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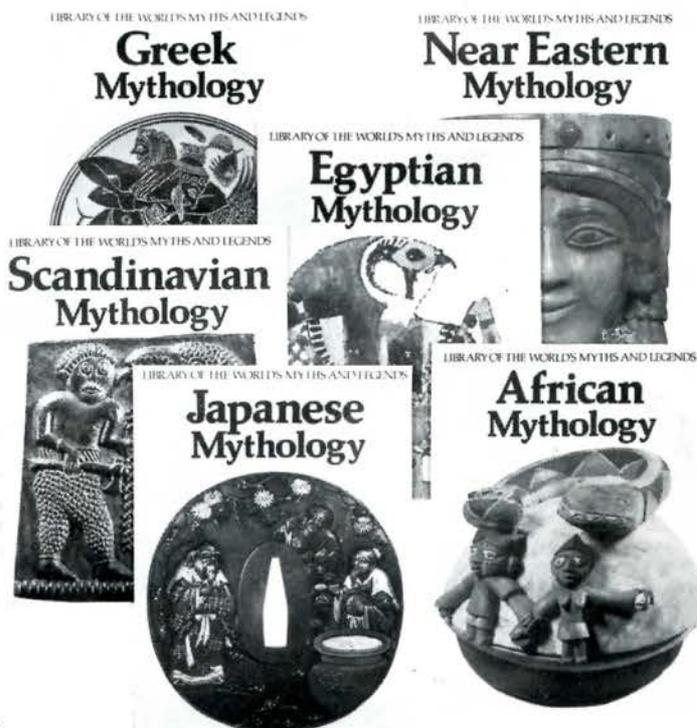
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## Cover Book

On our cover this issue we feature an illustration by Charles Keeping from **Beowulf** (OUP, 0 19 279770 0, £4.50), a new picture book version for 9-13s of the Anglo-Saxon hero tale. The story is retold by Kevin Crossley-Holland. We are most grateful to Oxford University Press for their help in using this illustration.

# EDITOR'S PAGE



September and another school year. Time for something grand, exciting, larger than life. Time for a sense of perspective. Where better to find all that than in myths and legends, the theme for this issue of **Books for Keeps**. Kevin Crossley-Holland offers a persuasive invitation to the world of the Norse myths (page 4). His book for adults on the subject (Deutsch and Penguin) makes fascinating reading. We may be able to look forward to a children's version from Deutsch next year. Meanwhile there are other sources to be found on our booklist (page 6).

Our cover is from a superb new picture-book version of **Beowulf** — a real super hero if ever there was one! Kevin Crossley-Holland and Charles Keeping share the honours in what appears to have been a collaboration without communication. Both are very familiar with the story: Kevin Crossley-Holland, an Anglo-Saxon scholar, has done a verse translation and a version for schools radio; Charles Keeping illustrated Rosemary Sutcliff's **Dragon Slayer**. Both have their own ideas about it. You can read how Keeping approached doing the pictures on page 20. For Kevin Crossley-Holland it's the story of a struggle between good and evil — black and white with no shades of grey except perhaps room to feel pity for the exiled Grendel because, although essentially evil, he is recognisably human and not a dragon or monster.

They worked independently but the result is a satisfyingly rich piece of storytelling, verbally and visually. They both will be discussing the book before an audience at the Cheltenham Festival of Literature in October. It should be a fascinating encounter.

## Printing The Highwayman

As the creator of so many picture books and twice winner of the Kate Greenaway Award, Charles Keeping had quite a lot to contribute to our exploration of how picture books are produced (see **World of Children's Books 4**, **The Production People**, page 17). We went to talk to him at home in Bromley and found him working in his comfortably cluttered living room using his printing press as a desk, and surrounded by the piano, the television set, rows of stuffed dolls made by his daughter and all the paraphernalia of family life. 'We've got thirteen rooms in this house but we all seem to end up in this one.'



On the wall behind him at the working end of the room hangs a collection of harness for carriage horses. For twelve years he kept a pony in the back garden (the garage was stable and coach house) and he still has four lovingly restored equipages. Horses were the first things he drew and he spent a lot of his childhood in the stables in Vauxhall Walk where he was born. Horses and London's past fascinate him and on his press he produced the most beautiful lithographs of old London buildings, mostly stables. 'I never exhibit them or sell them. I do them for my own pleasure.'

His other work he has to see reproduced in books. 'If you saw the originals of **The Highwayman** next to the book you'd be surprised. There's a tremendous amount lost. The originals are much richer, much more powerful, they've got more guts, more substance. Printing has softened them. The proofs I've seen of **Beowulf** look better, you can see it's richer. And it's the same printer. Maybe a different man made the plates. I've a great respect for printers but how it's done does make a difference.'

## Those were the Days

With both Charles Keeping and Brian Wildsmith in this issue we've got two legendary figures from our own golden age of picture books. And Brian reminded us of another, Mabel George, who started it all off at Oxford University Press. 'She was a visionary. And she knew printing. She was merciless with printers. Look at the early editions of my books. The printing is beautiful.'

Looking back twenty years Brian Wildsmith remembers it as a time of high idealism. 'We were trying to influence and educate children's perceptiveness and awareness. Something happened. Somehow it's all slipped away and we're back to little mice in trousers.' Well Pelican, Brian's new book is certainly not that. It's a 64 page (!) picture book of great charm and beauty — and it costs less than £5. Those co-editions Mabel dreamed up are still paying off.

## Meg and Mog — fading away

I'm sure Brian Wildsmith would be less concerned about attitudes in books today if he spent some time with people like Jan Pieńkowski and Jim Riordan (see page 26) who care very much. It was seeing Jan buying up a bunch of badly printed **Picture Puffins** to present to Tony Lacey, the editor at Puffins, that made me decide we needed to visit the **Production People**. The pages of the **Meg and Mog** books Jan picked out ranged from the rich bright shiny red they were meant to be to a dismal matt pinky brown. The customers at that book event learned a lot from the artist himself about what they were *supposed* to be getting.

We've also been spending time with another perfectionist, Raymond Briggs. But more about that in November, when we plop up again (Sorry, Fungus).

Meanwhile don't forget to order lots of **Extra copies for the kids**. You won't regret it.

*Pat*

'The child who approaches the Norse myths is entering a complete world that contains all creation: love and hate, hope and fear, every shade of good and evil.'

## THE NORTHERN MYTHS

**Kevin Crossley-Holland** invites us to share our own inheritance.

Eleven years ago a Stone Age tribe, the wide-eyed and gentle Tasaday, were 'discovered' in the dense rain forests of the Philippines. Before long, they were assaulted by the usual battery — anthropologists, tape recorders, cameras, a helicopter. When one of the Tasaday (there were only twenty-five of them) was asked what he thought of the helicopter, he spoke of it as 'a flying thing' and then as *manuk dakel*, the 'big bird'. Another man referred to it as the 'huge insect'.

Of course. When confronted with the unknown, primitive man tries to explain it in terms of the known. When faced by the apparently inexplicable, the turning of the seasons, the rising and setting of the sun, thunder, or why people have different characteristics, primitive man devises potent stories to justify it. For the Tasaday, thunder is the Big Word, and when it speaks humans are afraid and wise to take shelter; for the Norseman, thunder was the wheels of Thor's chariot rolling across the sky. These explanations are ways of taming and coming to terms with the world around us.

It is not long since people everywhere were disposed to believe in these stories and explanations as being literally true. One culture came to the conclusion that life on earth broke out of an egg; another subscribed to the idea that the earth itself was shaped by some supernatural potter; and in the Christian west, we knew that God created the earth, and life on earth, over a period of six days. Since Darwin, we have had to revise our ideas. But this does not mean that these creation stories have lost all their power. On the contrary, we recognise their quite extraordinary and enduring metaphorical strength.

Like the primitive myth-maker, a child sees the world as a strange and mysterious place that invites the question 'Why?' Children want explanations, definitions, tamings of the wild beyond, and this is precisely why, for as long as they are born innocent and unversed and do not spring fully armed from their mother's wombs, they will respond to myth. Hearing about a mythical (as opposed to historical) time, and meeting supernatural beings (with many human attributes, strengths and weaknesses) who created men and whose actions provide paradigms for men, is a magical experience that helps to define relationships — the relationships between one person and another, and between man and the natural world.

During the past decade, the book trade has displayed considerable interest and inventive energy over the presentation of legends — stories, that is to say, in which the hero has supernatural qualities (like Siegfried or Superman) but is not divine — and folktales. Not only are there literally dozens of editions and versions of Grimm and Perrault and Andersen, ranging from the single story which is a vehicle for the star illustrator to the complete bumper edition; we can also expect to find volumes, and indeed series, that represent an extremely wide range of collectors and countries.

The same cannot be said of myth. Although there have been a few exceptions (none better than Chatto & Windus with the strikingly good **Beginnings: Creation Myths of the World** edited by Penelope Farmer), the nearest that most publishers come to engaging with myth is to volunteer a new, or new-old telling of the classical myths or, at a pinch, the Hebraic myths of the Old Testament. On occasion such retellings can be very fine. One thinks immediately of Leon Garfield and Edward Blishen's two volumes of Greek myths, with their muscular illustrations by Charles Keeping (the crucifixion of Ixion on a wheel of fire is branded on my mind) and Peter Dickinson's Carnegie-winning **City of Gold**. Now it is true that our first instinct is to look to the Mediterranean: the Bible and the classical myths have furnished much of the iconography of western thought and art since the Renaissance. But for all this one cannot help but be struck by how unadventurous publishers are. There are several *superb*



Kevin Crossley-Holland is a poet, translator and writer for children. His particular area of interest and expertise is Norse and Anglo-Saxon literature and culture, and he has many publications in the adult lists. For children his books include retellings and collections of English folktales, Anglo-Saxon stories and Norse myths and legends. (For details of some of these, see the booklist on page 6.)

This autumn sees three new Crossley-Holland books for children. Already out is **The Dead Moon**, beautiful and powerful retellings of eleven tales from East Anglia and the Fens with illustrations by Shirley Felts (Deutsch, 0 233 97478 4, £5.95). Next month comes a new version of **Beowulf**, with illustrations by Charles Keeping (Oxford University Press, 0 19 279770 0, £4.50) and also in October, from Macmillan, **The Riddle Book**, an anthology of riddles ancient and modern in every conceivable form (0 333 33008 0, £3.95).

Kevin Crossley-Holland is at present working on a series of programmes for BBC2 on folk tales. The first of these was filmed during the summer. Next year André Deutsch hope to publish a children's version of his **The Norse Myths**.

bodies of material — wonderful, imaginatively rich, interlinking stories — that to all intents and purposes remain untouched.

What I find particularly surprising is that so little attention has been paid to the myths of the northern world, the Celtic and the Norse. These are the stories that were formed under our own skies, they are lit by the *aurora borealis* — the northern lights. Universal in its dealing with fundamentals and therefore universal in its application, myth is nevertheless specific in its clothing. Time may pass and attitudes change, but the fact is that these myths are our own inheritance. They cannot but have a special meaning for us.

During the past five years I have given a lot of attention to the Norse mythology. These stories call for no special pleading. They are literary artefacts of the very highest order, terse and vivid, humorous and astute. I recognise in them a magnificent attempt to wrestle with complexities, and incidentally learn from them a great deal about the early Germanic peoples, the people who lived in this corner of the world. Let me try to outline them in a few paragraphs.

The Norsemen — by which I mean the Vikings — believed that the universe existed on three levels (like plates suspended one above the other) and consisted of three worlds. The top and middle levels were called Asgard and Midgard — the world of the gods and middle-earth — and were linked by a flaming three-strand bridge, Bifrost. It was nine days' gallop northwards and downwards from middle-earth to the bottom level, Niflheim, a realm of freezing mist and darkness inhabited by monsters and by the dead. The three levels were also linked by the mighty ash tree, Yggdrasill, that grew up through the three levels like an axis — a timeless tree that nourished all creation (its dew was fed to pregnant women to ensure safe childbirth) and suffered from the depredations of the countless animals, birds and squirrels and deer and dragons, living on it and living off it.

The nine worlds were inhabited by gods, light and dark elves, men, giants, dwarfs, and the dead. Of the twelve leading gods and



'The Burning of Bergthorsknoll', illustration by Alan Howard from Kevin Crossley-Holland's Faber Book of Northern Legends.

goddesses, the most important of all were Odin (the rather terrifying god of inspiration — of battle and poetry), Thor (god of the sky and thunder, but also associated with the maintenance of law and order) and Freyr (god of fertility — human increase and fruitfulness of the earth). Any society gets the gods it deserves, and the Norse pantheon is packed out with gods and goddesses that reflect the strengths and weaknesses of Viking society: spirit and confidence, boundless curiosity, extreme bravery, clannish loyalty, generosity, arrogance, lack of compassion and cruelty.

Quite the most extraordinary figure in the Norse myths is the character who embodies all these qualities — the attractive, ambivalent, mischief-making Loki. To begin with, Loki is little more than a thorn in the side of the gods. As part of a bargain, for example, Loki kidnaps the goddess Idun and her apples of youth and delivers them to the giant Thiazi. The gods grow anxious and old:

They soon began to crumble inside their clothes and to seem smaller than they were before. Their skin hung over their bone-houses, bunched or puffy or wrinkled, or stretched so tight that it looked as though the bone would break through. The eyes of one became bloodshot and the eyes of another misty; one god's hands began to tremble, one lost all his hair, and one could not control his bowels. Their joints creaked and ached and they felt utterly limb-weary. The gods felt the spring in their step and the strength in their bodies ebbing from them hour by hour.

Nevertheless, the gods corner Loki and oblige him to make amends. He borrows the falcon-skin of the goddess Freyja, travels to the world of the giants and, after a thrilling chase, brings Idun and her apples back to Asgard. This, indeed, is characteristic of Loki in the early myths; while he frequently gets the gods into a fix, he invariably gets them out of it again.

As the myths progress, however, the figure of Loki darkens from mischief-maker to demon. It is he who is responsible for the death of Balder, the god of innocence and beauty, in what I take to be one of the world's great tragic stories. And by subsequently standing in the way of Balder's return from the dead, Loki prepares the way for the end of the world itself — an all-consuming conflict between gods and men on one side, and giants, dwarfs and monsters on the other.

This animosity between gods and giants is — with the changing colour of Loki — the principal theme of the myths. To begin with, one has the sense that the existing order is not going to change. One giant may masquerade as a mason with the intention of overthrowing Asgard, another may steal Thor's hammer and bury it eight miles deep in the earth, but the gods soon reassert their control. Nor are gods entirely white and giants black. Some gods have weaknesses, and some giants are well-disposed to the gods. There are friendships, unexpected love matches. But in time this fundamental stability becomes

unsettled; the opposition of gods and giants becomes more naked and violent; the gods represent the forces of order, the giants the forces of chaos.

So when the gods fight the giants at Ragnarok, the apocalyptic final battle in which all creation is destroyed and the nine worlds are submerged, we are witnessing the expected — the last trumpet-blast in a long and dramatic symphony. I emphasise the word symphony. Although the myths survive in a number of sources, and the business of retelling them can be like piecing together a huge jigsaw, what we have is a complete cycle of stories with a beginning, a middle and an end. Several themes are stated and then heard in variation; new protagonists appear in every story but key characters reappear over and over again. The child who approaches the Norse myths is entering a complete, self-referring world that contains all creation; he/she meets characters who love and hate, hope and fear, characters active and passive, generous and grasping, every shade of good and evil.

