, and stowing away in the fisherman's van one day and the post van the next. On other days he falls in the river, causes consternation at the school and rushes off with the biggest fish at the fishing competition. A gentle tale for pre-schoolers with bright picture strips that are reminiscent of Sarah Garland in their grasp of domestic detail. But what a curious National Trust shop world Unwin shows us, complete with steam engine and painted canal barges, where everyone smiles even in the rain and the supporting cast includes too many Mr and Mrs Stereotypes. The only people who look harassed (some concession to realism or just the usual caricature?) are the teachers in the village school. CB

Hey Diddle Diddle and Other Mother Goose Rhymes

POETRY ★★★★★

Shoo Rayner, Puffin, 20pp, 0 14 055574 9, £4.99 pbk

This 'lift the flap' nursery rhyme book will not last forever but its impact makes it worth the price and, what is more, worth regularly replacing! The Reception class at my school begged for it to be shared at whole school story time and with



some trepidation I tried it. It worked brilliantly – and not many books of this size work well for over 160 four- to seven-year-olds at the end of a wet Friday afternoon! Children have related to it at different levels; some just respond with delight to the novelty elements, others delve in to find the layers of visual jokes in Rayner's witty illustrations; all share the sheer fun of this book which presents well known nursery rhymes in a fresh and accessible way. JS

Fur

★★★★★

Jan Mark, ill. Charlotte Voake, 0 7445 5505 1 hbk, 0 7445 5245 1 pbk

'Quack!' said the billy-goat

★★★★★

Charles Causley, ill. Barbara Firth, 0 7445 5506 X hbk, 0 7445 5246 X pbk

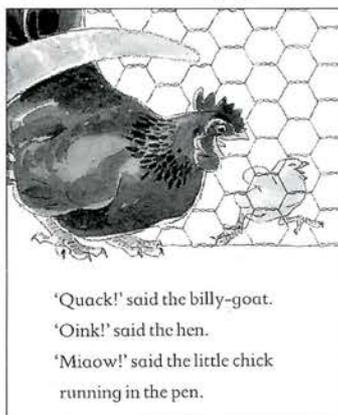
Walker, 24pp, £9.99 each hbk, £4.99 each pbk

These two popular books are now reissued in hardback as well as paperback which is welcome when I look at the well loved (euphemism for – so well read they are tatty) paperback copies that are in class libraries in the younger classes in our school. *Fur* has been a real favourite with many children over recent years. It is the story of the cat's search for the right place to curl up in. The book builds to the charming climax with the arrival of kittens – more fun! Mark's text, told in six short sentences in a large typeface, uses language inimitably and is complemented by Voake's gentle ink and wash illustrations.

'Quack!' said the billy-goat is an



Above, from *Fur*; below, from 'Quack!' said the billy-goat.



'Quack!' said the billy-goat.
'Oink!' said the hen.
'Miaow!' said the little chick running in the pen.

amusing picture book which has a zany nonsense poem as its text in which a farmyard is turned upside down. Firth's exuberant illustrations provide us with a 'book that zings' as one of the Reception class reviewers insisted. JS

Billy and the Big New School

★★★★★

Catherine and Laurence Anholt, Orchard, 32pp, 1 86039 207 5, £9.99 hbk



All that Sunday the sparrow lay in the box and watched Billy with a big round eye.

Billy is about to go to school for the first time and he is full of fears. In the garden he finds a sparrow fledgling which is also finding it difficult to leave the nest. The empathy between Billy and the bird is used to good effect as the bird learns to fend for itself and Billy discovers that he likes school after all, despite his forebodings.

This warm and reassuring story will help young children and help parents to talk through their child's worries about 'big school'. It is simply written and has pleasant, soft illustrations which make it a good complement to the more robust style of books like the Ahlbergs' *Starting School*. It is suitable for toddlers going to playgroup or nursery, as well as those starting school. LW

In the Rain with Baby Duck

★★★★

Amy Hest, ill. Jill Barton, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 5234 6, £5.99 pbk

This straightforward and rather quirky picture book about a family walk to Grandpa's house with a baby duck who dislikes the rain is set within double page panoramas of big, bold and luminous pictures. The print is large and vivid, and the text, though simple, has rhythms within it which mimic a rainy trudge, with delightful use of verse and onomatopoeia. This would be a popular book for a read-aloud, with plenty of opportunities for joining in with the nimbly written play of words. GH

Little Miss Muffet Counts to Ten

★★★★★

Emma Chichester Clark, Andersen, 32pp, 0 86264 747 9, £8.99 hbk

A numerical variation of the well known rhyme: Little Miss Muffet sits on her tuffet as usual, but 'along came one spider /Who sat down beside her, /And said to Miss Muffet, /"Please stay!"' So she stays, to be joined by two lemurs, three magpies, etc., all bearing streamers and food. The ten crocodiles who arrive last scatter the assembled crowd and give Miss Muffet a fright – 'Were they taking her back /In a box as a snack?' – but they've only come to complete the turnout at her surprise birthday party.



Good fun, charmingly illustrated (even if the lemurs don't seem quite right!) and a welcome variation on the number book theme. AG

My Little Supermarket

★★★★★

Caroline Repchuk, ill. Claire Henley, Templar Publishing, 18pp, 1 898784 12 4, £7.99 hbk novelty

This is less of a book than a binder of very jolly infant maths workcards. The idea is interactive to the point of exhaustion as Teddy goes shopping with push-out card coins and groceries. The book is ingenious, with a folded paper purse, till and trolley, slits to put the cut-out food in so that teddy can buy it and put it in the trolley and instructions in rhyming couplets for the child and adult to follow as they help with the shopping and count out the coins. This would be fun for a child working one to one with an adult – perhaps from about four to six years old. Younger than that and the structure and sums are just too much; older and teddy is just too babyish. No doubt the many little pieces will get lost, adults will try to keep their child at the task far too long and the folded card will get torn but for a week or two of mildly educational fun this book is fine. Pity the coins are only tokens marked with a '1' and not representations of real pennies – but then I suppose the book could not be sold throughout the world so cheaply. LW

REVIEWS 5-8 Infant/Junior

Changes

★★★★★

Anthony Browne, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 5428 4, £5.99 pbk

Browne (inventor of *Piggybook* and *Willy the Wimp*) is the master surrealist of children's picture books, and this title is one of his most enjoyably disconcerting creations. A boy waits alone in the house while his father is out fetching his mother. Joseph has been told that things are going to change, and sure enough, as he wanders around his familiar home, the objects within it dramatically shape-shift, as if they have become infected with a sinister fertility and are giving birth to secret



versions of themselves. Then his parents arrive home, carrying a new baby.

First published in hardback in 1990, this wonderful evocation of silent anxiety will provide a bountiful source of spellbound speculation in your classroom. GH

Fruits: A Caribbean counting poem

POETRY ★★★★★

Valerie Bloom, ill. David Axtell, Macmillan, 32pp, 0 333 65311 4, £8.99 hbk, 0 333 65312 2, £4.99 pbk (paperback available August 1997)

This is a delightful counting picture

book for the very young based on a 'dialect' poem set in the Caribbean and illustrated using Caribbean fruits. There is a glossary describing most of the fruits featured in the book as readers/users not born in the Caribbean would be unlikely to be familiar with such fruits as guineps, jackfruits, jew-plums, naseberries, Otaheiti apples or sweet-sops. There is no reason however why the language and the exotic nature of the fruits should limit the book's appeal. On the contrary it should be viewed as a celebration of the vigour and flexibility of the English language and the diversity of fruits to be found on the planet, and the very



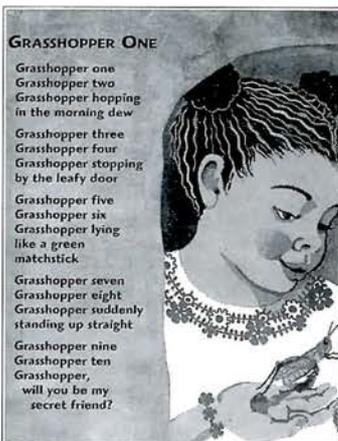
strangeness of the fruits themselves should stimulate discussion – very nostalgic discussion when the Caribbean teacher/parent is involved. At the very best it could encourage a shopping expedition in search of these delicious fruits as many are beginning to appear in shops and market stalls in inner city areas and some are even to be found in supermarket chains. Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that bananas (also featured in the book) were a rare sight in Britain 50 years ago!

