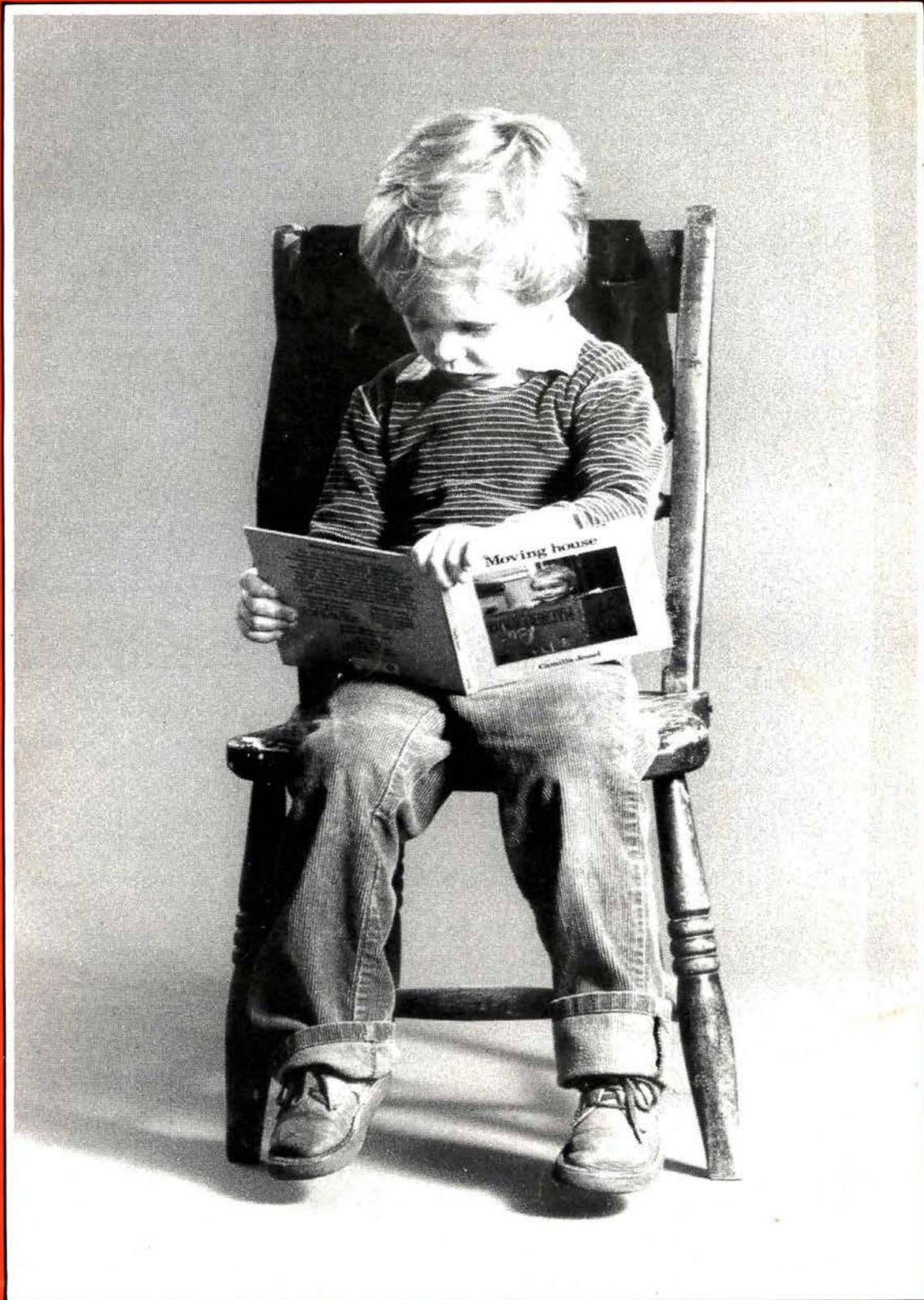


BOOKS FOR KEEPS

JULY 1983 No.21
UK Price 95p



**Books for Babies
Teenage Romance
Authorgraph 21: Leila Berg**

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Please Note

The publishing details of Ruskin Bond's *Tales and Legends from India* were inadvertently omitted from Judith Elkin's selection of Traditional Tales for a Multi-Cultural Society in our last issue. The book is published by Julia MacRae, 0 86203 044 7, £5.95.

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Reviewers

in this issue



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.



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



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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.



Colin Mills is in the Division of Teaching Studies at Worcester College where he helps run a Diploma in Children's Literature. He's taught in a comprehensive school, a primary school and worked in radio.

EDITOR'S PAGE

In this issue we are going to extremes: from Books for Babies to Teenage Romance. In one way babies and teenagers have a lot in common — both are on the brink of a whole new world: growing and changing at an amazing rate, finding out who they are and where they fit. It's a time when books have much to offer — a chance to reflect, consolidate, to experiment with new ideas, meet new situations in advance, try on different personalities in safety. But an encounter with a book is itself an experience. What a reader finds in a book becomes part of his or her 'reality'. Presumably, like all other experiences, our encounters with books have an influence on what we think, how we behave, what we become. So what's on offer for the very young and the 'near adult'?

Love or Romance?

There are now four paperback teenage romance series available. All the indications are that they will sell and sell. Is this because they are 'romances' — a word which has associations of dream, unreality, 'a picturesque falsehood', a 'wild and wanton exaggeration' (as the OED defines it)? Because they offer an alternative to the less-than-perfect world their readers inhabit? But what if those readers start believing in 'romance'? And where is the reflection of the intense sexual feelings boys and girls are experiencing? And where is *love* in all this? These are some of the questions raised by our feature (page 4). Write and tell us what you think and give us your suggestions for love stories which you'd like to see on a reading list for teenagers.

Two new books by British writers which have a fair bit to say about love — if very little about sex and romance — are *Voyage* by Adèle Geras (Hamish Hamilton 0 241 10988 4, £5.50) and *The Dragonfly Years* by Mollie Hunter (Hamish Hamilton 0 241 10976 0, £5.50). The *Voyage* is across the Atlantic in the winter of 1904, the passengers are Jews fleeing from the pogroms. 'All human life is here' in this very readable story which has something to say about love in all its forms. *The Dragonfly Years* also has a wider perspective. Bridie McShane (of *A Sound of Chariots*) lives her teens in 1930's Edinburgh. Her story is as much about politics, family, and realising a driving ambition as it is about falling in love. Will these non-contemporary, more broadly-based stories appeal to the readers of *Sweet Dreams*? It would be nice to think so.

Uneasy Connections

I've always thought of Gollancz as trail blazers in teenage fiction: Robert Cormier, Rosa Guy, S. E. Hinton, Ursula Le Guin, are only a few of the important writers whose work they have brought across the Atlantic. This month they have the third book by Sandy Asher (a writer worth watching). *Things Are Seldom What They Seem* (0 575 03760 X, £5.95) breaks new ground by being about, among other things, paedophilia (or at least a teacher who likes stroking and touching adolescent girls). It is written with good sense and understanding. Which is much more than can be said for Liz Berry's *Easy Connections* (also from Gollancz) which begins with a rape which the rest of the book goes on to justify. It's a glamorous story about 'beautiful' international rock stars and a beautiful, super-talented eighteen year old girl art school student. It's got a glittering, reader-grabbing surface; but its attitudes are confused and confusing and the dominant message is that 'physical magnetism' is

irresistible and women really rather like being knocked about and dominated. It left me feeling sickened and uneasy. We need strong, accessible stories from British writers, but this cheap sensationalism is not one of them. Try again Gollancz.

Cover Story

On our cover this issue is Robin Hill, three year old son of Angie and Richard who run the SBA. Robin was born soon after *Books for Keeps* and has become our home grown tester of books for babies. (Brother Simon, now nearly one is following rapidly behind.) When we took this picture Robin was absorbed in *Moving House* one of Methuen's Chatterbooks by Camilla Jessel, the subject of our May Authorgraph. Robin was equally taken with Leila Berg and her stories when he came along to the photo session for our twenty-first Authorgraph (page 14). Leila Berg is a natural with children and soon had a captive audience for her stories as our picture shows. (The other listener is Leila's granddaughter.)

As our Authorgraph shows Leila Berg has always run delightfully and productively counter to accepted trends in publishing for children. Her contribution to the current *Books for Babies* explosion appears from Methuen in the autumn; it's a series she describes as 'anti-concept books'. They are fresh and funny and well worth looking out for.

Chew on This

Just as *Books for Keeps* was planning to do something about books for the very young we heard that British IBBY had had the same idea and was holding a one-day seminar called, appropriately, *Chew on This*. (Chris Kloet reports on it on page 17.) We were delighted when Harvey Cox, whose talk on how young children perceive books was a highlight of the day, agreed to write for us. His account of Jenny, her mum and her books is an object lesson in what could and should be the experience of all three year olds.

It is interesting that Jenny's favourite books are *stories*. A salutary reminder to some publishers who seem to be hell bent on turning books into toys: zig-zag books (horribly confusing to babies just learning how a book works) with press out bits (easy to lose) are not top of my list of priorities. As usual Janet and Alan Ahlberg are an honourable exception. Their *Daisychains* which unfold like paper cut outs have plenty of story and child appeal. Our favourite *Ready, Teddy, Go* appears on page 17.

Inspiring Babies

A shrewd eye on the market may well be behind this publishing explosion. Equally significant it appears is the number of artists being inspired by their own babies to turn in this direction. Helen Oxenbury and husband John Burningham, Colin MacNaughton, the Ahlbergs all acknowledge an interest aroused by their own children. When we talked to Michael Foreman recently (BfK, March) he was enthralled by the idea of making books for young Ben. Appropriate we thought to show him with Ben (page 28) to illustrate the announcement of yet another Kate Greenaway medal — this time for two books which illustrate the range of his distinctive style. We shall see if he can make room for a 'baby' book in his busy schedule.

Happy holidays. I hope the sun keeps shining for all of us.

Pat

♥ Affairs of the Heart? ♥

Hot on the heels of the fast-selling **Sweet Dreams** series come **First Love**, **Wildfire** and **Heartlines**.

Pat Triggs takes a closer look at what is being offered in the name of Teenage Romance.

Last Autumn teenage girls in their thousands proved their willingness to extend their reading from magazines like **Jackie**, **Patches** and **Blue Jeans**, to full-length novels. They did it in the most conclusive manner — by parting with ready money in exchange for books in the **Sweet Dreams** series. There was, it seemed, a gap in the market ripe for filling. As so often happens that gap had been identified first in the United States. **Sweet Dreams** originated there with Bantam and along with other similar series has been highly successful. Last year's moves to import that particular version of the American Dream into Australia and Britain far exceeded the expectations of publishers behind the series. Sales have been astounding. In April of this year two other American imports, **First Love** from Silhouette and **Wildfire** from Scholastic hit the bookstalls and in June the first home-grown product, Pan's **Heartlines** series joined them.

Let's look first at Teenage Romance, American Style.

All the stories, from whatever publisher, have a similar formula. The press release which heralded **First Love** from Silhouette (imported by Hodder and Stoughton) sets out the publisher's view of the product.

'Aimed at the previously untapped market of 10 to 15 year old girls, **First Love** provide teenage romances in a crisp modern style. Written by a specialist team of writers, **First Love** has none of the sensuality of the adult Silhouette lines yet upholds the proven formula of top editorial quality, realistic situations and happy endings. While removing the reader from the depressing realities of life, these stories are at the same time strong on identification. They are usually told from the heroine's perspective, and deal with different adolescent concerns — their feelings as they mature, their day to day problems, their first romantic encounters. With settings both familiar (eg. schools and parties) and exotic (eg. a resort or a cruise) they trace the heroine's growing awareness of herself as an individual and as a romantic being. The tension in the story usually lies between her fantasy and the reality — with the hero often helping to bridge this gap.

Although colloquial, slang and dialect are used only when appropriate for characterisation. Implicit in the stories are moral values which will help the **First Love** reader to develop her own sense of responsibility.'

The Package

The product is created and packaged as a result of 'continuous consumer research'.

The **First Love** press release again:

'Research has proved that there is a lack of contemporary literature particularly for teenage girls as their choice of reading matter is limited to either children's books which are too young or adult books for which they are not quite ready. As a result they turn to magazines.

First Love aims to encourage the reading skills of teenagers. The series has been based on the findings of market research specifically conducted for Silhouette by highly experienced psychologists. All aspects have been carefully examined from the editorial content through to the series' name and the covers.

Photographic covers are preferred because they increase the realism.

The **First Love** series had a perceived value of 80p — £1.50. At 85p therefore it represents excellent value-for-money, an important consideration for money-conscious teenagers.'

As a final clincher:

'86% of all adult romance readers (my italics) thought **First Love** books were excellent for encouraging young girls to read.'

The Formula

Editorial direction about the content of all these stories is strong. I quote the following extract from 'guidelines to authors' as reprinted in the American journal **Inter-Racial Books for Children Bulletin**.

'... they are always written from the viewpoint of the young heroine and deal with her day by day problems, her uncertainties and her first romantic encounters. The heroine is 15, 16 or 17 and

the hero no more than a year or two older than she. Though usually they are still in high school, it is permissible for the hero to have just graduated, especially if the novel takes place in the summer ...

... Prominent in these novels is the heroine's inexperience and shyness of dealing with the inevitable misunderstandings of a first romance ... she should be from an ordinary middle-class suburban family which is warm and supportive ... The plot is moved by a conflict or conflicts embracing adolescent life — finding one's identity, finding that special boy, choosing between suitors ... There can be no explicit sexual involvement between the couple except kissing and feelings of attraction.'

Typical titles are **Saturday Night Date**, **Sixteen Can Be Sweet**, **New Boy in Town**, **P.S. I Love You**, **Please Let Me In**.

A couple of publishers blurbs give a taste of the standard plot.

When her old boyfriend went off to college Sarah Jordan felt lost and alone, especially when she thought about the Winter Carnival and Senior Prom. How could she enjoy her senior year without him? Then she met a new classmate, Bernard St Onge. Soon his European charm had her heart singing that old sweet song again. But was she really free to form a new relationship? And would Bernard be interested or had he already fallen for the wiles of Lisa Forster, the scheming class siren. (**Serenade**, **First Love**).

Abby's summer on Castle Island is a lot of fun — at first. She's popular with the kids. They invite her to parties and Abby is the centre of attention!

Then she meets Guy. He's Abby's dream boy, with blond hair and a terrific smile! But the other kids don't like him. He's an outsider in their in-group. Abby knows she must make a choice ... and it won't be easy.

Criticisms

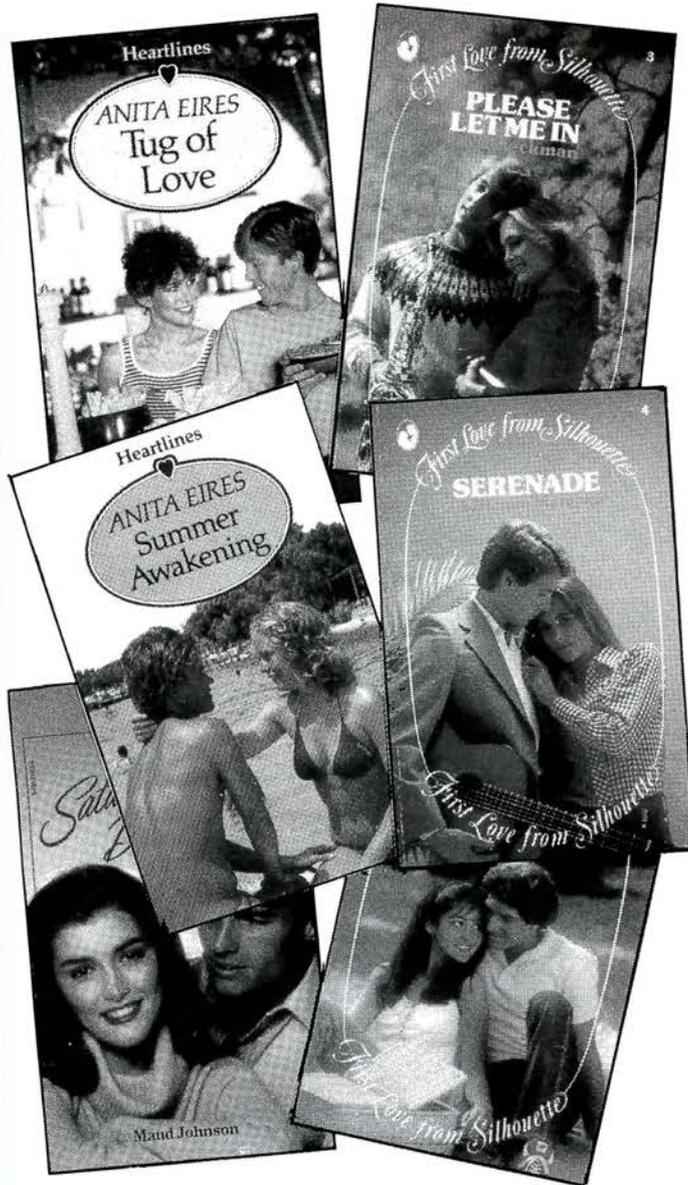
It's certainly a formula which sells. It's also one which predictably has sparked a debate among critics, teachers, librarians, authors and publishers.

Criticisms of these series are directed mainly at the heroine. She is always white, pretty, (supposedly) intelligent. She never has weight problems, spots or other teenage afflictions. She invariably comes from a happy supportive affluent home where adults are communicative, understanding and loving. Conflict with parents or siblings is practically unknown. The stories are accused of being sexist. The dominant adult female role offered is that of being a mother (or grandmother, or wife). Even when mother has a job this is shown as less important and never impeding her primary function which is to mother (i.e. provide food and good advice). The heroine may aspire to college and a career but this is seen as secondary to getting a boy. Or more properly getting the *right* boy. Our heroines start out knowing that happiness = getting a boy. They end up knowing that happiness = getting the *right* boy. And the stories are very clear about what constitutes the right boy.

All boys worth considering in these series are good-looking with broad shoulders, slim waists, 'rangy muscular frames'. They all have strong, even white teeth and eyes that can range from 'intense blue' to 'interesting brown, flecked with green'. Guy Winship in **The Summer of the Sky Blue Bikini** (**Wildfire**) 'Looked like the guy in the Marlboro ad'. So how do you tell Mr Right from Mr Wrong? Well, the right boy is 'sensitive-looking', he has 'an open friendly face' or 'an open frank gaze'. He's clearly 'open and honest', 'what you see is what you get'. He may be 'shy, serious, formal', especially if like Bernard St Onge in **Serenade** he is Belgian. 'I could not be like American boys, so bold. I did not know how else to tell you how I felt.' (He's just dedicated to her his brilliantly original composition for classical guitar: *Serenade for Sarah*.) He's articulate, 'says all those wonderful things that any girl would love to hear but that no kid around here would ever dare to say. Chris spoke the language of poetry'. (**One Day You'll Go**, **Wildfire**).

