

# BOOKS FOR KEEPS

No. 40 Sept. 1986  
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**Books and Television Special Feature:** Tony Robinson on TV Storytelling; Peter Firmin and Oliver Postgate at work; Adapting **The Cuckoo Sister**

**Plus:** Lois Duncan • Aliki • Stories in Special Education



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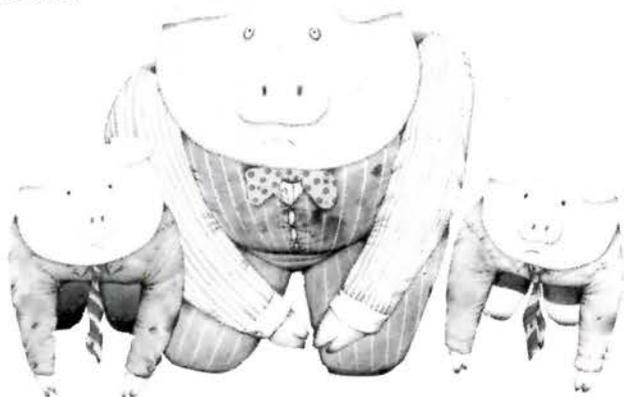
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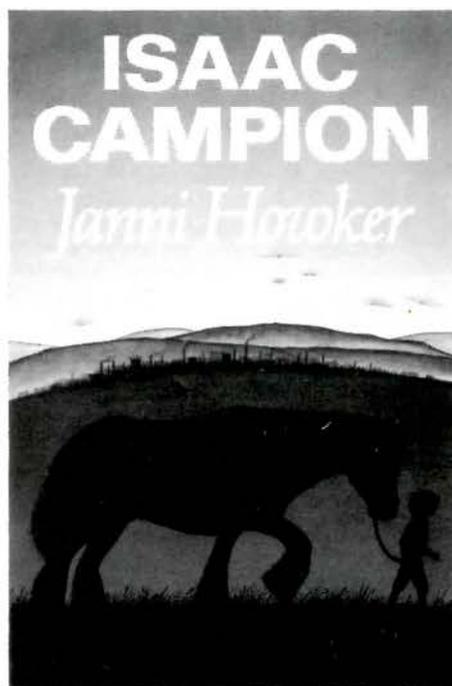


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# Contents

<b>Editor's Page</b>	<b>3</b>
News and comment from the Editor	
<b>Sound and Vision Special</b>	
• <b>Ways of Telling</b>	<b>4</b>
Tony Robinson talks about storytelling on television	
• <b>Can the Box Match the Book?</b>	<b>8</b>
Chris Powling talks to Vivien Alcock and Paul Stone about <i>The Cuckoo Sister</i>	
• <b>Firmin and Postgate present . . .</b>	<b>9</b>
A visit to two very talented film-makers	
<b>Authorgraph No 40</b>	<b>14</b>
Lois Duncan	
<b>Perfecting the Message</b>	<b>16</b>
Pat Triggs talks to Aliko about Information Books	
<b>Stories for Special Teenagers</b>	<b>18</b>
Thelma Davey assesses the value of fiction for her class of young people with special educational needs	
<b>Reviews</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>News</b>	<b>28</b>

## Cover Book

Our cover picture, by Aliko, is taken from *How a Book is Made* (0 370 31003 9, £6.95).

We are grateful for help from the Bodley Head in using this illustration.

## BOOKS FOR KEEPS

— the magazine of the  
School Bookshop Association

### SEPTEMBER 1986 No. 40

ISSN: 0143-909X  
Editor: Pat Triggs  
Managing Editor: Richard Hill  
Designed and typeset by: Rondale Limited, Lydney, Glos.  
Printed by: Surrey Fine Art Press Ltd, Redhill, Surrey

© School Bookshop Association 1986

**Books for Keeps** can be obtained on subscription by sending a cheque or postal order to the Subscription Secretary, SBA, 1 Effingham Road, Lee, London SE12 8NZ. Tel: 01-852 4953.

Annual subscription for six issues:  
£6.90 UK

Single copies:

£1.15 UK,

Or use the **Dial-a-Sub** service on  
01-852 4953.

Editorial correspondence: Pat Triggs,  
36 Ravenswood Road, Redland, Bristol,  
Avon BS6 6BW. Tel: 0272 49048.

**Books for Keeps**  
is published by the  
School Bookshop  
Association Ltd  
with the help of  
**Lloyds Bank**,  
six times a year.



# EDITOR'S PAGE



Peter

A new school year and two national book promotion events on us almost before we can say Kenneth Baker (and check to see what he is up to). The beginning of October sees the start of this year's **Children's Book Week** and a bid by the organisers to get into the **Guinness Book of Records** with the most performances in one week of a single play. The response to the offer of royalty-free performances for the plays which have been specially written for CBW by David Wood with Dave and Toni Arthur has been very encouraging. Heroes and Heroines, the theme of the week, are being celebrated all over the country and with the Readathon also going strong books should be being talked about *and* read. Hard on the heels of CBW comes **Teen Read** the Book Marketing Council's latest promotion aimed at getting teenagers (defined as anyone over 11!) buying and reading more books. Given the problems and pitfalls lurking in this notoriously difficult area it's a brave attempt. Sensibly the BMC abandoned its original idea that a group of 11+ teenagers should provide a list of their favourite books. (What about all the books they might have enjoyed but had never heard of?) Instead a 'Top 100' titles has been created from a combination of publishers' submissions and information from booksellers and librarians. On October 13th twelve 'young people' will meet to choose their 'Top 20'. We haven't been told anything about these twelve selectors which, given what we all know about matching books to readers, must have made it difficult for publishers to decide what to submit. As it is the list of 100 includes *Cormier* and *Cheerleaders*, *Forever* and *My Friend Flicka*, *A-Ha* and *Mahy*, *Spitting Image* and *Lord of the Rings*. There's no information yet about how the twelve went (will go?) about making their choices. Will they be given 100 books each? Will they just browse and take away what tickles their fancy? (If that's the case this could well tell us most about cover designs and blurb writing.) Will they be expected to read (or at least start) all the titles? How will they agree among themselves where there is no clear consensus? The final selection will be of greater interest and value if we know something of this. **Teen Read** as a promotion will run for three weeks with a free 'jazzyly designed and loudly coloured' magazine featuring the 'Top 100' to support it. After the event, **BfK** is looking at teenage reading in January; so if you have any comments on **Teen Read** or observations from your own experience, please write.

## Teen Read – Train Read

By a nice coincidence three of the Top 100 Teen Read titles are by Lois Duncan, our Authorgraph for this issue (see page 14). Lois, like many of the writers on the list, is American; finding a voice many teenager readers can tune in to seems a transatlantic talent. I was particularly pleased to meet Lois Duncan on her first visit to England because, as a very new editor of **BfK**, *Killing Mr Griffin* was the very first novel I was given to read in pre-publication proof. Hamish Hamilton, I believe, thought some teachers and librarians might think it a little 'strong'. I read it on the train between Paddington and Temple Meads and was entirely gripped by a very unusual story.

## Mixing Media

Lois Duncan's books have a quality that would translate well into film. Books have always been a rich source for TV drama – not least for children, as Paul Stone points out talking to Chris Powling about his new BBC Production of Vivien Alcock's *The Cuckoo Sister* (page 8). We've given a large section of this **BfK** to the relationship

between television and books – nowadays very much a two-way affair. Many of Peter Firmin and Oliver Postgate's original creations for television have been translated into books. We went to see them in their amazing and delightful studios in Kent (page 9). They had just finished *Tottie and the Big Wish* and we were very surprised to hear that (as yet) there are no plans for Rumer Godden to turn her screenplay into a sequel in book form to *The Dolls' House*. Peter Firmin's *Pinny* came to him indirectly via television but appeared first in books; now it seems books will follow the screen stories.