David Axtell's well researched, sumptuous illustrations bring the book alive with vivid colours and give a warm authentic Caribbean feel. He uses the clever device of two Caribbean girls at play to give narrative context to the introduction of the fruits. EL

Asana and the Animals: A book of pet poems

★★★★

Grace Nichols, ill. Sarah Adams, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 3740 1, £9.99 hbk



This is a boldly illustrated and designed picture book featuring sixteen beautifully crafted poems by well known poet Nichols, centred on the fantasies of a young black girl (Asana) in a magical world inhabited by insects and animals, ranging from grasshoppers, spiders, ladybirds, cows, alligators to elephants and tigers to name a few. Though the poems and illustrations are wonderfully playful, there is at the heart of the book an alert environmental awareness of the sanctity of wildlife and its place in the scheme of things. This book should have a wide appeal as a classroom resource and as a cosy, friendly book to get lost in. EL

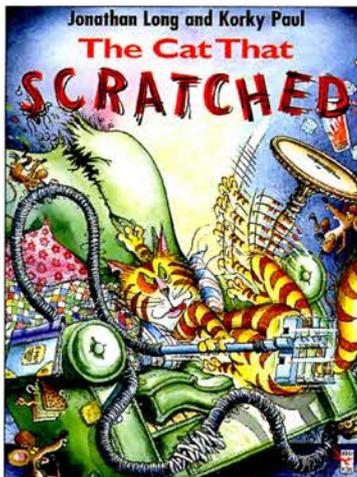
The Small Good Wolf

★★★★

Mary Rayner, Macmillan, 32pp, 0 333 65305 X, £8.99 hbk, 0 333 65306 8, £4.99 pbk

In the folk tale tradition the wolf has long been cast as a villain and Rayner herself has perpetuated this image in some of her Pig family stories. More recently though, the wolf has been given a chance to have his say chiefly through alternative versions of 'The Three Little Pigs'. Now Rayner has created a version of 'Little Red Riding Hood' which mother wolves might tell their cubs in the den: a Small Good Wolf dresses up in Grandma's clothes for fun and only dives into her bed to hide: 'What a nutter ... doesn't she know a wolf when she sees one?' he thinks when Red Riding Hood enters and speaks her well known lines; and it is only the food in her basket that the Small Good Wolf is interested in eating. We learn that the original version of the tale was invented by Grandma to preserve her reputation.

The matter-of-fact retelling with its nice blend of irony and suspense, and the gently humorous water-colour illustrations make this picture book a treat to read and to share. JB



The Cat That Scratched

★★★★★

Jonathan Long and Korky Paul, Red Fox, 32pp, 0 09 935371 7, £4.50 pbk

This second Long and Paul collaboration, a follow up to *The Dog That Dug*, is served up in the same irresistible combination of galloping couplets and teasing refrain. The cat will do anything to rid herself of a flea, including hoovering herself, going through a car wash and enduring the primping to end all primpings at the hairdressers. But "Ha ha ha," said a voice, all tiny and teasing, "To get rid of me won't be nearly that easy." The 'bothersome bug' and 'tortuous titch' (Long loves alliterative insults) eventually meets its end on the claw of an escaped lion. The plot is not as tight as *The Dog That Dug* but Korky Paul's unrivalled talent for conveying furious mayhem in two dimensions is given great scope. This will entertain kids from infant to top junior. I itch every time I read it. CB

The Children of Lir

★★

Sheila MacGill-Callahan, ill. Gennady Spirin, Ragged Bears, 32pp, 1 85714 128 8, £6.99 pbk

Legends and myths undergo many metamorphoses, and one must remember that what may be designated the official version may only be the one which has survived the longest. If, however, a retelling is a radical departure from what are hitherto the known versions, this should be indicated on the cover and the title page and this has not happened in MacGill-Callahan's version of this old Irish legend.

Among the questionable aspects of this retelling are the introduction of a whale, Jasconius, as a major character, the incorrect spelling of Queen Aoife's name, the portrayal of the children as two daughters and two sons, instead of three sons and one daughter. Most glaring of all is the upbeat ending, belying *The Children of Lir's* status as one of 'the three sorrows of Irish story telling'.

The presentation of this book is stylish and Spirin's illustrations are handsome, but more in keeping with European fairy tales than Celtic legend. VC

One Day in the Jungle

★★★★

Colin West, 0 7445 4784 9

"I Don't Care!" said the Bear

★★★★

Anita Jeram, 0 7445 4783 0

The Caterpillar Fight

★★★

Colin West, 0 7445 5279 6

The Brave Ones

★★

Tony Kerins, 0 7445 5283 4

Contrary Mary

★★

Anita Jeram, 0 7445 4782 2

Daisy Dare

★★

Sam McBratney, ill. Jill Barton, 0 7445 5282 6

Little Pig's Bouncy Ball

★

Alan Baron, 0 7445 5280 X

Walker 'The Giggle Club', 24pp, £1.99 each pbk

A clutch of titles intended for 'early reading' from a series called (rather optimistically in some cases) 'The Giggle Club'. By far the strongest are the pair from Colin West. Undoubtedly the winner with my reception children, *One Day in the Jungle* takes us through a week of sneezes from butterfly's little one to hippo's enormous one until, on day seven, elephant's gigantic 'ACHOOOOOOO!' blows away the jungle. This jaunty tale with its repeating pattern has been read over



and over in eager anticipation of the final blast.

In "I Don't Care!" said the Bear Bear refuses to be scared by the growing crowd of huge and unfriendly creatures following him till who should send him dashing for the safety of his lair? – teeny-weeny mouse. Cumulative fun, rhyming style, jokey pictures.

You will need to be a skilled reader aloud to get the best from *The Caterpillar Fight*, a rhyming, tongue-twisting, pillow-bashing romp (*When the caterpillars went to their caterpillar beds, they all had caterpillars for their caterpillar heads* etc.). The pacifist in me is somewhat ill at ease with all the thumping and whacking but I thoroughly approve of Big Caterpillar's ingenious intervention. (Keep an eye on the cushions in your book corner if you add this to your collection.)

In *The Brave Ones* assorted toy-like animals march through the woods to Little Clancy and the safety of home, convincing themselves they are not afraid at every rustle and creak. But, the Brave Ones are in for a surprise in their own quiet cosy house. The gentle scariness and helpful repetition carry the reader through the book but even the most timid might be disappointed by its feeble finale.

The girl mouse in *Contrary Mary* starts her day with roast potatoes and gravy and ends it being tucked into bed tail first, 'out-contraried' by mum. Though the pictures contain much of the warmth of the mother/daughter relationship, Mary's antics are only mildly amusing. The same is true of the spirited female mouse character in McBratney's *Daisy Dare*.

Little Pig's Bouncy Ball is a cumulative tears to laughter tale with an old fashioned look about it. I cannot imagine many young readers joining the heap of laughing animals when Dan Dog returns with the lost ball. The funniest part of this book was the Club joke inside the back cover.

An uneven series in which the best titles are very good value; the £1.99 price point has been achieved by using cheap paper on which some of the illustrations look quite muddy. JB

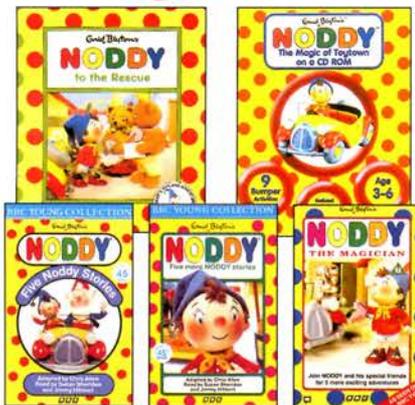
A Box of Stories for Six Year Olds

★★★★

Collected by Pat Thomson, ill. Phillip Norman, Doubleday, 144pp, 0 385 40726 2, £9.99 hbk

This anthology of ten stories illustrated with line drawings does not break new ground, relying instead on steady 'safe bets', penned

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'The Froggy Princess' from A Box of Stories for Six Year Olds.

by authors like Dorothy Edwards (of 'My Naughty Little Sister' fame), Nicholas Fisk, and Joan Aiken. Alison Uttley is represented with a supernatural farmyard yarn and from Jamila Gavin there is the tale of a Diwali party from *Kamla and Kate*. The most recent extract, and possibly the best, is taken from Stan Cullimore's *Henrietta and the Tooth Fairy* but heavy-handed editing detracts from the original story.

The unfortunate title will undoubtedly alienate 7- and 8-year-olds for whom this book is eminently suitable. **AK**

Letters from a Mouse

★★★

Herbie Brennan, ill. Louise Voce, Walker, 48pp, 0 7445 4132 8, £6.99 hbk

S. Mouse taps out letters on the keyboard at night to help Hayes Bros. When someone rings up for a briefcase 'big enough to hold half a million pounds in unmarked 5 pound notes' Mouse fails to get his address. Afraid of losing a big order he notifies all the customers about this mysterious order - not what this particular customer had in mind. Mouse finds himself threatened and caught up in the robbery. There are awful puns - Mouse's cockroach friend sneaks into the villains' briefcase, 'i had them bugged' (the caps lock key is hard to use). The solving of the crime and a certain cuteness in the letters should keep the interest of inexperienced readers. **AJ**

Blair the Winner!