Above all he's much more interested in and concerned about our heroine than about himself. 'Melissa almost melted with admiration for Marshall. None of the selfish hint of wanting to have her alone to himself that Greg would have voiced. Instead Marshall showed a true concern for her feelings, understanding that it had to be something pretty important to her.' (**Please Let Me In**, **First Love**).

He's gentle, polite, careful of her feelings, 'mature', understanding — though, of course much the same age as our heroine!



What an impossible ideal for real life fifteen and sixteen year old boys (or indeed real life adults) to be measured against. Almost as impossible as the ideal of parents and family life depicted here also.

The Stuff of Dreams?

But, you may say, these books come from the dream factory. They are escapist reading. A little junk never did anyone any harm. Perhaps not. Consider though that these stories are being gobbled up as fast as they are produced, often by young impressionable readers. (Remember, *First Love*'s target is 10-15 year olds.) Are these the best dreams we can offer them? Dreams peopled by two-dimensional characters identified mainly by how they look and what they wear. Is it helpful for a thirteen year old to be offered a vision of being sixteen that is so far removed from reality? The girls in these stories face no real problems, no difficult moral dilemmas. They accept without question or struggle the values of their parents. They like dating and kissing but feel no real passion. 'Ecstasy mingled with concern' rushes through Melissa when Greg thinks it's time to make their relationship 'more . . . meaningful'. The concern Melissa feels is not about coping with her own powerful sexual feelings; it's simply about how to hang on to her dishy football hero boyfriend. 'Could she keep dating him if he made a nuisance of himself about his needs?' After all one of her new cheer-leader girl friends in the in-crowd had told her, 'I hold Louis on two kisses a week'.

The *right* boys it seems don't have 'needs', and neither do nice girls.

Australian View

Anne Simpson, an Australian librarian has some interesting views on the effect of all this on boys, their reading habits and their developing ideas about what love is. I'd like to quote extensively here from an article by her which appeared last September in *Review*, the journal of the Schools Libraries Branch of the Education Department of South Australia.

'Boys are given no point for identification in these stories. Male readers are unable to compete with male characters who are so mature and unselfish, so competent, sure, good looking, high-minded and so sexless. Whether their emotional response is one of confusion, disbelief or disdain, the end result is that boys turn away from such literature which is unrealistic, sentimental and pat. They turn to non-fiction for their serious reading and to pornography for reading which recognises sex.'

Sexual stereotypes are re-inforced, readership is further segregated. Neither sex is in any way prepared by these books for the emotional and physical actuality of real life relationships. In fact they are actively deceived. The author's own hang-ups about sex are handed on, as is tellingly demonstrated by one author's defence of her books as she unwittingly gives herself away, calling sex a "problem" and lumping it with suicide. "It is easy", she says, "to write about the more dramatic problems of sex, suicide etc. . . . but not every girl engages in sex, drugs, suicide attempts etc." Critics are continually confusing sexuality and sexual feelings with explicit sexual activity (not, by the way, that there should be anything wrong with that), and seem to think that by acknowledging the sexuality of young people, they are opening the floodgates of pornography.

It is ironic that by *denying* the characters any sexuality in teenage books, specifically the male characters, they are indeed leading one half of the teenage population to pornography (or at least to girlie magazines), to satisfy their natural curiosity about sex.

The current romance series, with their deliberate omission of any reference to sex, coupled with their easy availability and accessibility seem to me to be a significant and worrying further development of this trend of the polarisation of girls' and boys' reading habits and subsequent expectations of what love is about.

Not funny

What is also lacking, for me, in these series is the very quality for which we have learned to value American children's books: humour. These heroines are po-faced, self-obsessed young women; there's no sense of perspective, no wry self awareness, no sense of the ridiculous. Nothing to help build a teenage survival kit.

So what have the British to offer? Teenage Romance, British Style

'For a welcome change' says the *Heartlines* press release 'the story lines of this British-based series are so real that the endings are rarely neat and happy and the situations are painfully real'.

Pam Lyons 'a key *Heartlines* author' writes: 'The area between childhood and adulthood is an emotional minefield. And whoever dreamed up the phrase "the young years are the best years" obviously had either a very bad memory, or else was wrapped in cotton wool from the age of 14-20! The truth is, the teen years bring with them not only pimples and periods but also a whole gamut of new emotions and experiences. *Heartline* stories highlight the whole kaleidoscope of these intensely traumatic and emotionally fraught years'.

So we have Maria in *Tug of Love* in conflict with her strict Italian father over Joey who comes to work in the cafe; Hazel, into Punk and Heavy Metal, truanting and getting involved with rich middle-class Rolo, a biker and leader of the gang, in *He Was Bad*.

All human life is here?

We are far away from affluent suburban middle America. Hazel lives in a two bedroomed flat; Dad is a salesman, 'mostly out on the road', Mum's always buying things at coffee mornings. Lainie's dad is a taxi driver and their villa holiday in *Summer Awakening* is their first trip abroad, the result of two years saving.

Stronger stuff

The British stories are stronger stuff in some ways and would not be likely to find favour with moral majority parents in the States who must thoroughly approve of *First Love* et al.

In *Heartlines* marriages break up (*He Was Bad* and *A Boy Called Simon*). Parents are less than perfect. Lainie's mum in *Summer Awakening* who nags, is narrow-minded about bikinis and over indulgent to younger sister Shara, confesses to a brief but passionate Italian affair when she was seventeen and on holiday with a friend although engaged to Lainie's dad. The result was big brother Brian. Wine and beer appear without attracting much comment. (In the American series alcohol is almost as big a no-no as sex. Melissa, offered a can of beer at a party in *Please Let Me In* is 'shocked').

Maria and Joey in *Tug of Love* drink wine at a party in Exeter and bring home friend Janice rather the worse for drink, and drugs.

More significantly the *Heartlines* approach, at least on the evidence of the first four titles, recognises the existence of strong sexual feelings in teenagers. In *Tug of Love*, even before they meet, Joey's voice on the phone makes Maria feel 'sort of strange — shivery'. Later when they are at a party. 'I no longer trusted myself. Just his kisses had sent me reeling . . . I wanted to stop, but somehow I couldn't.' Of course they do stop. The good guys, like Joey, know when it's better to leave the garden shed and get back to the party. Rotters, like Rolo and Jonty (the rich Cambridge under-graduate of *Summer Awakening*) are ingeniously prevented from having their evil way. Hazel on Rolo's parents Hampstead bed has drunk too much wine and has to throw up at the crucial moment (I'm not sure what the moral is there). Lainie, torn between shame and desire, discovers a hidden photograph of Jonty's steady girlfriend and realises she means nothing more to him than 'a good time'.

This is going to hurt

It's a hard life with *Heartlines*, a far cry from the sanitised *Sweet Dreams* and the like.

The pay-off for *Heartlines* heroines is different. The author's brief seems to be to show young love as one, probably painful, step on the road to maturity. 'Rolo was a phoney. Only I'd been too young and immature to recognize it. . . It isn't easy facing up to your mistakes and I'd made a lot of them.' (*He Was Bad*). 'Perhaps all first love leaves a bitter sweet memory.' (*A Boy Called Simon*) 'I wonder how other girls will find a holiday romance — or heartbreak. If they will discover true love — or learn a hard lesson? But then maybe that's what life is all about, learning for ourselves.' (*Summer Awakening*) (Let's hope she wasn't too damaged by the experience — burying the bikini she was wearing in the rubbish bin is not a good augury for her future sex life!) 'Maybe it's just that I am growing up. . . But sometimes, well sometimes, I wish it didn't hurt so much. . .' (*Tug of Love*)

Will all this home-grown 'realism' make *Heartlines* more appealing than its rivals? The very different teenage culture of the American series — high school, dating, Senior Prom, Homecoming Queen, 'going steady' — doesn't seem to have deterred British readers. They haven't been put off either by references to fashion and music now far out of date, or by photographs on the covers of characters most of the young teenagers of my acquaintance would describe as 'wallys'. What remains is the fantasy of 'young love' — false but reassuring. That is the need that is being fed.

At the end of *Heartlines* stories the girls are 'wiser' in conventional terms but they don't seem any stronger as people or to know a lot more about themselves. Marriage to Mr Right may not be presented as the future; but what is? Hazel, Lainie, Gabby, and Maria don't look forward at all. They react to whatever presents itself. Only Hazel forces her life into a new direction — and she ends up on probation!

Where in all these series is the warm-blooded, teenage heroine who is developing a proper sense of herself as an individual, taking charge of her life and thinking purposefully and realistically about herself, her world and her future?

And where are the writers who can put her into words that are not plonkingly heavy-handed or weary with cliché? Now there is a dream worth having. ●

First Love titles, Hodder & Stoughton, 85p each (two new titles every month).

Wildfire titles, Scholastic, 75p each.

Heartlines titles, Pan, 85p each (two new titles in August).

What can teachers do?

1. Several commentators have suggested taking short extracts from popular series and getting girls and boys to discuss some of the attitudes and values presented in the stories, guided by questions like How do you choose your friends? Do you agree that for a girl it's important to have a boyfriend? In this way the books are not dismissed or condemned by the teacher — rather they are opened up for critical examination. We might learn something of what these stories offer their readers from this sort of discussion.

2. Offer better books — the classic answer but not easy to achieve. In this area in particular we need to match books to readers. To do this well means knowing a lot of books. We are working on a list and we would welcome your suggestions for it. Send us the details of each title plus a brief note on the sort of readers who in your view will enjoy it most. Don't be afraid that everyone else will already know what you do — that's rarely so. Tell us about even the, to you, most obvious titles. You'll be adding to the well of common experience which we all need to draw on and share.



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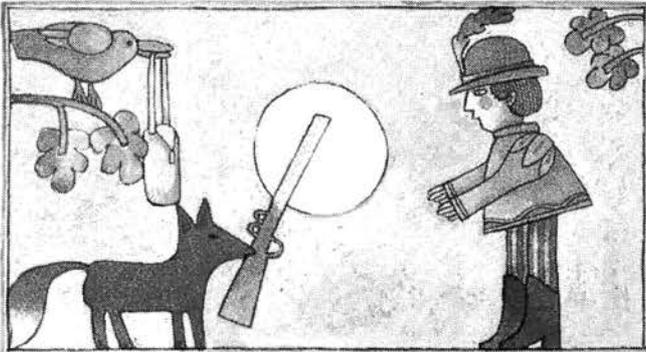
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Nursery/Infants



The Hunter and the Animals

Tomie de Paola,
Sparrow Books,
0 09 930780 4, £1.50

A wordless story in which a hunter gets lost in the forest and is led safely home by the animals who have been keeping a watchful eye, whereupon he becomes a reformed character. Designed like a frieze and inspired by a picture on an old Hungarian wood panel, this is, in my view, one of the artist's best books; besides the visual pleasure it gives, it offers plenty of food for thought and discussion. JB

Mrs Fox's Wedding

ill. Errol Le Cain, retold by Sara and Stephen Corrin, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050 375 7, £1.25

The Corrins have combined what are really two episodes from Grimm into one story here; and their effective use of rhyme together with Le Cain's highly imaginative comical illustrations make a handsome book which is best read aloud. Essentially, it tells of the pretty but hard-to-please Mrs Fox who is looking for a husband as charming and handsome as her first, and of the various suitors who come to woo her. JB



The gay young dog is dismissed as a suitor, from 'Mrs Fox's Wedding'

The Terrace House Books

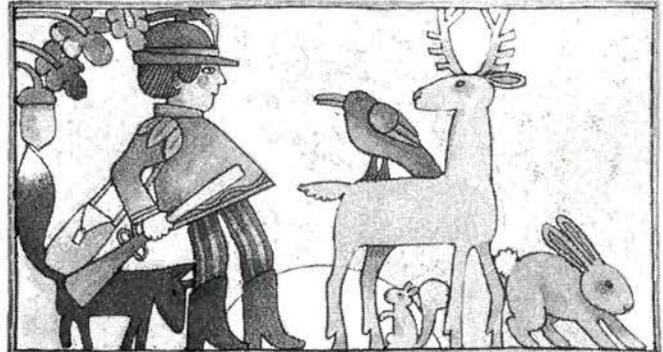
Peter Heaslip,
photographs by Anne Griffiths, Methuen Educational
Set E, 0 423 51100 9,
Set F, 0 423 51110 6,
£2.95 non net each set

As with the previous titles all these: *Getting Dressed*, *Favourite Food*, *New Shoes*, (set E) and *Going to School*, *The Building Site*, *Post Office*, *Vehicles*, (set F) with the exception of *Holidays*, (set E) have an urban setting; and each has the characteristics of the other books in the series: good, clear colour photos and easy-to-read text of one or two sentences per page. The repetition of sentence patterns makes the books suitable for children learning English as a second language as well as for the beginning readers for whom they were designed. Because of their cultural diversity however, these books are recommended for all primary classrooms. JB

House by Mouse

George Mendoza, ill.
Doris Smith, Magnet,
0 416 25510 8, £1.25

Visual delights abound as each turn of the page reveals the realisation of one of Henrietta mouse's designs: a tailor-made dwelling for each of her assorted clients; although these are animal, the characteristics portrayed are essentially human. Each illustration is packed with minute, often witty detail such as the bee design on bear's duvet cover. Though this paperback is much reduced from the hardcover original, nevertheless it still offers plenty to look at and to stimulate the imagination. JB



Maybe it's a Tiger

Kathleen Hersom, ill.
Niki Daly, Macmillan,
0 333 35166 5, £1.95

A multi-racial story with an urban street setting and a nice blend of the imagined and the real: little Joseph's picture book leads a group of children into fantasy play about zoos, their cat becoming a tiger, the dog a bear and the gerbil a kangaroo, much of the text taking the form of dialogue. A good one to read aloud and for learner readers who will find the repeated language patterns helpful. JB

Further Adventures of King Rollo

David McKee, Sparrow Books, 0 09 931200 X, £1.50

Four more of the stories about this delightful king and his friends: *King Rollo and the Dishes*; *King Rollo and the Balloons*; *King Rollo and King Frank*; *King Rollo and the Search*, in a single volume. The changed format (from the original pocket-size books) with its four frames per page,

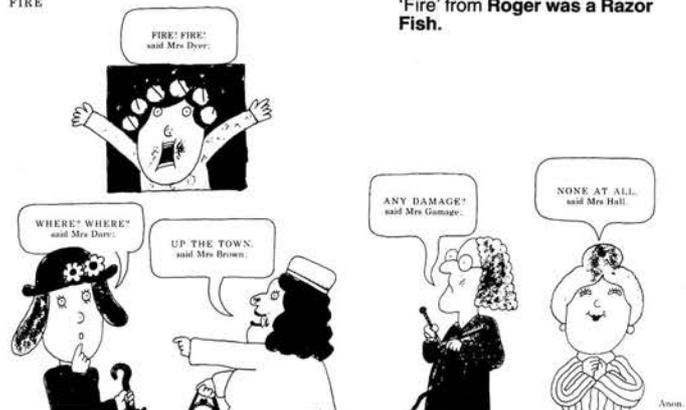
gives this one more of the feel of a comic book perhaps meaning that its appeal will be to a slightly different audience. However, anyone who has yet to make the acquaintance of the endearing monarch should take this opportunity to do so. JB

Roger was a Razor Fish

Compiled by Jill Bennett, ill. Maureen Roffey, Hippo, 0 590 70095 2, £1.25

A beautifully crafted picture book of verse from an editor whose concern for children, literacy and the sharing of the best with the young is familiar to the readers of Books for Keeps. Jill's choice of poems combined with Maureen Roffey's jolly pictures and inventive design make a book with lots to offer. The implied readers are 4 to 7's: children who are enjoying the essential playlike nature of poetry. This book will build bridges between the action game, the nursery rhyme and the first sustained reading book. CM

FIRE



'Fire' from *Roger was a Razor Fish*.

Infant/Junior

Tex the Cowboy
0 00 123715 2

Tex the Champion
0 00 123712 8

Tex and Bad Hank
0 00 123713 6

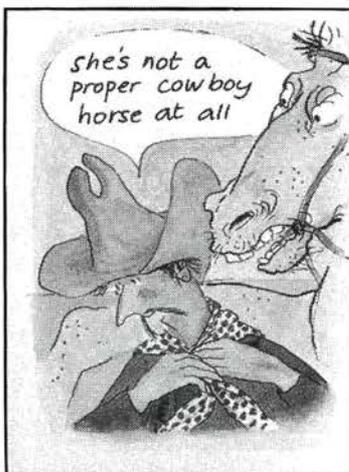
Tex and Gloria
0 00 123714 4
Sarah Garland, Collins
Colour Cubs, 50p each

Sarah Garland's last two books have been firmly rooted in English domesticity so it is a surprise — though a pleasant one — to find this series of Cubs have a cowboy as their hero. Tex and his horse Gloria are far from the glamorous image one usually associates with Westerns; in fact they appear to be two of life's natural victims. Despite Tex's incompetence however, together the pair always manage to come out on top.

With their bubbletalk, short text and subject matter, these are a good bet for the more reluctant, and possibly slightly older reader. **JB**

Ice-creams for Rosie
Ronda and David
Armitage, Hippo,
0 590 70160 6,

Though not without amusing touches, this book is not of the same standard as the Armitages' *The Bossing of Josie* and *The Lighthouse Keeper's Lunch*; the storyline: how Rosie copes with the



From *Tex the Cowboy*

problem of getting fresh supplies of ice-cream to her island shop, is less powerful. However, the book with its well designed pages, use of bubble talk and comic strip is visually attractive and could well be useful for those who are put off by too much printed text. **JB**

A Child's Book of Manners

Fay Maschler, ill. Helen Oxenbury, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050 374 9, £1.25

Not even Helen Oxenbury's superbly humorous illustrations can redeem Fay Maschler's 'cautionary tales' which are really doggerel verse at its worst and most painful — even difficult — to read aloud. **JB**

Meet M and M
Pat Ross, ill. Marylin Hafner, Fontana Young Lions, 0 00 672144 3, 95p

The ups and downs of friendship as experienced by look-alike pals Mandy and Mimi, and a first independent shopping trip to the supermarket are related in what is another splendid addition to Fontana's Young Lions series. With its spot-on humour — both verbal and visual, and generously illustrated and spaced page layout, this is a particularly inviting book and is perfect for that awkward 'inbetween' stage of reading. Why is it that the Americans still do this so much better than us? **JB**

"Rub-a-dub-dub,
M and M in the tub,"
they sang at bath time.
They took turns piling bubbles
in the yellow pail
that belonged to *both* of them.



From *Meet M and M*

I'm Taggart Toad
Peter Pavey, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050 414 1, £1.50

A sumptuous, beautiful picture book about the exploits of the boastful Taggart Toad "bigger and braver and bolder than most". The text is both energetic and poetic ("I've ridden down rainbows fearless and free") and Pavey's individual pictures are bold, imaginative, richly-textured.