It was quite a challenge for Tony Robinson to put his very modern television re-tellings of *Odysseus* into books – especially as an integral part of the telling was the locations used for the filming. Tony has some fascinating things to say about storytelling and television (page 4). He took me to meet producer, David Bell, who was busy editing *Odysseus*. Some of the episodes were already complete so we had a preview. I'd recommend you to make a special effort not to miss this remarkable performance. Tony's version of *Odysseus and the Sirens*, for instance, is amazing; it lasts over seven minutes and he did it all in one take in a rowing boat attached by a very long rope to the jetty at Mevagissey.

## Cover Story

An equal tour de force was the production of *HABIM* (the abbreviated title everyone involved gave *How a Book is Made*). No TV spin-off – this is the book of the calendar! Aliko, the writer and illustrator is so good at in what she calls her 'learning picture books' (page 16). As well as 'conventional' information books like *HABIM*, these must include the many books Aliko has done which help particularly young children to learn about themselves; books like *Feelings* and *Jack and Jake* (which takes an original look at being twins). Out this month is the latest result of her collaboration with husband Franz Brandenburg. *Cock-a-Doodle-Do* (Bodley Head, 0 370 31004 7, £5.50) is a beautifully designed and illustrated book for the youngest with a storyline rooted in animal and human communication.

## New Views

For an alternative view of human communication read Thelma Davey's account of sharing books with her class of special teenagers (page 18). I found it very moving – and instructive; quite a different perspective on Teen Read.

Just time to note our new reviewers: Cathy Lister is taking a break while she settles into her new job as head of a primary school in Stafford. Good wishes, Cathy. Welcome Nigel Spencer and Bob Jay. Nigel, deputy head of a village school in Essex is a teacher librarian and school bookshop organiser. Bob is head of a Junior School in Tunbridge Wells and an enthusiastic book event organiser.

A busy term for all of us; but, we hope, a peaceful one in which long-closed school bookshops and book clubs can get going again.

Any relaunch stories?

# Ways of Telling

**Odysseus: the greatest hero of them all** is the latest in an exciting series of experiments in television storytelling.

**Tony Robinson**, the innovative electronic storyteller, talks about how **Theseus**, **Odysseus** and **Fat Tulip** were brought to the screen.

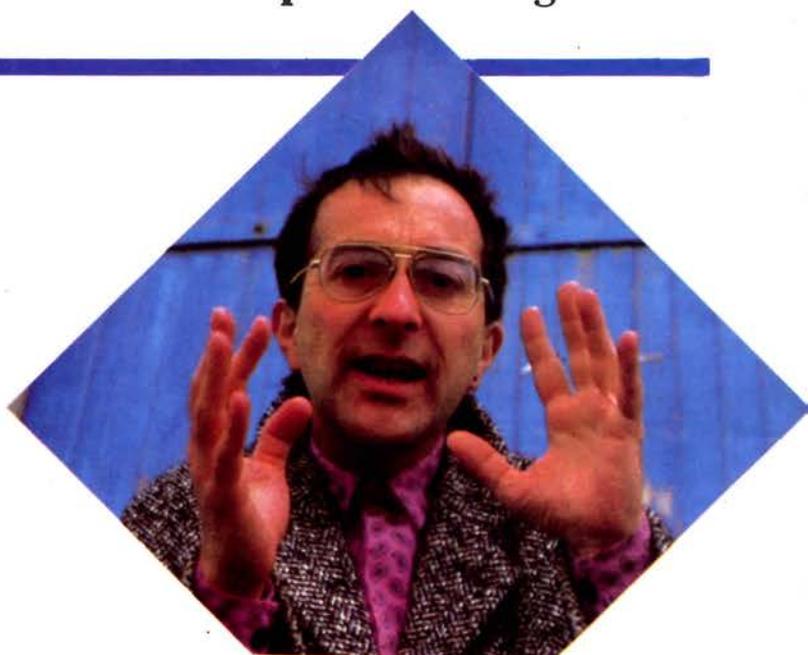
Very little of what is called storytelling on children's television has anything to do with what is important about telling stories. Watching someone sitting in a leather armchair in a Laura Ashley dress reading **Little House on the Prairie** off an autocue is not the same as having your mum or dad reading it to you. The thing about storytelling is the relationship between the people involved; an actor reading aloud on television can't create that relationship with millions of children. David Bellamy, Patrick Moore, James Burke: they get a relationship because they are passionate about their subjects, they care, they are committed. An actor reading aloud is transmitting someone else's story, the result of someone else's passion, a passion generated while writing the words down, crossing things out, doing rewrites, finding rhythms for the page which are quite different from the rhythms of the storyteller.

Storytelling is about how we use our imagination. Demonstrating that on television may make it less of the ruthlessly exclusive medium it is. If I'm telling a story on a hill and the hill becomes the Land of the Dead, or this pedestrian precinct becomes the palace of Sparta, then it seems to me that somewhere the programme is saying, 'You do this too; it's easy isn't it? Your play, your storytelling is the same thing as what those people on the screen are doing.'

In the last two years I've been given the chance on BBC **Jackanory** with **Theseus** and now **Odysseus** and on ITV with **Tales from Fat Tulip's Garden** – to try out my ideas. (I've also been asked to 'freeze' my storytelling in book form, and I've agreed. The ultimate irony?) And now **Books for Keeps** wants me to talk about my 'approach to storytelling on television' and for the first time I'm asking myself where my ideas came from, and realising that my thoughts about storytelling and what it is to be a storyteller evolved slowly over many years.

I started acting when I was 12 and I've been doing it for 28 years. By the time I was 25 I had become very dissatisfied with conventional theatre which seemed to me a decayed, dead end culture which could only speak to people who already shared its cultural reference points. I spent the best part of the next ten years working in community theatre. At the end of that time I was still convinced that live performance should and could be a cultural tool in contemporary society but it happened very rarely. I also began to see that all the reference points I had as an actor came out of a tradition that simply didn't work any more. When 'alternative' comedians arrived at the end of the 70s I was interested, I watched, they made me laugh. What didn't occur to me at the time, though it has since, is that stand-up comedians are storytellers. It was a link waiting to be made.

By far the strongest influence was my two children. Observing them I began to understand how we learn and about the liberation of play. I also started to tell stories. On holiday with friends who had small children I told long stories on long car journeys. It was partly to shut the kids up and partly showing off but I realised I was enjoying it and suddenly I understood – I'd got the taste of being the vessel through which the story is told for a particular audience and it wasn't a chore any more, it was expression. I realised too that although I was primarily telling the story for the children there was a bit of me that was telling it to the adults who were in the car as well. That was the harvest of a seed I'd got from Eric Thompson. **The Magic Roundabout** worked for the very young children it was aimed at and for lots of people of all ages too because he was telling the stories as Eric Thompson; it wasn't someone playing 'let's pretend, children', it was him.



All this was buzzing around in my head when I went to the National Theatre in 1982 to join Peter Hall's company for **The Oresteia**. We worked on the plays for six months which included a lot of work with masks and this was very important for me. As an exercise we would perform three pages or so of Tony Harrison's very strong rhythmic text to groups of about twenty people. At the end we'd take off our masks and ask the audience what had happened. Everyone agreed that the masks had changed, undergone a kind of transformation as they watched and listened; everyone agreed that it had happened at roughly the same place in the text. When we asked what the masks looked like when they changed everyone said something different, each had a unique vision, a unique response. I began to see the mask as the vessel, the focus; to realise that for an actor there is another way of doing things, an alternative to 'becoming' and demonstrating your own mental anguish. Then, still working with masks, we started doing improvisations. We decided we simply didn't know enough about the stories inside the **Oresteia** so we agreed to do three or four days' research and then tell a story, in mask, from the point of view of a particular person – you could be Orestes or just somebody who came in to polish the furniture. I chose Cassandra. I thought about Cassandra a lot, about how she sees things, and it seemed to me she must tell the story in the present tense. When my turn came I just put on a plain mask and started. I wasn't trying to act; it was just like recalling what happened this morning. The more I got into the 20 minutes the more lucid I got, the more rhythmic it got – but not the rhythm of literature or poetry. I had a spell-bound audience, it's a good story. At the end there was a silence. I took my mask off and burst into tears. '... masks!' I said in a very male way, went to wash my face, pulled myself together, came back into the room to talk about it and burst into tears again. I'm not usually an openly emotional person and that was a very instructive exercise. It showed me the power of the mask (the vessel) and how it could be used; it made me fascinated with the idea of the economy of storytelling, of storytelling where you are trying to present your listeners with a series of stark images, or people or dilemmas, and where the relationship between tellers and listeners is an active one because the listeners do the work.