★★★

Theresa Breslin, ill. Ken Cox, Mammoth, 64pp, 0 7497 2753 5, £3.50 pbk

This quartet of lively little stories involves Blair's younger brother Willis, older sister Melissa, Mum, Dad and Granny. Within the fairly limited confines of this particular kind of publishing - 'stories for building confidence' as the blurb describes them - Breslin succeeds in conveying the boisterousness of a young boy determined to establish his own place within his family, an aspiration in which a notably supportive Granny has a significant role to play. The move in the stories is always from chaos to order, from (mild) discord to harmony - with a good deal of hilarity to be encountered en route. Refreshingly, grown-ups are shown to have their fallibilities and their shortsightedness; part of the fun is young Blair's understanding that this is so. Cox's illustrations capture the exuberance of the stories and their young hero's energy. **RD**

Elena the Frog

★★★★

Dyan Sheldon, ill. Sue Heap, Walker, 64pp, 0 7445 4153 0, £6.99 hbk

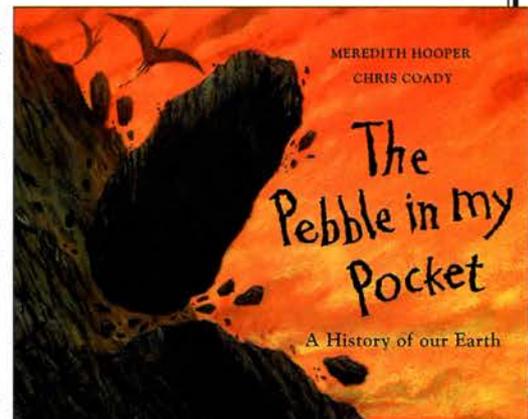
A good introduction to the format of a novel, chapters and all, for the newly-launched reader, this easily and quickly read volume has the feel of an expanded picture book - in fact one of my eight-year-old guinea-pigs suggested that the generous supply of very simple line-drawings would have been better 'colourful'!

It is a ballet story with the traditional elements - jealousy, rivalry, and ultimate victory. Elena wants to dance the part of the princess in 'The Frog Prince', but when she is chosen to be the frog eventually realises that rather than sulking about

"That's pretty good," said Elena's father as she brought him his tea *en pointe*.



it, outshining her rival is her best weapon. Apart from a rather unnecessary reference to a 'pain in the bum', the text explores Elena's feelings sensitively, and with a few well illustrated balletic terms thrown in. Described as a bit 'girlish' by one of my testers, it was nevertheless enjoyed. **AG**



The Pebble in my Pocket

NON-FICTION

★★★★★

Meredith Hooper, ill. Chris Coody, Frances Lincoln, 40pp, 0 7112 1022 5, £4.99 pbk

Although I am still flinging gravel about by the barrowload I am - thanks to this book - doing it respectfully. For this title's message is 'every pebble in the world is different from every other pebble'. Goliath would have agreed.

Here is a compelling picture book which, by considering one small stone, whistlestops us through 480 million years of global evolution and explains the gentle continuum of the geosphere. Coody's truly illustrative watercolours engage with Hooper's skilfully lively text to provide an excellent example of what can be achieved by 'narrative non-fiction'. Hooper has a particular talent for explaining how special some very ordinary-seeming things can be. If you missed this title in hardback last year, grab it now! **TP**

The World is Full of Babies!

★★★★★

0 7496 2752 2, £3.99 pbk

Splish, Splash, Splosh!

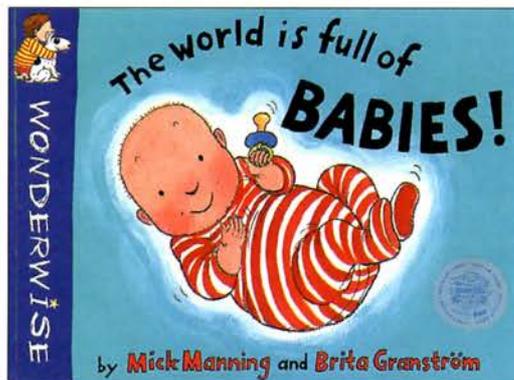
★★★★★

0 7496 2410 8, £8.99 hbk

Mick Manning and Brita Granström, Watts 'Wonderwise', 32pp each

The World is Full of Babies! (reviewed in BfK 100) gained the Silver Award in the 0-5 category of the 1996 Smarties Book Prize. Published in a picture book format, this innovative and entertaining look at human and animal growth and development now makes a welcome appearance in paperback.

In their latest offering, the award-winning duo employ the same exuberant style and technique (not to mention some delightful verbal as well as



visual imagery) to unravel another complex topic – this time it is the water cycle – and make it accessible to the very youngest readers. *Splish, Splash, Splosh!* follows a young boy and his dog as they encounter such diverse elements as rainbows and reservoirs, clouds and chlorine and streams and sewage farms and find that they all have a part to play in a journey which culminates in the discovery that 'all water ends ... and begins'. VH



REVIEWS 8–10 Junior/Middle

The Ghost of Able Mabel

★★★★

Penny Dolan, ill. Philip Hopman, 'Young Hippo Spooky', 80pp, 0 590 13879 0, £2.99 pbk

The Cleaning Witch

★★★★

Cecilia Lenagh, ill. Serena Feneziani, 'Young Hippo Magic', 64pp, 0 590 13923 1, £2.50 pbk

Hands Off Our Hens!

★★★★

Jennifer Curry, ill. Christine Pilsworth, 'Young Hippo Animal', 80pp, 0 590 13767 0, £2.99 pbk

Big Puss, Little Mouse

★★★

Kara May, ill. Susie Jenkin-Pearce, 'Young Hippo Animal', 64pp, 0 590 13641 0, £2.50 pbk Scholastic

The Young Hippo series ('Young Hippo Magic', 'Young Hippo Animal', etc.) aims to provide something exciting and involving for that notoriously difficult group to satisfy – the seven to nine year olds who have mastered the skill of reading, but haven't yet caught the reading habit. The novels discussed here are relatively short, divided into short chapters, and liberally illustrated with line or line and wash drawings, imaginatively dispersed throughout the pages. They were much appreciated by the class of eight-year-olds I tried them out on who returned to them eagerly in spare moments. They particularly mentioned how funny the books were in their different ways. I was interested to note how the superficially mundane stories had a strong secondary theme exploring a child's relationship to the world and her/his peers, giving a much richer texture than I had anticipated. The stories are well enough written to suggest that the series is worth looking out for, in contrast to much existing material for children at this stage.

In *The Ghost of Able Mabel* young Sam braves the dark misty moor to retrieve his grandfather's gold from

the inn haunted by Able Mable. The story is told in a rather tongue-in-cheek melodramatic style, with characters 'as cheerful as cherry pie' and happenings on 'dark and stormy nights'; this intended humour may be lost on the less sophisticated reader. Atmosphere is built up well, making a story that is tense but not too scary, and Sam's bravery, determination and quick-thinking give it more substance than might be expected.

The Cleaning Witch is Grizelda Grimthorpe, out of work until she takes a job as a school cleaner. As she magically restores a run-down but happy school to sparkling order, she saves it from closure. A humorous tale, told with affection for the rather incompetent headteacher and the welcoming children. The occasional unusual word is included to stretch the inexperienced, but well held in context to give clarity.

In *Hands Off Our Hens!* Ben has come to a new village from his home in Scotland. Finding himself lonely and isolated, he becomes involved with a flock of feral hens and the Pakistani doctor who cares for them. When moves are made to remove the hens Ben runs a solitary campaign to save them. The story involves Ben in some 'white lies' which result in him being knocked down on the main road while trying to save the hens – an area for discussion if the book is being used by a class. Through the doctor Ben learns that being the odd one out needn't matter, and his accident leads at last to friendship with a boy in his class. In addition, Ben's self-esteem is enhanced by the success of his campaign giving the book a very positive feel.