A rewarding reading and looking experience for 5 to 11's from a very promising author-artist. **CM**

Littlenose

John Grant, BBC/
Knight, 0 340 33117 8, £1.25

A new edition of one of the earliest stories about the Neanderthal boy. A delightful introduction to an endearing character for a new set of readers and listeners. The source of much of the fun is in the quirky relationship between Littlenose and his parents and in the 'Stig of the Dump' — like inventiveness of the Little noses.

A super bridge between the fascination of prehistory and good, crisp, contemporary storytelling. Grant's own pictures are characterful. **CM**

Junior/Middle

Beaver Towers
Nigel Hinton, ill. Peter Rush, Knight,
0 340 32105 9, £1.10

Here's a writer who invites 7-ups into a story and carries them along with ease: "Maybe none of it would have happened if Philip had listened to his father's warning . . ." A summary of the plot — young boy is carried off to an island where a witch is gaining power over the beaver inhabitants — does not do justice to the power and atmosphere of the story.

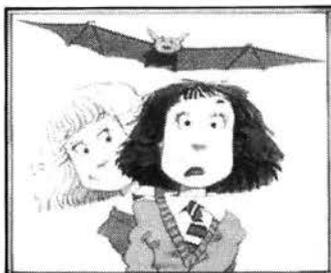
It's an imaginative quest, a superbly tailored yarn which shows a knack for action and character. A gift for serialisation. **CM**

The Fiend Next Door
Sheila Lavelle, Fontana Lions, 0 00 672082 X, £1.00

A smashing first-person account by Charlie Ellis of her

"best friend" Angela and their tempestuous comradeship. Lavelle is one of the best writers for 7 to 11's and her appeal is rooted in her ability to catch the contemporary social world of Lady Di, Mars Bars and record some frighteningly perceptive glimpses of school life ("Project and Activities and Learning by Experience and stuff like that").

Like Jan Mark and Gene Kemp, this writer can show children as they really are without ever patronising. Try,



From the cover of *The Fiend Next Door*

as I did, the episode of the kidnapped baby to get 'reluctant' tens hooked. **CM**

Elmer Makes a Break
Patrick Cook, Puffin,
0 14 03 1574 8, 90p

I greatly enjoyed *Elmer the Rat* and this follow up confirms the waterfront-dwelling rodent as a super character. Seven-ups should love the splendid action which befalls Elmer when he chooses to venture from the wharf to the great big world.

It's a rare kind of book for this age group that can combine a rigorous plot, a sense of fun and quite serious ideas (what's it like to run against the crowd?) Cook's stylish writing and his clear, racy pictures do this. Recommended. **CM**

The Secret Brownies
0 340 27867 6
The Brownie Venturers
0 340 32887 8
Dorothy Richardson,
ill. Thelma Lambert,
Knight, 95p each

Despite a rather dated ring to some of the dialogue, the first of these — about a group of Brownies who carry on in secrecy after Brown Owl has left — appealed to the nines and tens (girls) who read it for me. The writer conveys a strong atmosphere of children's private society and she deals well with the magic element in the story.

The second has a more realistic theme: the Brownies help in looking after some old folks. Skilfully drawn relationships here between young and old. Try some in the bookshop: the stories are more promising than their outside packaging suggests. **CM**

Dragonfall 5 and the Master Mind

0 416 21020 1

Dragonfall 5 and the Super Horse

0 416 58200 1

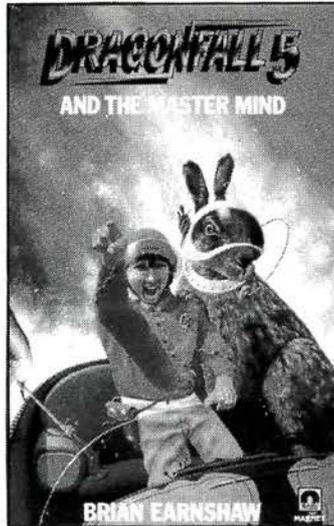
Dragonfall 5 and the Haunted World

0 416 30090 1

Brian Earnshaw, ill.
Simon Stern, Magnet,
£1.25 each

Reading and discussing these books with top juniors has taught me that sci-fi is one of those areas where we need, the young's help more than ever. They often know the forms and conventions far better than we do. Stories in the genre need both the pace of the comic strip and the involvement of the computer game.

These three are the fifth, sixth and seventh in a series about the Starship Dragonfall and its adventures on the planets of Snow, Mowl and Pine Home. The action is fast, the narrative packed. The connoisseurs in the class worked hard on the three here but their driving enthusiasm needed more help from the form and the author's style.



If you have addicts, read extracts, perhaps, and talk about them. Sorting out criteria is an important reading experience and conventional literary judgements **don't** have all the answers here! **CM**

Ben and BlackbeardT. R. Burch, Granada,
0 583 30569 3, £1.25

The covers present the reader with three smartly dressed children, gleaming pale jeans,

immaculate tops, even a pair of white shoes. What are the three children doing? Desperately, untouched by the foaming waters, they battle their way over a rushing dam on a raft that is rapidly breaking up!

The excitement ends when the three clamber out of the river at the beginning of chapter two and quarrel their way home. Thereafter **Ben and Blackbeard** becomes a rather tedious story of Ben who seeks adventure while big sister nags and little sister forgets herself in a book: (She was reading one on the raft!) A troop of Brownies somehow manages to get into the action before the end.

There is big print, easy reading vocabulary, a manageable read for the eight plus age range but not a story to be remembered. **CL**

Cat's MagicMargaret Greaves,
Magnet, 0 416 30120 7,
£1.25

When the money runs out, orphan, Louise Genevieve, daughter of a French dancer and an English artist must go to live with Aunt Harriet. Life at Deep End seems to be a dead end until Charlie

Parkinson comes along. Louise acquires her first nick name, and her first close friend. She also becomes the owner of a cat, Casca, and that is where the fantasy really begins. With Casca comes, uninvented, Bast, a Goddess of the sun and protector of all cats. With her aid Louise is taken back in time to many ages past.

The story is told in the first person in a strong forthright tone and is very absorbing. Linguistically the level is quite high and those children who might most enjoy the fantasy may find it a difficult read at times. However it will stand up well to being read aloud to the younger middle school age range and should engross older children who have not yet abandoned books of magic and fantasy. **CL**

From *Cat's Magic* cover

Middle/Secondary

Pippa's Mystery HorseJudith Berisford, Knight,
9 78340 268117, £1.10

An appaloosa is a rare spotted horse bred from horses belonging to the American Palouse Indians. This was news to me but horse mad Pippa recognises the breed of the rare horse as soon as it is spotted on Puffin Island and knows that it must be rescued. In my experience only girls read horse books and then only a certain committed group. Others have been known to declare such books to be 'rubbish'. The latter have my sympathy. However I do have a sneaking admiration for Judith Berisford in that her books do get away from the everyday life of horsey folk and pack in quite a bit of action.

Not a book to be excited about but if your school is in a rosette earning catchment area the cover will be sufficient to entice the appropriate readership. **CL**

My Brother, The ThiefMarlene Fanta Shyer,
Granada,
0 583 30496 6, 95p

This is a useful little novel, first person stuff about an older half-brother who turns to petty crime, partly as a result of a bad-influence friend, partly

out of hang-ups concerning his real father. Consider its social attitudes and you start to feel a little uneasy but somehow the U.S. setting puts it into a kind of never-never land and — perhaps wrongly — that defuses concern. It's the Blume approach, but on more dangerous ground. Yet the touch is light and I doubt whether anyone's likely to get too involved. Top junior/early secondary kids (probably girls) should take to it. **SB**

The Magnet Book Of Spine Chillersed. Lance Salway,
Magnet, 0 416 25560 4, £1

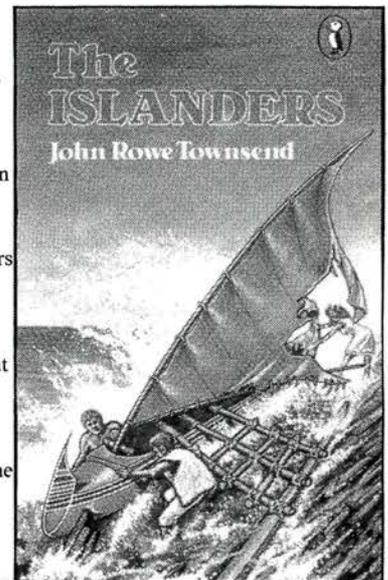
Six stories, originally compiled as **Black Eyes** (Pepper Press). They are worth a look, though not uniformly successful and not all suited for the same age range. In literary terms, the best story is Philippa Pearce's **Black Eyes** though it's about kids much younger than the main audience and teddy bears are central. I've used Joan Aiken's **Finders Keepers** successfully with third year secondary kids, modifying its too-difficult vocabulary as I read. Jan Mark's haunted aviary and Marjorie Darke's changeling story aren't great but might find some readers. Helen Cresswell and Dorothy Edwards fill up the rest of the pages, along with Jill Bennett's illustrations (poor, as usual). Good cover though. Have around for top juniors and early secondary kids. **SB**

The IslandersJohn Rowe Townsend,
Puffin, 0 14 03.1478 4,
£1.25

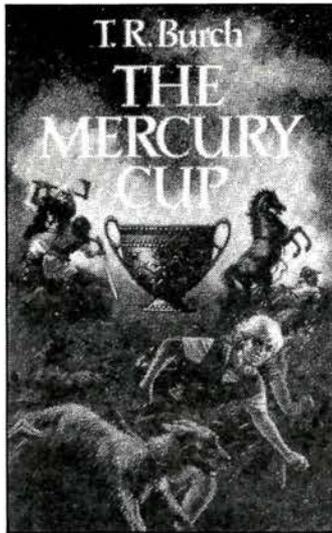
In this month's sea of mediocrity John Rowe Townsend's island of Halcyon stands out like a well-crafted vessel that will transport the willing reader into a myriad absorbing waters. The islanders themselves live a tenuous, claustrophobic, yet peaceful existence governed by the tenets of 'The Book', which strangely no one can read, but which the Reader claims to know by having learnt them from his predecessor and thereby bestowing him with the priesthood/leadership of the community.

A half-dead boy and his girl companion wrecked in a frail canoe set off a sequence of events which strike at the very core of the island's convincingly-realised society, upset its balance and whilst destroying an old, arduous way of life, replace it with a future that seems as arduous and as uncertain but for different reasons.

The sensitive reader cannot fail to see the many parallels with our own society that this imaginative and penetrating study gradually unveils. The author knows how to tell a good story and what's more tells it superbly well. **DB**

**The Mercury Cup**T. R. Burch, Granada,
0 583 30570 9, £1.25

An adventure set at the eclipse of the Roman Occupation of Britain, which seems to lose its way as often as the hero Aquilo, even though he has the statutory rangy cur, Brutus, to protect him. Our privileged lad is trying to catch up with his parents, who have fled their villa heading towards Silchester and the safety of Brittany. It somehow escaped their notice



that their heir had been forcibly trapped in his room by their perfidious steward, Felix. Still, they were in a hurry I suppose and anyway they were possibly concerned that another servant had just been found dead in the corridor. Anyway, after several bloody Roman and Saxon noses, a brace of old mystics and a lot of toing and froing it all ends well — as you always knew it would. It's harmless and some kids might be able to enjoy its exciting bits. DB

Children of Fire Mountain

Graeme Farmer, Magnet, 0 423 00770 X, £1.25

This adventure story is set in the last century among the boiling mud holes and hot geysers of Maori country, where Sir Charles' new hotel development is threatening taboo land and so the earth itself is evoked to wreak terrible vengeance. Alongside all of this Tom Gregory and his gang are squabbling with prim Sarah Jane, Sir C's granddaughter, and aiming to bring to justice local baddy Doomy Dwyer, who sells meat but more often illicit liquor to the natives. Throw in a pinch of Maori mysticism and unfamiliar customs and you have the book of the T.V. series.

It's exciting and predictable and once introduced should make adequate lightweight reading for young readers. DB

Kay Tracey

1. The Double Disguise

Frances Judd, Armada, 0 00 692045 4, 95p

2. The Sunken Garden

Frances Judd, Armada, 0 00 692046 2, 95p

"If Kay makes up her mind to catch him, you can be sure she will! . . . It's getting to be a habit with her."

These books are the first in a series we could probably do without. Think of a cliché comic cartoon adventure; picture a stereotype character and here you have it. I don't doubt that there are readers around who will lap it up until they pass on to something better and better there must be. How's this for a tortured phrase . . . 'She was friendly, sincere and very popular in the nearby high school which she and her friends commuted to from the little town of Brantwood'.

In Book One a random selection of chapter headings should say it all — 'The Witch's prophesy', 'The Stolen Formula', 'The Poison Vial', 'The Hidden Loot' and the last of all 'Happiness'.

In Book Two it's much the same picture but there's dancing in it!

Stock them in your bookshop if you want to make easy cash but I shan't because I'd feel a fraud seeming to give them some seal of approval. DB

The Highwayman

Alfred Noyes, ill. Charles Keeping, O.U.P., 0 192 72133 X, £2.50

At last a large format paperback version of Charles Keeping's award winning picture book for big kids. Few cannot be acquainted by now with the artist's uncompromisingly striking style — the grotesque faces, the pools of blood that still seem to trickle darkly before the eyes, that prevailing, real and yet unreal wood grain texture that hints at things strange, mysterious, world within worlds. Yet is it for children? If only the very best of anything is good enough for our children, then we owe them an introduction to Keeping's work and this book is a must, especially for the picturebook section of secondary libraries, added to which you have a memorable, gutsy poem, which will delight the ear as the pictures assail the eye. DB

Fireball

John Christopher, Puffin, 0 14 03.1498 9, £1.25

Romans again! However, they are 20th century ones, only still living in the old toga and gladiatorial style that we're most familiar with. They are from the 'If World', a dimension alongside our world out of which Simon and Brad were transported by a fireball. In the 'If World' Julianus's paganism overcame Constantine's christianity so making history a different matter up to the present. The ill-matched cousins from this world become dangerously involved in shaping contemporary 'If' history, using as tools their knowledge of rudimentary weaponry, which even so is superior to the Roman armoury.

Christianity gains dominance two thousand years after Christ, whilst in an ending which calls out for a sequel, the New World of America is discovered anew.

It is refreshing that John Christopher chooses not to reverse the time-slip at the end but otherwise the novel does not startle the experienced reader with new ideas. However, there are many others I am sure who will find it an intriguing and exciting read and for the many Christopher fans it is well worth stocking. DB



A detail from *The Highwayman*

Strangers In The House

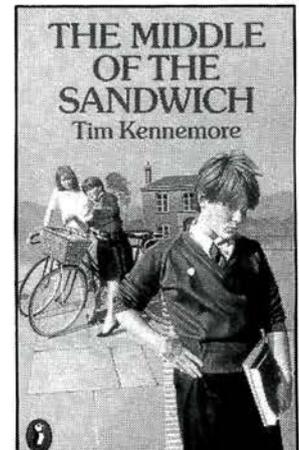
Joan Lingard, Beaver, 0 600 20676 9, £1.00

Yet again, an established writer abuses a reputation. The Lingard stamp ensures publication for this jog through the conventions of the re-marriage idea. The opening is especially turgid, Willa and her two kids on the Cromarty-Edinburgh train, approaching a new life in Tom's poky flat. Adolescent Calum complains . . . background detail is doled out on cue. Chapter two? Equally dull; Tom's daughter has her turn to moan. If the book survives reader-disgust with the lack of effort, thereafter it's the old shifting focus — the two teenagers' problems intertwine with lost infant, parental tiffs, house-hunting . . . the usual. A professional's job so relatively slick; expectations of quality are numbed quickly once you're into it. Best tried with first/second year girls beginning on teenage fiction. They'll have met the clichés less often and will object less to Beaver's appropriately dull, too-young cover than older kids. SB

The Middle of the Sandwich

Tim Kennemore, Puffin, 0 14 03.1519 5, £1.00

A simple, ultra-conventional story about a girl eventually triumphing over tough times in a village school where she spends a few weeks. Startling to think that Tim Kennemore followed this with *The Fortunate Few* — only the occasional detail suggests she was capable of such a good book. I suppose there might still be such backwater schools around but I can't accept Helen as thirteen, even with her sheltered upbringing — ten perhaps, eleven possibly. Her character adds to the book's old-fashioned feel. Undemanding girls (say 10-12) who are into books might trip through this one painlessly — if they can accept that such an obviously intelligent girl can be so stupid at times. SB



The Mark of the Horselord

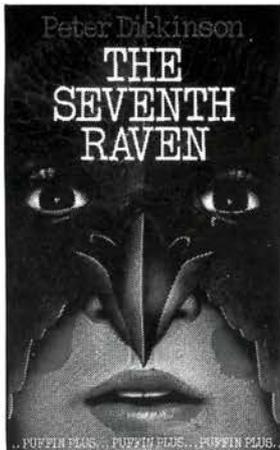
Rosemary Sutcliff, Puffin, 0 14 03.1473 3, £1.75

Phaedrus the slave knows little other than the brotherly companionship of the Gladiator's School, but even so he can stifle sentiment and kill his own best friend in an ordered fight to the death before a blood-lusting Roman crowd. By this deed he earns his freedom, which he promptly swaps for another kind of servitude.

His physical likeness to the fugitive, blinded Horse Lord, Midir is seized upon by Gaelic desperadoes to overthrow the reigning She-Vixen Monarch, whereby Phaedrus becomes trapped in a sequence of events that lead to another kind of mortal danger and a different kind of desperate companionship.

The descriptions are lengthy and vivid, the tone is authoritative and heroic and the plot gradually, smoothly unfolds like scenes on a tapestry of ancient working. School libraries should stock such a book if only for that once-in-a-while reader who wants to and can, savour that special writing magic which is Rosemary Sutcliff's hallmark.

Older Readers



The Seventh Raven
Peter Dickinson, Puffin
Plus, 0 14 03.1506 3,
£1.50

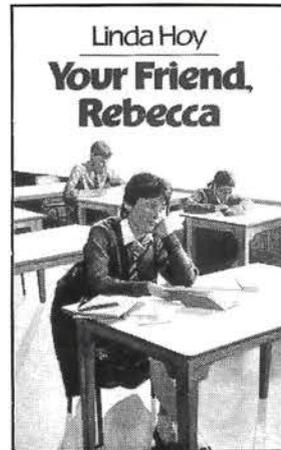
Arguably the most talented writer in the teenage market, Peter Dickinson can be infuriating because of his persistent determination to ignore the nature of the audience. *The Seventh Raven* fits into the thriller strand of his work — following on from *The Gift* and *Annerton Pit* as opposed to the sterile *Tulku*.