So what are the snags? The Norse myths, you may object, are cruel and fatalistic. They are indeed both these things. One does not have to study the Vikings for long before detecting the streak of ruthlessness in their make-up. This characteristic is not unique to the Vikings; it is common to many societies used to much greater physical hardship than are we. The fatalism is something shared by many pre-Christian societies — it was no less true of the Anglo-Saxons. But to write or read about these qualities is of course not to condone them, and it is absurd to argue that their presence renders a book ineligible for children. They are daily subjected to far worse on television; there is a strong and attractive moral code in the myths; and it is not beyond the writer or reteller to furnish a comparative (compassionate and perhaps Christian) context. It may be some consolation that, in a kind of epilogue to the symphony, two humans, who have survived Ragnarok, and several gods set in motion a new cycle of time and life in the nine worlds:

The earth will rise again out of the water, fair and green. The eagle will fly over cataracts, swoop into the thunder and catch fish under crags. Corn will ripen in fields that were never sown . . . The two humans who hid themselves deep within Yggdrasil will be called Lif and Lifthrasir. Lif and Lifthrasir will have children. Their children will bear children. There will be life and new life, life everywhere on earth. That was the end; and this is the beginning.

All right, you say, but what about the tongue-twisting names? Yes, we are left with those. They are the only real obstacle to immediate enjoyment of this magnificent body of myths, but of course, like most strange things, they soon become familiar. As do the myths themselves; indeed they soon become stimulating friends. In their rich soil responsive minds can grow and learn that greatest of joys — imaginative understanding. ●

## Gods and Heroes

Some in-print re-tellings of myths and legends of the northern world. Great stuff for reading aloud with junior, middle or lower secondary classes.

### The Heroes of Asgard

A. and E. Keary, ill. C. E. Brock, Macmillan Facsimile Classics, 0 333 07802 0, £4.95

Annie and Eliza Keary's selection of the most accessible of the Norse myths was first published in 1870. There's still a lot of life in their rather formal Victorian prose. Those expecting winged and horned helmets, blonde braided hair and lots of thongs will not be disappointed by the pictures.

### The Norse Myths

Kevin Crossley-Holland, Deutsch, 0 233 97271 4, £8.95; Penguin, 0 14 00.6056 1, £4.95

For adults, with plenty of scholarly notes; but the telling is such that many of the stories could be used with children as they stand — *The Theft of Idun's Apples* for one, which is so rich and resonant with meanings.

### The Vikings

Mikael Esping, ill. Julek Heller, Piccolo, 0 330 26746 9, £1.00

Stories of Norse gods and Scandinavian and Icelandic heroes as told by 'my parents and grandparents on long winter evenings'. The narrative style sometimes switches strangely from the formal/poetic to the colloquial — "That settles it," said Odin. — but in general the eight myth episodes are swiftly and simply told. The illustrations which look as if they might be very powerful suffer badly from being reproduced on such nasty paper.

### The Faber Book of Northern Legends

ed. Kevin Crossley-Holland, ill. Alan Howard, Faber, 0 571 11519 5, £5.50

Twenty-two stories drawn from the Germanic hero legends, Icelandic sagas and Norse myths, with an excellent and useful foreword. Contains



Another Alan Howard drawing from the *Faber Book of Northern Legends*

a chilling re-telling by Penelope Farmer of the marvellous legend of Wayland Smith. (See also *Wayland Smith of the Gods* by Ursula Sygne, Bodley Head, now out of print.)

### Tales of the Norse Gods and Heroes

Barbara Leonie Picard, Oxford University Press, 0 19 274513 1, £5.25

An established collection by a well-respected collector. Two clear sections: gods (Odin, Thor, Freya) and heroes. Useful alphabetical list of names with meanings.

### Myths of the Norsemen

Roger Lancelyn Green, Puffin, 0 14 03.0464 9, £1.10

Myths and legends linked in one continuing story of the saga of Asgard.

### Dragon Slayer

Rosemary Sutcliff, ill. Charles Keeping, Bodley Head, 0 370 01043 4, £3.50; Puffin, 0 14 03.0254 9, 85p

Imaginative and descriptive prose version of the Anglo-Saxon poem. Excellent read aloud; good version for younger juniors.

### Beowulf

Kevin Crossley-Holland and Charles Keeping, Oxford University Press, 0 19 279770 0, £4.50

A strong and exciting version by Kevin Crossley-Holland right in the spirit of the original. Begs to be read aloud by all would-be actor teachers. Keeping's pictures take off from his last encounter with Beowulf in *Dragon Slayer*. They are more than a match for the story, full of power and feeling. The book is a splendid exercise in counterpoint.

# Kevin Crossley-Holland



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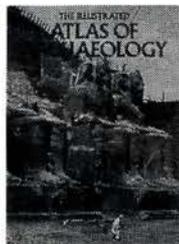
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# REVIEWS

## Nursery/Infant



'Maisie cleaned her teeth and went to the toilet. So did Teddy. She washed her hands and face. So did Teddy.'

### Fred & Bixby Speckles

0 7207 1361 7

### Fred & Bixby Fred feels fed up

0 7207 1358 7

### Fred & Bixby Spoilspoorts

0 7207 1360 9

### Fred & Bixby—Who do you think you are?

0 7207 1359 5

Sylvia Caveney, ill. Simon Stern, Pelham, 75p each

Stories of a friendship between two somewhat unlikely creatures: Bixby, a frisky fly, and Fred (short for Frederika), a feathery hen. These small books, just 16 pages long, are attractively packaged and their appeal lies mainly in Simon Stern's lively and amusing full colour illustrations; these provide the sparkle that is lacking in the text. And why, oh why use the present tense? Young readers do not find it easier to cope with in stories of this length. JB

### Maisie Middleton

Nita Sowter, Picture Lions, 0 00 662041 8, 95p

Maisie quickly became a favourite with my infants when the hardcover edition was published. Her early morning exploits: attempting to wake mum and dad, getting washed and dressed, making breakfast for herself and her animals after dad's dismal efforts, and especially the picture of her sitting on the loo, delight young children for they are seeing something of themselves portrayed in a real book. A must for all nursery and infant children. JB

### Max

Rachel Isadora, Carousel, 0 552 52166 3, 95p

Baseball player Max discovers a new way to warm up for his Saturday morning game: he joins his sister's ballet class where he stretches, springs and leaps — the ideal way to keep in trim for those home runs. Both present tense narrative and black and white illustrations are used to great effect — the latter creating something of the illusion that the reader is watching a film sequence — by an American artist whose talents have yet to be widely appreciated over here. This paperback edition should help, it's a real joy. JB



Max, having fun.

### The Last Puppy

Frank Asch, Carousel, 0 552 52204 X, 95p

A beguiling story of the last born of nine puppies who seemed destined to be last at everything for the rest of his life. When his owners put up the notice 'puppies for sale' he tries desperately not to be last again but his own anxiousness has the opposite effect. Then at last, his turn comes and he is, in the words of his new owner, 'My first puppy'. Frank Asch's simply drawn pictures in muted colours are in keeping with the gentle nature of the text and the whole should have instant child appeal. JB

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

## Reviewers

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**1. Jill Bennett** is in charge of a Reading Centre in Middlesex. She is the compiler of **Learning to Read with Picture Books** and of several anthologies of poetry for infants, Literary Editor of **Child Education** and on the Board of the SBA.

**2. David Bennett** (no relation to Jill) is a former librarian, and currently Head of English in a Nottinghamshire secondary school.

**3. Steve Bowles** teaches English in a secondary school in Essex. He was co-producer of **Reviewsheet** until it ceased publication and has several books for children in print.

**4. Cathy Lister** teaches in a middle school in Staffordshire, with responsibility for English and Language across the Curriculum.

### Postman Pat and the Mystery Thief

0 590 70106 1

### Postman Pat's Treasure Hunt

0 590 70105 3

### Postman Pat's Secret

0 590 70107 X

### Postman Pat's Rainy Day

0 590 70108 8

Stories by John Cunliffe, ill. Celia Berridge, Hippo, £1.25 each

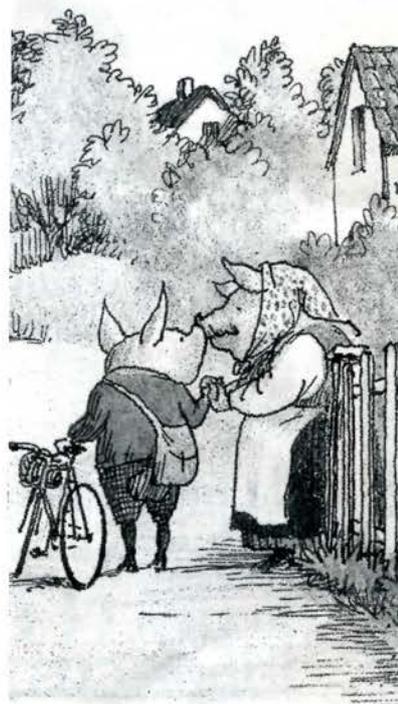
These books will undoubtedly be very popular with the many pre-schoolers who have been following the adventures of Postman Pat and his black and white cat and the other residents of Greendale on BBC TV. I am glad that real illustrations, and excellent ones at that, have been used rather than stills from the TV series; they give the stories far more character somehow, have a naïveté that is just right for them and provide plenty for young children to look at whilst listening to the competently written tales being read. JB

### The Three Little Pigs

ill. Eric Blegvad, Picture Lions, 0 00 661966 5, 95p

This is a superb interpretation of the story; Blegvad's drawings in pen and ink and soft colours are full of dramatic detail, but they support rather than overwhelm the text which

remains close to the Joseph Jacobs version of the classic English fairy tale. Very strongly recommended; and an excellent antidote to the brash Disney version that so many children come upon as an introduction to the traditional tale. JB



One of the pigs leaves home to seek his fortune, one of Eric Blegvad's illustrations to **The Three Little Pigs**.

# Infant/Junior

## The Old Woman who Lived in a Vinegar Bottle

Rumer Godden, ill. Mairi Hedderwick, Macmillan Picturemacs, 0 333 32965 1, £1.50

The old tale of rags to riches and back again is given a new flavour in Rumer Godden's version, first published some

ten years ago and now issued in a full-size paperback. Here, the main character is an old woman whose home is shaped like a vinegar bottle (the old fashioned stone variety) and who lives with Malt, her cat. Despite her hunger, she throws a fish, given her by some fishermen, back into the sea. The fish grants her wishes which become increasingly demanding till at last he tires

of her avarice, tells her she is greedy and she is returned to her vinegar bottle.

Mairi Hedderwick's watercolours have a Hebridean flavour and beautifully capture the humour of a text that is longish for a picture book, but which has a powerful holding quality. JB

## A Kindle of Kittens

Rumer Godden, ill. Lynne Byrnes, Macmillan Picturemacs, 0 333 32964 3, £1.50

Rumer Godden is again well served by the artist who has illustrated her tale of a stray cat, the tabby who manages to place her 'kindled' kittens in the best homes in town. A long but utterly enchanting picturebook text. JB

# Junior/Middle

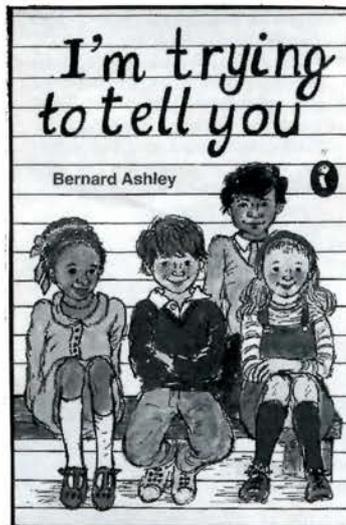
## The Bunch from Bananas

David Pownall, Puffin, 0 14 03.1343 5, 90p

A series of highly improbable happenings is centred around the town of Santa Margarita del Banana and its crazy inhabitants. Each chapter stands alone as an incident and the short sentences make it accessible reading material for most readers from nine years provided they can get their tongues around the names of characters and places. Each paragraph is packed with corny comments of the kind that seem to appeal to young boys. It can however be too much of a good thing and I suspect that for some the humour will wear thin before they get to the end. CL



Ug the Indescribable, from *The Bunch from Bananas*, line drawing by Freire Wright.



## I'm Trying to Tell You

Bernard Ashley, Puffin, 0 14 03.1337 0, 85p

Disappointing. The short story form curbs the self-indulgence that mars Ashley's novels but the first two here flop and the execution of the third — school-camp described in parallel letters to parents and big sister — doesn't match its interesting form. The last story is excellent, though, its strength highlighting the others' weaknesses. Prakash befriends the class scruff, risking his family's disapproval, but everything goes wrong and he's left guilty and ashamed. This has a power which transcends age-groups and, if you hid the typical Young Puffin cover, would read aloud in secondary schools as well as with lower juniors. It should be a benchmark for writers, publishers and teachers alike. SB

# Middle/Secondary

## Salt River Times

William Mayne, Puffin, 0 14 03.1499 7, £1.25

A sequence of short stories with their genesis in Mayne's work at an Australian school. As usual, the style is likely to defeat most kids but secondary teachers might glean ideas from it and there are one or two pieces which, properly presented, could be useful as examples of less common narrative techniques. Minority stuff like this seems an odd choice for Puffins, though; I can't really fathom the current direction of their list. Perhaps it's for the export market. SB

## Bagthorpes v The World

Helen Cresswell, Puffin, 0 14 03.1324 9, £1.00

Reeling from the aftermath of the Great Daisy Chain in *Bagthorpes Unlimited*, poor Henry is further beleaguered



Great Aunt Lucy, from *Bagthorpes v. the World*

by discovering that he is grossly overdrawn at his bank — all this and the impending arrival of Great Aunt Lucy, who refuses to acknowledge the existence of time.

This fourth in the Bagthorpe Saga may find new fans converted by TV. The slapstick

humour, the crazy and obsessively single-minded characters and the superb bagthorpean invective is here larger than life and as unashamedly uncompromising as ever. I don't care if some of you out there hate the Bagthorpes; I and my sizeable gang are utter devotees, eagerly hoping for book number five! DB

## The Missing Man

Roderic Jeffries, Beaver, 0 600 20475 8, 95p

Likely to appeal to kids whose reading records show a distinct penchant for fast-moving, not very realistic and not too demanding material. The villains are really very 'orrible and the good guys, like Pat our schoolboy hero, son of other good guy, Mike, a local detective, responds to 'You're not feeling sick?' with 'My head's booming a bit, but it's gradually easing and my arm's stiff and sore, but otherwise I'm fit . . . How long is it to lunch?'

Out fishing on his own at 3.00 a.m. Pat sees an explosion at sea. The first piece of rotten luck for the nasties, who plan to pinch the Lady T'seng art treasures. Now of course they want to get Pat, little knowing who his father is, etc. etc. . . . All very predictable. DB

## Dawn Wind

Rosemary Sutcliff, Puffin, 0 14 03.1223 4, £1.50

The Britons' resistance is finally quashed by the Saxons at Aquae Sulis, which 14-year-old Owain manages to survive. Together with a war-hound, Dog, he begins a journey through darkness and servitude, which only ceases eleven years later, when Augustine lands near Canterbury and brings the light of Christianity to Saxon and Briton alike. Finally Owain is free to pursue his own happiness with Regina, whom he has met and lost.

As ever Rosemary Sutcliff tells her tale in an impeccable style.

It is a tragedy that we have not yet found a way to mediate such books to more than a few young readers. That Puffin keep them in print is an act of faith for which I, for one, am very grateful. DB

### The Beethoven Medal

K. M. Peyton, Magnet,  
0 416 24720 2, £1.25

Pennington and his seventeenth summer has been around for over a decade but he's never been very popular in the schools in which I have taught. This second book, followed subsequently by Pennington's *Heir*, introduces Ruth Hollis into Penn's life. (She was previously heavily into horses in *Pattern of Roses*.)

Our hero is working to support himself whilst he continues his music studies in London and tries to prepare for a major piano recital. Ruth proves quite prepared to be his long-suffering drudge, turn his music for him and wait whilst he sweats it out in jail, having hammered a policeman in a fit of temper. Kids who are hooked on Penn will lap it up; others, I am sure will go for more recent, more exciting reads. DB

### The Shadow Guests

Joan Aiken, Puffin,  
0 14 03.1388 5, £1.10

### The Night of the Lemures

Enid Gibson, Terrapin,  
0 86042 041 8, £1.40

Ghosts of the long-gone past haunt both of these fairly ordinary novels, exerting a frightening influence on youth of the present. In the former the trigger is a combination of the highly-charged emotional state of Cosmo and a long-standing family curse. In the latter the boy's discovery of a roman sword is the more mundane device used to initiate events.