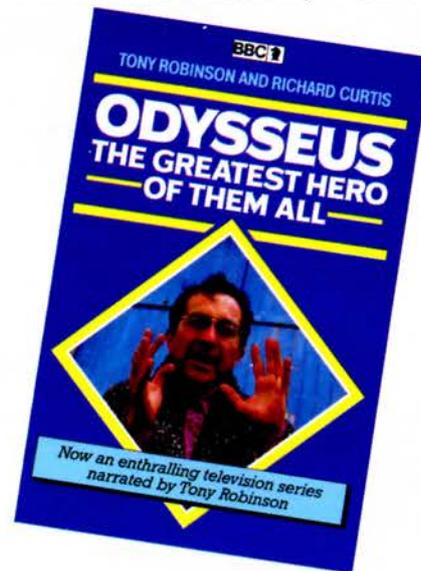
And then I was asked to be part of an OU programme about Bruno Bettelheim. I'd never heard of Bettelheim so I read **The**

**Uses of Enchantment.** There I was with all these nags and concerns and ideas about acting and the theatre, about the problems of speaking as a cultural worker in this country with its disparate cultures and enormous contradictions, the problem of speaking to anybody outside small coterie – and suddenly I came across this person who was saying what I'd been nudging towards for years. Bettelheim gave me the confidence that what I'd been thinking and feeling about storytelling, about myth and folklore was useful. Storytelling done properly is a unifying activity; done properly on television it could speak to a huge audience and by implication say something important about the medium.

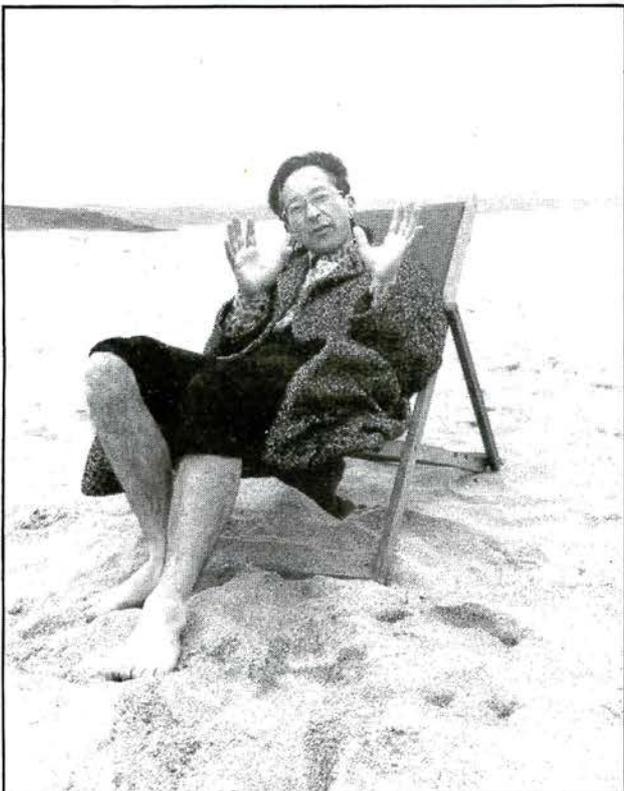
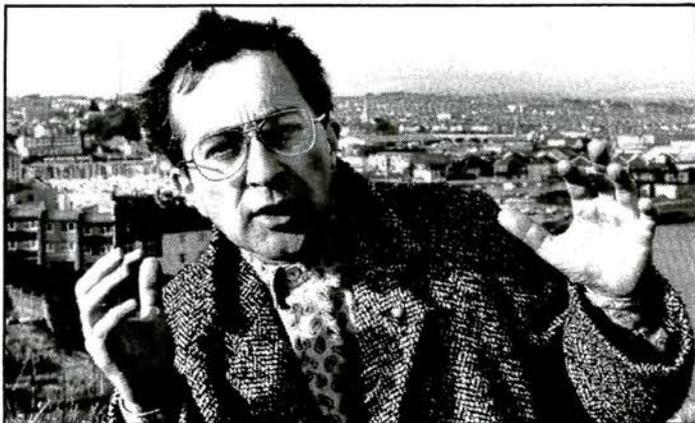
I found myself expounding my ideas about television storytelling to Angela Beeching, executive producer of **Jackanory**. She called my bluff and commissioned me. I chose the story of Theseus. I feel confident with the Greeks. When I was doing the Oresteia I would come home at the weekend and my daughter who was then 3½ would ask me what I'd been doing and I would tell her the story of the Oresteia. There is nothing in that story she could have experience of! But she was hooked. Since then I've seen classical stories have the same effect on all sorts of kids. The potency of the stories is phenomenal; if they are told right they stick. They also seem to me to have something in common with children's favourite TV programmes like **The A Team**, **The Dukes of Hazzard** and **The Young Ones**. The characters in these stories are huge, of mythic proportions; **The A Team** are like Greek heroes, children revel in their sheer size. I've deliberately tried to get the same idea in **Tales from Fat Tulip's Garden** by building characters that are of mythic size. In my storytelling I'm not interested in realism. Serious television for children is frequently seen in terms of a graphic description of our society as it is – the other stuff is labelled escapism. That I believe is a false distinction. These stories make a link between the 'real world' and the internalised lives of listeners of all ages, if in my telling I can make them a bit more accessible, democratising the references, finding contemporary resonances to illuminate things which were different 'then' but are related to 'now', then maybe there is a chance to open up the whole thing to more people.

The way I tell the stories and the way we make the films is central to trying to achieve that. When my director, David Bell, looked at my first improvised tape for **Theseus** and read the 'script' he said 'We've got to do it on location.' We only had finance to do it in the studio so he phoned Angela Beeching and told her what we wanted to do. She was terrific: she gave him a really bad time for the first two-thirds of the phone call but he dug his heels in and explained why and eventually she agreed. Making the programmes on location wasn't just a matter of taste. It seems to have been an imperative that came out of the way the stories were told and what they were. Working in the studio you get an evenness of light, an evenness of acoustic and a lot of tension; it is about making product. On location you are working to a tight schedule but it is a different kind of tension, more a kind of concentration of everybody in the crew; and there is the possibility of unplanned things happening which adds an extra something: that seems absolutely right for storytelling.

After **Theseus** Edward Barnes, Head of Children's TV at the BBC, asked me what I would like to do next. Ever since I was twelve Odysseus has been a hero for me so it wasn't a difficult choice. This time of course there was no question – we would do it on location. I had grand ideas about stopping off at different places in England and Wales but that was going to be too expensive. David did a brilliant low cost job, finding three different bases for three different weeks where each location was never more than three or four miles away. We filmed out of Plymouth



in Devon, Mevagissey and Newquay in Cornwall. Finding the locations for each story or each part of the story takes ages. I give David a series of images of the kind of environment that I had imagined and he starts looking, coming up with ideas of his own. Then we look together, live the stories for about four days in different environments and see what works. For Troy we used the Citadel in Plymouth, our idea of luxury and decadence for Calypso's Island was one deckchair on the beach. The choice of locations and what I wear help me get that feeling of tension between modern reference points and epic.