It's a siege novel; a hundred or so kids rehearsing for an opera with a few adults are held in a police-surrounded church (W. London) by S. American 'terrorists' seeking an ambassador's son whom the rest of the cast manage to hide for a while. With a few concessions, the fascinating arguments about politics and art might have reached many more kids. As it stands, this will only do for a few bright readers, 14+, despite its quality. SB

Your Friend, Rebecca
Linda Hoy, Sparrow,
0 09 931280 8, £1.25

First novel, so rough-edged, but worth a go. After her mother's death, Rebecca has tough times at her terrible, very recognisable school and at home with her despairing 'pig' of a father. Sixties-style drama workshops on King Lear (!) provide one haven, Quaker meetings another. But things get worse . . . before they get better. To some extent it's shaped by conventions but some vitality spills round the edges e.g. the names Rebecca uses for other characters — Miss Hoggit, Sarah Swille etc. Chapters begin with Lear

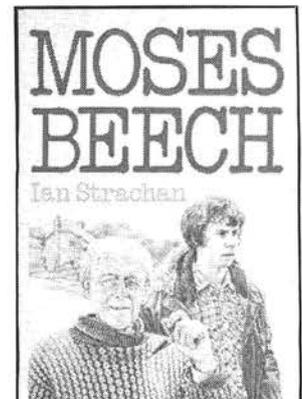
quotations — very clever, no doubt, but Lear's not common back-row reading; adult bait, here. There's a lean towards didacticism, too, which the writer ought to watch. Try at 14+. SB



Moses Beech
Ian Strachan, Puffin
Plus, 0 14 03.1540 3,
£1.50

I'll offer this to my fourth year 'O' level aspirants — a couple might try it though it's more the thing for Rank/Observer

Teenage Fiction Prize judges. Blizzard, runaway boy, remote country hovel, old man . . . Once the snow allows travel and old Moses has recovered from sudden illness, a relationship is forming. Peter stays and gets to like the primitive country life. But love for farmer's daughter, Susan, against strong parental opposition, eventually leads to disaster . . . for Moses. Peter is shipped, the police arrive — and bring the Welfare. Do read it — not for the contrived ending but for a sense of the writer's personality. I can't recall feeling bad vibes so strongly ever before. SB



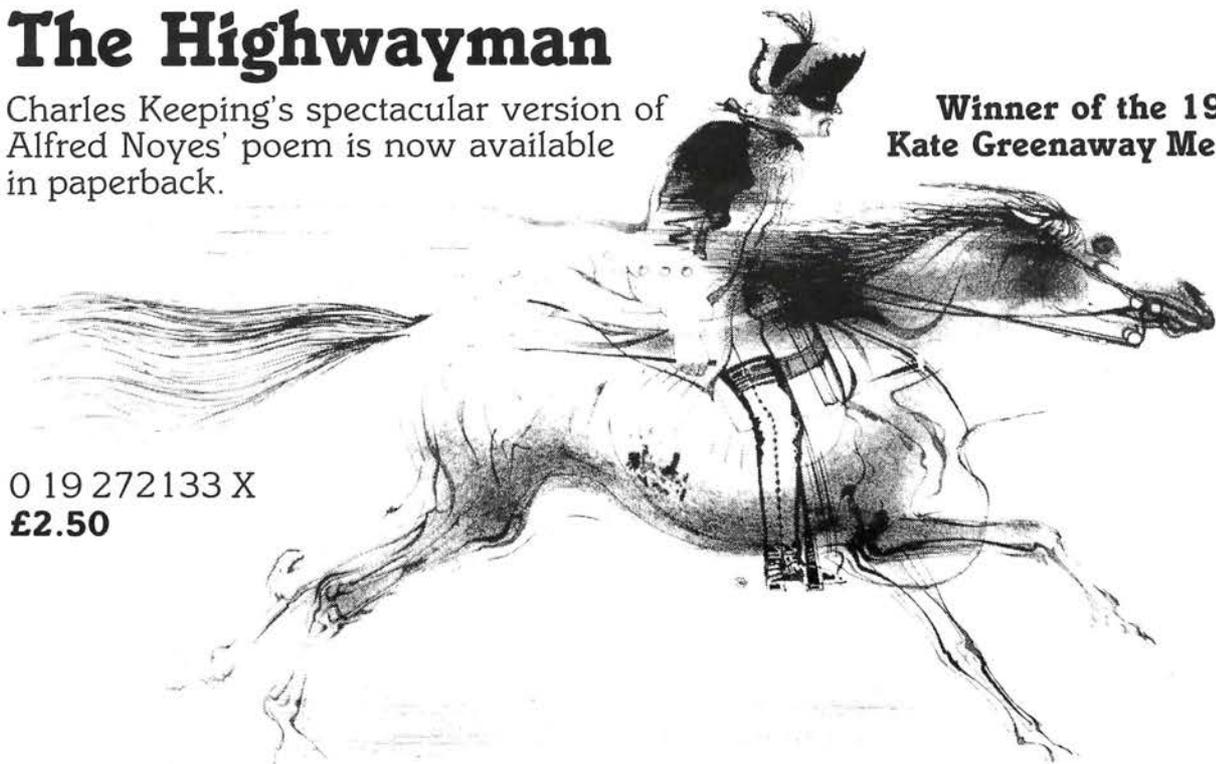
FOR THE SCHOOL BOOKSHOP

The Highwayman

Charles Keeping's spectacular version of Alfred Noyes' poem is now available in paperback.

**Winner of the 1982
Kate Greenaway Medal**

0 19 272133 X
£2.50



Oxford Books for Children

Ways into Poetry

Encounters with Poetry should be pleasurable, so that each child will want to repeat the experience, will want to extend it into further discovery and exploration of the many, varied insights and outlets, forms and styles that are contained within the broad title of Poetry.

Through the Windows

Poetry is for everybody. It can be found everywhere. Whatever a child experiences can be expressed in Poetry. It was this philosophy that inspired the group of poets who formed the **Windows Project** in Liverpool in the summer of 1976. Working in areas of the inner-city where literature and writing is largely ignored, they had to contrive experiences to introduce the traditionally thoughtful and delicate art of Poetry into the boisterous atmosphere of summer holiday play schemes in youth and community centres. The first problem clearly was how to get the children to come to the sessions at all. Well, they were playing games, so why not extend the fun into the Poetry Workshops? It seemed to make sense, and it worked. That embryonic idea developed into the Amazing Push Poem Machine (details below) and was to prove the catalyst for seven successful years of **Windows Workshops**, with games providing the introduction to many of the themes.

Whether it is guessing what's in a black bag, batting a balloon through a hoop, or launching paper aeroplanes, it can be used to get the session off the ground. The games serve a dual purpose. They are fun, and they provide the participant with a picture, a letter, a sound, a taste, a stimulus to start building ideas towards the 'production' of a poem. Motivated by Merseyside poets, Dave Calder and Dave Ward, there are always available poets, writers, playwrights, guitarists, whoever might be needed to lend the young poets further stimulation or assistance in the completion of their work.

Windows held a Poetry Workshop for children at the Poetry Society in London this June, a fitting accolade in a year which has seen them hold over a hundred workshops with groups through the range of school children, teenagers and adults. Their venues have included schools, community centres, playschemes, carnivals, shopping precincts and cafes, but I would hazard an opinion that none have left a workshop disappointed or feeling that Poetry is too exclusive for them. Whatever one's skills or deficiencies with written words, **Windows** has a medium for self expression to offer. The finished poems are 'published' in many different forms, on banners, on balloons, as sound tapes or in sculpture. More power to their efforts! Dave Ward and his group will travel to give workshops. (Details below.)

Words in Space

Another imaginative initiative in bringing Poetry within the sphere of pleasurable experience of children is the 'Words in Space' Poetry Festival, which recently celebrated its second year in the Tameside area. A week-long packed programme of events included intensive school workshop sessions by three established poets (Kit Wright, Vernon Scannell and Leo Ayles); poetry surgeries to give the young writers a unique experience of a one-to-one discussion of their work with a 'famous' poet; creating poster poems with the 'concrete' poet Stanley



Paul Sonabend and Dave Calder leading a workshop for West Lancashire Play Association.

Cook; public readings by the poets; and an Exhibition of children's poetry at the Teacher's Centre throughout the Festival. The event concluded with a 'celebration' at which the children who had been working on their poems in the workshops, read out their writing before a packed audience. A remarkable concentration of events, a tribute to the efforts of the Tameside Libraries Department who staged the Festival. Chris Kloet (address below) will be glad to supply some hints if you are keen to organise your own Festival on whatever scale.

One in particular of the activities at Tameside illustrates my theme that Poetry is for all. The work combining words and visual imagery led by Stanley Cook, was done in a special school for those with learning difficulties. Not that all Poetry experiences need to be through such ambitious projects. A particularly rewarding experience for schools wishing to enter the water gently is to take advantage of one of the many Poets in Schools schemes in operation.

A Poet in School

The Poetry Society runs such a scheme (details below) which aims to stimulate children to write their own poetry through direct contact with poets. A poet will visit the school three times during the term. The first visit will be a half-day introductory workshop, usually held during an afternoon. This is followed by a second visit, a full day workshop in which ideas initiated during the initial visit are developed and worked upon. After this second visit, the poet chooses the best poems which the children have written and these are presented in a small, printed anthology (the funds for the production of which are provided by WH Smith — to a limit of £40 per school) which is utilised at the final evening event. This last visit is usually an evening's celebration of the children's poems. At this event the children present the poetry they have written during workshops to parents, visitors and other members of the school. This event is made

as much of as each particular school wishes; some decide to include other internal groups in the fun, for example, music and drama groups. The Poetry Society scheme is in great demand and there is usually a waiting list, but it is such a beneficial experience for the children and the school as a unit, that it is worth writing to be put on the waiting list.

Many local Arts Associations organise slightly more modest, but none the less rewarding schemes of their own. A poet will make a visit to give readings or possibly hold a creative workshop or even discuss and read the work of other poets with the youngsters. Details of these localised schemes are generally available at your local Education Office, Teachers Centre, or Library. I have personal experience of the scheme run by the Merseyside Arts Association, through a very enjoyable and stimulating reading, discussion and writing session held by Kit Wright, for a mixed group of tens to twelves at my Social Priority Middle School on the Ford Estate, Birkenhead. Arrangements for fees for these sessions normally vary with each Arts Association, so if you would like a visit from a poet to your school or centre, contact your local Arts Association for details.

Catch the Light

Extending the concept of the poet meeting and working with his young audience, Oxford University Press have pioneered a novel venture with the Poetry Society. To launch their 'Three Poets' series of new poetry books for children, an afternoon of readings and group writing workshops was held at the Poetry Society. Vernon Scannell, Adrian Rumble and Gerda Mayer, who are all represented in the books, presented the afternoon's readings, and subsequently worked with children from London schools in workshop sessions. The event was titled 'Catch the Light', the name of the first volume in the three book series. Possibly other publishers will take up the idea of launching new publications in this way. But,



Chris Kloet at the 'Words in Space' Poetry Festival

fingers crossed, without always feeling the need for the sessions to take place in London, to the exclusion of provincial centres.

Voices out of the air

Despite the options outlined above, many children's experience of direct poetry reading remains limited to that provided within the classroom environment by the teacher. Therefore the diet of Poetry broadcasts on BBC Schools' Radio through the age range is a complement which should be welcomed and utilised by teachers — the programmes range from Poetry Corner for the very young, through Pictures in Your Mind and Stories & Rhymes for first and middle Juniors, to the consistent Living Language for upper Juniors. Listening, Speaking, Writing offers a range of resource units for the early secondary years. Thames TV's excellent 'Middle English' for the same age group usually contains at least one well presented poetry unit per term.

Getting into print

Other ways in to Poetry not to be ignored or undervalued are the outlets provided by the, usually financially struggling but somehow surviving, magazines devoted to publishing children's verse — in the north we have several including the excellently produced 'Northern Line' and 'Westwind' magazines. An appearance in any of these adds greatly to any child's motivation to write, and I am sure that there are similar publications offering such an opportunity all round the country.

Also, much maligned in some quarters, but valuable at least as a useful stimulus to the otherwise reluctant writer, the number of Poetry Competitions at local and national level for children's verse.

The best known is undoubtedly the WH Smith sponsored annual 'Children as Writers' competition, with its accompanying published

anthology of the prizewinners' efforts. The Poetry Society's annual 'Children's Poetry Competition' also evokes a huge response. Its absence this year, due to financial pressure, will be a disappointment to many, but a return is promised for next year — the 75th anniversary of the Poetry Society. This year there is also a Poetry category in the 'Cadbury's Art Competition' to add to the occasional competitions run by a variety of national magazines and newspapers. If competitions don't appeal you can always publish your own anthology in school.

Voices on the page

If you can't get a 'live' poet into the classroom, the next best thing is to have 'lively' poetry books available for the children. Books whose content and approach relate to the experiences and environments of the youngsters, and illustrate the possibilities of imagination extending these experiences into their own writing. The range of those available seems to be extending, and the quality and thought revealed in these recent publications augurs well for children's initial exposure to poetry experiences.

Oxford have added 'A Fourth Poetry Book' to their Junior series, which contains a wealth of read-aloud material to enliven any lesson — this Fourth Book is noticeable for the amount of new material of particular relevance to children from Roy Fuller, Wes Magee, Gareth Owen and Stanley Cook. All four books are recommended as essential to any classroom or school library. 'Catch the Light', 'Upright Downfall' and 'The Candy Floss Tree' are the three titles in Oxford's Three Poets series, and they feature the established names of Vernon Scannell, Norman Nicholson and Roy Fuller, alongside lesser known poets such as Gregory Harrison, Gerda Mayer and Adrian Rumble. Again many new poems are included, a sign that publishers are becoming aware of the increasing importance of this section of the

educational market, and the refusal of teachers to buy re-vamped collections of 'old chestnuts'.

'Hard Lines' from Faber is even more of a breath of fresh air, a gale-force one almost; all the poems are by young 'unknown' poets, the themes are today, and the experiences are so relevant to secondary school children everywhere. Again for secondary years, Thom Gunn's 'The Passages of Joy' demands to be read and thought about, even if youngsters were only exposed to a reading of 'Expression' the book would have proved a worthwhile buy.

Brian Patten's collection of story poems, 'Gangsters, Ghosts and Dragonflies' provides a mine of new, fresh and inventive material for junior age reading, either aloud or alone. Certainly no stale poems or sour verse here — everything is alive and captures the young listener's imagination. Finally, Collins are publishing in September a new series 'What's in a Poem?' Book 1 for the lower Junior range, Book 2 Upper Junior/Lower Secondary years. The series is unusual in that it takes vital and powerful material from children of educationally and socially deprived backgrounds and publishes it alongside the work of established poets. Each anthology contains between seventy and a hundred poems arranged thematically, the themes relating closely to children's own experiences and environment. As an added bonus the first poem in each section has a commentary, which examines the poem itself and suggests follow-up activities for writing and discussion. ●

Information

The Windows Project: 22 Roseheath Drive, Halewood, Liverpool L26 9UH (051 486 0828)

Publications available from WINDOWS: The WINDOWS Workshop pack — contains the Amazing Push Poem Machine game, City of Poems handbook, Phantastic Phonetic Phactory poster and cassette, Workshop sheets, etc. . . . £3.95 (from above address).

'City of Poems' — a report on children's workshops, games, poetry and photos. £1.00 (from above).

Tameside Libraries & Arts: Contact Chris Kloet, Young People's Librarian, Council Offices, Wellington Road, Ashton under Lyne (061 330 8355 ext. 3442) — details of Poetry Festival and copy of 'Words in Space' anthology.

Poets in Schools: Contact The Education Officer, The Poetry Society, 21 Earls Court Square, London SW5.

Writers in Schools Scheme: Contact your Regional Arts Association.

'Catch the Light' Workshop details: Contact Janice Mughan, Children's Books, Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP.

BBC Schools Radio Poetry: Contact Janet Whittaker or Diane Reed, at the BBC (01 580 4468 ext. 3316).

Middle English: Contact Peter Tabern, Thames Television, Television House, 306 Euston Road, London NW1 3BB.

Books

A Fourth Poetry Book Oxford, 0 19 918151 9, £2.25 (paperback)

Hard Lines Faber & Faber, 0 571 13073 9, £1.95 (paperback)

The Passages of Joy Thom Gunn, Faber & Faber, 0 571 11867 4, £3.00 (paper)

Gangsters, Ghosts and Dragonflies Brian Patten, Piccolo, 0 330 26955 0, £1.50

What's in a Poem? Collins, Book 1 00 314830 0, £1.95, Book 2 00 314831 9, £2.25, (available in September).

Authorgraph No. 21

Leila Berg

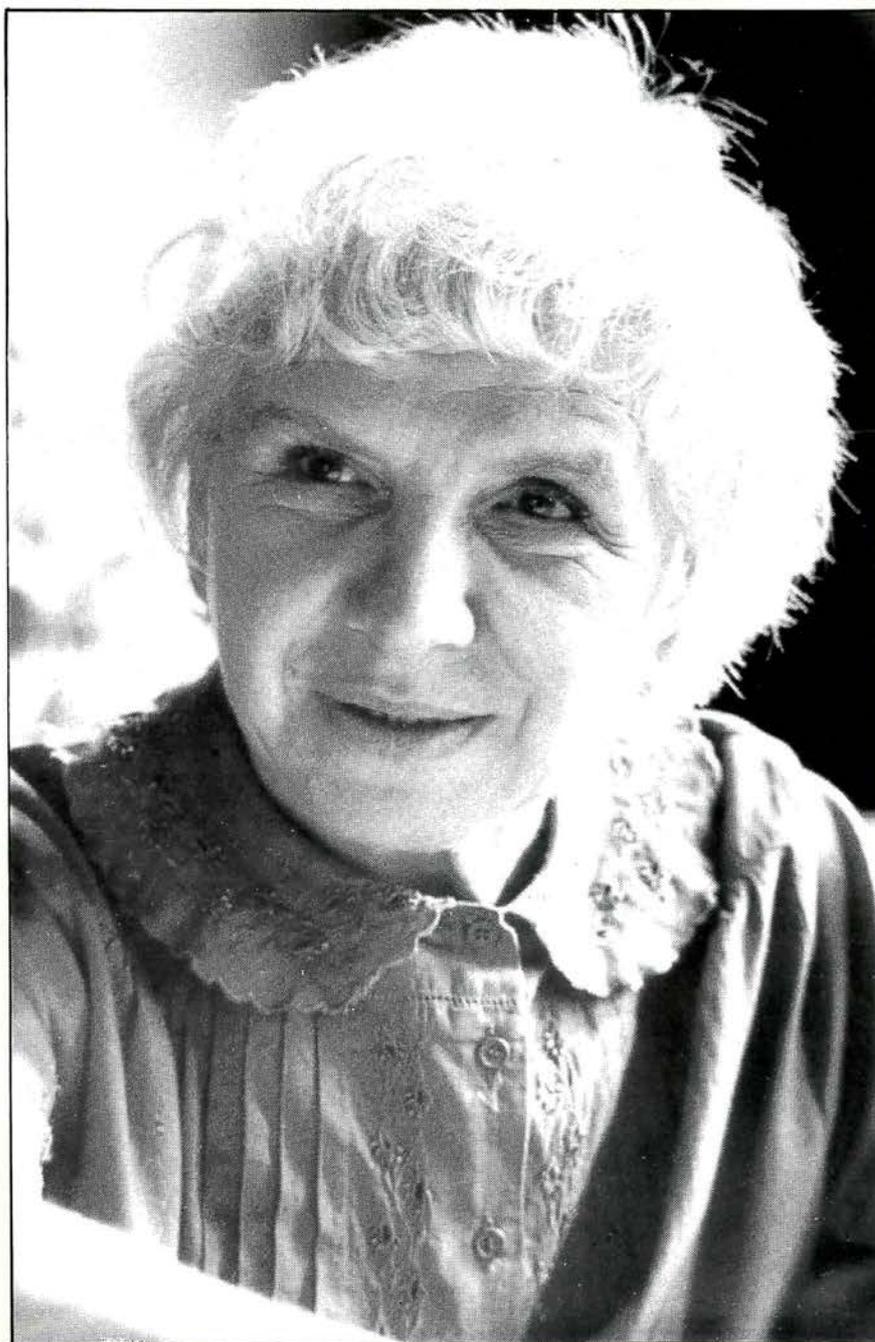
Leila Berg is daunting — she's got energy, conviction, and a driving restlessness that makes you feel she'll "get things done". Much of her energy has been put into bringing books to children who would not normally read. The *Nippers* series, for which she won the Eleanor Farjeon Award in 1974, completely changed attitudes to children's reading in the sixties, and were perhaps the first books to break away from the middle class tradition of Janet and John. *Risinghill*, about one of the controversial early comprehensive schools, was a best seller when it was published in 1968. She now lives in a large, shared house on Streatham Common, has written many books for children and for adults about children, started up a children's book centre in south London, opened a bookshop in her front room and regularly visits schools all over the country for storytelling sessions.