Big Puss, Little Mouse is also concerned with friendship. Little Mouse teases scaredy-cat Big Puss until Little Mouse needs to be rescued and Big Puss puts fear aside to save him, leading to firm friendship. A rather slight tale compared to the others perhaps, but reflecting a common childhood experience, and a constructive 'happy ending'. AG

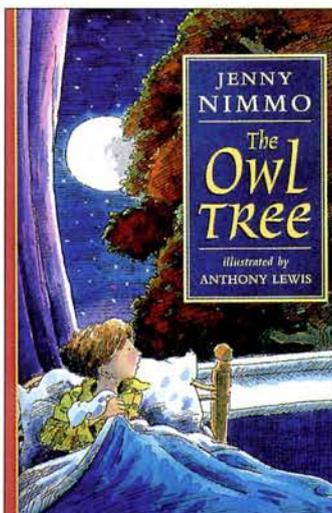
Hazel the Guinea-Pig

★★★★

A N Wilson, ill. Jonathan Heale, Walker, 96pp, 0 7445 5275 3, £3.50 pbk

'You can't really imagine a guinea-pig having an adventure,' says the children's mother at one point in the first of these three short stories about Hazel's exploits. Well, maybe so: but Wilson does his best to

convince us otherwise, with his gentle and affectionate observations of what happens in a household where a boy, a girl and their pets are given the opportunity to enjoy one another's company and to learn something of the strange ways of human and animal alike. The plots are easy to follow and speckled with quiet humour: the style is straightforward and well suited to reading aloud. Heale's black and white illustrations succeed in bringing Hazel, Fudge and Tobacco to life, each with her (or his) own individuality. RD



The Owl-Tree

★★★★★

Jenny Nimmo, ill. Anthony Lewis, Walker, 96pp, 0 7445 4142 5, £6.99 hbk

Readers familiar with Nimmo's *Stone Mouse* will need no persuading that she is an author to recommend to junior-aged children. Staying with Granny, Joe quickly comes to believe that if the wonderful tree in next door's garden is chopped down, Granny's life will be too (echoes of Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders*). Joe despairs of persuading the Monster as Granny's next-door neighbour is known not to axe the tree – until, that is, he discovers its secret: a barn owl with great wings that the Monster himself once ringed. From that point on, it is a race against the clock until the owl-tree is reprieved and, in storybook style, neighbourly differences buried.

Nimmo's accessible narrative has a fine eye for how children see the strange and blustering adult world;

she captures the heady mix of fear, joy and expectation that Joe experiences. Lewis's line-drawings are superbly focused on the novel's turning points. RB

We Was Robbed: Yet More Football Poems

POETRY ★★★★★

Chosen by David Orme, ill. Marc Vyvyan-Jones, Macmillan, 64pp, 0 330 35005 6, £2.99 pbk

Orme's third short collection of light-hearted football poems deals with the nation's number one spectator sport in a witty fashion, and will be enjoyed over and over again by young football fans. Poems about the professional and non-league game in addition to the playground kickabout are well-observed and will surely strike a cord with both adults and children.

The combined use of heavy metre and clever rhyme is the feature of many poems. Paul Cookson's 'No One Passes Me' rolls easily off the tongue; 'Harum-scarum do or dare 'em! I will take the knocks and bear 'em! Show me strikers and I'll scare 'em! No one passes me!'

'Never Put Noel in Goal' by Nick Toczek was another popular poem with a Year 5 class: 'Oh no! Not Noel! He flaps around like a Dover sole! We always get this rigmarole! whenever we've got Noel in goal!' Illustrated with lively line drawings. AK

Be Smart, Stay Safe

★★★★

112pp, 0 330 35184 2

Beat the Bullies

★★★★

96pp, 0 330 35185 0

Michele Elliott, Macmillan 'The Willow Street Kids', £3.99 each pbk

Designed to be read by children on their own or by adults to junior children, these two powerful, no-frills books deal with the theme of a child's right to be safe. Issues are discussed using the device of fictional characters, the kids of 'Willow Street', who tell stories about problems and difficult situations they have encountered.

Be Smart, Stay Safe tackles stranger danger, upsetting phonecalls, uncomfortable and unwanted touching or kissing among other

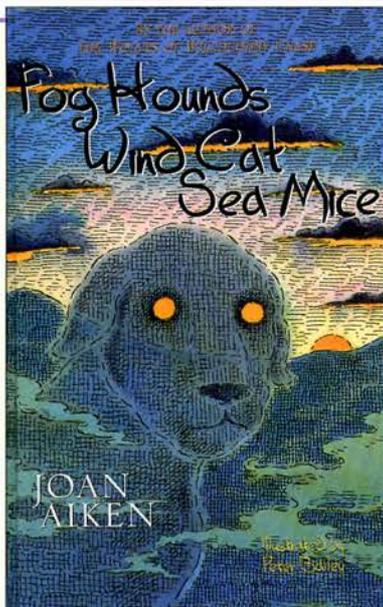
Editor's Choice

Fog Hounds, Wind Cat, Sea Mice

★★★★★

Joan Aiken, ill. Peter Bailey, Hodder, 96pp, 0 340 68130 6, £9.99 hbk

Three elegantly crafted short stories resonant with meaning which dexterously weave magic into everyday matters and the everyday into magic. The old king is dying and his menacing Fog Hounds which 'flow over the ground as the wind itself', haunt Tad's dreams. What is the significance of the ring of tea leaves round the rim of Tad's cup and why do the hounds seek him out? Lukey's aunt who lives next door to unpleasant neighbours from Bournemouth, has given up being a witch - 'with all the private health insurance schemes nobody these days needs witches', she tells Lukey whom she suspects, when the neighbours' house disappears, of inheriting the family habit. Hella must wait until she is twelve before picking the fruit from the plum tree planted for her by her lost sailor



father. When the sea draws back to let her pass, the adult reader can only gasp at the audacity of Aiken's literary references (Greek myths, the Old Testament) so seamlessly incorporated into her casually conversational, beautifully structured text.

Bailey's sensitive pen and ink illustrations with cross hatching complement the moods of these stories well. RS

situations in an honest, yet non-frightening way. Equally forthright, in its zero tolerance of bullying, is *Beat the Bullies*, where author Elliott (Director of the children's charity 'Kidscape') explores the ways in which children can help themselves or enlist the help of adults to combat this perennial problem.

Be Smart, Stay Safe is the ideal resource for opening up PSE discussions and will provide both adults and children with a practical framework for dealing with some very difficult, sensitive and potentially dangerous situations.

Drawing on her experience as a parent, teacher and educational psychologist, Elliott also shows adults how they can help the children entrusted to their care, to develop 'good sense defence'. A list of useful addresses and telephone numbers to obtain further help or information is included as an appendix. AK

The Nubbler

★★★★★

Pam Ayres, ill. Caroline Crossland, Orion, 128pp, 1 85881 435 9, £9.99 hbk



I was initially prejudiced against this book because of its celebrity author with her celebrity photo on the back of the dust jacket - but there is much to like about it. The Nubbler is a

strange, dragon-like creature who comes to help Rufus through the pain of parental arguments and separation, show him what the future can be like and give him a gentle shove in the right direction at opportune moments. Whilst some of the school details jar a little the incidents at home are clearly and sensitively described and more than once I found a lump in my throat as I read. Racism and bullying also feature. If and when the paperback comes out, this would make a good class reader for Years 6 to 8. SR

Bag of Bones

★★★★

Helen Cresswell, Hodder, 208pp, 0 340 67031 X, £10.99 hbk

Griselda finds the bag of bones under the laurels in the park in a strange moment when everything seems sharper, clearer. At home the bones re-shape themselves into an enormous cat who leads Griselda to the edge of the world and then into another world where they do battle with the evil Raggabow who bears an alarming resemblance to the fearsome Miss Murdoch, Griselda's class teacher. Magic and reality are nicely fused in this fantasy adventure novel designed with a large typeface. SR

Irish Sagas & Folk Tales

★★★★

Eileen O'Faoláin, Poolbeg, 256pp, 0 905169 71 9, £5.99 pbk

The myths, legends and folktales which constitute the vast body of material generally referred to as 'Irish folklore' continue to provide a rich resource for re-tellings. In recent years these have become increasingly attractively produced, often with full colour illustrations, a fact which may make this edition of

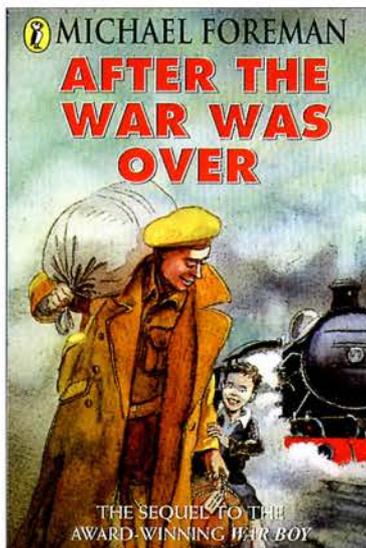
O'Faoláin's versions (in spite of P J Lynch's new cover design) seem rather dated. First published some forty years ago, the book offers a selection of some of the best known of the ancient epic stories - 'The Children of Lir', 'The Fate of the Sons of Usnach', episodes from 'The Cattle Raid of Cooley' - together with some examples of what O'Faoláin calls 'Tales for the Chimney-Corner', these being adapted, in the main, from originals first collected in the late nineteenth century. Even in re-tellings such as these, occasionally weakened by a flatness of tone and a pedestrian pace, the magic, romance and intrigue of these dramatic narratives remains. RD

After the War Was Over

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Michael Foreman, Puffin, 96pp, 0 14 038100 7, £3.99 pbk

This book is artist and storyteller Foreman's second instalment of the memoir which began with the beautifully written and highly popular *War Boy*. Now that the war is over, an almost idyllic childhood on the Suffolk coast resumes. As adolescence and the rock 'n roll years approach, the narrator's interest shifts to the changes in society, but he maintains a vigilant fascination with the natural world.