Photographs courtesy of BBC TV.

Somehow we couldn't get a strong image of that sort for Circe's Island. Last March we were looking all over Cornwall and we couldn't agree on anywhere. We were staying in one of those faded seaside hotels in Newquay; we'd been thrown out of the restaurant for not wearing ties and gone back in borrowed ones. The restaurant was full of little pink serviettes in glasses; we were the only people there, and there was acres of space. I said, 'Wouldn't it be funny if we did Circe's Island here . . .' and we both shouted in agreement. It was exactly right, our visions had come together.

There is of course the question of the script. If the stories were to work I had to be genuinely *telling* them. I would like to be able to say that it was more improvised to camera than it was. With thirteen 15-minute stories, and filming bits of episode 7 followed by two minutes of episode 10 in the same place on the same day, we couldn't leave it so loose. There came a time when I semi-improvised a script into a tape recorder so that we could time the sections in advance. Once that was fixed I couldn't suddenly go off on a whim in mid-story adding exciting visual detail or whatever. Where the improvised quality does come in is in the physicality of the telling. I know roughly how each sentence is going to start and finish; what I don't know when I'm starting the

telling is how I'm going to move around. My choreographed relationship with the hand-held camera means the story comes out differently each time, the flavour of different takes can vary enormously. We are especially lucky in our cameraman. I wanted someone who would 'find' the story and capture it rather than put it in a proscenium arch. Frank Shepard who started with us on *Theseus* cottoned on to the whole idea in 30 minutes. He loves the stories, he listens and because of his involvement the camera moves in and focusses with his experience of the story.

Before I could improvise a script there was a lot of research. Richard Curtis and I had to decide which story of *Odysseus* to tell. I'd never really researched anything before so I just read and read; it was a real pleasure. When I started I had some romantic notion of finding a translation in a dusty secondhand bookshop which would be the best version ever. In the end I must have read about twenty versions and decided the Penguin E V Rieu was as good as any. As well as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* we've used the play *Philoctetes*, and the *Oresteia*, Robert Graves, *The Anger of Achilles*, and the *Little Iliad* – about ten different sources in all. I don't think I've made anything up but I've run some characters together and sometimes I've made an explicit contemporary reference. Some scholars may get cross about that but for me that is what storytellers do and my retelling is part of a long cultural tradition.

This *Odysseus* reflects its origins in that most of the stories are about men and public affairs. One of the storylines I wanted to tell was the story of Helen, Clytemnestra and Penelope, all of whom are profoundly intelligent, and actors rather than receivers. But that had to be pared away for the direction of the story and the limitation of having only 13 episodes. I care passionately about having stories which present a whole variety of possible activities for people of both sexes; I want to deromanticise war. But there has to be a time when I become a storyteller; the demands of the story to be told are stronger than my desire to be didactic. I've tried not to draw conclusions about the characters. I've tried not to think about the moral imperative of *Odysseus*'s actions and rather leave it to the listeners to decide for themselves. I like this wily little guy who gets out of situations by using guile rather than being macho – you may not.

My collaborator Richard Curtis was the perfect person for me to work with, especially in converting the tellings into a book. Richard got a first in classics at Oxford and has written a lot of *Not the Nine O'Clock News* and *Black Adder*. I've written programme notes, speeches, leaflets but I had no idea about writing as an expression of anything other than the immediate task. Richard shares with me a passion for the classic stories and a vision that they can be told for now. With the book we spent a long time trying to find a mode of address which would do in text what we'd been trying to do with television. In places the stories in the book have a different flavour – they are slightly more reflective, lingering on a particular aspect of a scene. They tend to point up the contradictions between the epic and the mundane more. As a storyteller I can say, 'There was this massive giant,' and add gesture and movement; on the page that is not good writing. It was Richard who cracked the majority of the problems. I'm used to the technology, the politics, the economics of TV. I know how I feel about it, what is possible and what isn't. I'm not in the same situation yet with books though I am pleased that I am being asked to write more.

What of the future? One of the characteristics of the Mycenaean stories is that they are a reinterpretation of a reinterpretation at a great distance. An artefact that is continuously reworked and repolished approaches universality. It might be worth exploring the opposite of that, something with a specific quality in relation to what is going on here and now – you could pursue the Robin Hood story or King Arthur for its Englishness. As an actor I can only get excited about things I find dangerous. That's probably terribly childish and not necessarily something to be applauded but I have the feeling that if I am excited about what I am doing there is a chance it will come across to some of my audience. After years of being an actor in other people's control – however much I might enjoy expressing myself via a great writer's language in a production with other actors, with lighting, with a set – TV storytelling is an enormous liberation. There's just me, and a few rabbits and a story to tell. ■

**Odysseus: the greatest hero of them all** starts on BBC1 on Thursday 13th November. The book, published by BBC, 0 563 20497 4, £6.95 hbk; BBC/Knight, 0 340 39679 2, £1.75 pbk, tells the first half of the story up to the end of the Trojan War. A second series of *Fat Tulip* tales, *Fat Tulip Too*, has been made and will be shown on ITV. *Tales from Fat Tulip's Garden* are published by Hippo. Tony Robinson can also be seen as Baldrick in a new series of *Black Adder*.

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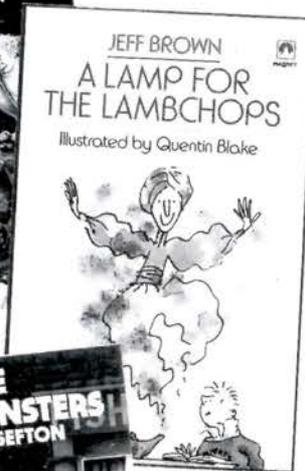
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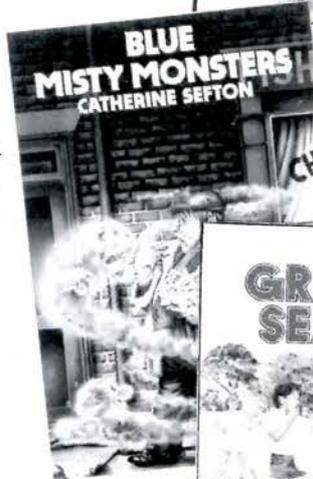


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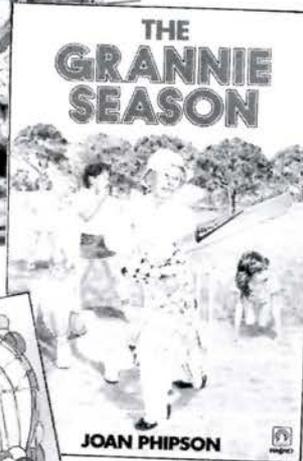


## Shepherd's Flock

ELIZABETH GOWANS

The five Blair children love wandering the hills around their homes for it is there that they come across quite unexpected excitements like the Witch of Ballin Brae, the mad cow and the mysterious Jack Tattie Bogle ...

£1.75 Age: 8+



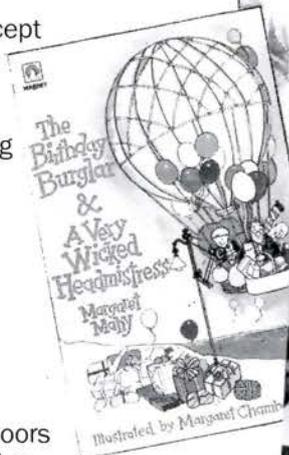
## The Birthday Burglar and a Very Wicked Headmistress

MARGARET MAHY

Bassington was the most fortunate boy in the world, except for one thing — he didn't have birthdays! So he set out to acquire other people's!

Two hilarious and side-splitting stories from a prize-winning author.

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## The Grannie Season

JOAN PHIPSON

Timothy's grannie isn't like everyone else's!