Her interest in children and education began when she was about 17, sparked off by Susan Isaac's books about the social development of children at Maltinghouse, a nursery school where children were given a free rein to read, learn and explore. At this time she was living in Salford, the northern industrial town where she was born and brought up. Her parents were both teachers who separated when she was on the point of leaving school. "My father felt he had a duty to set me up in a safe job. I agreed to go to teachers training college — for one term only". It was 1937, the Spanish Civil War, and she had friends in the International Brigade. She spent her term organising college aid to Spain, which upset the staff, and she left just before they had the chance to expel her.

She could have gone to Oxford but chose to go to London University to take an Arts Course which involved a lot of journalism. Since the age of 6 (when her first poem was published in a comic) she had wanted to be a writer. Newspapers gave her the chance to get across her strong ideas on social, political and educational issues, subjects she was "passionate about". When writing her first articles, many of them for *The Manchester Guardian*, she felt compelled to alter their form "to get people to listen. In my mind all of them started as poems. Always the subjects were things I felt very intensely about. I used to get an enormous amount of correspondence, people used to write to me in a very intense way". She believes that this great impact was directly due to the fact that the articles "weren't really prose as we used to see prose in papers then, but translated from poetry".

It was after the war that she made what she calls her "large scale switch". She was a mother of two, and looking for good books for her children found only what she calls "junk" children's books on the market. She started writing her own children's stories and sent them off simultaneously to 2 different publishers. Both made her immediate offers. She accepted the first and told the second she'd write another collection "very quickly" (*The Nightingale and Other Stories*, "funny stories, not too twee" for 4-7 year olds). But she soon became concerned at the high prices of her books: *The Adventures of Chunky*, written in the early 40's, was selling for 16 shillings. She began writing for Hodder's Brockhampton Press, who had started a series of cheaply produced books at 5 shillings hardback, books most families could afford.

She wrote the *Nippers* series in the sixties. Macmillan suggested she did some supplementary reading books for primary schools and she saw her chance to put her ideas about "books which fit the child, fit his experience" into practice. "For middle class kids the book has always reflected them; they can identify with things in the pictures. I'm not saying this in a hostile way at all; it's marvellous that they feel 'books are for



Photos by Richard Mewton

me, part of my heritage'. Other kids who haven't had books in the home are coming to them quite cold and not finding themselves in the book at all. The speech and everything is absolutely alien".

Macmillan saw her proposals for *Nippers* and were excited but apprehensive. They sent out proof copies to schools and authorities. The initial response was one of outrage. The books were branded as "immoral, nonsense. They said 'No houses

are without hot and cold water, there are no places where children play on dump heaps; they've all been turned into parks. No family has ever seen a tin bath".

Very soon after came the Milner Holland report and a spate of housing reports, discussing exactly these issues. The working classes were news. The *Nippers* critics began to soften their blows, admitting that such social conditions might exist but still saying that poverty shouldn't be emphasised in books. It would make children ashamed of their homes. Macmillan decided to go ahead anyway.

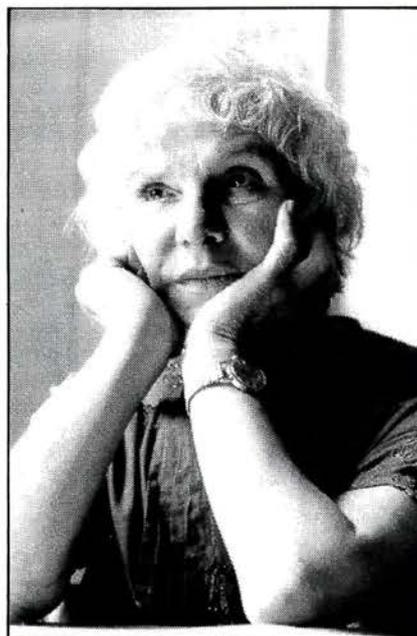
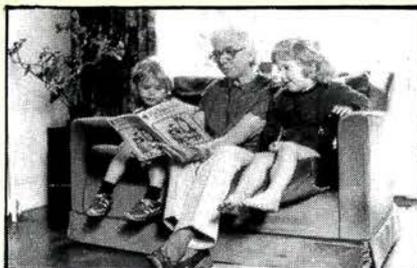
Her own experience of reading typescripts of *Nippers* to an East End class was "quite riveting. I found I was having to read through laughter all the time, continuous, constant laughter, not ordinary laughter. The children were hugging themselves and jumping up and down, hugging their neighbours in this warm, physical, clutching way. As I watched them they were getting loose and limp in front of me. I was quite shaken."

She recalls a similar scene watching the play *Billy Liar*. The language included "bloody this, bloody that" and the adult audience became loud and uncontrolled. "It suddenly clicked, the adults were seeing for the very first time their own situations, their own talk in a place where there'd only been middle class things before, and those kids were recognising themselves in a place where there'd only been other kinds of families".

It was at this time that *Risinghill*, the story of the troubled comprehensive school in Islington, was being vetted by lawyers before Penguin could publish it. Legal problems were not the only obstacles she faced writing this book. Much of the information was statistics which she tried to present in the most interesting and digestible way. "When I got bored with the figures I'd pick up a copy of Rex Stout and read a few chapters. I think it's very important to hook the readers so they can't put the book down; it's like a cliffhanger all the way through. Reading Rex Stout I'd get a feeling of cliffhanger then go back to the book and get that feeling of tension."

Leila Berg identified with the fight for working class children to gain respect and "validity" being fought by Michael Duane, Headmaster of *Risinghill*. The school became a test case and battleground for those in favour of new-style comprehensive education, and those who supported established methods. Leila thinks that the significant difference of *Risinghill* was "its attitude. It didn't shape kids to fit the role we decided they should play, but according to their own individuality, believing that each family outlook is valid and accepting that validity. It was the only school that put comprehensive education into practice in a way we'd talked about it before, where every child felt cherished, thought about, provided for." She recalls the startling "inner grace" of two teenagers at the school who treated her, while she was waiting to see Michael Duane, as if they were "host and hostess", with a spontaneous friendliness she hadn't experienced in children at other schools. The attitude of the school affected parents, too. There was less physical punishment at home when teachers stopped using the cane, and some parents were taking an interest in their children's education for the first time. "There was much bitterness when it was closed down after only 4 years by a socialist government and socialist council. It had represented people's hopes: it was a sort of symbol."

The hostile reaction to the 'liberal' aims of *Risinghill* by some of its own staff were, she says, by no means untypical of the rigid, disciplinarian teaching attitudes elsewhere. Once when setting up a temporary bookshop in a school, the Deputy Headmaster asked her where to put the barricades. When she replied that barricades wouldn't be needed, he said "But the children will get at the



books won't they? There will be a riot". He needn't have worried — no child at that school could conceive of the idea of buying a book for pleasure. The sole visitor to the bookshop was a boy who came each day to see if the paperback he was saving for was still there, and, Leila says, "it was worth keeping the shop open just for him".

The *Nippers* series were not the only books to cause alarm, to anger people. The *Little Pete* stories, based on her own son, were read aloud on the new radio programme 'Listen with Mother', "a programme of tremendous exciting promise". The music and rhythm in Leila Berg's books make them ideal for reading aloud, and for radio. Yet some listeners wrote to the BBC saying that the stories were a "corrupting influence". They thought that *Little Pete* was too naughty.

When embarking on new projects, she never makes assumptions about children's reactions to books, a lesson reinforced by her granddaughter. Leila chose what she thought was a book of "innocent charm" to look at with the child, who had just learned to read. But the little girl's face grew more and more downcast as the story progressed. "This child not yet 4 had become a literary critic: the story was really patronising and I hadn't seen it. What I had taken for innocent charm was quite false and manipulative."

Her approach is empirical, open, and she always works closely with the artist. Making the Methuen Chatterbooks series with

photographer John Walmsley, they showed slides of his photographs to mothers and babies to see which pictures the children responded to most strongly before making the final selection. "The quality of excitement is very important, a silent, inner excitement, not this awful blandness that creeps into books for the under 5s." In the new Methuen series with artist Lisa Köpper, she tries to present facts in a different way, looking at things from a child's point of view. "How is it that a child knows a Great Dane and a Pekinese are both dogs? And why should we tell children that bees give honey, cows are for milk and sheep for meat? It makes me cringe to hear that said — it's the sort of thing that would puzzle a child very much. In these books I build on the child's curiosity and wonder which are so often wiped out by a barrage of facts."

Respect for a child's "curiosity and wonder" and books which fit the child and his experience are the best books, she says, just as the best schools are "creative, loving places" where there is no dislocation of experience. Only then can the feeling of "inner grace" rather than pent up, destructive anger, prevail.

In *Look at Kids* (Penguin) Leila attempts to focus adults' attention on children through short, evocative text and black and white photographs. It is a collection of observations of children, written in words that are full of movement, poetry and feeling. She is simply looking at children with an adult's wonder and delight, and asking us to do the same: to look and listen to the poetry and potential of our children.



Leila Berg's Books

Tales for Telling, Methuen,
0 416 25080 7, £3.95

The Little Car, Methuen,
0 416 20250 0, £3.50 and Young Puffin,
0 14 03.0682 X, 95p

Little Pete Stories, Methuen,
0 416 11760 0, £3.50 and Young Puffin,
0 14 03.0124 0, 90p

My Dog Sunday, Young Puffin,
0 14 03.1083 5, 95p

A Box for Benny, Hodder & Stoughton,
0 340 03207 3, £4.50. (Magnet paperback
later this year.)

Methuen Chatterbooks (with John Walmsley)

A Tickle, 0 416 88780 5, £1.50

The Hot, Hot Day, 0 416 88790 2, £1.50

Our Walk, 0 416 88810 0, £1.50

In a House I Know, 0 416 88800 3, £1.50

Methuen Small World (to be published in
September 1983)

Dogs, 0 416 44020 7, £1.50

Bees, 0 416 44050 9, £1.50

Worms, 0 416 44040 1, £1.50

Blood and Plasters, 0 416 44030 4, £1.50

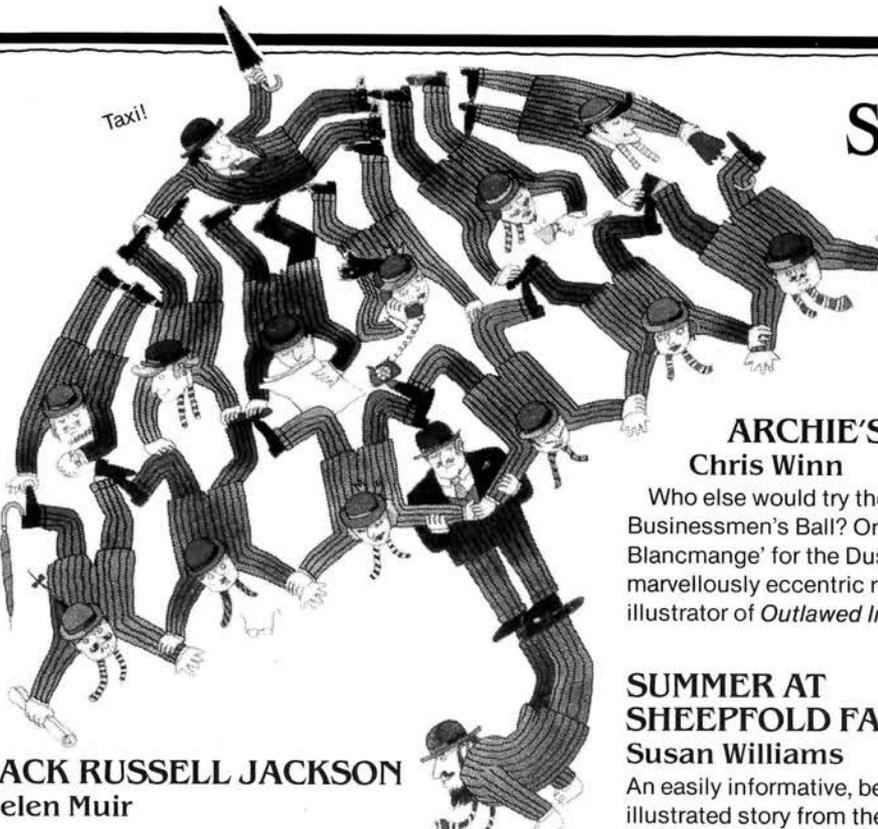
Nippers series, Macmillan Education, 75
titles, Groups 1-5, 60p-95p each

Little Nippers, Macmillan Education, First
set, 8 titles, £3.95 and Second set, 12 titles,
£5.95

FOR ADULTS

Look at Kids, Penguin Education,
0 14 08.0661 X, £1.75

Reading and Loving, Routledge & Kegan
Paul, 0 7100 8475 7, £5.95 hb and
0 7100 8476 5, £3.50 pb



Summer's a Washout Without a Good Book

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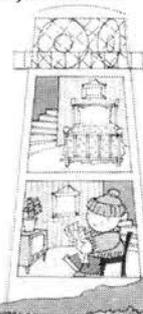
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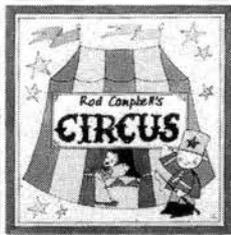
Gollancz

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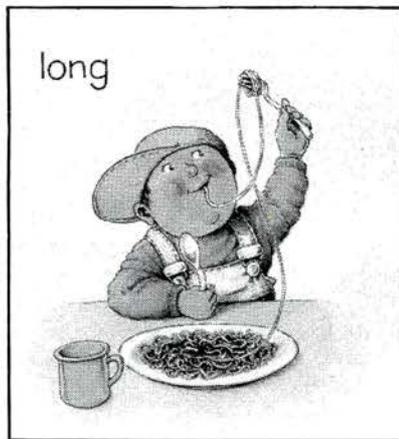
THE BEST IN BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

Chew on this!

Chris Kloet reports on a talk-in about Books for Babies.



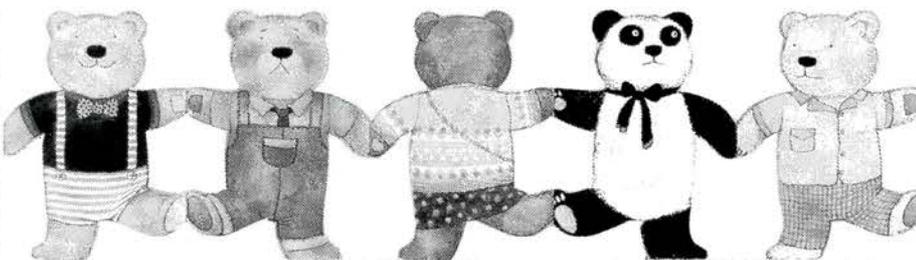
From Steven Cartwright's **Find the Teddy**



Half a spread from Colin McNaughton's **Long-Short a Book of Opposites**



'Happy Birthday, John', Mum said. She made me give him the present. From Helen Oxenbury's **The Birthday Party**



<p><i>Ready, Teddy, Go!</i> Janet & Alan Ahlberg</p>	<p>"Once upon a time," Said the Hangdowsy Man, "Roast and roast the garden, Some teddies ran." <i>With a few close friends.</i></p>	<p>"One step, two steps, The teddies ran, With the lion roaring down!" Said the Hangdowsy Man. <i>And closer and closer!</i></p>	<p>"Help," cried the teddies And a party took, (He was there on a visit) "Whosever shall we do?" <i>Then the lion got them.</i></p>	<p>"Get you!" roared the lion With a savage glare, "Now then - One step, two steps, Tidy up the air!" <i>And then it was his turn.</i></p>
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"Books for babies? You must be kidding. Babies don't read books, do they?" was the amused reaction of a local radio interviewer when I, seeking publicity for the event, told her about the IBBY seminar **Chew on This: books for babies and toddlers**, held in Birmingham in May. Her response gave me the cue to quote, missionary-like, from Dorothy Butler's splendidly argued **Babies Need Books** — (as indispensable to the new parent, surely, as nappies?), while looking and laughing with her at the solemn concentration of the potty-enthroned infant pictured in Helen Oxenbury's board book **Working**.

There was no similar disbelief, however, amongst the 145 publishers, librarians, booksellers, teachers and others — not forgetting the baby, who attended the seminar. Their presence bore witness to an appreciation of both the need for, and the current publishing boom in, books for the under-three's. The time was ripe for a closer look at this new literary manifestation of cradle-power, what with Dorothy Butler, plus the Ahlberg's **The Baby's Catalogue** and at every turn, offerings printed on laminated board, (with safely rounded corners, naturally), bearing titles such as **Mealtime** and **Bathtime** which variously chart the youthful daily round. There's a whole new meaning for the word Babygro with *this* expanding market.

The publishers spoke first

An overly cynical listener might have argued with Matthew Price, children's publisher with Blackie, for his slightly rosy analysis of this publishing boom. He felt that a growth in the study of young children's needs and an upsurge of idealism in children's book publishing had led to publishers producing for a younger clientele than hitherto. When pressed, however, he conceded that the shrinking institutional market might also have influenced editorial decisions!