'May your firstborn son die in battle at an early age, and may his mother die of grief at his loss, and may this go on from generation to generation! is the curse which his cousin Eunice Doom reveals to Cosmo Curtoys when he arrives at the family home, after his flight from Australia, where his brother and mother have disappeared in *The Bush*. Four previous victims of the curse visit Cosmo and as if this isn't enough to give him the collywobbles he's having a thoroughly miserable time at his new school.

The plot moves fairly smoothly despite lengthy discussions of time dimensions, which seem to punctuate all meal-time conversations with the learned Miss Doom.

Lower Secondary boys might enjoy it.

The rather forbidding Marcus conjured up by Peter is a hang-over from the days of *Boadicea*. He is upset by Lemures, sort of nasty undeads, intent on claiming more victims. Single-handed Peter is reduced to ancient pagan ritual in order to lay his roman friend's ghost and save his own skin. By the by he also succeeds in rescuing the local baddy colonel from a larcenous bat-man. Not remarkable stuff, but probably worth a library copy for lower secondary. DB

### Welcome Home, Jellybean

Marlene Fanta Shyer,  
Granada, 0 583 30485 0,  
85p

The nearest thirteen-year-old Geraldine can get to her own name is 'Gellydean' and making that effort successfully is a major step in the tedious progress of a mentally handicapped child along the path of intellectual development.

When she is thirteen her mother persuades a reluctant father to bring Geraldine home from the 'institution' to live with the family. The effect she has on family life, on her brother's status at school, on her father's musical talent, is related in this totally involving, heart-warming story. It is undoubtedly a tear-jerker but

one with considerable substance. I would recommend it to all top middle school children who are sufficiently alert and sensitive to be aware of the frustrations and anguish with which they can be confronted and the rewards that are slow to come. Recommend it also to those ready to be nudged into acknowledging that caring and sharing require cooperation from all involved in a relationship. CL

### The Deserter

Nigel Gray, Lions,  
0 00 672029 3, £1.00

This enterprising piece of publishing deserves support. A little-known writer; a hardback that scarcely made a ripple slipping by; writing aimed at kids, not literary pundits; subject matter which they might question — *The Deserter* isn't an editor's dream despite being an appealing (and useful) little novel. Four kids help a young soldier who's deserted rather than return to N. Ireland. Not a strikingly different starting point but the first person narrative has an attractive freshness and some punchy sections allow a fine balance between reality and reassurance. The episodic first half is always interesting but a little static; the second half has more pace and drama. A quick, easy read — 120 pages, large print, good cover — well worth having around. SB

## PUFFIN CLASSICS

### David Bennett looks at a new series

#### The Wizard of Oz

Frank L. Baum,  
0 14 03.5001 2, 85p

#### The Secret Garden

Frances Hodgson Burnett,  
0 14 03.5004 7, 95p

#### What Katy Did

Susan Coolidge,  
0 14 03.5011 X, 85p

#### The Railway Children

E. Nesbit, 0 14 03.5005 5,  
90p

#### The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

Mark Twain,  
0 14 03.5003 9, 90p

What I wonder are Puffin's motives in collecting these titles into a new series? Do they presume that young readers wish to add these so-called classics to their collections on a sort of 'yard of children's books' principle? Will it simply work out as an economical proposition due to copyright considerations? Are these books aimed at the dotting aunties and ill-informed grannies market, who generally like to buy familiar and safe-sounding books for their young relatives?

Given that they have arrived, who will read them? My

librarian considers that children (and teachers) have enough on to keep up with newer and perhaps more meaningful books; They do not need to be 'cluttered' (her word), with some of the older titles, especially when not all are strictly children's classics anyway. I personally doubt whether they cannot be matched in style by more modern authors. Most make good stories, but not all so great as to be an indispensable part of literary growth.

On a more positive note, most of these books are now adapted for film or television and as such frequently on the small screen. For this reason alone, on the off-chance that a pupil will want to read the original, a copy or two in the classroom, library or bookshop will not come amiss. They are attractively priced.

And so to the plot... Before she saw...

*The Wizard of Oz* a cyclone whisks Dorothy into the magical land of Oz, where along with Toto her dog, she encounters Munchkins a wicked witch, a tin man who wants a heart, a scarecrow who needs a brain and a lion who requires courage. Then, most important of all, she

meets the wizard himself and what a revelation that was...

Meanwhile in...

#### The Secret Garden

disagreeable Mary was being particularly awful, until she saw a robin fly into the walled garden for which she thought there was no entrance. Once in the garden agreeable things happen so that 'there was no room left for the disagreeable thoughts which affected her liver and her digestion and made her yellow and tired'...

On the other hand...

*What Katy Did* was to be singularly last century with her family and friends in rural America, enjoying such innocent pleasures as brawling with girls in a neighbouring school — all over a hat — and pretending to be a mighty river...

Back on the line...

*The Railway Children* were prancing about in the smoke, steam and grime of a railway embankment trying to stop trains from crashing, for which service they received great praise plus watches and chains. There's also a damaged boy pretending to be a dog, an old gentleman who seems to spend a lot of time travelling, a long-suffering mother who is so

poor she can only afford one servant, a Russian revolutionary, and a dark secret...

And so to the Mississippi...

*Tom Sawyer* and his chums are generally being pretty tiresome and superstitious and meet up with some thoroughly bad characters in a graveyard, which scares them so much that they go in fear of their lives, or more specifically of a sinister ethnic type who ends up, conveniently, blocked in a cave. Tom, who had planned to murder, pillage and take hostages at the beginning of the book gets handsomely rewarded and a few favours from a Miss Thatcher.

I said these classics made good stories didn't I? ●



The Tin Man and Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz*

## Beowulf

newly translated by Kevin Crossley-Holland and illustrated by Charles Keeping\*

The story of Beowulf and his struggle against the monster Grendel is one of the most powerful epics in the world. This completely new version is for children aged 9-13 years.

48 pages, illustrated in black and white, laminated boards  
0 19 279770 0

£4.50

\* Winner of the Kate Greenaway Medal 1982 for *The Highwayman*.

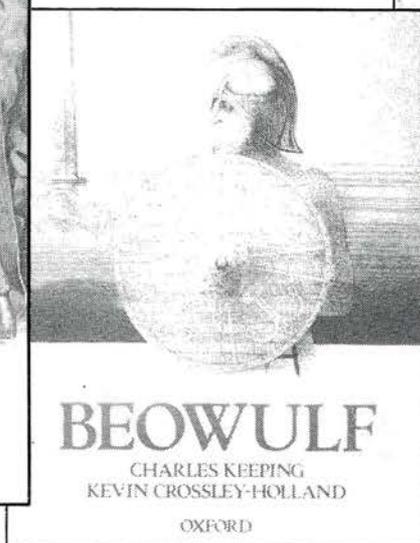
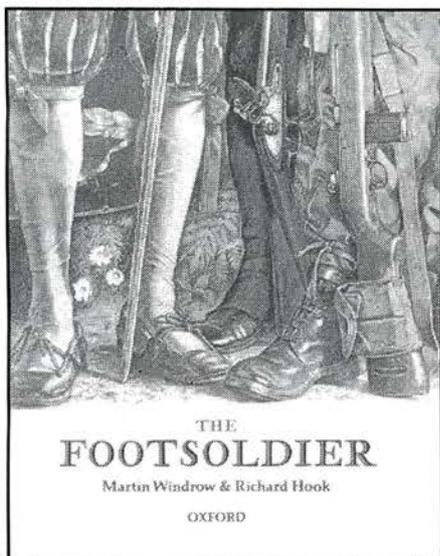
## Blackbeard the Pirate

by Victor Ambrus

'Soon after my dear father was knocked down by a runaway sedan chair, my mother took me to one side, " 'Tis time you learned a trade, my boy," she said. So she took me to be apprentice to Captain Blackbeard.' Thus began the adventures of Ned Bones, the cabin boy in the sea-story to end all sea stories.

32 pages, illustrated in full colour, laminated boards  
0 19 279771 9

£4.50



## A Packet of Poems

chosen by Jill Bennett and illustrated by Paddy Mounter

A delicious new collection of poems all about food. Includes poems by Kit Wright, Jack Prelutsky, Ogden Nash, Eleanor Farjeon and many others.

112 pages, 56 pages of full colour illustrations, laminated boards  
0 19 276049 1

£5.50

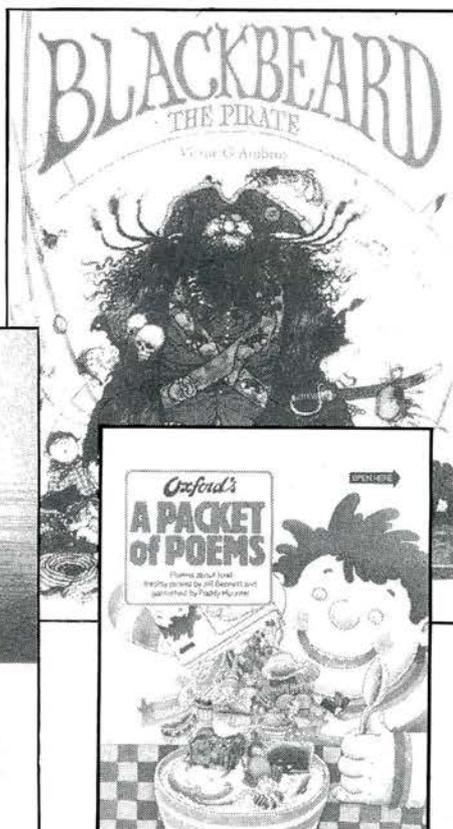
## The Footsoldier

Martin Windrow  
illustrated by Richard Hook

This is a beautifully illustrated and highly informative guide to the life of the common soldier on campaign and in barracks down the centuries.

80 pages, illustrated in full colour, laminated boards  
0 19 273147 5

£4.95



# Oxford Books for Children

# HARDBACK

An attempt to separate the wheat from the chaff among some of this year's offerings to date.

**Pat Triggs** looks at stories for new and developing readers.



## Black Bear Baby

Berniece Freschet, pictures by Jim Arnosky, World's Work, 0 437 41304 7, £3.95

Black bears may not be such an established part of the cultural stock of young children in this country as they are in their native North America where this book first appeared last year, but I dare bet there will be few who can resist the appeal of this little bear.

Born in a dark warm den under deep winter snow Bear Baby and his sister grow up through spring and summer, feeding, playing, learning, watched over always by the mother bear. Four episodes, short lines, large well-spaced print and delightful pictures add up to a book that is easy to read and dispenses absorbing information with warmth and humour.

## Horse

Jane Gardam, ill. Janet Rawlins, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 066 8, £2.75

## A Present for Nellie

Anne Harvey, ill. Victoria Cooper, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 067 6, £2.75

Two more in the excellent Blackbird series. As usual Jane Gardam's story tells more than it says. Susan and old Mr Grandly seem to be the only people in the village to notice that Horse on the hill who used to look 'pressed out of the grass by a huge pastry cutter. Dazzling white.' is now overgrown with bilberries and weeds. But when the Forestry arrives intending to plant Christmas trees all over him the whole village begins to take notice. Demanding and rewarding but not difficult. Lots to talk about with those who wish; but don't be surprised if some want just to hug it to themselves.

A Present for Nellie is based on an incident from Eleanor Farjeon's autobiography. Those who don't shine at parties will share Nellie's hopes, fears and disappointments and even perhaps be comforted by the heart-warming ending and Nellie's grown-up realisation 'that how you looked was not the most important thing about you'.

## The Perfect Hamburger

Alexander McCall Smith, ill. Laszlo Acs, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 10717 2, £2.50

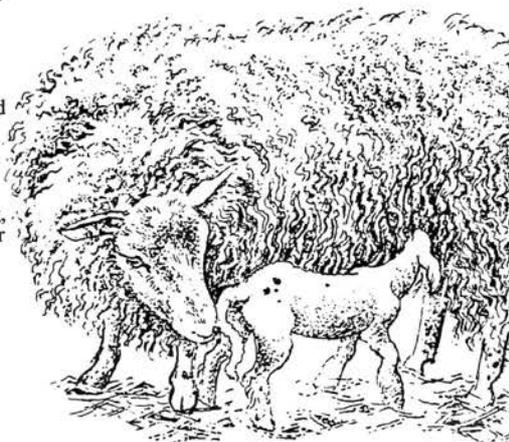
## The Dead Letter box

Jan Mark, ill. Mary Rayner, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 10804 7, £2.75

Two from the Antelope series for those tackling longer stories on their own.

The Perfect Hamburger has an admirably clear and strong narrative line. Joe's search for the ingredients for the perfect hamburger which will save Mr Borthwick from a takeover by the slick operators of the Hamburger House chain makes appetising (sorry!) reading.

'Glenda and Louie were best friends, but Glenda was Louie's only friend, while everybody was Glenda's friend.' Louie's imaginative plans for keeping in touch with her 'best friend' when she moves house don't really work. But during the experiment she meets Jane whose ideas for exploiting the library far outstrip Louie's modest scheme (picked up while watching a spy film) of using it as a dead letter box. Jan Mark's devastatingly clear observation of human behaviour and her particular brand of humour blend to make a story which is accessible yet offers the developing reader something a bit tougher to bite on.



## Lambing at Sheepfold Farm

Susan Williams, Gollancz, 0 575 03045 3, £3.95

A delightful and informative story of shepherd Jack Evans, his wife Betty and their children Polly and Tim at lambing time in Wiltshire. In late February the whole family move from their cottage to live until Easter in a caravan and shepherd's hut at the lambing site high up on the Downs. This is Susan Williams' first book and draws on her experiences as a shepherd's wife. She was originally trained as an artist and her black and white illustrations are a beautiful complement to a simple text. Together they evoke a genuine feeling of a working family life — warm but matter-of-fact and in no way romanticised. Good for reading aloud or alone. (57 pages)

## The Julian Stories

Ann Cameron, ill. Ann Strugnell, Gollancz, 0 575 03143 3, £4.95

Julian tells six stories about himself, his little brother Huey, his mother and his father — but especially his father. Full of humour and the amazingness of everyday happenings. The story of how Julian's father makes a pudding that 'tastes like a whole raft of lemons, like a night on the sea' is pure delight. Read it aloud to younger listeners. Simple sentences and large print mean older readers can go-it-alone with confidence. (72 pages)

## The Accidental Twins

Angela Bull, ill. Jill Bennett, Faber, 0 571 11761 9, £3.50

Susan Green and Sally Gray look alike and share the same birthday but they have never been friends and are less than delighted at being labelled 'accidental twins' by everyone else in school. As their ninth birthdays approach things seem to be getting even worse. A nicely observed home and school story. Eight chapters, 63 pages.

## Warton and the Castaways

Russell E. Erikson, pictures by Lawrence di Fiori, Hodder and Stoughton, 0 340 28147 2, £3.95

Fans of the five previous books about Warton and Morton Toad will need no persuading to this one. It is well up to standard. In search of honey for Morton's favourite (or in this case favorite — you have to excuse the American English) honey bread the two brothers get caught in a flood, narrowly avoid becoming lunch for a raccoon, take refuge with Cora and Hester, two elderly tree toads with a highly distinctive life style, and end up in a colony of herons (and you know what they like to eat for breakfast!). Amusing, exciting and highly diverting. Six sections, largish print, 112 pages.

## Double Dare and Other Stories

Jamila Gavin, ill. Simon Willby, Methuen (Pied Piper series), 0 416 21540 8, £3.95

Four longish stories (30+ pages each) with a multi-ethnic cast of characters and a taste of the supernatural in each of them. Lorraine, desperate for a pet, finds a box of silkworms and strikes up a friendship with an old lady with a mulberry tree. On a demolition site Charlie swings himself into the past and is mistaken for a runaway slave. Terry Singh from the children's home in trouble with a double dare has some strange encounters with an old Indian man. And Maggie helps old Mr Winterbourne who seems to be haunted by a soldier from his past. Four nicely resolved endings to stories where the strange and the ordinary co-exist quite naturally.