She isn't soft and gentle, with snow-white hair — but it isn't till Timothy's cricket match that she shows everyone just how different — and special — she is ...

£1.50 Age: 7+



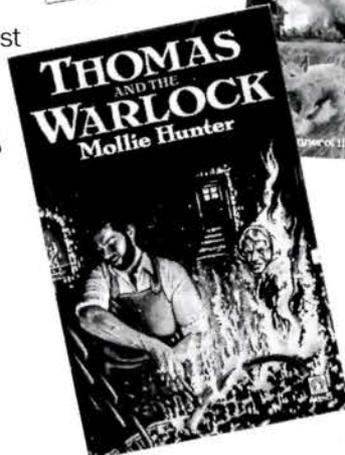
## Thomas and the Warlock

MOLLIE HUNTER

Lurking amongst the misty moors of Scotland was Hugo Gifford, a dreadful warlock — who, strangest of all, cast no shadow.

Thomas had banished all the other witches and wizards — but how could he get rid of this one? An enthralling fantasy by a well-loved writer.

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Young Ned, the lad who endlessly turns the spit in front of the great kitchen fire, works for the tyrannical master of Winterpicks Manor. But with the arrival of Mr. Ransom, the handsome young tutor, Ned's world begins to expand and before long dramatic events are set to change all their lives.

£1.75 Age: 10+



# MAGNET

# Can the Box Match the Book?

Chris Powling talks to Vivien Alcock about the TV adaptation of her novel, *The Cuckoo Sister*, and to Paul Stone, the man behind it.

The television version of a book is 'never completely as one expects,' says Vivien Alcock. She should know – two of her novels, *The Haunting of Cassie Palmer* and *Travellers By Night*, have already been turned into series for the small screen. Now comes *The Cuckoo Sister* due for transmission in four episodes this Autumn. Currently, parts 1 and 2 are at the stage of fine-editing with 3 and 4 still as a rough-cut so as yet she can only guess at the degree of unexpectedness in store for her. 'It's bound to be different, though,' she says cheerfully, 'because they're such different media.'

Also, she admits, of all her novels *The Cuckoo Sister* is perhaps the least obvious candidate for dramatisation. The book's title refers to a street-wise teenager who is dumped, quite literally, on a Hampstead doorstep. Is she, or is she not, the elder sister kidnapped before Kate, her first-person narrator, was born? From this follow clashes of personality, culture and generation but with Vivien Alcock focusing squarely on Kate 'with whom I very much identified as a sort of variant of the prodigal son's brother . . . I was interested in the way she interpreted and coped with this experience.' *The Cuckoo Sister*, in fact, is a deft psychological thriller – the reader is carried along not by what happens but by Kate's feelings about what happens.

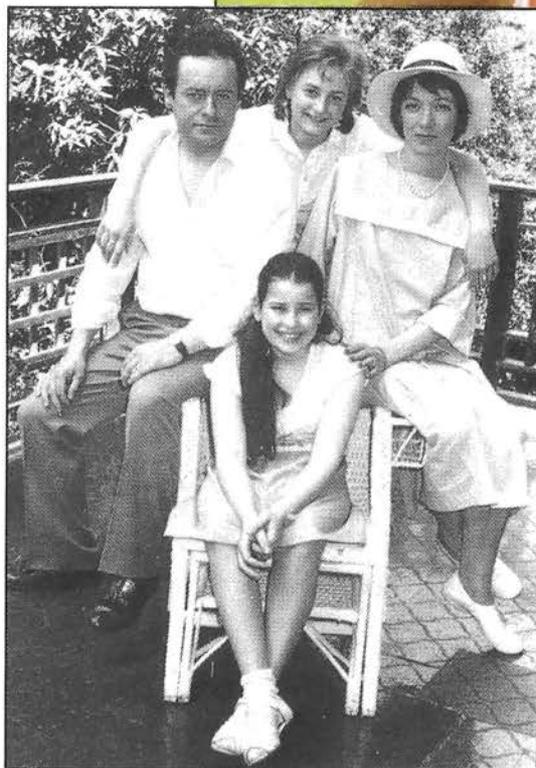
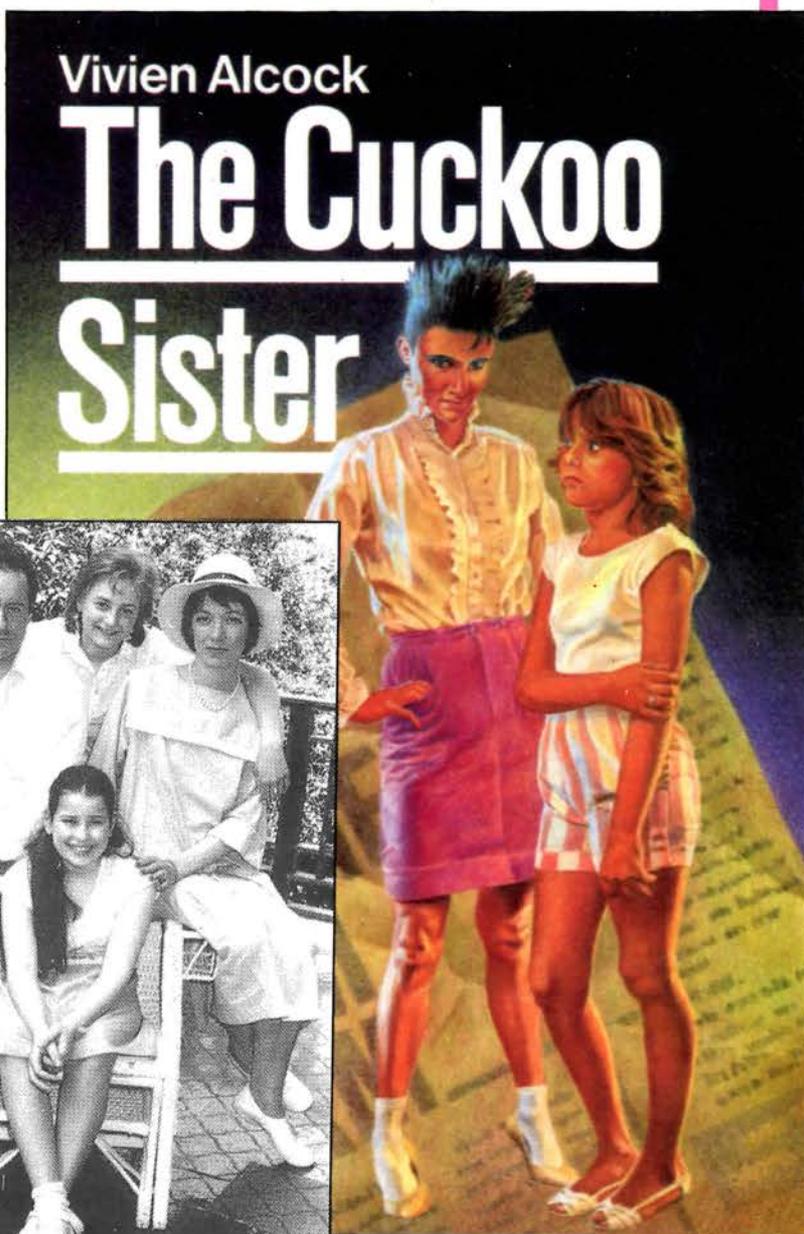
All of which, on the face of it, bodes ill for a television version. As Vivien Alcock herself is well aware 'a book is obviously much more internal. The novelist can say exactly what her characters are thinking. Television has to show it by the actor's expression. Also television scenes are much shorter – a novel can sustain much longer scenes.' How, then, can she be so blithe about this project?