The observations of people and places which are related with such plain speaking lucidity in this book find expression in drawing, and Foreman's initiation into the art world is described as the book closes. This is a fascinating yarn, whose value for historical awareness as well as for sheer entertainment is enhanced by the author's wistfully nostalgic illustrations and the inclusion in the text of a range of realia, including family photographs, cartoon strips, adverts and a record sheet of Tommy Lawton's earnings. GH

About the Weather

NON-FICTION ★★

Barbara Taylor, Macdonald 'Everyday Science', 32pp, 0 7500 1920 4, £8.50 hbk

Here are 48 'popular' questions on weather subjects answered in simplistic fashion at the rate of just under two per page. So we get replies to queries like 'Where do rainbows come from?', 'What are the swirly lines on a weather map?' and 'Why does it rain?' This is all right as far as it goes - but that is not far. Reading level required is well above that suggested by the book's super-photographic presentation, and the order of questions is random, so that knowledge acquired from early answers does not help the reader with later ones. So instead of a gradual build-up of knowledge we have a pile of meteorological trivia - satisfying for readers to dip into but unsatisfying for the purposeful reader and not useful in a library. So circumambient an influence as the weather deserves more thoughtful treatment than this. In the same series, *In the Bathroom* (March '95) was far better. TP

Roman Aromas

NON-FICTION ★★★

0 19 910094 2

Tudor Odours

NON-FICTION ★★★

0 19 910096 9

Victorian Vapours

NON-FICTION ★★★

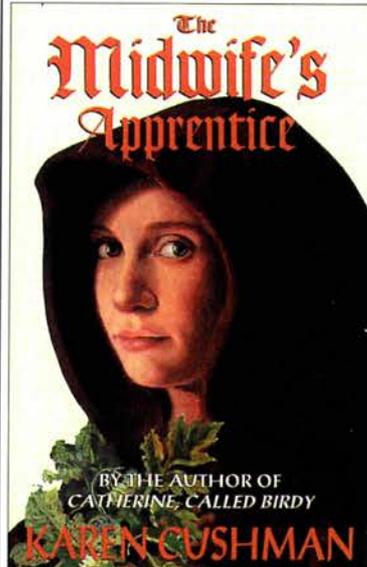
0 19 910095 0

Mary Dobson, Oxford 'Smelly Old History', 32pp, £4.99 each pbk

A researcher on the history of disease, Dobson points out that the smell of the past is now forgotten. These books seek to remedy this - each title contains five Scratch 'n' Sniff panels with smells that include the rotting heads of Celts' enemies, sweaty Henry VIII in bed, and a multiple privy full of Victorian children. This novelty factor will ensure the series' initial success with young readers, though how authentic the smells are is open to question. After a while 'sewage in the Thames' smelt much like 'fumes in a cotton factory' to me.

The books, humorously illustrated in Asterix style, are littered with fascinating historical facts. Children will love learning that the Romans, not hot on personal hygiene, washed their laundry in tubs of urine and that Elizabeth I's favourite hair gel was made of apples and puppy fat. If you want to find out what Tudor clapperdudgeons or Roman vomitoria were (or smelled like!) these are the books for you. The plethora of puns in the prose and the occasional awful poem are perhaps the only mild irritants to get up one's nose in an otherwise revoltingly refreshing series. AK

REVIEWS 10-12 Middle/Secondary



The Midwife's Apprentice

★★★★★

Karen Cushman, Macmillan, 128pp, 0 330 34961 9, £3.99 pbk

'From someone who had no place in the world, she had suddenly become someone with a surfeit of places.' This is the transformation achieved by the young woman whom we met as Brat and leave as Alyce in this highly readable and always engaging novel. Set in the England of the fourteenth century, it belongs to that genre of historical fiction which places its emphasis on the everyday lives of ordinary men and women (here, mainly women) as distinct from the doings of the mighty and privileged. As we follow Brat's progress from abandoned orphan to young midwife a vivid picture emerges of a world characterized by harshness and cruelty and a desperate struggle to survive. It is her combination of humour, resilience and adaptability which enables her to come through, to learn to live with disappointment and, above all, to understand the gap which exists between dream and reality. Cushman brilliantly incorporates these themes of personal growth within a fascinating frame of medieval social (and medical) history, the erudition being lightly and entertainingly displayed. RD

Butterfingers

★★★★★

Roger Collinson, Andersen, 160pp, 0 86264 746 0, £9.99 hbk

Quite subtle humour pervades the pages of this well-paced, enjoyable yarn. Stock comic characters and situations are given new twists, including the gourmet, man-mountain thug with no brain and the foul-mouthed ex-music hall parrot! The hero's pal being called Vera because his surname is Lynn is also a good wheeze.

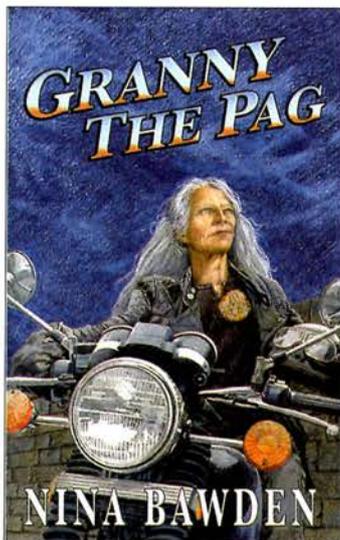
Non-sporty boys will identify with Theo's fear when he has to face cricket balls bowled by the fierce Meltzer. Deliverance comes in the form of a bash on the bonce, rendering Theo unconscious but setting off a train of challenging, manic action that requires masses of tenacity and true manly pluck. DB

Dancing Through the Shadows

★★★★

Theresa Tomlinson, Julia MacRae, 112pp, 1 85681 713 X, £9.99 hbk

A dramatic year in the life of 11-year-old Ellie. 'The shadows' is the knowledge that Mum has breast cancer. The dancing in a school club provides the therapy. The discovery of an old well on the school site by an eccentric history teacher, herself a former cancer patient who underwent a mastectomy, leads to some interesting deliberations on the healing powers of fresh water and brings the two plot elements together as the dance club perform at the opening of the site when it is fully excavated. We follow Mum through the operation, the chemotherapy and the radiotherapy but none of it is heavy-handed and the book ends on a positive note. This should find an appreciative audience well up into Year 9. SR



Granny the Pag

★★★★★

Nina Bawden, Hamish Hamilton, 160pp, 0 241 13549 4, £10.99 hbk, Puffin, 0 14 038061 2, £4.99 pbk

Pags, in case you didn't know, are special people - 'the sort of people who make all the really important things happen' - and Catriona's granny Polish refugee, retired psychiatrist, cigarette-smoking, Greek island holidaying, Harley-Davidson riding Dame Halina Lubinorska is definitely a Pag. Catriona has been brought up by her whilst her feckless parents have continued their theatrical careers which now see them starring in a popular TV soap. When Mum decides she wants Cat back to complete the show-biz smart home they have just acquired, Cat decides to take action - well, you would resist living with a woman who called you Precious-kins. Told in the first person, the spunky heroine has a nice line in ironic asides and the book carries a number of important messages about families and relationships. SR

NEW Talent

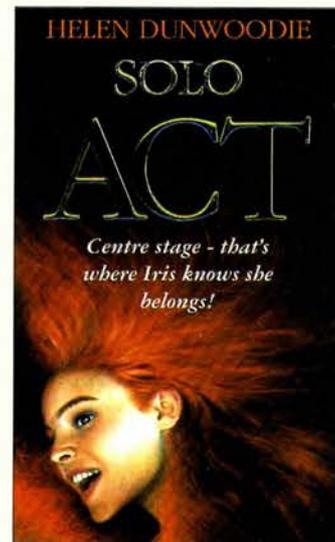
Solo Act

★★★★★

Helen Dunwoodie, Corgi, 192pp, 0 552 54524 4, £3.99 pbk

Iris Champion loves being the star of school shows and she is furious when Jimmy Garcia, the drama group's trendy new director, criticises her acting. Meanwhile Iris' best friend, Aly, seems to prefer the company of wimpish Janine to hers. Then to her horror, Iris thinks she has fallen in love with Jimmy - but is it love or the need for something deeper?

Curtains certainly swish quite a bit in this debut novel and there are some unlikely twists of the plot but it is more than a tale of wannabe luvvies. As Iris learns to recognise and deal with her jealousy and anger, chance leads her to a meeting with the father she has never known. It is an unpromising encounter but one which, with her newfound sense of herself, Iris knows how to confront.