'He lifted the bedspread. There was his face, and his eyes like black lightning.' From *The Julian Stories*.

# HARVEST

**Steve Bowles** finds only a few nourishing grains in his look at short stories and science fiction.



Drawing from 'Eggshell Saturday', from *Black Eyes and other Spine Chillers*

## Black Eyes and other spine-chillers

ed. Lance Salway, Pepper Press, 0 560 74523 0, £3.95

Probably compiled with top juniors in mind but it should keep a year or two without harm (Joan Aiken's piece, in particular). Philippa Pearce's title story might make an interesting experiment with younger kids too; a small girl scares a more fortunate cousin by claiming malevolent powers for her teddy bear. Touching, possibly a little gentle for some kids, but this standard is exceptionally rare. Of the others, I'd ignore Dorothy Edwards and Helen Cresswell but Jan Mark and Marjorie Darke could be handy when times are hard and Joan Aiken's *Finders Keepers* (though wordy as usual) provides a good illustration of the use of weather and setting to create atmosphere. Particularly useful for the staffroom/department short story shelf.

## A Whisper in the Night

Joan Aiken, Gollancz, 0 575 03105 0, £5.95

These stories of 'horror, suspense and fantasy' could be stored similarly, though for secondary only. I enjoyed *Old Fillikin*, with its open ending and country grandmother full of quaint old sayings, and *The Birthday Party* where the menacingly self-centred Juniper becomes possessed of a nasty way to wreak vengeance on her enemies. *Finders Keepers* reappears and ten more will promote your own understanding of short stories and spark ideas even if Ms Aiken doesn't have sufficient knowledge of, or perhaps commitment to, the audience to adopt the right style, structure and content for generally-acceptable read-alouds. Keep for dipping into; don't read it all at once.

## Break of Dark

Robert Westall, Chatto & Windus, 0 7011 2614 0, £5.50

A less distinctive style and, consequently, less feeling of sameness. However, the five stories are similar to most of the Aiken in that they're near-adult in viewpoint, theme and style, not really classroom read-alouds.

The three shorter stories lack originality and, despite some good moments, the humour and horror in *Sergeant Nice* mix a little uneasily but *Blackham's Wimpey* shouldn't be missed. Those who accuse Westall of 'going over the top' will bristle because the details of conditions in a W.W.II Wellington are even more horrific than the ghosts of burning German fliers which drive British crews mad. It needs its fifty pages for full impact, though, so even here reading aloud would be awkward.

## Sweets from a Stranger

Nicholas Fisk, Kestrel, 0 7226 5759 5, £4.95

These stories would be no problem for class reading in terms of length but I can't say there's anything I feel desperate to share with my groups. The book's publication shows the value of an author's name — an unknown would have struggled to get this collection into print. (I notice that all the titles I'm reviewing are by well-known writers.) Fisk's starting points are quite interesting, they just don't lead to rounded, satisfying stories.

The next two titles, also SF, could conceivably have had trouble finding outlets, too, if editors didn't generally 'show faith' with writers they've promoted in the past.

## Ring-Rise, Ring-Set

Monica Hughes, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 069 2, £5.95

Not one of Monica Hughes' best books. With the Ice Age cometh idea as backdrop, Liza frets about women's restricted life in a Canadian scientific community, part of the research effort to halt the glaciers. An impetuous escapade necessitates rescue by Ekoes, descendants of Eskimoes, who become her family for several months. Hereafter, her loyalties are torn, especially when the scientists' first breakthrough proves fatal to the caribou upon which the Ekoes depend. Both characters and plot show little originality and there's insufficient drama to grab many readers. Exclusively for fans of Monica Hughes and similar writers.

## This Time of Darkness

H. M. Hoover, Methuen, 0 416 21770 2, £5.50

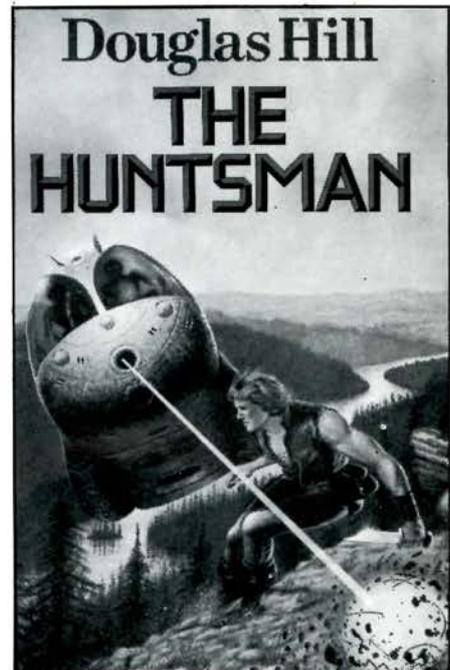
Helen Hoover's new title also disappoints, and not just because of the too-young jacket. Their literacy allows Amy and Axel to outwit the authorities and battle to the underground city's upper levels where the leisured-elite society shows signs of decadent decay. Hence, they traverse the Badlands — avoiding the savage inhabitants — to reach haven eventually with Axel's family in a calm, honest, farming community. Once again, there's insufficient excitement and, till near the end, the threat is too nebulous. Like the Monica Hughes, a minority read.

## The Humboldt Effect

Delia Huddy, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 043 9, £5.95

A third unsuccessful SF novel, this time exhibiting that all-too-common lack of understanding of the audience. Perhaps it shouldn't shock us here, though; Delia Huddy is 'an editor in a London publishing house' — no guessing which. This sequel to *Time Piper*, though ultimately absurd in its

revelation that Jonah was swallowed by a submarine, not a whale, has a surface gloss in the detailed preparation for the reversal-of-time experiment. Unfortunately, such details, allied to those dealing with the characters and their inter-relationships, are just the thing to send kids to sleep.



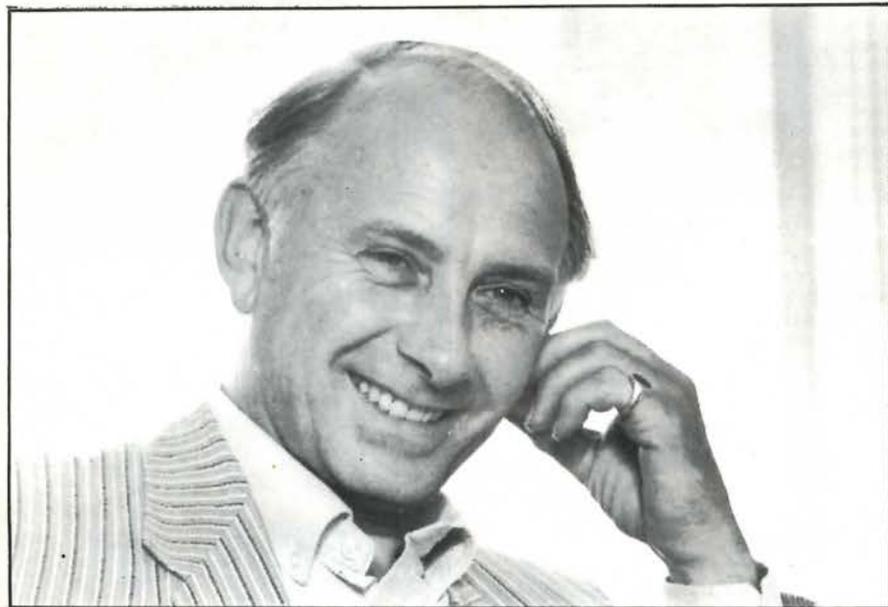
## The Huntsman

Douglas Hill, Heinemann, 0 434 94284 7, £4.95

Douglas Hill, by contrast, knows very well what the reader wants. For the opener of his new series, another super-hero on a quest fights massive odds with help from trusty, oddball sidekick. Finn Ferral, woodsman extraordinary, has his adventures on an Earth that's reverted to primitive village society and been invaded by the cruel alien Slavers. The diminution, compared with the galaxy-wide Keill Randor stories, detracts a little but the jacket is effective and, once you're into it, the pace is fast, the fights plentiful. Sold on the back of *Galactic Warlord* et al., it should do quite well. ●

# Authorgraph No. 16

Brian Wildsmith



First and foremost Brian Wildsmith is a painter. But he also sees himself as an educator in the most fundamental sense of the word. Behind his many books for children is an impulse to develop in those who encounter them a perceptiveness and an awareness about themselves and the world they inhabit which will help them to become more complete people. For all his humour he is essentially a serious and thoughtful man and this view of himself and his work is deep rooted and well-considered.

There was a time when he seemed to be going in quite a different direction. Born in a South Yorkshire mining village he won a scholarship to Barnsley Grammar School and was doing science in the sixth form. 'I was going to be a chemist. Then one morning I was going into a physics class and I remember thinking "Is this really what I want to do with my life?" And the answer was no. I want to create.' He left that day. 'It was a very significant moment in my life — almost a revelation. I've never regretted it!'

How did his family react? 'My mother was marvellous. My father was sceptical; but they were both very supportive. It was a case of whatever our Brian wants to do it's all right.' In a Yorkshire mining village being a painter must have seemed an odd thing to do 'Yes, but I didn't care. I went at it with tremendous energy and with no thoughts for anything else — except playing cricket.'

He went to Barnsley School of Art. 'I had done *nothing* that would give any indication that I had any talent but they'd take anyone in those days.' After three years, in 1949, he won a scholarship to the Slade School of Fine Art and 'existed' on a grant of £203 a year. 'I thought I was rich. All I wanted to do was paint. I still do.'

After the Slade came National Service. 'They put me in the Royal Artillery. I thought, I'm not cannon fodder.' So with an effrontery born of logic which is not uncharacteristic Brian Wildsmith marched off to the War Office to find out what they thought they were doing. 'They said, "All right you can go into Education."' So I ended up teaching Maths at the Military School of Music. When he came out jobs were difficult to find. He applied to be Art Master at Selhurst Grammar. 'There were forty others in for it. I got it not because I was an artist but because I could play cricket and play the piano. I coached the second XI and played in Assembly.'

After three years he knew his heart was elsewhere. 'My wife said, "Why don't you do what you want to do? Be a freelance painter."' The only problem with that is how to survive while you are doing it. 'The answer was book jackets. 'I thought with 29,000 new titles every year there's got to be a few for our Bri.' So after school he started to take his work around. His first commission was from Michael Joseph. Trained in Fine Art he knew nothing about printing or publishing but found the luck that sometimes comes to the innocent, the talented and the persistent. 'The Art Director said, "We want a three colour separated book jacket. Can you do that?" "Oh, . . . yes," I said. So he explained it all. "And bleeds too." I'd never heard of bleeds, but he told me — as if, of course, I already knew.'

That was the beginning of Brian Wildsmith freelance artist. For three years they lived on book jackets at £10 a time. 'But no-one offered me books to illustrate.' Not that is until the day he went to show his work to yet another art editor and found a man wearing no tie, no jacket and no shoes, his feet on the desk dictating to another man with a bowler hat and a rolled umbrella. 'He said, "Do you mind if I shave?" Looked at my work with his face covered in soap and

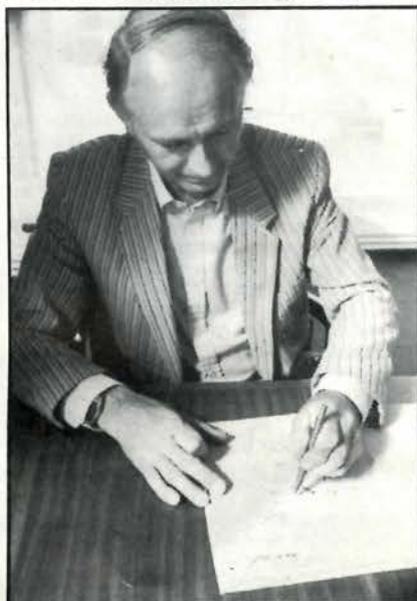


said, "You're not bad." I did my first illustrations for him. Twenty-eight black and white drawings for a travel book.'

Then came the most significant meeting of his career — with Mabel George at Oxford University Press. 'She had just taken over the children's department. She was very shy but she had a will of iron.' This was the lady who was to be the midwife to the birth of the new approach to picture books which revolutionised children's publishing in the sixties. She asked him to do the black and white drawings for Rene Guillot's *Prince of the Jungle*. It was a significant moment. 'I felt this book was somehow make or break. I knew I had to succeed. My wife was having our first child. I had to produce something different for me and for Oxford. As it turned out it showed me my future and I'm still proud of some of the pictures.'

Two years later in 1959 Mabel George uttered the fateful words, "Have you ever thought about doing an ABC, Brian?" 'I didn't know it then but Oxford had already decided to start on a big picture book programme and they were looking for an artist to carry it out. Mabel had picked me but she knew I didn't know anything about books so she'd been grooming me for three years. The first full colour book I did was an *Arabian Nights*. It got terrible reviews. The *TES* was particularly scathing. Mabel said, "When I read that I knew I'd got the right person.'"

Oxford in fact were leading the way and it was Brian Wildsmith's *ABC*, published in 1962, which started everything going. 'I'd



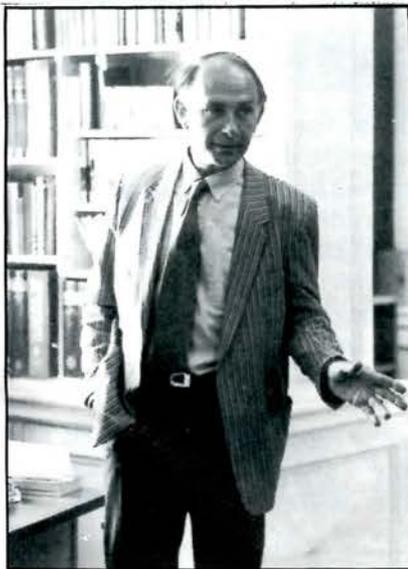


just begun to formulate what it was I wanted to do for children. I like there to be an inherent logic to everything I do. The logical function of an ABC is to teach. To teach how? Through basic shapes, colours and textures. It was a new concept: to produce pictures of value in their own right which would stimulate and excite children. And I wanted a new design. Most ABCs say "A is for apple". A is *not* for apple. A is for A. I wanted this book to say that.'

It was, of course, a huge success. The strong shapes and colours, completely new to books for young children, certainly made an impact. It won the Kate Greenaway Award and is still in print, (in the USA in its 19th edition).

What next? 'Well Mabel was idealistic, but she was also realistic. She said, "The key to all this is co-editions." We needed an established author and text for me to illustrate so we could bring in foreign publishers and build up a clientele for our work. So she sent me off to do La Fontaine's fables.'

The Wildsmith clientele grew and his name became so well-established that eventually he could offer his own storyline. 'My ideas about children's books fell into place. I want to cover the whole educational experience of the child through humour, colour, shape, form, words and pictures together; to deal with human experience. *Hunter and his Dog* is about compassion, *Professor Noah's Spaceship* is about the environment. I have a conscious moral impulse, but not to preach, rather to show the fundamentals that make for a better world.'



Ten years ago, about the time he started writing his own stories, the Wildsmith family moved to France, to Provence where they live today. 'My wife is half French and I'd always wanted to live there. And I needed a change. By nature an artist has to be insecure; it makes you keep reaching and striving. We had a nice house, everything was going very nicely. I had to put myself in a position of insecurity.' The four Wildsmith children were thrown in at the deep end, sent to French schools. They seem to have thrived on it and certainly their father thinks more highly of the French educational system than the English. Did the children have any influence on the books? 'When they were younger they used to dash home every day to see what I'd done. If they just looked and went off I knew there was something wrong. I might have done a good painting but it wasn't a good painting for *children*. So I'd do it again. You have to make contact with the child; that's the necessary spark in illustration for children.'