Her answer, of course, is to refer to the team making the transfer. What author wouldn't be thrilled with an adaptation directed by Maralyn Fox and produced by Paul Stone? Who could possibly do it better? Especially reassuring was Julia Jones's script which Vivien Alcock 'was very pleased with – particularly the notion of using voice-over for Kate's reflections which very much follow the prose of the book. Actually, two aspects of the book seem to me to gain from television: the collision of cultures between the two girls and the cuckoo sister's affection for her supposed mother.' Her only serious objection was to the suggestion that the series be extended to six episodes in order to make the cuckoo sister's mother more prominent. 'I didn't want this. I wanted her to remain a shadowy figure off-stage.' The objection was sustained.

Paul Stone's own response to the book seems to confirm Vivien Alcock's confidence. 'This is not an action-plot,' he says. 'It's a drama of ideas and emotions seen through the changing relationship

The cover of *The Cuckoo Sister*, Methuen, 0 416 52210 6, £7.50.

Left to right: Michael N. Harbour as Anthony Seton, Shelley Measures as Rosie Martin, Victoria Fairbrother as Margaret Seton. Front: Joanna Joseph as Kate Seton. Photo courtesy of BBC TV.



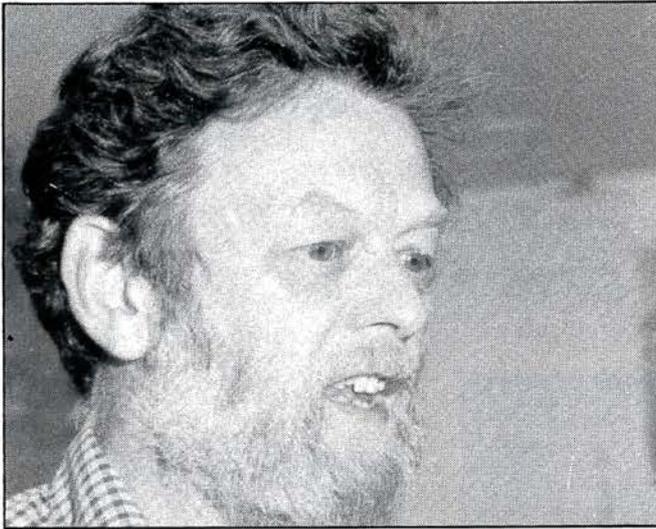
between a child who's totally streetwise and a child who's totally protected.' It was this 'marvellously subtle relationship' which attracted him to the book in the first place. 'The initial problem was how to get behind what Kate was thinking. We decided to use the device of voice-over so that we ended up, in a sense, with a triple-layered presentation of her – from the dialogue, from the voice-over and from the close-ups of her face.' Of course, there had to be changes. 'Our words tend to be slightly less literary, more naturalistic than Vivien's and sometimes, though we retained the book's basic format of a flashback, we altered the tenses in order to stress the immediacy, to make Kate's viewpoint more here-and-now.' Nevertheless, his main concern was to be true to what he calls the 'mental progression' of the book. This was even more vital than getting the setting right which involved taking over an actual house in Hampstead and shooting scenes in East London, and at

the zoo, which were as close as possible to those depicted in the novel. A genuine respect for his source is what's made Paul Stone our foremost adapter of children's books. 'Children's Drama has grown out of children's novels,' he points out. 'The quality of television drama for children has been squarely based on the quality of writers of children's books – who, in my view, are every bit as good as adult writers.'

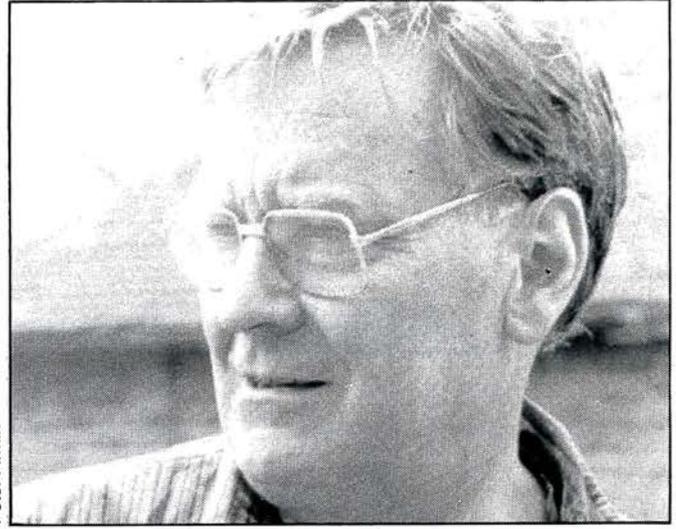
Few readers of *Books for Keeps* will disagree with that. So, in the case of *The Cuckoo Sister*, can the box match the book? Paul Stone concedes 'it's a bit of a risk.' But one person who's already convinced the risk is worth taking is Vivien Alcock and she's not just thinking of her sales figures. 'A book should arouse the reader's imagination more,' she says, 'but television can be a more complete experience. I'm looking forward to the series very much.' ■

# Firmin and Postgate present . . .

Two new BBC TV series for children worth looking out for this autumn are **Pinny's House** and **Tottie and the Big Wish**



Peter Firmin



Oliver Postgate

Both are made by a talented partnership which has been producing material for children's television for nearly thirty years. Since 1958 when Peter Firmin and Oliver Postgate first worked together – Oliver was looking for a 'hard-up artist' to do the drawings for his Alexander Mouse stories which were animated live to camera using magnets, levers and string – they have created a steady stream of characters and stories: Ivor the Engine, Noggin the Nog, The Pogles, The Clangers, Bagpuss.

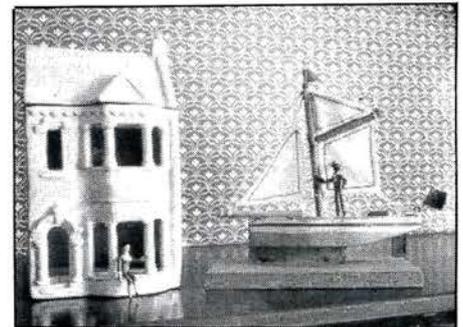
Last year Oliver adapted and animated Rumer Godden's *The Dolls' House* for television as *Tottie and the Dolls' House*. Peter designed and made the set and the puppets. *Tottie and the Big Wish* is a sequel to this very successful series.

Many of their television originals have become books with Oliver as the author. But, also last year, Peter's stories about Pinny, an inch-high wooden doll, were published by Deutsch. On the evidence of the first three books Cynthia Felgate commissioned thirteen five-minute Pinny films and Oliver was called in as animator and director.

The films are made in studios near Canterbury; but this is a far cry from Hollywood or Pinewood. The 'studios' are the barns and outbuildings of the Firmin family's eighteenth century farmhouse. The huge barn where the Clangers moonscapes were created is now used mainly by the swallows who return every year; but in one corner is this glass-fronted cabinet holding a collection from past productions.



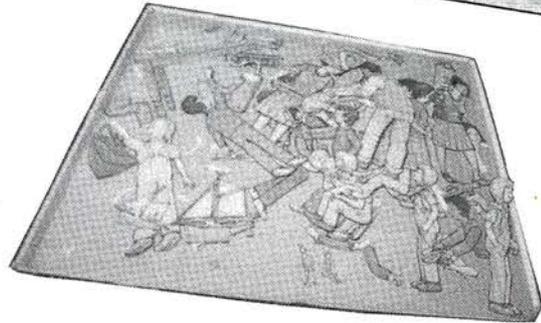
The *Tottie* and *Pinny* films are made in this converted pigsty. Inside at one end is Oliver's home-made animation table. It also houses the 'editing suite' and the permanent set for *Tottie*. Oliver's camerawork is often accompanied by the braying of Mary Ann the donkey who lives in the adjoining field.