Dunwoodie sweeps the reader along in a most agreeable and enjoyable way in this debut novel. RS

Comfort Herself

★★★★★

Geraldine Kaye, Scholastic 'Point', 176pp, 0 590 19074 1, £3.99 pbk

Comfort Kwatey-Jones has learnt adaptability and personal survival early on in her life, qualities she is to need as she lives a life of contrasts from London with a free-wheeling white mother to the children's home to idyllic Kent with her maternal grandparents to Ghana with her harassed black father and then to the ancestral village with her strict traditional Ghanaian grandmother.

This fascinating account is told with compelling sympathy and absorbing detail. It has lost none of its relevance in the 13 years since first publication. I wish I had discovered it earlier. DB

The Noctuary of Narcissus Batt

POETRY ★

Paul Muldoon, ill. Markéta Prachatická, 48pp, 0 571 19020 0

Dibby Dubby Dhu

POETRY ★★

George Barker, ill. Sara Fanelli, 96pp, 0 571 17999 1

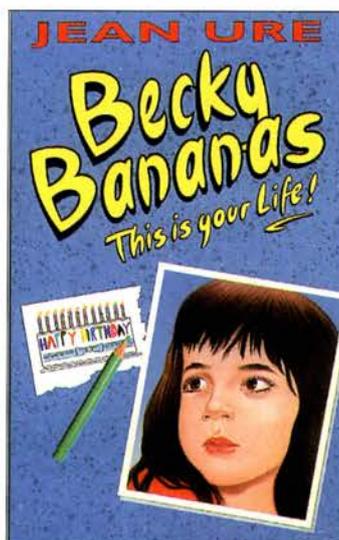
The Red-All-Over Riddle Book

POETRY ★★★

George Szirtes, ill. Andrew Stooke, 64pp, 0 571 17807 3 Faber, £8.99 each hbk

There is something about these new collections of Faber children's poetry that excites the worst of my lower middle class prejudices. If a publisher had set out to produce 'poetry for boffins', this would be it.

The books' design is more likely to appeal to the adult collectors of the poets' work than children. The label



Becky Bananas - This is your Life!

★★★★★

Jean Ure, ill. Mick Brownfield and Stephen Player, Collins, 176pp, 0 00 185638 3, £9.99 hbk, 0 00 675148 2, £3.99 pbk

Becky's ultimate ambition is to become a famous ballerina and be on *This Is Your Life* and the imagined programme and guests run through the book as she imagines her future. Her immediate ambition, though, is to get to be 12 and go to Wonderland in Florida - but she suffers from acute myeloid leukaemia so she might not reach the age of 12. There are enough hints dropped in the early stages of the book for the careful reader to recognise that Becky is ill but we don't learn the full truth until page 121. Ure deals with the medical details with an assured lightness of touch and Becky remains spirited to her, and the book's, end. Two illustrators with quite distinctive styles are used and the book should appeal across a wide age range. SR

'Children's Poetry' hides away on the back cover; the lists of the authors' other books are predominantly adult titles; and the black and white drawings by three different illustrators have that kind of knowing naiveté that shrieks sophistication.

Children's librarians will take one look and dismiss these as shelf sitters. Teachers, with classes used to Rosen, Wright, Ahlberg and company, may not look at all. In an age obsessed with marketing, it is refreshing to find a company apparently indifferent to selling the product. But it will not help these poems find an audience. All three poets are better known as writers for adults; and only Szirtes, it seems to me, is nearly at ease writing for children.

Paul Muldoon's *The Noctuary of Narcissus Batt* is a brilliant word play. Nothing makes it appropriate for children, although it comes in the form of an alphabet book about animals. Its playfulness is disengaged and ironic. There may be children who will like it, and have a dictionary at their elbow to get the best out of it. They will be a small minority.

Many of George Barker's poems were written for his own children. In particular, the sequence of poems about the eponymous 'Dibby Dubby Dhu' (illustrated as the poet disguised as a red Christmas tree?) seem to me to be on a par with those family jokes that are hilarious to one's loved ones but perplexing to everyone else. Yet there are some wonderful poems here, too, with the directness and richness of Blake or Stevenson. It would be a shame if teachers and anthologists and, through them, children, should miss them.

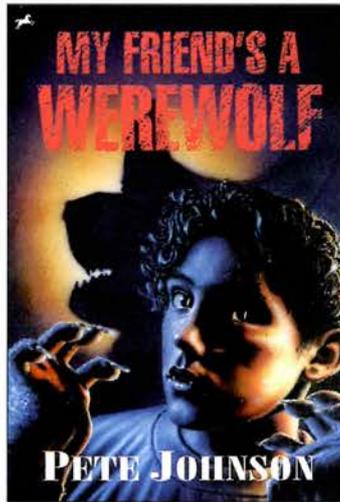
George Szirtes' *The Red-All-Over Riddle Book* is the most child friendly of the three collections. Riddles are among the oldest forms of poetry: the idea at the heart of simile and metaphor. They are popular with children and still do the rounds of the playground. Szirtes makes the most of the form. Some of his poems are identification games: 'On the top sits fire, In the middle gold! At the bottom grass' - traffic light. Others are thought-provoking: 'To some a source of pride/ To some a sheet of grief./ A kind of gaudy tie/ Or giant handkerchief.' - flag. Others have the aura of mystery that Anglo Saxon or medieval riddles have. The riddle of an apple tree begins: 'I saw a bride splendid in white garments./ I saw a woman with one hundred children/ The children plump and firm within her arms.' Rarely is Szirtes tempted into pretension or obscurity; and the answers to the riddles are given in the illustrations and at the back of the book. These poems will delight and stimulate junior and lower secondary children. They deserve a better production. CB

My Friend's a Werewolf

★★★★

Pete Johnson, ill. Peter Dennis, Corgi Yearling, 176pp, 0 440 86342 2, £3.99 pbk

Kelly is pleased when the attractive Simon moves in next door but the reasons for his constant wearing of gloves and other mysteries make her realise that he is, surprise, a werewolf! The horrors build up nicely to a climax and then Johnson



presents a new version of the myth - being a werewolf is a special gift; they work to help humans. The book cleverly creates sympathy for Simon and understanding of what happens to him in the face of blind prejudice reacting to the unknown or different. He is forced to leave but we are left not with the gothic horrors but the sadness of a good person being forced to hide. Cleverly done. AJ

Blood Brother

★★★

J H Brennan, Poolbeg, 192pp, 1 85371 602 2, £3.99 pbk

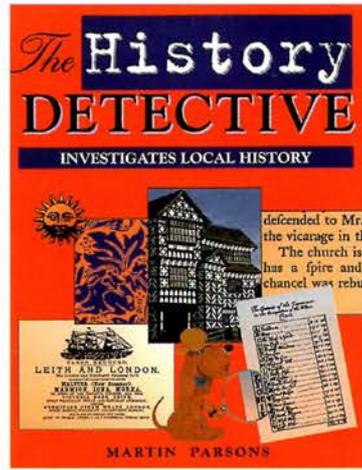
One of the 'Dark Shadows' series, this is a novel which, in a currently popular mode, moves between real and supernatural worlds. The 'blood brother' relationship of Billy and Seb Sallis and its development following an accident in which Seb is severely paralysed provides an interesting, and at times an ingeniously used, starting point for Brennan's story. It has, undeniably, a number of dramatic and tension-packed moments, particularly those in which Seb's 'marvellous, modified Macintosh computer' would seem to be assuming a life and direction of its own. But the overall difficulty with the book is that it attempts to incorporate serious themes - bullying, alcoholism and wife-beating, for example - within a narrative format where their seriousness is diminished by being juxtaposed with a macabre dimension which becomes increasingly predictable and decreasingly subtle. In good horror fiction the real horror resides in the reader's imaginings: here, we are told too much and left to imagine too little. RD

The History Detective Investigates Local History

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

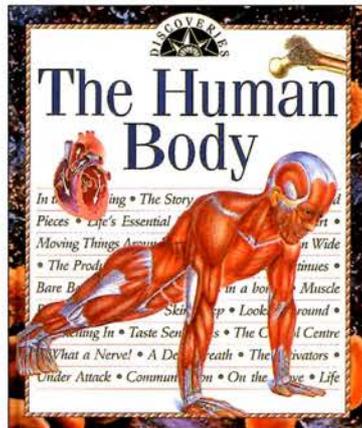
Martin Parsons, Wayland, 48pp, 0 7502 2043 0, £9.99 hbk

Parsons covers many sources in this children's guide: census records and school logbooks, photographs and post cards, the physical fabric and layout of a place and oral reminiscence. A local historian himself, he is unflinching practical. He sets out what you need to take with you and how to find and interpret your sources. He stresses the need to plan your project, suggests some interesting ones, and urges you to record and present your



findings clearly. His examples are good. Oral Reminiscence is about World War II, which gran or granddad should know about; and Village Patterns looks at Welsh mining villages.