Rosemary Collins from Methuen talked about their list, from the Lars Wik photographic Mini-Books, originally Danish, which they pioneered in 1978, to more recent titles by established artists such as Oxenbury and McNaughton. She mentioned Leila Berg's consumer research when compiling her **Chatterbooks**: Ms Berg showed babies a range of photographs. Those pictures which stimulated the most animated response were used in the books. Rosemary felt that books for babies "must have parent appeal" and humour.

Why, the publishers were asked, were there not more multicultural books for babies. Jennifer Holmes, head teacher of a Birmingham nursery school where 90% of the children speak no English on arrival,

stressed the need for very simple books which cross cultural barriers. The answers seemed to be that no-one had given it much thought, and the artists capable of doing them hadn't come forward. Publishers take note.

Alas, the speakers did not rise to the chairperson's, (your present writer's) bait, recalling Dorothy Butler, who did not regard board books as 'proper' books. I can't help wondering if there's been a world slump in the price of cardboard. That would account for the glut of board books. The question, "What has happened to rag books?" didn't get many takers, although I later heard the remark that "rag books were only fit for wiping one's nose"!

The view from psychology

For me, the day's highspot was Harvey Cox's lecture, illustrated with over 40 specially taken slides; he's an educational psychologist with Tameside who has great personal enthusiasm for children's books, as well as a professional interest in them. Called "The Child's Perceptual Development", the talk demonstrated, via the slides, the way babies and toddlers interact with books at successive stages of development. It was reassuring to hear Harvey, at one step removed from the professional 'book scene', setting a different discipline's seal of approval on publishers' and other book mediators' efforts on behalf of the youngest child.

Librarians reaching out

Many publishers remarked afterwards how much they had picked up from the afternoon session on using books with the under-threes. Here, two (unrelated) librarians from Birmingham, Vivien Griffiths and Sue Griffiths spoke of their efforts to encourage book-sharing with the very young — from ensuring that libraries stocked and lent suitable books, to talking about these books with: childminders, playgroups, nurseries, CSE Childcare pupils, mother & toddler groups, PPA advisers, trainee nursery nurses, Under 5's Consultative Group, National Childbirth Trust groups and so on.

The artists' turn

Finally Shirley Hughes, Helen Oxenbury, Susanna Gretz and Colin McNaughton spoke about their works. Helen and Colin both turned to doing books for babies and toddlers because they couldn't find anything suitable when they were searching for books to share with their own small children. Susanna's 'Teddybears' books began, not because she had a favourite teddy, but as revenge for a publisher's rejection slip of an earlier work which remarked that her "drawings were not sweet enough for the grannies and aunts who buy children's books".

Shirley felt that before they learn to read, very young children are "visually more perceptive than they will ever be again" and she felt that the job of the illustrator for this age group was to facilitate "a marvellous mulch within a very young head — hearing your own language used with relish, coupled with some interesting images" — which was a very good way of summing up what the seminar had really been about.

◀ **Ready, Teddy, Go**, Janet and Alan Ahlberg, Heinemann Daisychains, 0 434 92506 3, 99p.
Long and Short, Colin McNaughton, Methuen/Parker Books, 0 416 06150 8, £1.25.
The Birthday Party, Helen Oxenbury, Walker Books — First Picture Books 0 7445 0035 4.
Find the Teddy, Stephen Cartwright and Claudia Zelf, Usborne — Find It Board Books, 0 86020 715 3, £1.00.

Chew on this!

Before I became an educational psychologist I was a father. It was thus no surprise when I was told in lectures on child development that babies were sociable beings, fascinated almost from birth by the human face. My son had taught me that. He also taught, and his sister repeated the lesson, that to a baby all the world is new. One inquisitive crawler, who continually tested the nature of every object he met, left toothmarks on some of our record sleeves that bear mute witness to the apt title of the IBBY seminar.

There was little, if anything, said in those lectures nine years ago about the place of books in the development of pre-school children, particularly babies. That may have been because there was little published specifically for the youngest age group. I had realized before then that one of the most splendid things about being a parent is the license it gives you to do childish things. Among these was discovering picture books. I remembered garish annuals and the 'Pookie' books from my childhood, but not until 1972 did I start to find out about authors and illustrators such as Brian Wildsmith, Quentin Blake, Helen Oxenbury, and Shirley Hughes, who make a bookshop such a delight. Since then the range of books directly aimed at very young children has increased dramatically. As a father I regret that they were not available when my children were tiny. As someone working daily with babies and toddlers I rejoice.

The baby, who is also a scientist, does not at first understand the nature of a book. It is a brightly coloured "thing" and, like a rattle, or a plastic brick, or a saucepan, will be subjected to various experiments involving all the senses. Each page exists in its own right. It can be shown in every culture across the world that babies do not begin until nine months old to understand that an object continues to exist when they cannot see it. Before then, turning a page eclipses one experience and presents another that is totally new. Eric Carle in *Catch the Ball* has provided a brilliant device to help bridge the transition between this stage and that where the child realises the continuity within a story. A cardboard disc, representing the ball, passes from animal to animal on a string through holes in the board pages. It remains as a permanent object throughout the story, ideal for this early stage of cognitive development, as well as requiring simple shape perception and fine motor control.

John and Elizabeth Newson write in *Toys and Playthings* of babies having 'a hunger for happenings'. For a baby to have a person close to her, presenting patterns of colour that change frequently, making interesting sounds, like animal noises, or the names of things, or nursery rhymes, is a happening that meets most of the criteria for an ideal experience, in a baby's terms. It is also providing that adult mediation of the experience that helps the child to understand what makes a book different from a rattle or a saucepan.

Let us now skip a year or so and meet Jenny, who is two and a half. She and her mother have shared books for most of her life. She has almost mastered the physical properties of them, turning pages with only the occasional crinkle. In this picture she is looking at a book that has only just been given to her. The pleasure she takes in exploring a new page is evident and

Harvey Cox shares with us his observations of babies and toddlers and books.



her mother need do very little to complete the experience. In this we see one of the most significant changes between the first and third years. In many respects this is a meeting of equals. The pictures speak for themselves and the mediation that is needed is different. The adult's importance lies in feeding the most rapidly developing feature of the child, her language.

From the conversational cooing and babbling of the baby have come the first words. By the age of two most children have started to put them together. Now language development takes wing. Over the next two years children acquire a greatly increased vocabulary. Even more important, they gain the linguistic structures which enable humans to use that vocabulary in the multitude of ways that express an infinity of meanings. At this age the text of the book is as significant as the pictures.



When this picture was taken, Jenny had insisted that her mother get a version of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* from upstairs. (It was a part of the bedtime ritual.) It was fetched and her mother started to read it, but Jenny did not want that. She wanted to tell us about it; which she did — at length, discoursing about the animals in the pictures and weaving them into her version of the story. It had become a peg for her imagination.

That possibly sums up a vital quality of books. The reader can repeat an experience at will. The child has total control over the speed at which she turns the pages. She can let her thoughts wonder round an image, whether pictorial or verbal, and when the trip is completed nothing else has happened.

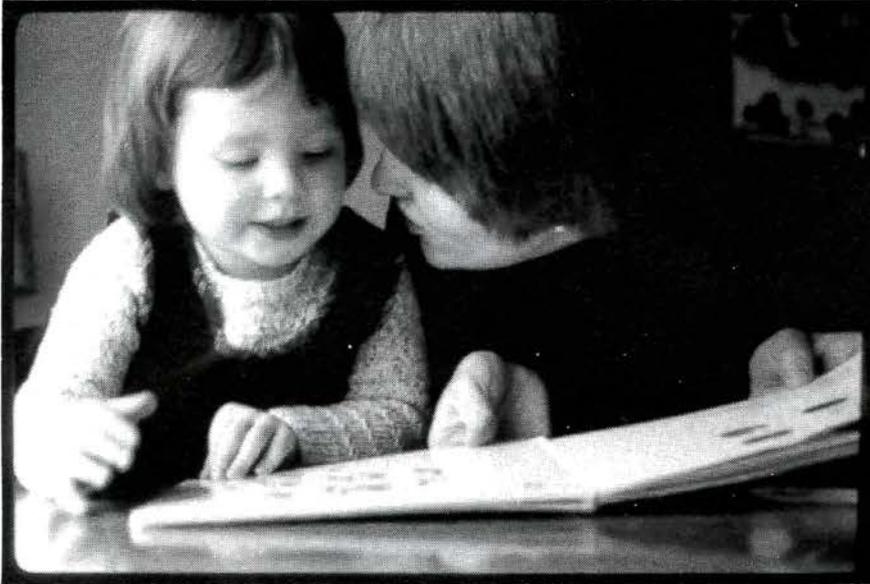


The fact that books offer an experience that can be repeated is clearly important to children. They tend to be creatures of habit, happiest when their world is stable and the order of the day's events reasonably predictable. An element in this can be the meaning they place upon events in books, extracting what is important to them and making it their own. Jenny encountered Roger Hargreaves' *Mr Snow* last Christmas. The figure of Father Christmas in the story has great potency several months later. Whenever the book is produced she shows much excitement, as if these pictures enable her to recapture some of the excitement she experienced then. Each viewing of these pages adds to an accumulation of joy.

The fact that a book provides a repeatable experience is also important in helping the child to learn about topics which are beyond her cognitive scope at any stage of her development. To paraphrase T. S. Eliot, "A good children's book communicates before it is understood". The adult world is complicated. Children's imaginative play shows how they rehearse activities, roles and emotions. Books give another way of exploring what may be difficult or frightening terrain. The physical closeness of the adult is a reassurance. The fact that the character involved is a bear, or a cat, or a princess, places the subject at one remove, where it is less personal, less threatening. A book can also be closed, which gives a child some control over the experience. And while it may be too frightening or worrying now, it can be picked up again months later, when she is better able to cope, and thoroughly enjoyed.



**Chew
on this!**



It should also be emphasized that, as a sociable being, the young child appreciates anything that gives her a shared experience with another person. A few minutes spent together over the latest acquisition from the library, or leafing through a battered favourite is valuable to both adult and child in helping to build an even firmer and warmer relationship.

At two and a half Jenny has none of the difficulty with the continuity of stories that is experienced by younger children. The novelty of being able to manipulate part of Eric Carle's *What's for Lunch* here caters to an increasing mastery of physical skills. Children are physical animals: watch the way they giggle. It also provided a nice example of symbolic play. When the monkey reached the bananas a few pages later his mouth was placed against them so "Monkey eat 'nana!"



It will seem obvious to the readers of this magazine that introducing a young child to books is laying the foundations for future literacy, but a significant percentage of parents still do not seem to realise this. It seems a long time since the Bullock Report recommended that pupils in secondary schools should learn how language develops and how they, as the parents of the future, could help their children. Meanwhile, Jenny has already learnt that the story of *The Tiger Who Came To Tea* by Judith Kerr has a set form. She says "Owp!" with glee when the tiger eats all the sandwiches on the plate. She says "Rumpeta, rumpeta, rumpeta" when the Elephant goes down the road with the Bad Baby. She is grasping the fact that the story is conveyed in those marks on the page. Soon she will want to know what they mean. ●

Lifeline Two

Judith Elkin continues her series on Multi-cultural Books and chooses

No. 4 Stories for the Primary/Middle Years

In the last three issues of Books for Keeps, I have tried to demonstrate the need for a multi-cultural breadth of vision when choosing books for children. Having looked at picture books and fairy tales, I now want to turn to novels for younger children.

Children from an early age should learn to show a concern for others and this seems to me to be particularly vital in a multi-cultural context. Children's books can help to inspire the young with respect and understanding of other races and cultures, and help them to grow up in an atmosphere of racial tolerance and awareness. Children need to be offered positive role models to enable them to build up a positive self-image, a true sense of identity. I would like to see books where black, brown and white children of many ethnic groups take a normal part in a story, interacting and displaying all the usual ranges of emotions, abilities, skills and rivalry which exist naturally in any real cross-section of society, but where the children are individuals, proud of their identity.

There are still comparatively few novels for younger children which do reflect the multi-cultural nature of society and surprisingly few which offer a picture of life and culture in other countries, in story form. I am saddened to see how few illustrators seem to be able to respond positively to the challenge of depicting realistically different racial groups. The impact of so many of the books included here seems to me to be lessened by the crudity of the illustrations.



Judith Elkin

Stories for early readers

The Julian Stories, Ann Cameron, Gollancz, 0 575 03143 3, £4.95

"My father is a big man with black wild hair. When he laughs, the sun laughs in the windowpanes. When he thinks, you can almost see his thoughts sitting on all the tables and chairs. When he is angry, me and my little brother Huey shiver to the bottom of our shoes." So begin 6 short stories written in simple, but powerful evocative language. The two children in the stories are delightfully drawn characters, involved in typical childish pranks and misunderstandings, but always rescued by a very sympathetic father. The mother is a shadowy figure but the relationship between the boys and their father is particularly nicely developed and full of humour. Beautiful bold black and white illustrations enhance the stories.

The Steel Band, Wendy Green, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 10777 6, £2.50

A welcome addition to the Antelope series, aimed at children just learning to read a complete story. Vernon, a restless inattentive black child, has his energy channelled into raising money for a school steel band. A pleasant little story stressing in simple terms the excitement of the music, the hard work, commitment and skill required and showing a multi-cultural group of children participating positively.

Linda's Lie, Bernard Ashley, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 099 4, £2.95

Flames in the Forest, Ruskin Bond, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 027 7, £2.75

Two titles in the Blackbird series aimed at 5-8 year olds and intended for newly

independent readers. **Linda's Lie** is a gentle little story reflecting a small child's anguish at the prospect of being shown up in public, when her parents cannot afford the money for her school trip. The description of the black father helping a white stranger to change a wheel, is a trifle sentimental but there is a strong message here. **Flames in the Forest** is a dramatic little tale set in India. Romi sets out on the 7 mile journey home from school, aware that a forest fire is burning ahead. The tension builds up as the animals flee from the fire and Romi struggles to get home before the fire engulfs him. Attractively illustrated.

Kamla and Kate, Jamila Gavin, Methuen, 0 416 22780 5, £3.95

A series of little stories about two six-year old girls, one English, the other Hindu, who are firm friends. Kate loses a tooth and tells Kamla about the tooth fairy and Kamla's family holds a Diwali party, where everyone is enchanted by Kamla's dancing. Mundane stories, but making a commendable effort to demonstrate the beginnings of awareness of each other's cultures between these two young children and the need for tolerance and understanding.

Stories for experienced readers

I'm Trying to Tell You, Bernard Ashley, Kestrel, 0 7226 5725 0, £3.75
Puffin, 0 1403.1337 0, 85p.

Four children from a multi-racial inner-city school tell their stories in their own words. Nerissa can't think of a single idea for her "exciting story" at school because her head is too full of her sister's wedding the day before. A

gentle irony and humour runs through the four stories and again demonstrates Bernard Ashley's perceptive understanding of children and their private feelings and reactions.

The Orange Tree, Jamila Gavin, Methuen, 0 416 86240 3, £2.75

Double Dare, Jamila Gavin, Methuen, 0 416 21540 8, £3.95

Two collections of short stories by Jamila Gavin about urban children but from very diverse backgrounds. The stories in **The Orange Tree** are pure fantasy, transporting the children into a world where anything could happen, providing a nice contrast between everyday life in England and the exotic cultures and backgrounds and dreams of these children, from West Indian, Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Chinese, Asian and Polish backgrounds. **Double Dare** is for slightly older children and all four stories have elements of the supernatural skilfully woven in.

Three of the stories sensitively explore the relationship between the young and the old. I particularly liked the title story about a young Anglo-Indian boy who begins to see visions of an elderly Indian man who turns out to be the grandfather he has never met.

City Summer, Rosalind Jackson and Pamela Johnson, Black, 0 7136 2019 6, £2.95

A simple, lively collection of five stories about a very mixed racial group of children in their first year at a comprehensive school. There is Costas, a Greek Cypriot; Kofi, a Nigerian; Kamal, newly arrived from India; Georgia, with both parents from Jamaica; Kwai, a Chinese girl and other children who form a warmly

drawn, inter-dependent, supportive group. I liked the story "Match of the Day" in which Georgia starts a 5-a-side football team and meets the predictable prejudice of the youth leader who fails to take them seriously because they are girls. Realistic settings and well portrayed children.

Gowie Corby Plays Chicken, Gene Kemp, Faber, 0 571 11405 9, £4.95
Puffin, 0 14 03.1322 2, 90p.

A refreshing and very funny story set in the same primary school as "The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tyler" but dealing with a new set of characters. Gowie Corby is a monstrous child, the bane of every teacher's existence: he does not have problems, he just has enemies (apart from Boris Karloff, his pet rat), and life is bad, until Rosie appears. Rosie is a large, energetic, Black American girl and it becomes her role in life to reform Gowie. Rosie is a splendid character and the closeness of her family life, her positive attitude and general good nature, contrast markedly with Gowie's depressing home circumstances, totally lacking in support and his ensuing negative approach to life. The story again demonstrates Gene Kemp's great skill in capturing the real essence of the primary school, warts and all.

Save Our School, Gillian Cross, Methuen, 0 416 89800 9, £3.50
Magnet, 0 416 30110 X, £1.00

The Mintygly Kid, Gillian Cross, Methuen, 0 416 25420 9, £3.95

Two fast-moving, readable stories by Gillian Cross revolving round the same three main characters: Clipper, the very likeable, larger-than-life, dominant Black girl, the best footballer, cricketer, climber, fighter in the Junior School; Spag, the thoughtful, quiet, organised boy and Gobbo, the fat, disorganised son of the local scrapdealer, full of bright ideas which normally misfire. In **Save Our School**, they set out to do just that when the school is threatened with closure. In **The Mintygly Kid**, they set out to win the local school cricket competition. Clipper, as captain of the cricket team, is a demon bowler, considerable batsman and stands no nonsense from her team, most of whom are terrified of her. Two very funny novels.

The Runaway, Gillian Cross, Methuen, 0 416 87230 1, £3.95

Also by Gillian Cross, **The Runaway** is a rather more serious, socially-committed story. When Denny's only relative, his granny is taken to hospital, he runs away and meets Nachtar Singh. Their initial antagonism ("Rotten Paki!" . . . "I am not a rotten Paki . . . I am a rotten Indian") changes, predictably but convincingly, into mutual understanding as Nachtar helps Denny hide from the police. Strong characters in an exciting and often funny adventure story.

The Devil's Children, Peter Dickinson, Gollancz, 0 575 00410 X, £4.95
Puffin, 0 14 03.0547 7, £1.10

This is another fascinating adventure story, again revolving round a group of Sikhs. Basically an historical story set in the future, this is the third book

about the "Changes", a time when the people of Great Britain turn against machines and revert to a mediaeval form of existence. The story gives an accurate portrait of a Sikh community, their customs, pride and feelings and the admirable way in which they adapt to their new environment.