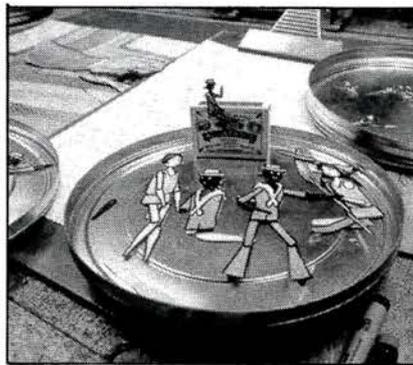
The *Pinny* stories are themselves a kind of spin-off from the first *Tottie* series. *Tottie*, made by Peter, is a three-and-a-half-inch-high Dutch Doll. A viewer asked Peter if he could mend her wooden Dutch Doll which was only one inch tall with jointed knees and elbows. He did the repair and also made a copy, carved from holly wood, to add to his collection of old and new toys. For this tiny doll he made a china house, and then carved a wooden sailor to be her friend. Pinny and her house and Victor and his boat sit on the Firmin's mantelpiece. One day Victor fell off and got lost in the carpet. He was found eventually in the vacuum cleaner bag and Peter started thinking how exciting and dangerous life could be for an inch-high doll. He started telling stories about Pinny and Victor to his four-year-old granddaughter Olivia, and these eventually became books and now films.



# Firmin and Postgate present . . . Pinny's House



The **Pinny's House** films are made by the stop-frame method of animation using paper cut-out figures and objects moving on a background of line and colour wash. The first step is to turn Peter's story into a script and storyboard. This one is for **Pinny by the Sea**. Oliver and Peter discuss together what backgrounds they will need, which parts of the story will be in close-up etc. Peter will use the storyboard to create the characters and settings; for Oliver it is a shooting script.



Hundreds of drawings of figures and bits of people and things are needed. They accumulate in trays and drawers.



To get perspective each character has to be made in six sizes – that's six sizes for each view. All the limbs are jointed with blu-Tack so that Oliver can animate them.



A sense of scale is naturally important. This is Mum's hand sweeping up the sweet papers which Pinny and Victor dress up in for **Pinny's Party**.

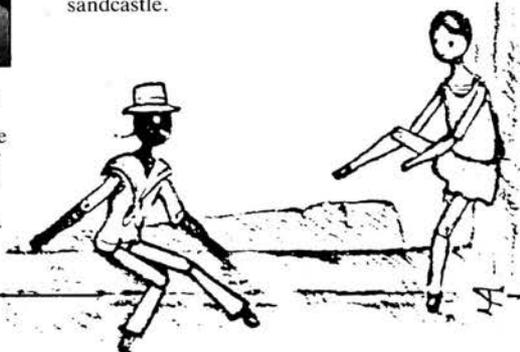
Peter works in his own studio – another outbuilding. Here he's been working on four backgrounds for **Pinny by the Sea** and is looking at one of a set of toy soldiers he bought in Moscow; they became the originals for the ones in the story which Tom puts on his sand castle. Real things and happenings are often the beginnings of stories.



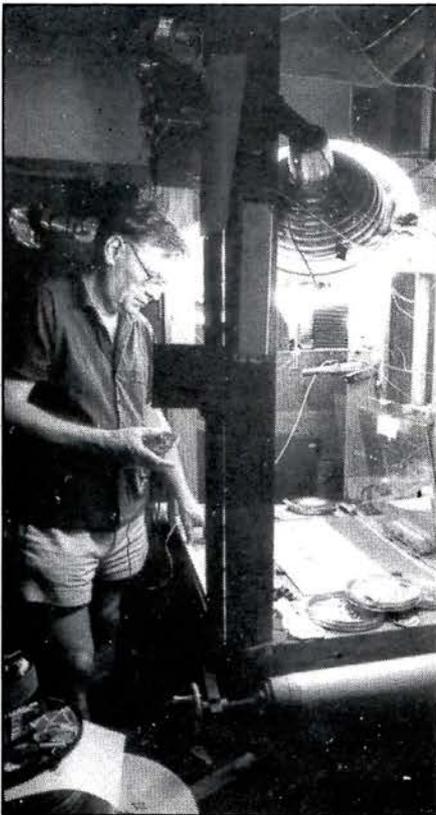
Here Peter is painting a head for Jo to match the backgrounds and experimenting to see how it will move. A close-up arm is ready for filming Tom putting his new soldiers on the sandcastle.



Three of the thirteen films are based on the already published **Pinny** books. (More books are planned based on the films.) Here Peter shows how the original illustration for the books is adapted for animation: Peg the Pedlar doll remains; Victor is removed so that his climb to Peg's tray can be animated.



Lots of hands are needed to show Mum releasing the butterfly which arouses Pinny's longing for bright colours . . . and lots of butterflies.

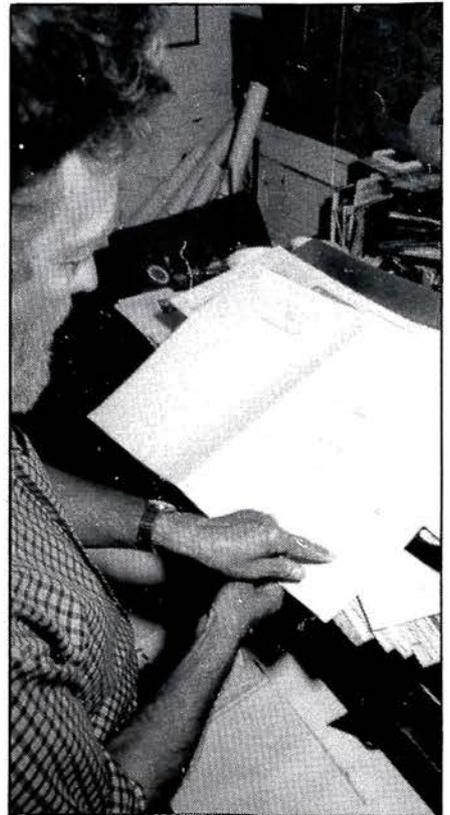


All this artwork ends up with Oliver in the pigsty. Oliver taught himself stop-frame animation by making the first **Ivor the Engine** films on a home-made animation table, and his current equipment is in the same Heath-Robinson-bits-of-meccano style.

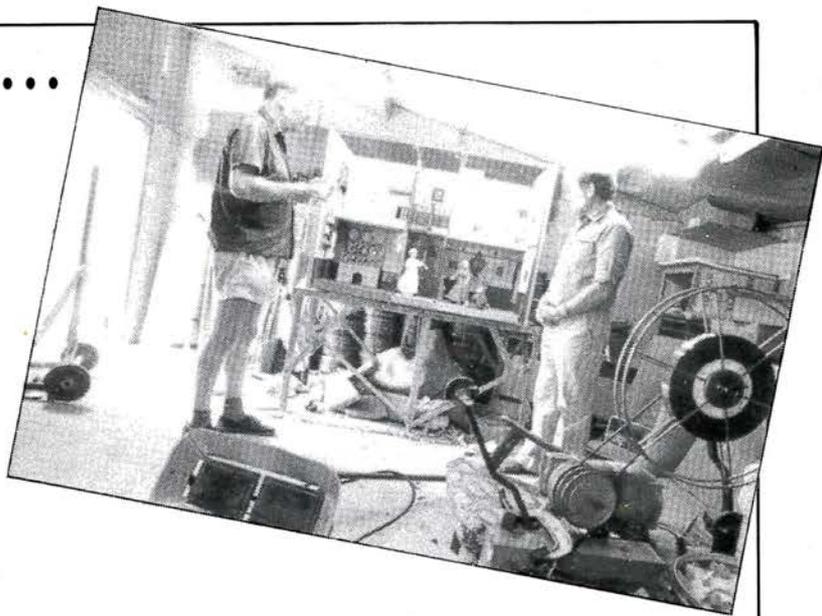
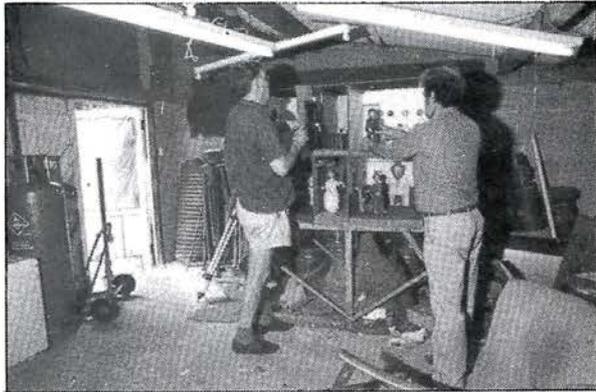
Working from the shooting script he decides on the action, arranges the scene and shoots the action frame by frame with the overhead camera, moving the characters in between. The camera is controlled by a remote switch and Oliver keeps careful count of the frames he has shot. A five-minute film uses 6,000 frames; on a good day Oliver will shoot 60 feet of film, 2,400 frames.