The book's layout is attractive and allows Parsons enough space to develop his arguments and to display his visual sources. Some of the sources have perhaps too much space, where there is so much that needs explanation in the text. The two pages on the history of buildings are uncharacteristically poor. It would have been good, too, to have seen what a census record or a logbook entry actually looks like alongside the tidied up entries which are shown, but these are small gripes. This is a lively and knowledgeable book that will be useful to secondary school children and to teachers in both junior and secondary schools. CB



Ancient Greece

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Judith Simpson, 0 7500 2375 9

The Human Body

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Steve Parker, 0 7500 2372 4

Incredible Plants

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Lesley Dow, 0 7500 2374 0

Sports and Games

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Neil Jameson, 0 7500 2376 7

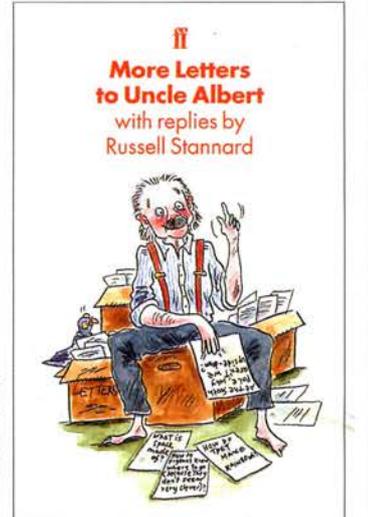
Macdonald Young Books 'Discoveries', 64pp, £9.99 each hbk

The publishers have not stinted on

the production of these handsome, colourful and visually appealing volumes. The emphasis placed on the pictorial content, however, means that page layouts are dominated by the illustrations, often at the expense of the text. Coupled with a rigid adherence to double-page spreads, this has resulted in an unevenness in the scope and level of the information provided.

The format proves less of a problem for the more highly focused topics, and for this reason *The Human Body* is by far the most successful, presenting detailed factual information in a lively, clear and logical manner. By comparison, *Sports and Games* allocates exactly the same amount of space to athletics, with its various track and field events, as, for example, it does to the game of squash!

Notwithstanding, these wide-ranging titles make very attractive books for browsers and will undoubtedly tempt reluctant information seekers to enquire within. VH



More Letters to Uncle Albert

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Russell Stannard, Faber, 176pp, 0 571 19051 0, £4.99 pbk

Stannard is a phenomenon - a highly articulate boffin with a heart as big as a cabbage. The success of his 'Uncle Albert' character is based on his own essential humility which allows him to approach and explain the complex interface between science and philosophy - Einstein country - with a refreshing simplicity which, in its turn, encourages a flow of letters and questions upon which this book - the second of its kind - is based. Stannard tackles everything from Gravity to God without patronising or fobbing off his readers once. My favourite answer in this collection illustrates completely his gift of quiet logic. Asked 'Is God left-handed or right?' he replies 'God doesn't have a body like ours. If he did, he wouldn't be able to be everywhere, he would only be where his body was. So, I guess it's a case of 'Look! No hands!'' So Maradona was wrong. And there is lots more from this genuine sage to make this, his latest title, another treat. For Stannard encourages his readers to think articulately and then to articulate their thoughts to a figure in whom they have complete confidence. Not many authors can do that. TP

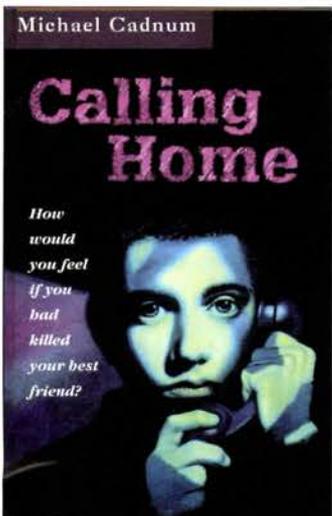
REVIEWS 12+ Secondary

All for Love

★★★★★

Edited by Miriam Hodgson,
Mammoth, 112pp,
0 7497 2920 1, £4.50 pbk

Michael Morpurgo, Keith Gray and Elizabeth Arnold are among the writers represented in this collection of original love stories. Two of the stories feature letter-writing love affairs. 'Words Last For Ever' is a movingly crafted vignette about a disabled boy and his able-bodied girlfriend continuing to go out with one another against peer group pressure. 'Act of Love' is a gripping and poignant account of love and death in the first world war trenches. An excellent collection of short and accessible stories for less confident teenage readers. RB



Calling Home

★★★★★

Michael Cadnum, Viking, 144pp,
0 670 83566 8, £10.99 hbk

I am a committed Cormier fan and so I was easily seduced by this icy novel. Cadnum layers his story in a strikingly surreal way. Peter, a teenage alcoholic, kills his best friend Mead with one thoughtless, drunken punch. Unable to admit to his crime and anxious to allay the fears of Mead's invalid father, he rings Mead's home, impersonating his dead friend.

The plot writhes like smoke: Peter's attempts to maintain a normal life are clouded by his drinking and his submergence in Mead's personality. He edges around confession like an uneasy boxer, advancing when in the company of his trusted friend Lani and retreating when pursuing meaningless intimacy with his brittle, shallow girlfriend Angela.

The novel ends in classical American tradition, with Peter poised to take his next step after the confession, punishment and rehabilitation cycle has been completed. A masterly, eerie work which must be read. VR

Olivia

★★★

Rosie Rushton, Piccadilly,
176pp, 1 85340 416 0, £9.99
hbk, 1 85340 411 X, £5.99 pbk

Rushton charts a sure course through the minefield of teenage angst: Olivia is her eighth book to be published by Piccadilly. Frustratingly, the book's cover leans towards caricature and is wholly at odds with the perceptive writing within.

Olivia's parents have separated: unable to hate her father's girlfriend and unsure of her status within the family, she falls in love with Ryan. Here the plot loses credibility, since he is revealed as her half-brother.

Laying incredulity aside, I can only admire Rushton's insights into the emotional maelstrom of teenage life. She has observed her subjects well and produced an entertaining story allied to a good deal of sound, practical advice. VR

Tenderness

★★★★★

Robert Cormier, Gollancz,
192pp, 0 575 06433 1, £12.99
hbk

There is a moment early on in this powerful but extremely disturbing novel when reference is made to 'that terrible world out there'. This is the bleak contemporary landscape familiar to us from previous Cormier books, a terrain in which the values of what might be called 'the system' (invariably perceived as corrupt and dehumanising) are challenged by youthful protagonists in search of their own dreams and fulfilment. Here, the youthful protagonists come in the form of Eric, an eighteen-year-old serial killer, and Lori, a young woman of fifteen, who introduces herself in the novel's opening line as a person who gets 'fixated on something', someone who 'can't help' herself. Both have a history of societal and sexual abuse, resulting in a compulsive need to experience the 'tenderness' of the book's title. From their intertwining destinies Cormier shapes a narrative which, in its sheer power to hold a reader's attention, is tinglingly skilful. It has, additionally, the tantalizing merit of provoking questions about crime and responsibility, motive and manipulation, which threaten to dislodge even our most apparently secure assumptions. RD

Freedom

★★★★★

Ali Buchanan, Sapling, 224pp,
0 7522 2216 3, £3.50 pbk

In an era of 'Goosebumps' and 'Point Romance' it seems publishers are increasingly slotting titles into series; this one is a 'Tear Jerker'. Its tear jerking qualities cannot be denied, but it is also one of the finest teen novels I've come across about Northern Ireland families torn between Protestant and Catholic allegiances. In many ways this is a 1997 version of Joan Lingard's *The Twelfth Day of July*. Seventeen-year-old Peter, brought up on the Shankhill the son of an Orangeman, meets Saoirse, sixteen and from a family with deep IRA sympathies. Their passion leads inexorably to profound family conflict.