The Third Class Genie, Robert Leeson, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 10623 0, £4.95, Fontana Lions, 0 00 670930 3, 90p.

A very amusing and highly readable story. Disaster-prone Alec, living in an inner-city area, stumbles upon an unopened beer can and finds it houses a genie from twelfth-century Baghdad. This unlikely episode is superbly depicted and allows for all sorts of exotic developments, such as looking at the Crusades from the opposite to normal viewpoint, through the eyes of the genie. A very likeable fantasy with a strong multi-cultural element.



Above, Su Su at school in Brick Lane.

On the right, Su Su remembers her life in Hong Kong - 'She had to sweep the yard at the back and wash clothes and dishes and do what the other servants told her with Chai Eng on her hip'.

Two of Glenys Ambrus' illustrations to **The Day After Yesterday**.



Cover illustrations from 'The Julian Stories' by Ann Cameron

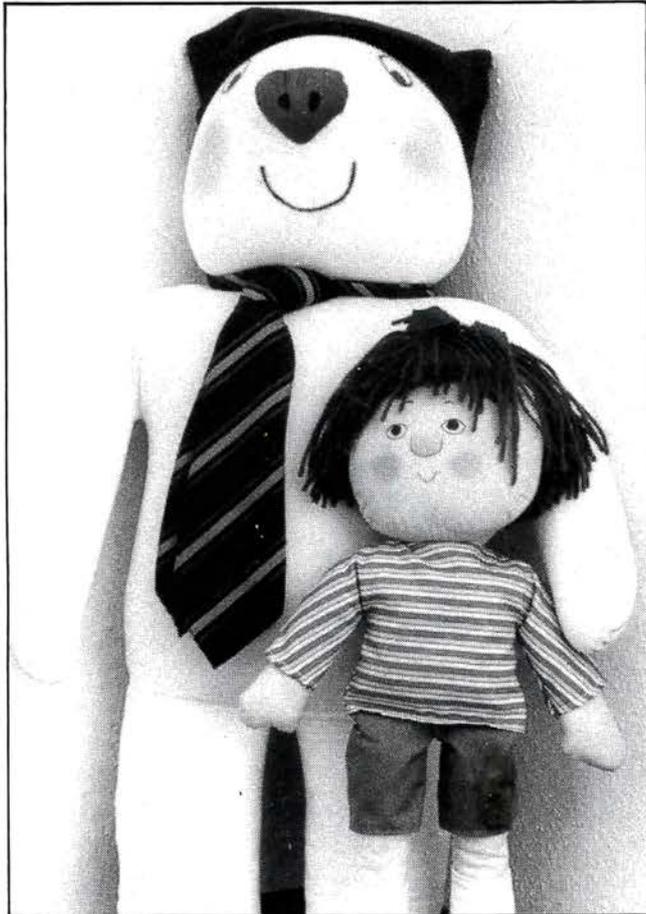
The Day After Yesterday, Geraldine Kay, Deutsch, 0 233 97344 3, £4.25

A gentle, unusual story about a young Chinese girl, Su Su, now living in London and helping her parents run a Chinese Take-away. Enigmatic Su Su lives in a world of her own, haunted by foggy memories of her terrifying last weeks in Hong Kong when she was left in sole charge of her brothers and baby sister, Chai Eng. Geraldine Kay manages to explore with great sensitivity the loyalties, fears, obligations and hopes within the Chinese community as well as the heroism of children in the face of threat and difficulty. Su Su's problem is finally worked out in the classroom through sensitive handling by a teacher and children. ●

SOUND & VISION

Important Visitors from the Court of King Rollo

A new series from King Rollo Films Ltd. appears on July 18th, starring Victor and Maria, two friends created by Carme Solé Vendrell and Roc Almirall. Victor is a dad-sized white bear (with purple hat and green striped tie) who entertains, advises and accompanies Maria everywhere, as any ordinary teddy would. The stories are simple and happy, based on everyday situations, and the pictures are clear, bright and colourful, a successful combination already proven in David McKee's King Rollo adventures.



We took the photographs on this page way back in 1981 when we visited David McKnee and his partners at their animation studios. It was early days for King Rollo Films and at that time Victor and Maria (above) were figures on a shelf, promise of films to come. Towser (below right) – the first 3D version of Tony Ross's cheerful dog – had recently joined them and ideas for his film adventures were just beginning.

The five minute films will be networked on Channel 3 at 4.15 each weekday for five weeks. They have already had much acclaim internationally and have been bought by Austria, Belgium, Finland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, West Germany, Italy, Holland, Norway, New Zealand and USA for Cable TV.

Clive Juster, King Rollo Films' editor is cheerful at last now the films are on TV as the production team have been working on them for a very long time — each movement is created by physically moving parts of Victor's and Maria's bodies on a background and filming each new position. They have also been very particular about the use of sound and use it surprisingly dramatically: there is incidental music and a voiceover telling the story but Clive Juster was conscientious about ordinary noises such as footsteps approaching and disappearing, birds squeaking and objects being put down on the floor, which is unusual in short films for children and certainly adds extra interest. (Clive used to work for the BBC, putting sound tracks on films designed for foreign countries so has had a lot of experience in thinking about noise — breaking cabbages in half was one of his favourites!) This extra use of sound is more expensive but well worth the increased expense. Another unusual aspect of the films is the appearance of characters in



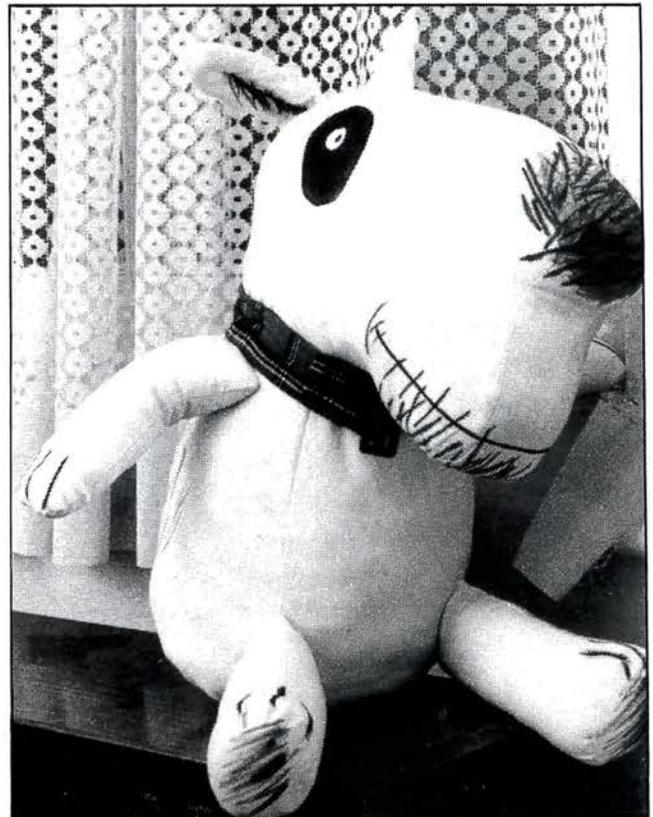
David McKnee, Clive Juster, film editor, and Leo Beltoft, animator, around the animation camera at King Rollo Films.

each episode who have nothing to do with the plot and nothing to say — a furtive, sunglasses, long-coated, mustachioed man hangs about in the background fiddling with a camera or painting a landscape, and middle-aged woman takes an energetic dog for a walk. They are put in just for fun, so that they will be anticipated at the beginning of each new adventure.

The series does have a definite European feel about it; the characters are cleverly clothed and put in backgrounds which would appear in any country and Victor and Maria play together as children all over Europe do. The books and TV series are sure to be at least as popular as King Rollo.

Blackie publish 8 titles for £2.50 in hardback and 75p in paperback.

As a footnote, the team are now working on a new series of films with Tony Ross, starring Towser, a scruffy but inventive and amiable dog, which should hit our screens in another year or two.



Adventures at Cockleshell Bay

More adventures from Robin and Rosie Cockle down in

Cockleshell Bay start in September, networked on ITV in their children's programmes slots at 12.00, repeated at 4.00. Brian Truman has written

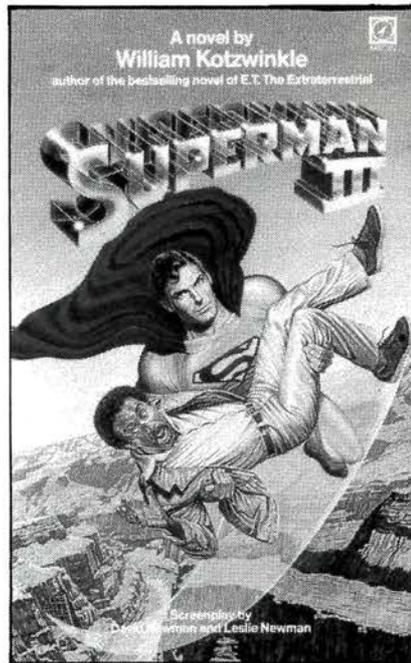
and narrated the TV programmes and is author of the books, published in paperback by Marks and Spencer and the four stories are sold in omnibus form by Thames Methuen in hardback with colour photographs from the television series. Thames Methuen also publish Stories from Cockleshell Bay.

Johnny Jarvis

A new drama series for young people of 6 sixty-minute episodes starts in September on BBC 1 at 8.00, dealing with the lives of two boys, Johnny Jarvis and Alan Lipton, who leave comprehensive school at 15 and face the problems of the adult world in its state of economic depression. Johnny Jarvis does manage to find work as a coachbuilder but Alan has less luck and has to take his place in the dole queue. It's a tough story of survival, with lighter moments of relaxation with friends, written by Nigel Williams, author playwright and director of *Arena*, and produced by Guy Slater, who produced *The Cleopatras*. A novelisation of the script will be published as a **Puffin Plus** on August 25th.

TV Classics

There is news that production has started on two major classic serials for television, to be shown in the Autumn: a new



version of *Jane Eyre* starring Timothy Dalton and Zelah Clarke as Rochester and Jane; *Mansfield Park* starring Anna Massey as Mrs Norris, Bernard Hepton as Sir Thomas Bertram and Angela Morris as his wife, with Sylvesta Le Touzel as Fanny Price and Nicholas Farrel as Edmund; and *Bleak House* will start being filmed later this year for television air time late in 1984.



Film still from the cover of 'Gregory's Girl'

Film Fun

If you've waited for a paperback version of the highly acclaimed, very funny film, *Gregory's Girl*, it's out now, published by Fontana for £1.00, written by Gerard Cole. So is Arrow's paperback version of *Superman III*, written by William Kotzwinkle (also wrote the book of *ET: The Extraterrestrial*) from Alexander Salkind's new movie.

Are You Sitting Comfortably?

Sparrow Books are publishing "a collection of best-loved stories", *Listen with Mother*, in August, in association with the BBC. And, of course, each story begins with "Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin". ●

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Here Comes Summer

Edinburgh goes Bananas about Books

The citizens of Edinburgh have grown accustomed to strange sights over the years during the annual Festival — there's usually at least one sensation to look out for like last year's diminutive, half-naked Sankai Juku warriors from Japan who caused a stir by hanging upside down from the walls of the City Chambers! This year — it's Fungus, of the slime and muck along with Fat Puffin and a Winnie the Pooh hot air balloon that will herald the start of the biggest bean feast of books ever seen in Britain. It's all part of the first **Edinburgh Book Festival** which will open in Charlotte Square Gardens in the west end of the city on Sunday, August 21st, until Saturday, September 3rd, from 10 to 8 o'clock each day including Sundays.

The buildings (not tents) are yellow and white weather proof structures complete with carpets, and walkways should we not have our full ration of sunshine. The Children's Exhibition has its own structure, sponsored by John Menzies and which will house over 2,000 titles, all for sale.

The extensive programme has something for everyone whether you drop in for an hour, or stay all day as there is a restaurant, theatre and adults exhibition on site too. All your favourite authors will be there — Mollie Hunter, Joan Lingard, John Grant and Lavinia Derwent head the Scottish contingent. Shirley Hughes and John Ryan will be drawing and telling stories, Jan Pienkowski will conduct a Paint In and no one will read poems quite like Mike Rosen! There's Leon Garfield and Roger McGough for older children and Phoebe Hichens will be revealing all about the Royal Family. No book fair would be complete without Toddy — H.E. Todd telling Bobby Brewster stories in his own inimitable way. An especially welcome visitor will be Anita Desai whose novel 'A Village by the Sea' (Heinemann) won the 1982 Guardian Award for Children's Fiction — it's a wonderful book!

Terrance Dicks will tell you all you want to know about Dr. Who and he'll be wearing his other hat on August 27th to talk about his work as the script editor for the BBC's Classic Serial. Sunday August 28th is Book Tower Day, Yorkshire TV's award-winning programme, when producers Joy Whitby and Doug Wilcox will show how books are chosen for televising and you can realise any secret ambitions to become a Star by having a go at dramatising an extract from a book. Another Star performer will be Tony Hart — from the BBC's incredible 'Take Hart' programme and Douglas Hill will be flying in from Canada to talk about science fiction.

The list of authors appearing reads like the ideal publishers catalogue with names like Bernard Ashley, Val Biro, Eileen Dunlop, Colin West, Robert Lee, Moira Miller, Antony Kamm, Joe Austen, Colin McLaren and Robert Crowther. You can also find Supergran who will be judging the best dressed Supergran with friend Forrest

Wilson, in a fancy dress contest organised by Puffin. Finally, if you were too busy at Christmas and missed it on Channel 4, the delightful film 'The Snowman', adapted from the book by Raymond Briggs, will be shown in the company of Raymond himself — who will also be accompanied by his grubby pal Fungus.

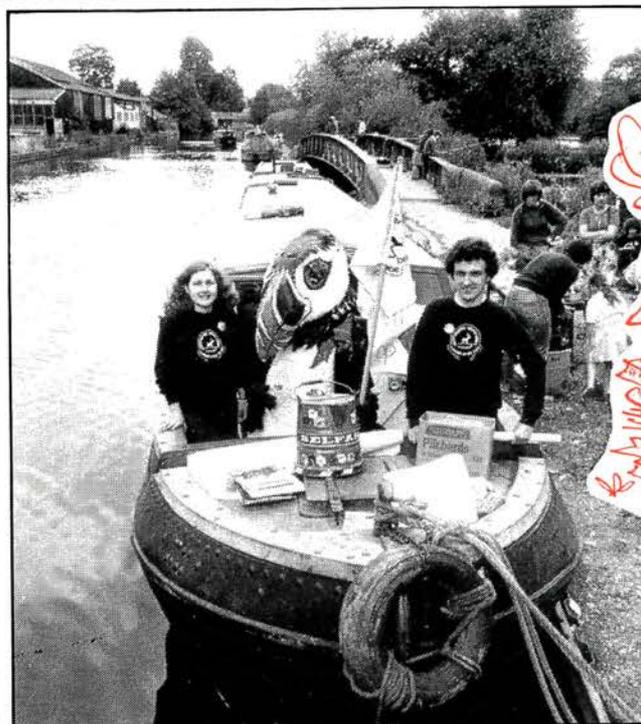
As if this wasn't enough, on site will be the BBC's record breaking exhibition '60 Years of Children's Programmes' — perhaps you were one of the 85,000 who queued in London — now is your chance to see it again in more spectacular surroundings!

The adult programme is equally star-studded. As well as the daily 'Meet the Author' programme at 11.00 a.m. when authors such as Malcolm Bradbury, Fay Weldon and P.D. James will be speaking, there will also be talks, readings and signing sessions. Those visiting during the fortnight include Melvyn Bragg, Tom Sharpe and John Updike making a special trip from the States. You can get gardening advice from Peter Seabrook, find what the Stars have in store from astrologer Kim Tracy and watch the last handloom weaver in Scotland plying his craft.

If you're visiting Edinburgh on holiday during August, the children can pick up their own passports — devotion has *not* arrived but the Passport Competition will have! Ten of the city's museums and galleries are taking part and children go in search of literary clues ranging from the easy to very difficult. It will involve rummaging around graveyards and keeping eyes peeled for plaques and inscriptions on walls, but it can be done in a day (we know, we've tried it!). At each venue, the passport holders will have their documents stamped with a

delightful rubber stamp individually designed and made by the calligrapher, George Thomson. (If you want to have a go at making your own rubber stamps, get a copy of his book 'Rubber Stamps and How to Make Them' published by Canongate.) The Passports have to be posted in the Book Festival and the prizes are marvellous — trips to either the London Tara Hotel for the weekend or a day's visit to the BBC's TV studios with Terrance Dicks for the two first prize winners. Also on offer are £50 of books for second prizes in the two age groups, £25 of books or a Paddington Bear from Collins and runners up receive copies of the superb Facsimile edition of 'Treasure Island' recently published by Gollancz with wonderful illustrations by N.C. Wyeth. Speaking of 'Treasure Island', some of you may have been on board the steam coaster 'Robin' at St. Katherine's Dock, London, recently to launch the Federation of Children's Book Groups National Tell A Story Week. In Edinburgh they will be showing the Orson Welles film version of 'Treasure Island' (sadly Robert 'Aarh, Jim Lad' Newton's version is not available) and there will be lots of the Federation's famous give-aways too in the shape of balloons, stickers plus yet another competition with a £10 book token as a prize to tax your knowledge of RLS himself.

And the cost of all this? Just 50p for children and £1 for adults with reduced charges for school parties. For a complete programme and a copy of the splendid Book Festival poster designed for us by Quentin Blake, write to us at the Edinburgh Book Festival, 62, George Street, Edinburgh or phone us on 031 556 3561. We'll look forward to seeing you there! ●



Summer Storyboat '83

Hertfordshire Libraries will be afloat on the canal again.

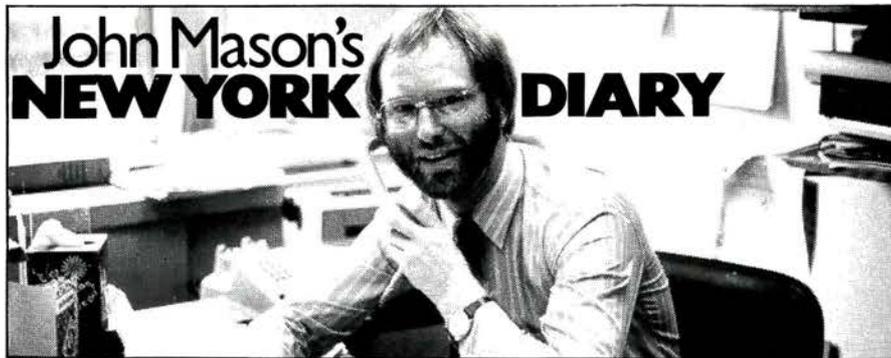
July 25, 9.30 – 5.00 Cassiobury Park, Watford: Iris Grender, Jill Tookey, Meryl Doney, Theatre in Education, Playbus, Puffin Club & Philippa Dickenson.