Life in France clearly suits Brian Wildsmith. 'It's tranquil, quiet. I can do my books and paint. The weather is good.' He feels more at home in the cultural climate than he does in England too. 'If I say, "I'm a painter" in England people think "What's up with him?" In France they just accept it.'

He works at a desk on the gallery that runs all round the living room. (The piano — his other passion — is on the other side.) 'The first studio I had in England was a hut in the garden. I did *Mother Goose* there. But I didn't like being cut off. I'd rather work on the kitchen table. At home now I'm isolated — you have to be — but I'm in the middle



### A selection of Brian Wildsmith's books from Oxford University Press

- Mother Goose**  
0 19 279611 9, £4.95 (hb)
- The Rich Man and the Shoemaker**  
0 19 279612 7, £3.95 (hb) and  
0 19 272104 6, £1.25 (pb)
- The Little Wood Duck**  
0 19 279686 0, £3.95 (hb) and  
0 19 272101 1, £1.25 (pb)
- The Circus**  
0 19 272102 X £1.25 (pb)
- Hunter and his Dog**  
0 19 279725 5, £3.95 (hb)
- Squirrels**  
0 19 272105 4, £1.25 (pb)
- Wild Animals**  
0 19 272103 8, £1.25 (pb)
- ABC**  
0 19 272122 4, £2.50 (pb)



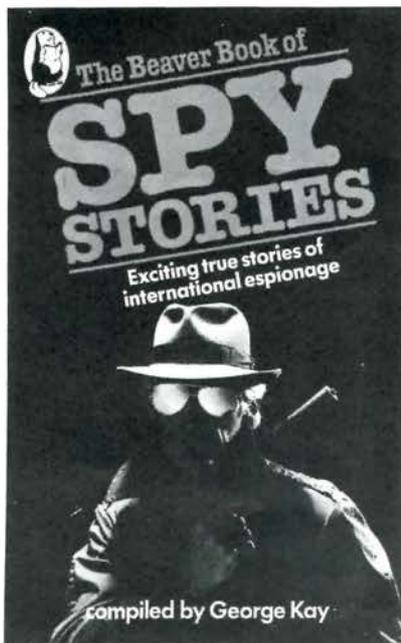
of the house so I'm not lonely.' His day starts at 11.00, 'after four cups of coffee', and he works until lunch, at two, 'on the terrace with half a bottle of wine'. Then work again until dinner at 7.30. 'I always leave a piece of work in a state where I want to go back to it.' For books he works on paper in the same size as the finished product. 'That's Mabel's training. She started by giving me a page with the text and I'd do my drawing round it.' But recently he's started to do really big paintings. 'Every time I go back to one I'm amazed at my own effrontery. I can't believe it's me that's done it.'

The latest Wildsmith book *Pelican* is rich in references to the landscape and buildings of Provence. It has split pages, a new departure in storytelling and book design for him. 'You have to design it like a motor car, it has to do the job properly.' He is obviously pleased with the way he has solved the technical problems of the book but it is the paintings that are the important thing, the visual language. 'The storyline has to come first but I use words merely as a connecting thread on which to string the images. The real message in my books is not literary — it cannot be said or put into words. In one sense *Pelican* is about the pain of growing up. Whatever the pelican does it's wrong. In a way I'm having a little knock at education: all the pelican needed was to be shown exactly, precisely and kindly how to do something. Its problem was that it didn't understand what people said to it. They keep saying you must go and fish — and it doesn't know what that means. When it learns, it is time to go away and find its own life.' But there's more in the pictures than that storyline. In one double spread the child goes out into a moonlit night. 'Many children are terrified of night. In fact it's a time of incredible beauty. The recognisable world changes and it's full of colour and subtlety — not menace. Beauty and mystery make you think. To acknowledge a mystery is to think about the universe, about what is happening to you. All that can't be put into words. I hope my painting does that for a child.'

It is here that the artist and the educator come together in Brian Wildsmith. 'If you can make a child aware and perceptive you have liberated it's mind. As a person that child can never become subjected to another individual or state. Whatever happens that person is free. It is in the mind that we live.'

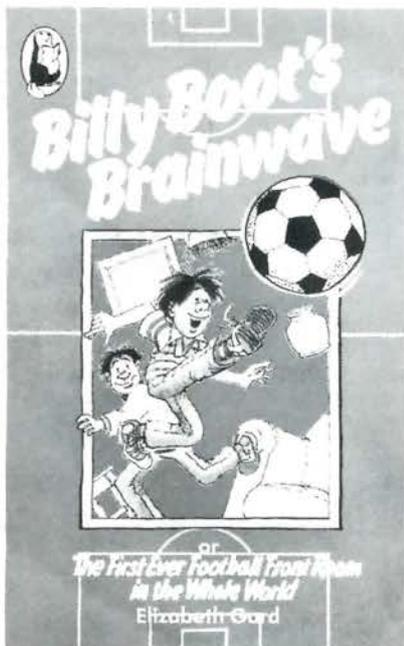
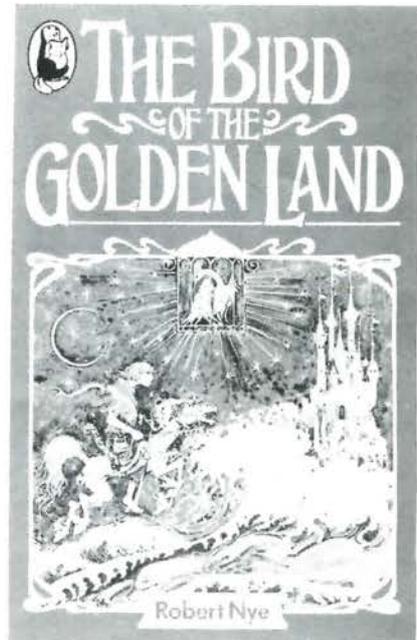
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# BACK TO SCHOOL...

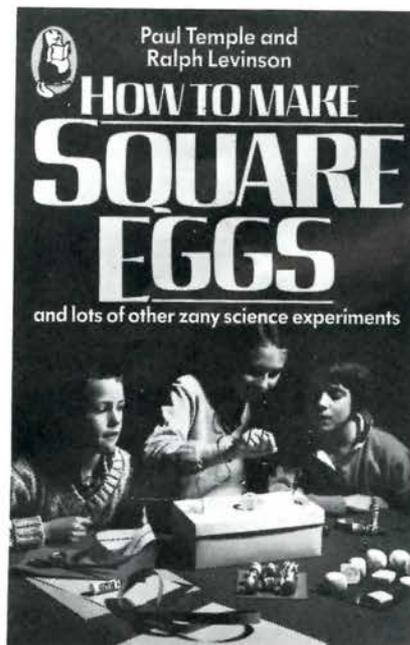


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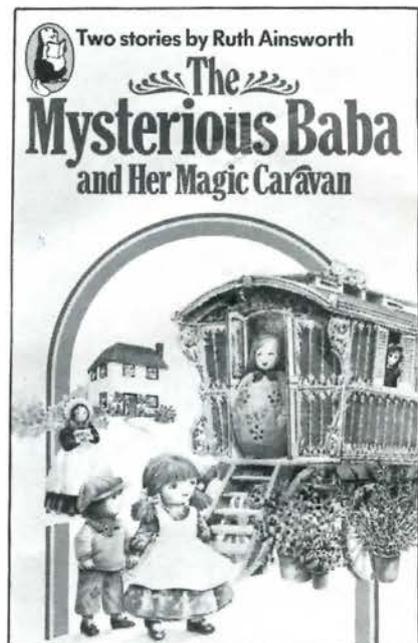
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# The World of Children's Books: Part 4

In one of the most mysterious and hidden corners of the world of children's books we find

## The Production People

Detail from the SBA's World of Children's Books map.

If the work of those who inhabit Author Island is to reach a mass audience it has to make the crossing from Publishers Island to Printers Island. On our map it doesn't look far but the journey across that narrow strait is fraught with perils. The people of all the islands in the Producers' Group have something at stake as the author's manuscript or the artist's originals are transformed into books. However their anxieties and their concerns may be very different as we discovered when we watched The Production People piloting a picture book through the process.

### First Decisions

When Jan Ormerod went to see Martin West, an editor at Kestrel, she showed him some black and white illustrations of a little girl waking up. Martin liked them, and encouraged Jan to work the idea into a book with colour. The result was, of course, the award-winning *Sunshine*. But before Jan could start work on the full set of illustrations for the book, several things had to happen.

Martin called in the production department. Kestrel is part of Penguin Books, and Richard Keller is Penguin's production manager. His responsibility is to make sure that Penguin's books are produced as well as they can be for the money available.

'The first thing to do with a new book,' says Richard, 'is to talk about cost-effective sizes and agree on the right specification for it. We do this with the artist and an editor, and what we're talking about is a size for the book and its number of pages.'

Jan Ormerod went away with two decisions made: *Sunshine* would have the standard number of pages for a picture book — 32 — and the pages would be 169mm x 254mm. Jan, Martin and Richard had together decided that 32 pages was the right number for the idea in an artistic sense, but they didn't just pick the figure out of a hat.

It derives from four — the basic magic number in printing. Books are printed on machines which can handle paper to produce four, eight, sixteen, thirty-two, etc. pages. Thirty-two pages for a picture book is an *economic* size because, using the right sized machine, the whole book can be printed with sixteen pages on one side of a large sheet and the other sixteen on the other. That single sheet is then folded and cut, and emerges recognisably a book. (A lot of careful planning goes into making sure page four ends up on the back of page three and is followed by page five!)

The page size was also an important factor for *Sunshine*. Kestrel wanted to 'sell' it internally to Puffin. To make this as cost effective as possible, they went for a page size which would slot into the Puffin picture book format without any adjustments. Puffin would be able to use the *original film* (more of that later) to produce their paperback. Jan admits she found it difficult to work to that particular page size; but she had to for that most persuasive of all reasons — cost.

### Which Printer? How Many Copies?

Meanwhile, Richard Keller and Martin West were grappling with other costing problems. Richard has to find the printer who is not only right for the job, but who will do it for the best price. 'On a picture book we would certainly get quotes from at least six companies, in this country and abroad. We wouldn't necessarily take the cheapest, either. We have to look at them for reliability — we've got to know they're going to do the job on time — and also for quality, and that can vary from printer to printer.'

Doing the job on time is important, because Martin will already have *scheduled* the book — that is, slotted it into Kestrel's publishing programme. He'll also want to start looking around for *co-editions* — selling a book to foreign publishers before it's been printed and persuading them to let him print their copies with his. Because it costs so much to *originate* everything that goes into producing *one* book — the more you can print and be *sure of selling*, the cheaper each book can be. But this takes time and causes production managers like Richard Keller more headaches. 'We can't actually tell the printer how many books we're going to want printed until the co-editions are sold.'



## Enter the Designers

The designers in a production department are the people who decide things like which size and style of typeface to use — there are hundreds to choose from. These days most type is done by *photocomposition*. This relatively recent development uses computers and the techniques of photography. A keyboard operator punches the words into a computer, which then instructs a machine to produce words on a sheet of paper photographically.

'We sometimes get the type set first for a picture book,' says Richard. 'The artist can then have it on a *galley proof* (a photocopy of the type) and work the text into the illustrations, instead of trying to fit it in later. But it depends on the artist and the artwork.'

Where the type should go in relation to the pictures is talked over with the artist, the editor and the production manager. Some artists have very firm ideas about this, others don't. Some ideas are technically difficult to achieve and therefore expensive. The dreaded word 'cost' hangs over everything. *Sunshine* has no text so where to put it is one problem which doesn't arise as Jan arrives with her finished pictures and the production department tackles the next job.

'Once the artwork is delivered,' says Richard, 'we start work on making it ready for the next stage. We do a *paste-up*. Sometimes artists do a rough paste-up, and we do a pukka one, but quite often we do the pukka one without a rough.'

Paste-up means what it says. A designer takes the type supplied by a typesetter and pastes it in position on the artist's illustration. It also means supplying anything else the artist may not have done, like rules round the pages, the page numbers and so on — and putting together the artwork for the title page and the cover. 'Once it's pasted up and ready,' says Richard, 'we send it off to the colour origination house for film separation'.

## To the Colour House

The next time you look at a full colour picture book, really *look* at it. Every shade, tone and colour on every page is made by separating the original colours into four, then re-combining them at the printing stage. This is known as the *four-colour process*. The four colours in the process are *black*, *cyan* (a fancy word for blue), *magenta* (a fancy word for red) and *yellow*.

Separating the colours so that the printer can print the book is a highly skilled and very expensive job. It's usually referred to as *colour origination* and is done by specialist companies — colour houses. The traditional method of doing the job — which is still quite widely used — is with a large camera which takes pictures of the whole artwork and produces *film*. (This film is later used by the printer to make the printing plates.) The artwork is 'shot' several times, each time with a different *filter* over the lens of the camera to screen out three of the colours, leaving a sheet of film which records, for example, only the magenta.

These cameras make an image of the artwork by breaking it up into thousands of tiny dots. Just as with paints you can get most colours by mixing a few basic ones together, so when the sheets of film of the artwork are made into plates and printed one on top of the other, the original colour reappears by a combination of dots.

Most artwork has very few areas of 'pure' colour — pure black, cyan, magenta or yellow. Artists mix their colours and the separation of these colours into the four is often very complicated, with dots of each of the four colours in varying combinations needed to reproduce a full range of tones.

Colour reproduction, like other areas of printing, has felt the impact of 'the new technology'. Increasingly, colour origination houses are using a new technique for making film. It's called colour scanning and is done by a combination of laser and computer: the laser is beamed through the artwork and the computer calculates the number of dots of separated colour needed on each of the four pieces of film.

It's Richard Keller's job to decide which colour house will do the colour origination for *Sunshine*. As with the choice of printer, reliability, quality and cost all have to be balanced. For Jan Ormerod Richard's decision is an important one as Brian Gregory who runs a colour house understands. 'The quality of a picture book depends on how good the colour film is. It can make or mar it — the separations are absolutely critical.'

## The Proof Stage

So that the artist and the publisher can check on this quality, the colour house provides *proofs* from the film it has made. A proof is simply a one-off printing of the book, done by a special process using only the film. Richard Keller again:

'Once the proofs are ready, we get the artist, the editor and quite often the colour origination people together to talk about them and any problems that there might be. I like to do it this way so that the interpretation is direct — the artist can talk directly to the man who's involved in the making of the film.'

They are looking for sharpness, clarity, colour balance — at the *quality* of the printing as well as for correct register (that's making sure all four colours line up exactly with no muzzy overlaps). 'If there's a problem,' says Richard, 'we'll get the corrections done, and have part or all of the book re-proofed. That costs more, though, so obviously we try to avoid re-proofing wherever possible.'

If Jan is happy with her colour proofs, *Sunshine* is now ready to go to the printer.

## Print it!

Martin West has completed his deals on co-editions and decided how many copies to print (the print run). Richard Keller has chosen his printer and agreed prices. The film from the colour house goes off to be transformed into a book.

It arrives first with the plate-makers. There, it's placed on metal plates which are chemically prepared so that they are sensitive to light in the same way as photographic film. Light is directed through the film onto the plate, and the image of the film is etched onto it. This stage is crucial to the finished product too. The care with which the plates are made will have a lot to do with how near *Sunshine*, the book, comes to Jan Ormerod's originals.

The plates now go to the printing presses themselves. The system most used these days for picture books is called *offset litho*. In this, the film is exposed onto the plate so that the plate carries a *reversed* image of it. The plate is bolted on to the press, and inked. Paper is fed through the machine and the plate rolls over it, *offsetting* its inked image on to the paper like a transfer, so that the printed image is the right way round.