But beyond the Romeo and Juliet tale there is an intensity and rawness

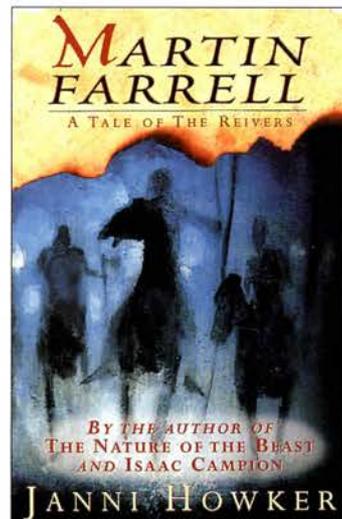
that surpasses even the best of Lingard and places this novel alongside Brian Moore's classic *Lies of Silence*. Buchanan unobtrusively interweaves historical and contemporary references with the vivid brutality of Belfast street-life and its horrific punishment beatings. The scenes of reconciliation at the end do indeed demand a few tissues. RB

Martin Farrell

★★★★★

Janni Howker, Red Fox, 96pp,
0 09 918161 4, £3.50 pbk

Set in the borders at the time of the Reivers and family feuding, this compelling novel begins with a murder: 'No one thought much about it. Pathetic.' But the casual brutality is momentous. The consequences of that death spread outwards through the story as the murdered man's stepson, Martin, is teased and led, like the reader, by a fiddler/storyteller into the mysteries of his own family and the magical revenging of his father's death. At 96 pages, this short novel has the feel of a much longer saga; it never loses its hold, charming and chivvying and, in case you're not concentrating: 'Fire! Fire! Get out of the house! ... Ah, sit back on your arse bones. It was just an alarm to keep ye awake! ... Are you listening? Then I'm not wasting my breath.' Stunning storytelling which fixes and tricks you as reader, so that you are always two-stepping with the words, enjoying the



pleasures of the story and the telling. A book to be heard aloud as the spoken rhythms would ease the complexity of the prose on the page. AJ

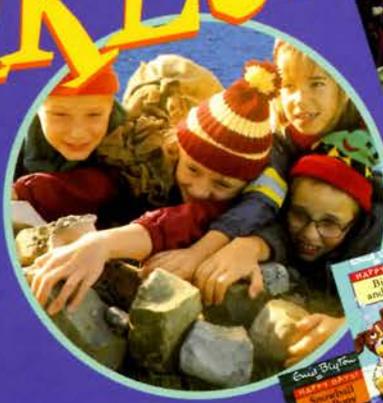
Picture books reviewed this issue relevant to older readers:

Changes

Fruits: A Caribbean Counting Poem
After the War Was Over

Enid Blyton

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- Snowball the Pony

Adventure Stories

- The Adventure of the Secret Necklace
- Mischief at St.Rollo's
- The Boy who Wanted a Dog
- The Secret of Cliff Castle
- Smuggler Ben
- The Children of Kidillin

All the books are available at a bookshop near you at £2.99 from 1st July.
Offer ends 31st July.

CLASSICS IN SHORT No.4

Helen Levene

Exploitation of factory workers? Making profit from chocoholics? It can only be ...

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

by Roald Dahl

First published:

1964 in the USA; 1967 in the UK.

Who's it for?

Ages unlimited, but mainly sweet-toothed readers of 6-10 years old.

Not suitable for?

People on diets. Readers who dislike fantasies.

Who was Roald Dahl?

Roald Dahl was born in 1916 in Wales to Norwegian parents. His father, a prosperous co-owner of a ship-broking firm, died when Roald was just four years old. His mother was left to raise two stepchildren (from her husband's first marriage) and her own four children. Fortunately the family was financially secure. Roald was nicknamed by his sisters as 'the apple' because as his mother's only son, he was the apple of her eye. He always remained close to his mother. Dahl's autobiography, *Boy*, describes his childhood and schooldays.

At 18 he went to East Africa, working for Shell as a salesman. Soon after the outbreak of World War II he enlisted in the RAF and trained as a fighter-pilot and in 1940 his orders came through to join 80 Squadron. This part of his life, described in his book, *Going Solo*, was to have a deep and long-lasting effect on Dahl as a writer. It was after a serious crash over the Libyan desert, which resulted in severe injuries, that he started writing. After the war he lived in Washington DC where, encouraged by the novelist C S Forester, he wrote several short stories for newspapers and magazines. His first book, *The Gremlins*, published in 1943 launched Dahl as an author.

In 1960 he and his wife, actress Patricia Neal, moved to Great Missenden in Buckinghamshire with their young family. Deep personal tragedies followed when their baby son Theo (to whom Charlie is dedicated) was seriously ill after an accident and when their eldest daughter died, just 7 years old.

From his famous garden hut at Great Missenden, Dahl continued to write for children and went on to become one of the world's most popular authors. His first commercial success, *James and the Giant Peach*, was followed by *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the book which gave him the greatest fame. These, and subsequent much-loved novels have sold all over the world in their millions.

In 1983 Roald married his second wife, Felicity (Liccy), with whom he lived until his death in 1990 at the age of 74.

Charlie who?

Charlie Bucket, who lives with his parents and his elderly grandparents in a tiny wooden house on the edge of town. They are very poor, sometimes starving. Nearby is the biggest chocolate factory in the world, owned by the great inventor, Willy Wonka. Charlie passes by the magnificent building on his way to school each day. He dreams of having chocolate whenever he fancies, instead of just once a year on his birthday.



Charlie and Grandpa Joe.



The five famous children with their winning tickets. From left to right: Charlie Bucket, Violet Beauregarde, Augustus Gloop ...



... Mike Teavee and Veruca Salt.

Then one day there is an exciting announcement in the newspaper. Mr Willy Wonka will give five lucky Golden Ticket winners (the tickets are hidden in the chocolate bars) a guided tour of his factory, and enough sweets for the rest of their lives.

After several raisings and dashings of hopes, Charlie's dream comes true when he finds the last of the winning tickets. The other winners are the enormously fat and greedy Augustus Gloop, spoilt Veruca Salt, chewing-gum addict Violet Beauregarde and gangster-TV obsessed Mike Teavee. During the tour of the never-ending underground world of chocolate flowing rivers and tunnels, and rooms full of amazing sweets produced by the Oompa-Loompas, Willy Wonka makes sure each beastly child gets his or her just desserts. As they and their ghastly parents each come to a sticky end, Charlie and Grandpa Joe are declared the final winners. It transpires that in setting the competition, Willy Wonka had been looking for a good child to take over the factory one day, and that deserved winner is Charlie. Charlie is appointed heir apparent and Willy Wonka insists that they all live in the factory for ever more.

What makes Charlie so popular with children?

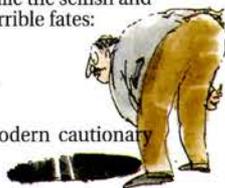
The story is essentially fun, yet at the same time it introduces serious themes that young readers relate to – snobbery and unkindness, for example. Roald Dahl put 'laughter' above all else as an essential ingredient in his work, followed by 'exaggeration'. In terms of wish fulfilment, Charlie can also be seen as the hungry but deserving child who is specially chosen to have as much chocolate as he wants – for ever. Meanwhile the selfish and unpleasant children suffer satisfyingly terrible fates:

Veruca Salt, the little brute,

Has just gone down the rubbish chute ...

We've polished off her parents, too.

These factors combine to make this modern cautionary tale a sure-fire winner.



Oompa-Loompas?

They are the tiny little men imported by Willy Wonka direct from Loompaland to work in his factory (after he'd sacked all his regular workers for betraying his trade secrets). Mr Wonka explains that where the Oompas had lived, there was nothing to eat but caterpillars, and what the little people really crave more than anything else is the cacao bean from which chocolate is made. So he invited them to live and work in his chocolate factory, where they could eat as many beans as they wanted for the rest of their lives. Happy in their work (and probably high on cacao beans) the Oompa-Loompas love to sing. Their songs tell the sticky fate of each of the obnoxious children on Willy Wonka's guided tour and contain the moral messages of the book.

Classic qualities:

Dahl's highly readable style speaks directly to children, and its strong subject matter has made Charlie an all-time favourite since its first publication. The clearly defined characters are each distinct and memorable, as is the satisfyingly rough treatment Augustus Gloop, Veruca Salt and the others receive. The book also has an uncomplicated, highly original storyline, a distinctive third person narrative voice, and an opening which leads straight into the story.

Politically correct?

No. The 'importing' of the Oompa-Loompas or 'miniature pygmies', who were depicted in the original illustrations (not by Quentin Blake) as Black, was considered highly offensive when the book was first published 30 years ago. In later illustrations they were redrawn as white. The name Oompa-Loompa was also considered to make fun of African language sounds. The Oompa-Loompas are treated kindly, but in a very patronising way – Willy Wonka clicks his fingers sharply when he wants a worker to appear; they also have to test various kinds of sweets, sometimes with unfortunate effects. Of course, the white children suffer a variety of dreadful fates but they are individualised in a way the Oompa-Loompas are not. None of the childlike Oompa-Loompas is considered a possible candidate to take over the factory.

Willy Wonka is a kindly magician but with bullying tactics and a rather selfish disregard for other people's feelings. He forces Charlie's grandparents into the flying lift to rehouse them, against their will, in his chocolate emporium. Hasn't he heard of rights for Wrinklies?

Film Versions?

Dahl wrote the screen play for the film version which was released in 1971 and increased his fame still further. Recent successful screenings of *James and the Giant Peach* and *Matilda* have made Dahl a household name.

Sequel:

Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator. ■

Helen Levene works in publishing. The illustrations and BJK cover this month are from the gift edition illustrated by Quentin Blake.