July 26, a.m. Kings Langley; p.m. Apsley: Kite-flying, drawing. Pub evening at The Albion.

July 27, 9.30 – 5.00 Boxmoor Hemel Hempstead: Pirate Day: Victor Ambrus, Rodney Peppe, Robert Leeson, Andrew Davies.

July 28, 9.30 – 5.00 Berkhamsted: Sarah Corrin, Jan Mark, Gillian Osband, Sally Gregory.

July 29, 2.00 – 5.00 Grand Junction Arms, Tring: Meet the Library. Pub evening.



Eat your hearts out, BFK readers — a few mornings ago I sat at breakfast table with Christopher Reeve, star of *Superman*! The occasion was the presentation of the children's books section of the prestigious American Book Awards, and Christopher Reeve was the presenter. It was all part of the award promoters' efforts to hype up the occasion and attract media coverage — and they did succeed in getting two of the big three national TV networks to film parts of it for their evening news slots. TV viewers were unaware, however, of the heated controversy in the children's publishing community that had preceded the event. Some time previously the awards planning committee had decided to hold the ceremony in a newly-converted wing of the New York Public Library, but no one had bothered to check on exactly how big the rooms were or when they would be ready. A few weeks before the ceremony — with all the press releases out — it was discovered that the largest available room was less than half the required size!

Hastily the committee decided to split the ceremony into several sections, with the children's books at a breakfast entirely separate from the Academy Awards-style main evening presentations. Children's publishers returning from Bologna Book Fair were furious to find their books and authors relegated to what they viewed as a patronizing "kiddies' corner" divorced from the main "grown-up" ceremony. Last-ditch efforts to reverse the plan failed while sharp words flew around the table and angry letters were exchanged. Next year, we're assured, things will be better managed. Meanwhile, I'm happy to report that Christopher Reeve is as clean-living in real life as he is as *Superman* — he didn't even drink coffee at breakfast, and ate only fresh melon!

Incompetent

At a talk in New York recently on "English vs. American Children's Book Criticism", Brian Alderson, children's book reviewer of *The Times*, castigated most children's book reviewing as "superficial and incompetent, bland and insipid". Not enough space is devoted to children's books in major newspapers, he said — *The Times* itself included — so that thoughtful, in-depth reviews rarely see the light of day. In addition, most reviewers themselves, claimed Alderson, don't treat children's books seriously or read them carefully. For example, in a comparison of reviews of Alan Garner's *The Aimer Gate*, Alderson found that several well-known, highly regarded British critics — and I'd better not mention any names here! — had made fundamental errors of fact in their reviews. (The novel is set in 1916; one reviewer placed it in the Boer War, another in the 1920s.) Even publishers are not immune, sometimes making errors in the blurbs on their own books. Alderson was no kinder to American critics, alleging that their professional scholarly reference works, which they study so seriously, are riddled with inaccuracies.

Stereotype

Where does selection end and censorship begin? The distinction was blurred in a recent article in *The New York Times* with the provocative heading: "When Librarians Ban Books". The article described how several major library systems had decided not to stock copies of a book called *Jake and Honeybunch Go to Heaven*, by Margot Zemach. The brightly illustrated picture book, which has caused a raging controversy here, depicts a happy-go-lucky black man and his mule who die and subsequently have a wild time settling into their new life in Heaven — where God, St Peter and all the angels are black, too. Critics have deplored Zemach's depiction of the black Heaven with its "Glory Road", "Pearly Gates" and "Heavenly Green Pastures", and its very down-to-earth angels in everyday clothes playing jazz and cooking chicken-and-ribs dinners, as racial stereotypes. The publishers, Farrar Strauss & Giroux, counter that the book is firmly based on black American folklore.

Folklore reduced to such a simplistic level is clearly offensive to some, though as a work of art the book is exuberant, splashy and a lot of fun. The unresolved question is whether librarians can be expected to select books on their individual merits or whether they are inevitably — perhaps rightfully — influenced against a book which they feel will be offensive to some of their patrons, even if this involves denying others the opportunity to have access to it. It's an area of judgement where there can be no definitive guidelines — conflicting pressures in society lead to conflicting library selection policies.

Kid-tested

What happens when a major toy company goes into children's book publishing? Well, they go about it in an entirely different way from traditional publishers. Parker Brothers, the Massachusetts-based toy company that also manufactures Monopoly and other board games, recently acquired the publishing licence for the Care Bears, a new set of characters brought to life by General Mills and American Greetings, joint creators of the phenomenally successful Strawberry Shortcake. The new character merchandising effort features a family of ten cuddly-cute bears with symbols representing personality traits on their protruding bellies — Tenderheart Bear, for instance, has a red heart on its tummy — designed to help children deal with changing emotions. Parker Brothers spent many months doing market research with teachers, psychologists, parents and kids themselves to pin down the most popular story lines — or, as their ad in the industry magazine *Toy and Hobby World* puts it, "kid-tested for sure sales".

Now that the "product" has been "developed", Parker is gearing up for a one-million dollar TV advertising blitz — over one-third the total sum spent in advertising last year by the entire children's book industry — focused on just six titles. Parker plans to sell the books mainly through toy shops and supermarkets rather than bookshops. "We're going to revolutionize the kids' book industry," states their marketing director James Buchanan. Publishers watch out! ●

NEW FANTASY FICTION

Nine Lost Days Michael Hyndman

Specifically written for those teenagers fascinated by both legends and myths of the past and the logic of modern science and technology, *Nine Lost Days* has everything from elves and goblins, mortals and immortals, not to mention a small dinosaur and a souped-up Citroen car. The result is a weird and very exciting adventure story.

January 1983 Hardback £4.95

Farmer Giles of Ham

J.R.R. Tolkien

Illustrated by Pauline Baynes

Farmer Giles of Ham is fat, unheroic and redbearded. But he is also fortunate and shrewd. When a very large and stupid giant blunders into his field it begins a surprising chain of events. Before long Giles is setting off with his dog Garm, his grey mare and his sword Tailbiter to tame the dragon Chrysophylax.

July 1983 Unwin Paperback £1.50

Smith of Wootton Major

J.R.R. Tolkien

Illustrated by Pauline Baynes

A collection that includes two of Tolkien's best fairy stories, *Smith of Wootton Major* and *Leaf by Niggle*.

'Whoever reads it at eight will no doubt still be going back to it at eighty.'

New Statesman

July 1983 Unwin Paperback £1.50

Prices are correct at time of going to press

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May we recommend...

A new series featuring writers and books we think you might like to know better.

Pat Thomson invites you to meet Nina Beachcroft

Should you go down a lane in one of Nina Beachcroft's stories something magical is bound to happen at its end. It seems appropriate that if you wish to meet her you must go down a winding lane, the trees meeting overhead in parts, to emerge on a village green. There you will find the cottage where she lives with her family and a friendly dog. This is how many of her books start, in normal, cheerful family surroundings which provide the solidly realistic base from which fantastic and magical events blossom. With a new book out this year and six more appearing in paperback, new readers as well as old friends can look forward to a real treat.

Nina Beachcroft has always been interested in fantasy and all her books are of this type, but all are different. She shows a remarkable versatility within the single genre. Usually, the children in the story are drawn into a fantastic situation where they enjoy the magical happenings but also have to take a certain responsibility for what occurs. Sometimes they gain insight into the lives of others or are brought to a character-testing situation. The decisions, however, are personal and domestic rather than cosmic, and although there are moments of real fear and tension, this author exercises discipline over the events, never exploiting her young readers. She is perfectly clear about the fact that she writes for children and feels a responsibility for them. She would never, for this reason, manipulate aspects of the occult for easy effects. In her books, you will find instead a great variety of imaginative experiment, requiring magical interventions, written in a crisp, humorous style, but always gentle when the feelings are strongest.

Readers might well start with her first book, *Well Met by Witchlight*, which has a delightful, unsterotyped witch as the central character. She is Padraic Colum's "Old Woman of the Roads", content and with special powers. The children in the story are allowed to participate in her magic and join with her to defeat a less benign witch who threatens them all.

The Wishing People follows a traditional theme in that the young hero and heroine are granted ten wishes. These bring the traditional mixture of great fun and awful disaster. The wish which one set of nine year old readers found exceptionally intriguing was the one where the children change bodies with their pets and revel in new and powerful senses, not least the sense of smell! Nina Beachcroft often uses this book when she goes to talk to schools as its subject and structure lends itself to discussion with the children about the craft of writing.

The book which has the most local connotation for her is *A Spell of Sleep*. The woods and lanes are part of the Hertfordshire countryside around her home. An archaeological dig nearby provoked thoughts about the way in which the past is sometimes part of the present. In the story, two obnoxious characters are awakened from a sleep many centuries long and move into the house next door to the Turner family. Their unpleasantness daily becomes more sinister until they threaten the happiness of the whole family, and Peter realises that he must summon aid from the past if the frightening pair are to be returned to their place in time. To do this, Nina Beachcroft invented a character called Robert the Hermit who appears in the nick of time and returns the couple to their great sleep. After the book had been written, she learned that the dig



Photo courtesy of Granada Publishing

had not uncovered a twelfth century manor, as had been thought, but a chapel of the same period, and there had indeed been a real hermit stalking the lanes of Hertfordshire.

Nina Beachcroft also writes about friendship, a major preoccupation of the age group she writes for. In *A Visit to Folly Castle*, Emma Jones finds a note in a bottle — on a footpath. It is a note from Cassandra, living in a grand and impressive house, but desperate for a friend. This imaginative method of attracting attention is the least of the surprises she can provide. Statues move, the view from the window changes according to mood, and her aunt walks on water. The fascinating house and complicated garden attract Emma at first, but when Cassandra's parents show an excessive interest in Emma's young brother, she becomes anxious and suspicious. Her fears are justified, for the family are not ordinary humans. As a child at the end of the war, Nina Beachcroft lived in Wimbledon surrounded by many such large, empty houses which she daringly explored, and the excitement of being on strange and forbidden territory is recreated in the book.

She has also written a genuine ghost story, *Cold Christmas*. She explains that she wrote this book "back to front". She came across the place name and the story grew from that. In this story it is the emotions of the past which persist to the present, affecting the Christmas guests gathered for the holiday. Josephine, uncomfortable among strangers, notices another girl whom no one else can see. She realises that the ghost child

is trying to reach her, even invading her dreams. The party treasure hunt is replaced by a hunt for real evidence about what had taken place in the house many years ago, something so significant that its effects remain. In resolving the mystery of the ghost, Josephine is able to resolve some of her own anxieties.

The newest book, *The Genie and her Bottle*, is a lighthearted account of the Arabian Nights let loose in the suburbs. An urban setting is unusual for this author, but there is no doubt that releasing a strong-willed genie in London gives scope for many awkward encounters. Alex and Robin soon wish that they had not released the imperious Leila from her bottle. She complains that there are no swans' tongues in the frig, and although they do get a trip on a magic carpet it hardly compensates for the affair of the giant roc in the garden. The problems come to a head when she wishes to attend the Queen's Garden Party.

One of the advantages of schools and school bookshops is that it is possible to know the readers, so who is likely to enjoy Nina Beachcroft's books? They will be invaluable in the junior and middle schools, especially for children who enjoy traditional and fairy tales. They come between these and the large-scale, demanding fantasies such as those by Ursula LeGuin and Tolkien. They are for readers who like to flex the muscles of their imaginations a little, and although they are not difficult to read, there is always something in them worth thinking about.

Nina Beachcroft's next book is already taking shape and once again there will be a change of direction within the fantasy genre. She is thinking of UFOs and other worlds, a new dimension to the subject which has always interested her the most. That is probably one reason why she writes about it so well. ●

Book Information

The Genie and her Bottle, Heinemann, 0 434 92856 9, £5.95
Under the Enchanter, Granada Dragon, 0 583 30609 8, £1.25
A Visit to Folly Castle, Granada Dragon, 0 583 30610 1, £1.25
The Wishing People, Granada Dragon, 0 583 30607 1, £1.25
Well Met by Witchlight, Granada Dragon, 0 583 30606 3, £1.25.

Cold Christmas and *A Spell of Sleep* will appear in paperback (Granada Dragon) in January 1984.

Pat Thomson is a librarian and past chairman of the Federation of Children's Book Groups. She has recently collaborated with Jan Ormerod on an anthology for the youngest, *Rhymes Around the Day* (Kestrel, 0 7226 5808 7, £4.50).



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BOOKS FOR KEEPS NEWS



Happy Birthday Paddington!

Paddington Bear is 25 years old on June 25th and December 25th (he has two birthdays like royalty). A Bear Called Paddington was first published in 1958 by Collins and they are organising different kinds of activity round the country to celebrate its anniversary and the publication of two new Paddington books in August: **The Paddington Suitcase**, a small case containing Paddington's notebook and birthday book (£5.00) and **Paddington's Storybook**, (£5.95) a special omnibus edition containing ten stories with new illustrations by Peggy Fortnum. Michael Bond will be travelling round the country signing books and will be special guest at the opening of a special Paddington Grotto at Selfridges in mid-October ready for Christmas. Even British Rail are joining in the fun and taking part in a major competition for children. Something to look forward to is **Paddington Bear's Magical Musical** which is currently touring the country and will arrive in London for Christmas. An LP and a single (Cross my Paws and Hope to Die) are also available.

After twenty five years, Paddington is still growing; there are over thirty titles in print in the UK, and he has been translated into 20 different languages. 11 million copies of the books have been sold worldwide, and he has collected even more fans due to the popularity of the TV series, the enormously high sales of the Paddington Bear toy and dozens of other pieces of merchandise.

If you would like to celebrate Paddington's birthday in school, and are going to be selling Paddington books, Collins are willing to supply special display material. Contact Nicky Henderson at 8 Grafton Street, London W1X 3LA, tel. 01 493 7070.

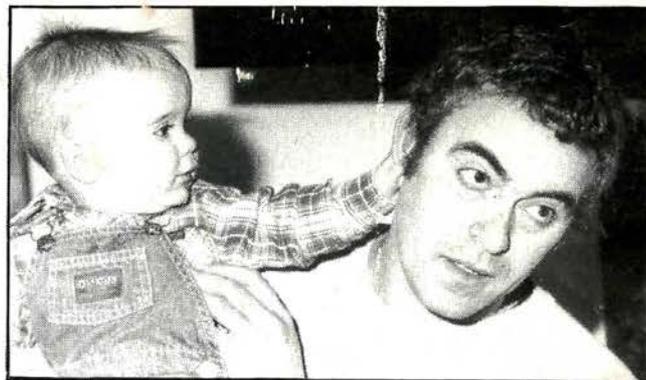
National Tell-a-Story Week

Tell-a-Story Week started with a splash at St Katherine's Dock, near the Tower of London on May 7th. Hundreds of children and parents dodged the showers and climbed all over the Dock's Historic Ship Collection which were temporarily converted into Jolly Roger-flying pirate ships, manned by scar-faced deckhands, all celebrating the hundredth year of publication of **Treasure Island** by Robert Louis Stevenson. One ship had a bookshop aboard with a special selection of rousing sea stories and treasure-seeking tales; another was full of Federation of Children's Book Groups members, cunningly disguised as pirates, helping children to make hats, eye patches and cutlasses, inflicting them with terrible painted facial scars, singing songs and telling stories. The day wouldn't have been complete without the most famous pirate, Captain Pugwash and his creator John Ryan, and Terrance Dicks, author of books about the futuristic traveller on the inter-galactic high seas, Dr Who. Even Long John Silver was spotted hobbling aboard the Greenwich Bookbus to tell children about his sea-faring adventures. There were long queues to meet Roald Dahl that even the

weather didn't shorten. It was a smashing day out, combining real naval history with existing fantasy — and could form the basis of a similar book event in your school; a visit to nearby boats or ships if you're lucky enough to live close to water, followed by pirate garb, stories and pictures in school and a selection of relevant stories in the school bookshop.

The One that Got Away?

An interest in books and helping children to enjoy and understand them has found a school bookshop organiser a job in publishing! Eunice McMullen, a teacher at Howarth Cross School in Rochdale, was so involved with books that she started to produce her own children's magazine, **Bookworm**, which reviewed books and provided information about authors, invented puzzles etc., and with the help of her husband Nigel, a talented artist and fellow teacher, the circulation eventually rose to over 3,000. She also organised a large and successful book fair at her school each year, inviting popular authors and personalities. This energy has now landed Eunice the job of organising the Puffin Club — and she is delighted about being able to communicate her enthusiasm about good books to thousands more children.



Michael Foreman does it again

This year's Kate Greenaway Medal has been won — yet again — by super talented Michael Foreman.

And the award was made for his work on two books.

Longneck and Thunderfoot, Helen Piers, Kestrel, 0 7226 5704 8, £5.25 and **The Sleeping Beauty and other favourite Fairy Tales**, Angela Carter, Gollancz, 0 575 03194 8, £6.95.

Highly commended was Graham Oakley's **The Church Mice in Action**, Macmillan, 0 333 33635 6, £3.95 and Commended was Janet Ahlberg for **The Baby's Catalogue**, Kestrel, 0 7226 5777 3, £4.95.

The Carnegie Award

The Carnegie Award went to Margaret Mahy for **The Haunting**, Dent, 0 460 06097, £4.95.

A junior age story about Barney and his wonderfully varied family who possess the 'gifts' of second sight, telekinesis, and thought transference. A chilling read.

Highly commended: **The Dark Behind the Curtain**, Gillian Cross, OUP, 0 19 271457 0, £5.95.

Commended: **Wall of Words**, Tim Kennemore, Faber and Faber, 0 571 11856 9, £5.25.

The Signal Poetry Award

This year's selectors, Margaret Meek and Neil Philip have given the Signal Poetry Award to **The Rattle Bag**, compiled by Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes, Faber and Faber, 0 571 11976 X, £4.95 (paperback).

The choosers write extensively about their choice in the May issue of **Signal**.

Watch Out For

Bridgwater is hosting a "never-been-anything-like-this-round-here-before" event on November 7th, at schools and at the Arts Centre. There will be competitions, visiting authors and poets, exhibitions and books for sale. Interested schools should ring Ian Hague at the Arts Centre on Bridgwater (0278) 422700.

WHS Hints

Yvonne White, who organises W. H. Smith's School Bookshops in the Northern half of England has just finished her latest competition, to design a book mark. She says that she always gets more response from asking children to make their own book marks than any other kind of competition and

suggests that school bookshop organisers might enliven flagging interest by organising their own competitions. Several children in the latest set of entries had designed book marks that moved when strings were pulled — if you're a bit short of ideas, get your kids to invent animated book marks . . .

Last Orders Please!

The closing date for orders for Children's Book Week promotional material is Friday 29th July, so if you haven't sent yours in already, now's the time to do it. There are attractive posters, bookmarks, stickers, badges and balloons available, with a surprise free gift for the organiser! For more information ring Dorothy Wood on 01-870 9055.