THE PUBLISHER'S DESIGNER



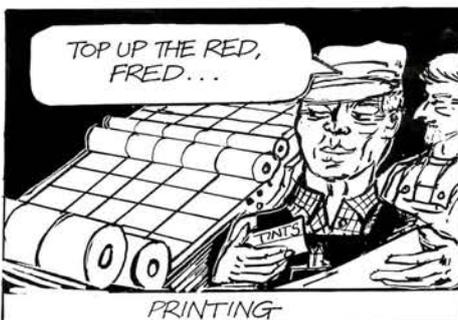
THE PASTE-UP



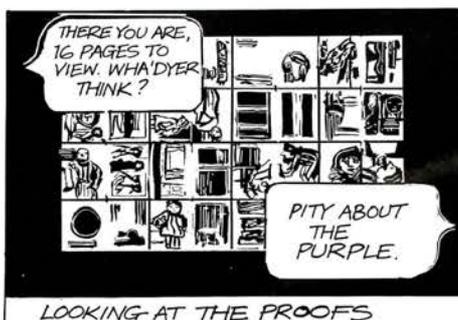
HANDING OVER TO THE COLOUR HOUSE



FILM SEPARATION BY LASER



PRINTING



LOOKING AT THE PROOFS

On a four-colour machine, there will be four plates in a row, one for each of the four colours — black, cyan, magenta and yellow. The paper rolls past picking up the coloured dots from each plate. After the paper has been past all four plates, there should be finished, full colour pages — all the dots combined to give a reproduction of the original artwork.

Even at this stage there are problems. The machines have to be kept topped up with the right amounts of ink, and there are likely to be variations in quality during the run. That's why there has to be rigorous quality control. If there's too much ink, the books might end up splodgy and 'over-inked'. If there isn't enough, they'll end up washed out and pale.

Once all the sheets have been printed, they have to be left to dry before they can be cut, folded and bound. That's the last stage, and even there, things can go wrong.

'That's why we sometimes go to a printer to check a book while it's being printed,' says Richard Keller. 'Printers do make mistakes — and we like to go along, sometimes with the artist, to make sure that everything goes as smoothly as possible.'

So finally, a small package of books arrives at Kestrel — and Jan Ormerod gets her hands on *Sunshine* at last. It is 12 months since she first took her portfolio to Kestrel and Martin West spotted those little black and white drawings.

For everyone in the Producers' Group — it all comes down to

### Counting the Cost

Liz Attenborough of Kestrel explains the publisher's position.

'Publishing a full colour picture book is so much more of a gamble than publishing a novel. We usually take delivery of a book two months before the date of publication. But everybody who's worked on it up to then — the colour house, the typesetter, the printer — expects to be paid 60 days after they've finished their work on it. All those bills have to be paid before a single book appears in the shops, before you're even starting to make money.'

How much does it all cost? Well it could be £15,000 or more just for production. 'And all of that is completely at our own risk,' says Liz. 'In the end, there's no guarantee that you're going to sell any of these books at all. It's all money you could simply have thrown away.'

And costs, particularly printing costs, have been rising steadily for several years. That's what lies behind the movement towards and now even through what publishers call the £5 price barrier for picture books. At Penguin they've got a computer to help work out the price they need to charge for a book.

'If it comes up with a figure like £6.82 — or something even higher — then you've got to go back and start thinking seriously about it. You might have to try and sell more co-editions — or even shelve the book completely.'

### Artistic Compromise?

Co-editions often mean there is a price of another kind to pay, this time for the artist. A picture book which is going to be printed in three or four languages can't have a text in any colour but black — and it must be placed clear of the pictures. All to avoid extra colour separations.

Foreign publishers sometimes object to certain things in the artwork, and a publisher might put pressure on an artist to change something so that the co-edition can be tied up. In Jan Ormerod's case, the Americans objected to one picture in *Sunshine* where the little girl's vest stopped short of what they considered modesty. The question was simple — should she keep her artistic integrity for the sake of one small picture and blow the deal which could guarantee successful publication? Jan grudgingly gave in, and did a new piece of artwork concealing the offending pudenda.

There are other problems, too, for artists. Most of these seem to crop up at the colour origination stage — and that's the point at which artistic integrity, technology and money meet in dispute over that eternal imponderable — quality.

### Never mind the quality, feel the width?

Have you ever felt disappointed when you've had a photograph developed and it doesn't come anywhere near the original you wanted to preserve? That's what a lot of artists feel when they see either the colour proofs or the finished book. To be available to thousands of readers as a book, their original artwork has to go through the same series of transformations as *Sunshine*. At every stage there's an inevitable diminution in quality from the original. It's like taking a photograph of a photograph — each one is slightly worse than the one before.

The aim is to keep that diminution in quality to the very minimum — and that's where the problems occur. The more time a printer is given to work on a book, the better the final product is likely to be, but all that work costs money. Artists may want publishers to keep correcting colour proofs until they're almost perfect — but publishers don't have that kind of money.

Julia MacRae, who has published many award-winning full colour picture books, knows all about the problems. 'You have to make your artist very aware that he's unlikely to get facsimile reproduction of his



artwork. The basic limitations of the four colour process are such that it's only in exceptional circumstances that you can get anywhere near exact reproduction of things like colour tone.'

It's that phrase — 'the basic limitations of the four colour process' — which really points the finger. In fact you can print with more than four colours. You can print in five, six, or umpteen — but that gets more and more expensive. Four colour printing is economical.

'But there are certain colours which are impossible to get right,' says Richard Keller, 'like certain browns and purples. If you had eight colour printing you'd have a better chance of getting them right — but you simply can't afford it.'

Brian Gregory in his colour house feels strongly that when a piece of artwork arrives full of browns and purples virtually impossible to get right, he's been landed with a problem which could have been avoided. 'Penguin are very good at getting us in right at the idea stage to talk to the artists and make them aware of technical problems like that. But that's rare. It's a shame, but often it seems that some artists work in a vacuum, unaware of the sort of problems their work can give us.'

'We could give them an enormous amount of technical information which they could incorporate into their work, giving themselves less disappointment — and us fewer headaches. I know an artist isn't going to change his style just to suit us but there are special colour books which show the complete range of tints we can achieve with our machinery. I think every artist ought to have one.'

Artists' attitudes differ. Charles Keeping after many years appears resigned. 'The four colour process is frustrating because it's impossible to get a full range of tones and colours. But you've got to remember that you're an *illustrator*. I'm a professional. I accept the limitations of the medium I use. I'm about books, not original artwork. I take a lot of trouble with my originals, but I still believe they've got to be in a book.'

Janet Ahlberg's style is very subtle. She uses a water colour, wash technique and her pictures are very delicate. Lovely to look at, but sometimes a devil for colour origination. Kestrel admit that her work costs more in the colour origination stage because the colour film needs re-touching at every stage to be anywhere close to the original artwork. Janet is unrepentant.

'I know that my work might be difficult for a printer to cope with,' she says. 'But I try not to compromise. There are definitely some things you can't do, but I'd never *not* do something which I knew to be right because it was difficult for the printer. It's not the way I work — and I can't work any other way.'

### But oh the difference — to whom?

As a result of the growing complexity — and growing cost — of the printing process, especially of colour origination, there has to be a constant dialogue between all the islands of the producers' group. For example, the new generation of colour scanners have *drums* on which the artwork has to be stuck so that the laser can do its job. Up to now, most artists have used stiff, white art board for their work — and obviously, this can't be bent round a drum without it cracking and ruining the illustration.

When an artist supplies work on stiff board a skilled man slices off the top layer with a surgical scalpel; it's time consuming, expensive and also dangerous for the artwork. That's why Martin West at Kestrel — and many other editors and production managers — are encouraging their artists to work on paper flexible enough for the scanner drum.

It has been known for artists and publishers to get into acrimonious debates about this sort of thing. 'I can understand why, but artists do sometimes tend to over-react on the question of colour proofs,' says Richard Keller. 'I believe, though, that we have to find some sort of mean, something which is acceptable to the artist and to us, aesthetically, technically and financially. At the end of the day, you sometimes have to look at the book and forget the original artwork. If people like it and they buy it, then that's the best you can hope for.' ●

This is the good ship Books for Keeps' last visit to the Producers' Group of Islands for the time being. In January we cross the Ocean of Opportunity to the Consumers' Group.

For new readers an account of the voyage so far is available in back issues of the magazine.

All prices include postage.

The Editors (includes map of the World of Children's Books): No. 10, September 1981, 75p

The Publicity People: No. 12, January 1982, 85p

Authors Island: No. 14, May 1982, 85p.

An enlarged (20" x 14") version of the map is also available for 75p.

# Keeping on Illustrating

'Children's books? Well, I've dropped out of the scene a bit.'



Photo by Richard Newton

Strange words from the illustrator of *The Highwayman*, this year's Kate Greenaway Medal winner, who has a new book (*Beowulf*) published next month? Well perhaps not, because in a sense these books are a kind of come-back or at least a change of direction. When Charles Keeping first won the Greenaway award it was in 1968 for *Charley, Charlotte and the Golden Canary*, almost the first of a dazzling sequence of full colour books. But in many ways he has been ahead of his time. Teachers, and librarians, have found him 'difficult', 'dark', 'depressing'; hard to 'place' and problematic. In the early 1970's he was much in need of an Elaine Moss to point out that picture books are not necessarily all 'for the infants'.

He got into children's books almost by accident (his first commission was for Rosemary Sutcliff's *The Silver Branch*) and alongside a stream of picture books has continued to illustrate novels for children and adults. *The Highwayman* and *Beowulf*, drawn in black with pen, pencil and soft chalk and printed in two colours (black and sepia) are new departures. The audience they find should take a look back at titles like *Inter-City*, *River*, *Railway Passage* and *Wasteground Circus* which mercifully are still in print.

To mark the publication of **Beowulf** Charles Keeping talked to us about his work.

'The general feeling now is that my ideas don't sell that well. I didn't stop doing full colour books from choice — but you don't get asked to do them if they can't sell them. Nowadays you've got to have a popular storyline, an idea that's a possibility for co-editions. You've got to please the Americans, the French, the Germans, the Japanese. Before they can ever begin thinking about taking on a full colour book publishers have got to think, "Will we get our money back?" I've never been that popular. Ten years ago editors took more risks. To produce something that's successful every time you've got to play a little safe. I don't feel that's what it's about. I'm not illustrating books like you would make sausages or something. It's not what to me books are about.'

## Charley, Charlotte and the Golden Canary (1967)

'I didn't set out to do a book about high rise flats. I wanted to do a book about a man who painted birds (literally). But Mabel George (my editor at OUP) wouldn't have it. She said it was wicked and anyway it couldn't happen. I said it did because my uncle used to do it. But she wouldn't change her mind. I was upset and I walked down through the Elephant and Castle where they had just put up all those high rise estates with all these kids in them. I looked up and I thought the kids were like birds in cages. The sparrows in the street had a better life 'though they took a chance on being squashed by the traffic. So I did the book. It wasn't a moral judgement, just a statement of what I saw. I like to let everyone make their own judgements.'

## Joseph's Yard (1969) Through the Window (1970) Spider's Web (1972)

'I did these for a BBC TV programme called *Storyline*. I painted on layers of plastic because I wanted the colours to be very rich. It worked on film — the camera panned into the pictures. But when they were photographed to make printing plates for the book the camera went through the plastic as though it wasn't there. You couldn't distinguish the range of colour tones. I think it was because they were photographing through the plastic rather than down on it; but I couldn't prove it because they were being printed in Austria. Anyway I gave it up after three books.

I think *Joseph's Yard* was the truest one. But I particularly liked *Spider's Web* although it never sold. Everyone said "What a revolting little boy, and he hides behind a girl when he's afraid." Well I used to hide behind my sister. I thought I was presenting teachers with opportunities. I thought they could say, "Do you think he was frightened of the spider? Do you think he was a coward? But they didn't like it. I suppose people just like something to amuse them. My publishers said could I try to do something a bit more popular. So I did *Richard* — the Police horse!

## Railway Passage (1974)

'I met this bloke who likes to mend cars. His job is gritting roads — or waiting around to grit roads — but he likes to mend cars. So he came to mend mine. All day he was at it and he was happy. At the end he came out dripping with grease. The car started — perfect! I said, "How much

do I owe you?" He said, "Don't insult me, Charlie, don't insult me." I thought of what makes us happy and what we do for money. I thought of all the dreams and desires we have and what greed does to us. And I invented the man who mends bikes for nothing and the old girl with her fish, Sam. She came out of watching our kids with their guinea pigs. When they had one they loved it, they called it a name. In the end they had so many it all went up the spout. When she gets her share of the pools win the old lady gets lots of fish. So many she can't see Sam — she's lost him for ever.

Poor Auntie Emma in her excitement, and with little imagination, bought a fantastic great tank for Sam, and stocked it with hundreds of goldfish. It looked beautiful, but sad to say, she could never find her Sam again among so many fish.



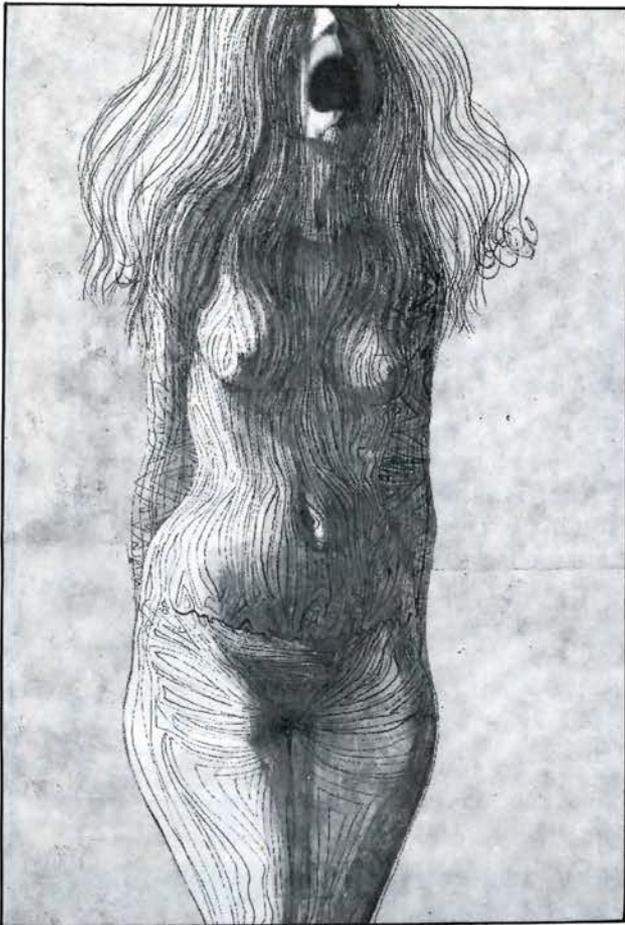
Left alone downstairs, Auntie Meanie had all the clothes she wanted now, but oh my goodness, what a sight she looked, with her knickerbocker suit, blonde wig and make up. Everyone said she was mutton dressed as lamb.

## From Railway Passage

All these things; they can be funny, they can be serious. When you see them you can make a picture book. But people don't seem to want them any more.'

## The God Beneath The Sea (1970) The Golden Shadow (1973) The Highwayman (1981)

'I like to approach illustrating with whatever I feel about that story. If you present me with a violent story it's pretty obvious the drawing is going to be fairly violent. You can't do the Greek Myths without a certain amount of violence. Without a certain amount of sensuality too, that's what they are all about. With *The Highwayman*, let's be honest, these guys came and they probably raped the girl too. When I read something I get feelings about it — I can't keep that out of my work. It's impossible. I may not draw a rape, but that's in my mind.'



Golden Demeter, the Lady of Harvests, calls to her daughter Persephone. From *The God Beneath the Sea*.

## Dickens

(Charles Keeping is currently illustrating *all* of Dickens for the Folio Society).

'Dickens is an incident writer. He's a very descriptive writer. You can't illustrate Dickens in the abstract. Whatever you do — film, musical, book — it has to be visual. He describes it all — the illustrator has got very little to do. You can't make up, or add anything or invent anything — it's all there. As an illustrator you have to draw within the limitations of the job.'

## Beowulf (1982)

'I don't take quite so heroic a view of Beowulf as Kevin Crossley-Holland does. First of all Grendel seems to me a bit of a poor sod. To be as disliked as he is is a bit sad. I saw him more as a cripple, deformed. He's not a great big tough guy. He looks sad, he looks frightened all the time. He has every right to be frightened because Beowulf's going to kill him and that's what it's all about and he knows that.

I've made Grendel's mother more ferocious, but not ferocious in that she's horrific, but ferocious because Beowulf's killed her son. She loves her son, so she must be capable of love. I can't see them as totally evil. When they are both dead I brought both their heads together so that they are slightly touching one another in death.

I've used a sort of symbolism too. All the heads of the Saxons in their helmets have got the rather repetitive look you get when people wear uniform and lose their personality. I used Saxon helmets, as helmets of roughly that time — you've got to; but I don't think that matters. A helmet then is the same as a helmet now; once you get everyone with helmets on it doesn't matter whether they are Saxons or police or yobs on the beach at Margate: they are just helmeted people.

The night before Grendel comes I've drawn them all drunk. A whole row of drunken heads, a load of untidy slob all rollicking about and singing. And then suddenly bang, bang, bang, they are all back in helmets again. So you get a humanising of them and suddenly they are robots again.

Kevin and I did the book without contact between us. I took him my dummy strip so he could see the whole flow and pattern of the idea — how much space there was for me, how much for him. But he didn't see my drawings. I finished before he did. I worked like that with Leon Garfield on *God Beneath the Sea*. Those pictures fit and yet really they shouldn't.

I've felt for a long while the *writer* in this type of book has been too dominant. In a book like *Beowulf* it can't possibly be so. If half the book is going to be drawings the bloke doing the drawings has to have as much say as the writer. I don't see why words and pictures in a book like this necessarily have to come together, be the same. The drawings can show



Richard Mewton photograph

a sympathy which the writer may not. In a way you get two stories. It's fun doing something like that.

I think *Beowulf* is going to be a better book than *Highwayman*. It's got a nice complete look about it. It was a nice story to do. You could do it again and again and again. That's the damned trouble with these things. You do one and as soon as you've finished it you think — I could have done that so much better; why didn't I do it better than that? ●



From *The Highwayman*.

## Some of Charles Keeping's books available from Oxford University Press

**The Highwayman**  
0 19 279748 4, £4.50

**Inter-City**  
0 19 279716 6, £3.95

**Joseph's Yard**  
0 19 279651 8, £3.75

**Railway Passage**  
0 19 279700 X, £3.95

**River**  
0 19 279723 9, £3.95

**Shaun and the Cart-Horse**  
0 19 279624 0, £3.95 and  
0 19 272110 0, £1.25 (pb)

**Through the Window**  
0 19 279655 0, £3.95

**Wasteground Circus**  
0 19 279708 5, £3.95

For *Kestrel*, he illustrated *The God Beneath the Sea* (0 7226 5093 0, £5.50) and *The Golden Shadow* (0 7226 5162 7, £4.50) by Leon Garfield and Edward Blishen.

Charles Keeping has also illustrated *The Beginning of the Armadilloes*, one of four *Just So Stories* coming from Macmillan in October (0 333 34138 4, £2.95).

# BEGINNER BOOKS AND BRIGHT AND EARLY BOOKS

**BRIGHT AND EARLY BOOKS** (formerly Beginning Beginners) are designed to help the youngest children to prepare for reading by introducing concepts or telling stories that appeal directly to pre-schoolers.

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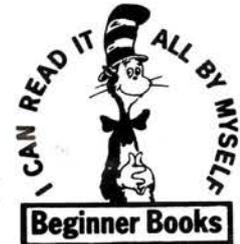
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**WHSMITH**

In 1975 Westminster City Children's Libraries started their summer reading schemes. Last year **Jean Bird** looked closely at all the eleven-plus readers in the scheme.

She reports here some of what she discovered about how they go about

## Choosing a Good Book

### About the over-elevens

There were 480 of them, approximately one third of the 1,500 children who joined the scheme. Of these,

80% were between eleven and fourteen

67% were girls

46% belonged to specified ethnic minority groups

30% spoke a language other than English at home

The majority said that neither parent was a member of the public library.

They joined one of three schemes.

Bookworm — read at least five books (20% joined this)

Bookwizard — read five books, review one (40% joined this)

Bookmaster — read four books, review all of them (40% joined this)

Each scheme has its own specially selected list of books. Librarians, who have read all the books, are always available to talk. Rewards come in the form of badges, certificates and presentation ceremonies. For my research the children filled in detailed questionnaires and took part in taped interviews. I also looked at the reviews they wrote.

### What makes a 'good' book

The best liked categories of fiction were funny stories, mysteries, adventure, ghost and horror. The most important characteristics of a 'good' book were that it should have a 'good' story, be interesting and have 'good' pictures. Books that didn't have a 'proper' story, that is one with a clearly defined plot and finish, were usually disliked. Also given the thumbs down were books which contained difficulties or distractions, such as use of dialect or a narrative which is not strictly chronological but jumps about.

A 'good' story was almost invariably a fast moving and easily comprehensible one. Several children specifically mentioned that they looked for long descriptive passages — if they found them, the book *wasn't* going to be good! Another common definition of a good story was that it should be 'real'. Boys and girls usually had broadly different interpretations of reality. For the girls it centred on people and social situations, so that they liked 'stories about teenagers like myself', love stories and school stories. Boys were more interested in things and events — they preferred science fiction, war stories and non-fiction generally. Young reviewers had no trouble indicating whether a book was a 'boys' or 'girls' book. Self-perceived and self-imposed lines of demarcation between boys' and girls' reading, and the difference in interest expressed in non-fiction was strong, although ghost, mystery or funny stories could and did transcend all such boundaries.

### Choosing books

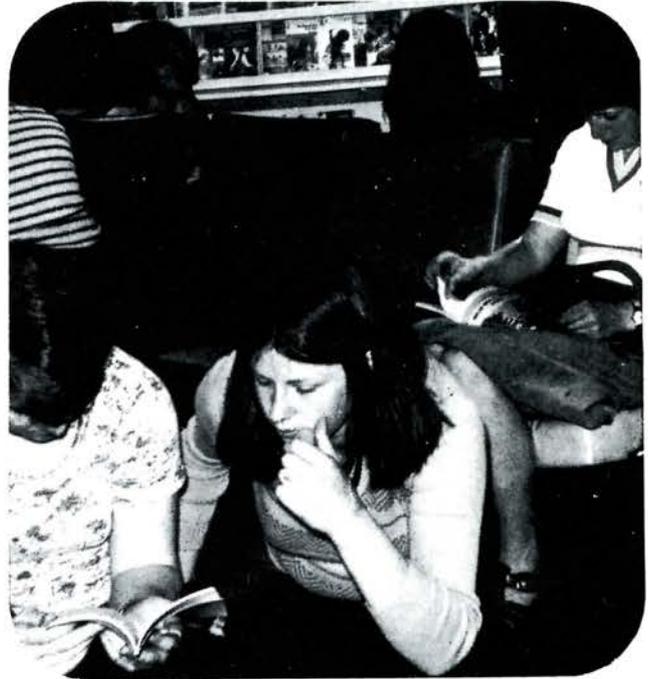
Title or cover attracted most children initially, largely because visual clues to subject matter were important. Girls were more likely to look out for particular authors or series, and the older children more likely to care that the books should look, or be, new.

The blurb or first page was usually read, and three-quarters of the children said that recommendations were important — usually meaning recommendations from friends. Length of book or size of print were less important to this group. Forty per cent of the children said that 'enough illustration' was important. (It was said that pictures 'help to fix the story in your mind'.)

Choosing a good book from a library wasn't seen as being easy. Suggesting what would make libraries better for them, the majority of children wanted to improve guidance; but they wanted more and better aids to *self-help*, rather than recommendation to individual books. A majority of children in all age groups agreed that it was difficult to choose a book from all those on the shelves. A recent DES publication\* noted similar difficulties among its sample of eleven-year-olds.

A major factor in the popularity of the Westminster schemes was that the set lists made the process of choice easier. A totally free choice of books was as unpopular as one 'set' book. The children also liked the fact that the librarians had read every book and could describe storylines if asked — this was seen as helpful in the process of choice.

(\*The DES publication Jean Bird mentions is **Language Performance in Schools**, Primary survey Report No. 1, Assessment of Performance Unit, 1981.)



Resistance to extending their usual range of reading interests was evident, particularly among younger readers, less avid readers, and boys. However in some cases once a relationship had been built up between librarian and reader this resistance lessened. In general, introducing new authors within the child's usual interest range was far more successful.

### Bonus points

Many children said that being obliged to read books carefully enough to be able to answer questions and formulate opinions, helped to make sense of the book. The scheme also made them read books in a relatively short period of time and think about what they were reading.

The chance for genuine self-expression without any perceived element of marking — or even necessarily having to like every book chosen — undoubtedly contributed to the enjoyment and relaxed atmosphere of the schemes. Confidence that adverse criticism could be voiced and would be accepted was enjoyed by the children. Even competent reviewers saw school reviewing as largely an exercise in saying nice things about books, if only because adverse criticism would probably attract attention and would need confident justification.

### In conclusion

The schemes did get many children reading during the summer where they might not have done, but also — perhaps more importantly — they got many children experiencing and enjoying the process of successful, independent library use.

The recent Schools Council report, **Extending Beginning Reading**, noted that the ultimate intention of teaching reading should be 'to produce children who *do* read'. Feeling confident about choosing fiction and feeling able to formulate opinions about books are important factors in the move from being a child who *can* read to one who *does* read. Westminster's well-executed, non-evaluative schemes foster and enhance confidence and pleasure in both reading and library use, as well as keeping youngsters reading during the long summer break. Perhaps they have something to teach schools. ●

Jean Bird's report, **Young Teenage Reading Habits**, is available from the British National Bibliography Research Fund, Sheraton House, Great Chapel Street, London W1V 4BH. Reports of the **Bookmaster Schemes** are available from The City Librarian, Westminster City Libraries, Marylebone Road, London NW1 5PS (1980 Scheme £2, 1981 Scheme £1).

# LIFELINE LIBRARY

Elaine Moss continues her five-part series

## Part 4: THE NOVELS



Elaine Moss

The experience of entering into another world through a novel is one that many children are denied either because they do not read very well themselves, or because the kind of books that present this secondary world most vividly are not to hand, or because teachers feel that 'good' time shouldn't be 'wasted' reading fiction to a class most of whose members could be reading it to themselves.

I believe that a teacher who reads real children's novels aloud to a class of mixed ability is using time productively for every member of that class. The shared novel becomes a living layer of common experience for the group. The book is seen to be not an object whose colour coding accepts you or rejects you, but a casket that, once opened, has riches *everyone* can share.

So which books? As in the three earlier *Lifeline Library* articles I am restricting myself to ten. Each of these deserves to be called a novel. None is a work of formula fiction (Dr Who, Willard Price, Blyton) which, however popular with children, make poor material for reading aloud because language, character and dialogue are all pawns to the plot. In a good children's novel the plot (important always, but not all important) develops from the author's creation of characters whose personality, actions and reactions ensure a naturally evolving sequence of situations — untidy, like life.

In Part 2 of *Lifeline Library (Learning and Listening)* I wrote about stories for 'listening' 5-7 year olds. And I promised to cover 8-11 in this instalment.

If you were to own, and *read!*, the following ten novels you would be able to choose your favourites to read aloud — your commitment to what you are reading will always be the vital spark that fires your listeners — to Juniors. You would also personally know a book by each of the ten children's authors represented. This will help you to help children to choose their own private reading, something that is almost impossible for teachers who 'haven't enjoyed a children's book for years'.

**So, for you to enjoy reading to or discussing with Juniors, how about**

### The Iron Man

Ted Hughes, Faber, 0 571 08247 5, £3.25; Faber Paperback, 0 571 09750 2, 95p

The huge mystery of the Iron Man — 'Where had he come from? Nobody knows. How was he made? Nobody knows' — is sustained right through the story of how Hogarth, a small boy, perceives the good in the visiting robot and helps him; whereas his elders see only a giant threat that must be contained. A science fiction fantasy readable at any level because it is a modern classic.

### The Midnight Fox

Betsy Byars, Puffin, 0 14 03.0844 X, 95p

It was terribly hard to know whether to choose this wonderful story or *The Eighteenth Emergency* by the same author.

I finally chose *The Midnight Fox* because children from 8 to 11 are all spellbound by it whereas *The Eighteenth Emergency* fits the mood of ten-year-olds best. The 'midnight fox' of the title is a black vixen, heavy with cubs. She is Tom's secret and only friend when he is exiled from town to country. But his uncle is a farmer with a gun, and with chickens to protect. As humourously observed as it is sad, in parts, and gripping.

### Pippi Longstocking

Astrid Lindgren, Oxford, 0 19 271097 4, £3.25; Puffin, 0 14 03.0894 6, 95p

The wild adventures of a girl with an imagination that is as powerful and vivid as the legendary strength with which she lifts horses, captures policemen. A rollicking read that is as popular with boys as it is with girls.

### Stig of the Dump

Clive King, Puffin, 0 14 03.0196 8, 90p

A quite remarkable story, brilliantly told, of Barney, a modern boy who, investigating a chalk pit, finds stone age Stig 'making do'. The boys become friends — and, to Barney's surprise, primitive Stig can teach him a few lessons.

### The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

C. S. Lewis, Collins, 0 00 183140 2, £4.50; Fontana Lions, 0 00 671663 6, 85p

*The Magician's Nephew* is the first in the famous C. S. Lewis 'Narnia' sequence but *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Number 2) is by far the best known and most popular. Four children, each very different in character, step through the old coats in a wardrobe and out the other side into Narnia, a strange and menacing magic world where 'it is always winter, never Christmas'. As 'Sons of Adam, Daughters of Eve', they become part of an enduring battle between the forces of good, in the person of Aslan the Lion, and evil, the White Witch of Narnia. An allegory that is also a rattling good story.

### Little House on the Prairie

Laura Ingalls Wilder, Methuen 0 416 07140 6, £4.50; Puffin, 0 14 03.0204 2, £1.10

Also the second book in a much loved series, and the most popular. Very far removed from the swashbuckling romance of the formula 'Western', this is the story of a family who set out in a covered wagon for the new frontier on the prairies (having abandoned the *Little House in the Big Woods*), and of their true adventures with bears, wolves, Indians as Ma and Pa struggle to make a home for Laura (the author) and her sister. A home, one is reminded, is any place where love and caring and loyalty hold a family together.

### The Borrowers

Mary Norton, Dent, 0 460 05104 0, £4.95; Puffin, 0 14 03.0110 0, £1.00

Best appreciated by the over-nines who respond wholeheartedly and with protective passion to the little world beneath the floor-

boards. There Homily and Pod, with their daughter Arrietty (even their half-heard names are 'borrowed' from above), use their ingenuity and all the odds and ends they can scavenge on dangerous expeditions 'up' to the house, to make their tiny home, lead their productive lives. The first of a classic series.



### The Shrinking of Treehorn

Florence Parry Heide, Kestrel, 0 7226 5458 8, £4.25; Young Puffin, 0 14 03.0746 X, 90p

A tiny masterpiece about a shrinking boy. His predicament elicits no sympathy from parents or teachers who refuse to recognize it because they are helpless to deal with it. 'We don't shrink in this class . . . but I'll let it go till tomorrow.' An hilarious story perfectly matched by Edward Gorey's all too accurate line drawings.

### The Best Christmas Pageant Ever (The Worst Kids in the World)

Barbara Robinson, Faber, 0 571 10593 9, £3.50; Beaver, 0 600 34526 2, 75p

Not to be opened till Christmas — well, December anyway. This is quite the funniest, most heartwarming story of a Christmas pageant in the making. A family of tearaways only go to Sunday School for the tea. But they grab the best parts in the Christmas pageant and by their unvarnished performance bring a deeper meaning to the Nativity play.

### The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tiler

Gene Kemp, Faber, 0 571 10966 7, £4.50; Puffin, 0 14 03.1135 1, 85p

The most famous of primary school novels is also one of the funniest. This is the story of eleven-year-old Tyke (boy or girl?) who is determined to protect Danny, an ESN friend, from the 'system' — which is equally determined to put him in a special school.

*Note:* All the books in this list have proved popular with third and fourth-year Juniors, whilst the first six have also been read with great success and enjoyment to first and second-years. ●

# SOUND & VISION



Tom Baker as Holmes, Terence Rigby as Watson, courtesy of BBC TV

## Tom Baker is Back

Sunday tea-times in October could well be punctuated by 'Shush — it's Sherlock Holmes' for with Tom Baker as the ace detective **The Hound of the Baskervilles** looks bound to succeed. It's a grand gripping yarn and the combinations of mists, moors, the Grimpen Mire and the monster hound may well send readers off to Conan Doyle for the first time. They shouldn't be disappointed, the Holmes stories are still very readable. Plenty of versions available but Sparrow have the 'official tie-in' (0 09 930070 2, 95p). Starts 3rd October, BBC.

For those wanting to cash in dramatically in the classroom, Michael and Mollie Hardwick add **The Hound** to their other classroom play versions of Sherlock Holmes (**The Hound of the Baskervilles** and other Sherlock Holmes plays, John Murray, 0 7195 3997 8, £1.50).

## Does Grange Hill Still Rule?

Fame seems to have taken over from **Grange Hill** as the new cult series (I'll bet someone's working on a tie-in deal somewhere) but Britain is fighting back and with a new term the fans will doubtless flock back. A repeat of the last **Grange Hill** series starts on Monday, 25th October and runs up to Christmas (every Monday and Tuesday at 5.40 p.m., BBC2).

And a new series is due to start in the very first week of 1983 (BBC1). Have we really seen the last of Tucker Jenkins? Is Phil Redmond doomed to write only about first to third years? Tune in in January.

## ROBERT LEESON GRANGE HILL HOME & AWAY



BASED ON THE BBC TV SERIES  
GRANGE HILL BY PHIL REDMOND

## Sharpen your wits

Teachers (and pupils) interested in developing lateral thinking and problem-solving skills will want to know about **The De Bono Thinking Course** (BBC2, October). We are promised ten half-hour programmes. Relevant books from BBC Publications and Penguin.

Sharpen up for de Bono with **Think of a Number**, a new series with the delightfully enthusiastic Johnny Ball. Ten programmes. Should start later this month on BBC1.

## Taking the long view

News of what should be coming on our screens next year.

**The Moomins** — Tove Jansson's delightful characters in a series of five-minute films (TV Central, starts January).

**The Ghost Downstairs** — A one-off adaptation of Leon Garfield's story seems likely on BBC1 this Christmas.

**The Flame Trees of Thika** — a repeat of the very successful Thames TV serial of Elspeth Huxley's novel is scheduled at present for January.

Also planned for next year — more of **Murphy's Mob** (Central, March), a new series of **Andy Robson** (Tyne Tees, May) and a serialisation of **The Machine Gunners** (BBC, Spring).

## Channel 4 opens in November

Look out in the next issue of **Books for Keeps** for an account of how the new channel will be approaching children and books.



Bath time for Mr Atkins (John Bird), with Marmalade Atkins (Charlotte Coleman) and Mrs Atkins (Lynda Marchal) — Thames Television

## Marmalade Atkins returns

And she's still determined to be the naughtiest girl in the world. Andrew Davies' anti-heroine scored a big hit on Thames TV's **Theatre Box** series with **Marmalade Atkins in Space**. She returns in a new series this autumn. (Abelard have the hardback titles. A paperback is coming from Magnet.) ●

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# TALKING POINT

## James Riordan asks Where have all the folk heroines gone?

**M**ost folk and fairy tales are about boys, men and male animals, and male adventures. In the major fairy tale collections, the ratio of titles featuring males to those featuring females is as follows: 81:25 in the Grimms, with 6 mixed (though the male always comes first); 65:22 in Jacobs' collection of British fairy tales; 34:16 in Andersen; and 17:1 in Lang's version of the Arabian Nights.

When females do feature in the tales, they often play insignificant, passive roles, or are portrayed as evil, ugly temptresses. Loving, watching, serving or hatching evil are the main activities permitted to women in fairy tales. In the Grimm tales, for example, 80 per cent of the negative characters are female.

So what? Surely no one takes fairy tales seriously? Or do they? There is plenty of evidence to show that children learn a great deal about the world through stories, about what is expected of children of their age, and what they can and ought to be when they grow up. Fairy tales play an especially important part in early development of ideas simply because of their immense popularity. They are read and told over and over again to children in the process of developing their own identity and future expectations by teachers and parents whom they trust above all others; and they are usually the first stories and films that children come into contact with.

And what do the stories say? That girls are not very important or positive characters, that females are empty creatures who do less exciting, less varied, less independent and less intelligent things than males. Even heroines like Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty and Snow White remain subservient females — prizes for male adventure. Females serve, males lead; and, the fairy tales imply, the former cannot exist without the latter.

The irony of fairy tales is that, although the main collectors were professional men, the original storytellers were mostly women — and humble, working women at that. Charles Perrault called his tales 'contes de vieilles' (old wives' tales). They came from ordinary people, such as children's nurses, farming women, servants and village sages who themselves often led active and robust lives. The Arabian Nights, it may be recalled, are recounted by a woman, Shaharazade, and during research into their origins I was surprised to find as many heroines as heroes.

When such fairy tales came to be recorded, published and 'mass-marketed', mainly in the last century, however, they were fitted to polite society's prevailing ideology, including the contemporary view of women. The published collections of fairy tales were originally intended for the literate; the values and aspirations presented were therefore those of the middle class. And when they came to be extended to the common people (after the 1870 Education Act) they naturally bore the dominant values of thrift, hard work, acquisitiveness and rugged individualism, as well as censorious attitudes to drink, gambling and sexual promiscuity (by women). Since there was virtually no call for educated Victorian girls to earn a

living, they were expected to marry early and set their sights firmly on the domestic hearth. So it was in a girl's interest to make herself an attractive marriage proposition by acquiring certain social graces while still a child — singing, dancing, music, embroidery, pretty manners. And the prescribed feminine attributes had to be displayed: females were to be wan, decorative, quiet, gentle, neat and tidy, fearful, and helpful to the male.

On the other hand, the acceptable Victorian image to fit educated males for their roles as captains of industry and Empire was quite different from ideals of femininity: boys had to be daring, vigorous, courageous, energetic, masterful, wild, unemotional and naughty (though not rebellious). The concept of a double standard of morality condoned sexual promiscuity in men as a display of 'masculinity' and male aggression, whilst condemning it in women as a sign of 'unfeminine', shameful behaviour. The princes of fairy tales, as of real life, could therefore sow their wild oats, while their blushing brides had to be delivered up pure and unsullied. Fairy tales were thus adapted and selected by their collectors and publishers to reflect the prevailing mores of an industrial ruling class establishing its power over the rest of society.

While social conditions down the ages have demeaned females, making them mere handservants of the man, fairy tales are fiction; as such *they do not have to* reproduce injustice and inequality. Those who tell the tales today have the opportunity, the duty even, to select tales and images that can help to counteract centuries of literary abuse of the female sex. They can provide girls with all manner of exciting models, thereby helping to combat deep-rooted prejudices fostered by the much-read tales.

Such fairy tales are not easy to come by after so much neglect. *But they are there.* I have found plenty in our own heritage of folk tales from around the British Isles. Typically, the tales of the British people contain no splendid palaces or pretty, elegant fairies; no handsome princes and aspiring peasant brides; no wicked stepmothers and ugly sisters; no noble knights and decorative belles dames waiting to be saved. Everything is popular and from the familiar lore of these islands. Heroines and heroes are as wild, unkempt, simple, hard-working and superstitious as they probably were in fact. And bold heroines stride about the land, from Cornwall's Cherry of Zennor to Wales's Maid of Llyn y Fan Fach, from East Anglia's Cap o' Rushes and Mary Who Were Afeard o' Nothin' to the Lancashire Witches, from Yorkshire's Old Mother Shipton to Lincolnshire's Pottle of Brains; but especially in Scotland: the Black Bull of Norway (where the heroine has adventures in search of her beloved and awakens him with a kiss, unlike the French **Sleeping Beauty** or the German **Snow White**), Kate Krakernuts, Mollie Whuppie and the Well at World's End. Here are heroines in plenty to stir the heart and blur the eye, even curdle the blood.

Beyond our shores, the abiding matriarchal influence is readily apparent even today in East European folk tales. Slav tales, for example, feature the Frog Princess, not Frog Prince, the ubiquitous Vixen (Liza) rather

than the Western Fox (Reynard), the adventurous heroine of the Bohemian Twelve Months or the Russian Fenist the Falcon, with her helpful, and often beautiful, Baba Yagás (witches).

But it is not only a matter of locating forgotten tales; it is necessary to trace back and locate stories in their original versions — before they were subverted by men's fear of and lust for women's power as observers and instruments of life and death. Let me illustrate. In my researches into original Arabian Nights stories, I was not surprised to find the oft-quoted lines from Prince Camaralzaman and Princess Budoor as spoken by the misogynist Prince:

If you ask my mind of women  
I will tell you; I know them well.  
When a man's head is grey and his  
wealth declines,  
Their love will turn to scorn.

And further,

With their fingers dyed with henna  
And their hair arranged in plaits,  
With their painted lids and honeyed lips  
They trap unwary men in the web they  
spin  
And suck out his life's blood until  
he is dry.

Among all the modern versions of the tales, only dear old Sir Richard Burton permits the Princess to respond in kind as she does in the original 15th-century version:

Men are vain and cruel  
And cannot love one wife alone.

And then,

Beware of men, for they will force  
you to obey.  
The maid will not prosper who gives  
men their rein.  
They will close her mind to life  
and science,  
For they fear above all the liberation  
of her mind.

Why have so many male collectors ignored these lines?

There *is* a small number of collectors who have set out to redress the balance: Alison Lurie (**Clever Gretchen and Other Forgotten Folktales** — Heinemann), Ethel Johnson Phelps (**The Maid of the North and Other Folk Tale Heroines**) and Jay Williams (**The Practical Princess and Other Liberating Fairy Tales** — Chatto). It is an interesting comment on British publishing that the response from two publishers to my own unpublished collection of 'feminist' folk tales was that it might 'upset parents and librarians more used to traditional images'. All the same, the challenge is there to those authors and publishers who wish to take it up. And take it up we must for the price of rigidity in sex roles portrayed in folk and fairy tales is paid by males as well as females. Boys are equally constrained by the need to be strong, brave and clever, fearing to express themselves emotionally, to take on and enjoy roles defined as 'feminine'. The oppression and exploitation of one sex inevitably inhibits the fulfilment of human potential in the other. Fairy tales can and should encourage the imagination and creativity of *all* children . . . at the expense of none. ●



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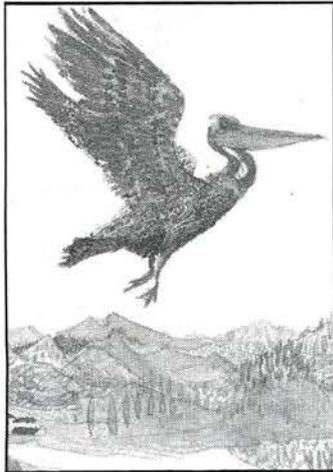
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BOOKS FOR KEEPS

# NEWS

## A new Award for Children's Books

Next month the Kurt Maschler Award will be made for the first time. It is for 'a work of imagination in the children's field in which text and illustrations are of excellence and so presented that each enhances yet balances the other'. The award is £1,000 and the winner or winners will also receive an 'Emil' — a bronze replica of Erich Kästner's famous character as visualized by Walter Trier (Kurt Maschler's publishing house, Atrium Press, was the publisher of *Emil and the Detectives*).

The Award is for a book published in the calendar year, January to December, by British authors and/or artists. Judges for 1982 will be Elaine Moss, Fiona Waters and Tom Maschler.

## Children's Books of the Year

Barbara Sherrard-Smith's selection of 1981 books is now on tour. This month look out for it in Cambridge (Homerton Teachers' Centre) and at the NBL Scotland in Glasgow.

In October it will be in Kent (Erith), London (Fulham, and Shoreditch Library) and Carmarthen (Dyfed College of Art). November and December will find it in Southport (at the In-service Training Centre) and Wick (at Wick High School).

For information about hiring the exhibition and/or copies of the annotated catalogue, published by Julia MacRae Books (£4.25, NBL members £3.95), contact the National Book League, Book House, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ.

## Rising to the Challenge

Hertfordshire Libraries are not the only enterprising ones around it seems. Martin Molloy of the Hampshire Library Service (who used to work in Hertfordshire!) is trying hard to outdo his former colleagues. He's got Puffin to co-operate in staging a week-long book fair in Petersfield (1st–6th November).

A whole string of authors will be there including Mike Rosen, Michelle Magorian, Jill Murphy, Nicholas Fisk, Jan Mark and Sara Corrin. There are plans for a special day for pre-school playgroups and Bernard Ashley is talking to adults in the evening. On the Saturday Radio Solent are doing their kids' programme *Albert's Gang* live from Petersfield Library. Martin has raised lots of sponsorship locally for the event. Well done that man.

Are there any other librarians picking up the gauntlet? Tell us what you're doing.

## What do you think of it so far?

The National Book League has been around now for more than fifty years. It was established 'to promote, encourage, foster or strengthen by all and every suitable or convenient means the habit of reading and the wider and more general distribution of books by and among all people'. It's been decided that now is the time for the NBL to

take stock of itself, consider its aims and how it tries to achieve them. Michael Marland is chairing a small working party and invites comments from all members of the reading public who would like to contribute. Now's your chance. Write to Michael Marland at the NBL, Book House, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ.

## Children's Book Week in Huddersfield

The Huddersfield Children's Bookshop which supplies many local school bookshops is getting CBW off to a poetic start. On Monday, 4th October Mike Rosen, Kit Wright and Anne Thwaite will be meeting hundreds of children and also appearing before an audience of teachers, parents and older children at the Teachers' Centre (This is open to all).

Sonia Benster who organises an event every year says it's usually a great success and well over 500 children meet an author. She's hoping though that there won't be a repetition of last year when a whole bus load of children arrived in tears, having been set off by one little girl who thought an author might be frightening!

## Book Fair in Peterborough

The Book Fair announced in our May issue has been postponed to 9th October. It will be held at the Education Development Centre, Cottesmore Close, Peterborough, 12.00 noon to 6.00 p.m. Authors appearing include Jill Murphy, Ruth Craft, Tim Furniss and John Agard. Details from John Byrne, School Library Service (0733) 268581.

## Malcolm Saville

It was with great sadness that we heard of the death of Malcolm Saville on 30th June. From the publication of his first *Lone Pine* story *Mystery at Witchend* in 1943, Malcolm Saville held a firm place in the hearts of millions of readers, an affection which was passed from parents to children.

He always made a special effort to keep in touch with his readers, answering personally up to 3,000 letters a year and making visits to schools and book fairs whenever he could. His enthusiasm and commitment were infectious and only last year he helped and inspired a whole class of children to research and write their first novel.

It was typical of his generosity that when we visited him in 1980 (he was one of our first *Authorgraphs*) he was as interested in the School Bookshop Association and *Books for Keeps* as we were in him. He was an unashamed upholder of the traditional ideals of friendship, loyalty and responsibility, and rightly proud to feel that from the evidence of thousands of letters he had quite clearly been responsible for turning more than one generation of children into readers. He will continue to be read and will be much missed.

## Extra, Extra, Read all about It

In November *Books for Keeps* will carry a special *Extra* supplement, specially for children. You will get *one* copy as part of the November issue and there's lots in it for you to use in the classroom, library or at home.

But we are printing *Extra* copies of *Extra* so you can order a few (or a lot!) more to pass on (or sell on) to the children it is *Extra* specially designed for (7–13s).

If you want to know what's in it you'll find all the details (and how to order it) inside the front cover. You'd be *Extraordinarily* silly to miss it. ●

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