From the storyboard Peter is able to anticipate most of what Oliver will need. ('Oliver takes what I give him and makes it better,' he says.) But sometimes extra pictures are needed. The collaboration is so close after so many projects that with only a few scribbles made while talking Peter knows what is needed. Here he is looking at his brief for the extra artwork needed for a scene in which the intrepid Pinny rescues Victor in a paper aeroplane.

When the film has been shot Oliver edits it in the studio and then mixes the tape for the soundtrack at his own cottage a few fields away. The **Pinny** stories are read by Matilda Thorpe and the background music is by a Welsh folk group, Ar Log. Peter heard them on the radio and traced them to south Wales where they recorded the music and the musical 'sound effects'. (Oliver says 'We need three seconds of squiggles and curly wurlies,' and they get it just right.) The traditional air chosen for the signature tune is, they discovered later, happily named; it's called **A Neat Little House**.



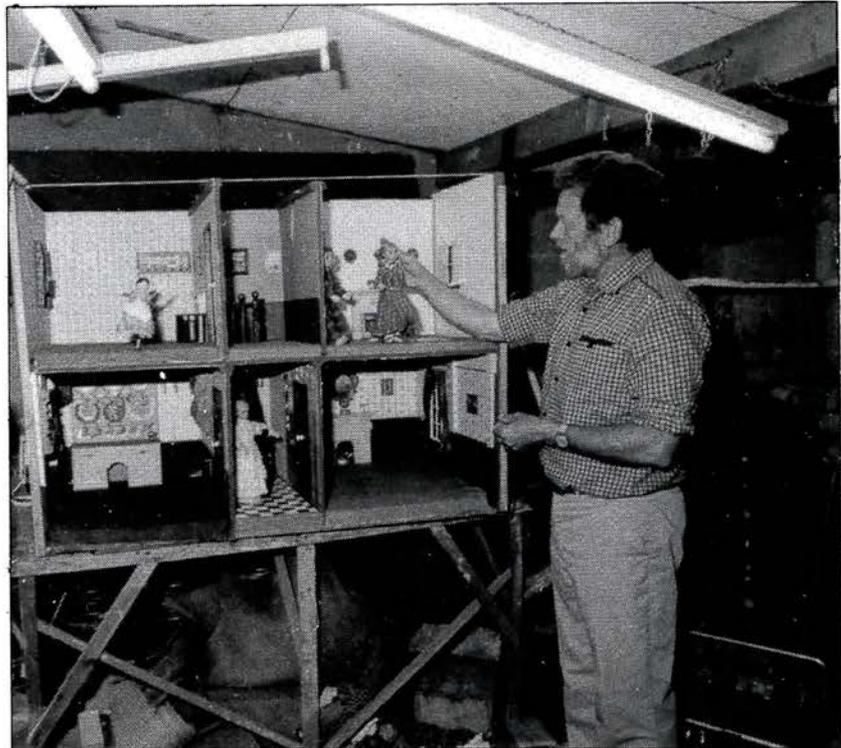
# Firmin and Postgate present . . . Tottie



**Tottie and the Big Wish** is animated using puppets made by Peter. This new story, scripted jointly by Oliver Postgate and Rumer Godden, was inspired by an American reader's response to the original book. In the character of a journalist (Melinda) this enthusiastic fan wrote to Rumer Godden and the Plantagenet family and involved herself in the story. For this sequel to the television version a lively American lady (renamed Melissa) is a new addition to the dolls house 'family' – of particular interest to the newly widowed Mr Plantagenet!



The set, made by Peter, has removable walls to make it possible to film. Here Oliver and Peter are putting it together.



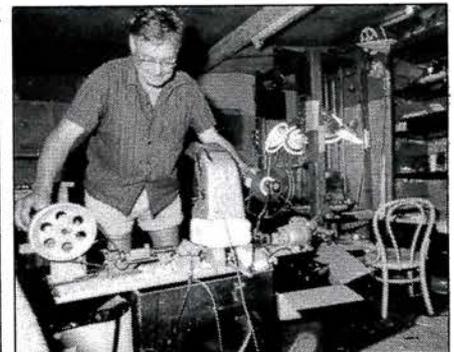
Peter sets up Melissa, the new puppet.



The set is complete in every detail.

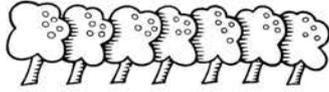


Oliver sets up the camera stand used for filming the **Tottie** stories. Like his animation table it is home-made with ingeniously designed attachments.



The 'editing suite' – also self assembled and unsophisticated – is located in the centre of the studio. Oliver edits the film here; as with the **Pinny** films the soundtrack is added later.

<p><b>Tottie and the Big Wish</b> Starts in late September and will be shown on Wednesdays for five weeks.</p>	<p><b>Pinny's House</b> Starts on Wednesday, October 22nd. One five minute episode will be shown each week for thirteen weeks. These times are subject to changes in scheduling.</p>
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A brilliant new pop-up book from this great bestselling artist. A little monster jumps out from every page and a twist at the end adds a counting element.

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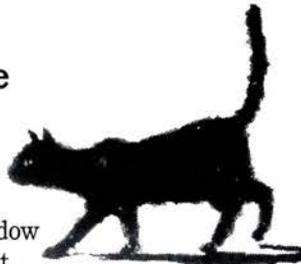


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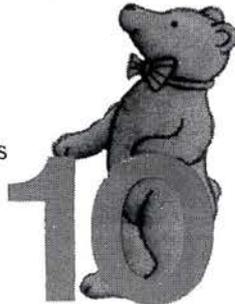


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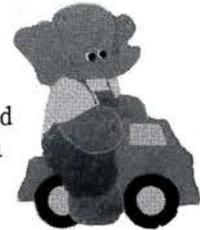


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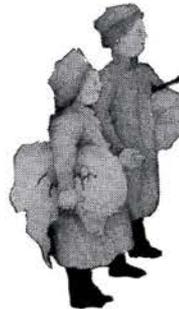
## Watch the Stars Come Out

RIKI LEVINSON

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A picture book of great distinction which tells the story of a little girl who emigrates to New York in the early part of this century. The tender simplicity of the text makes this a book for all ages and all times.

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## Authorgraph No. 40

*Lois Duncan*

**'I was a very unattractive little girl. I was fat; I had buck teeth and glasses. Writing was the one thing I was good at.'** It's difficult to square this self-portrait with the slight form and lively intelligent face of the present-day Lois Duncan. Difficult too to accept the implication that the child who at ten was submitting typed manuscripts to *The Ladies Home Journal* was driven to it as a last resort. No. Fate may have given her a useful if painful nudge from time to time but Lois Duncan is a born writer who from the first has worked hard at her craft. The six teenage novels available in this country are only a small part of her American published work since she sold her first story at thirteen in 1947.

From newspaper and magazine articles and stories, romance and crime novels for adults, verse and photography she now concentrates mainly on novels for young adults. For these she has won critical acclaim in the shape of prestigious literary prizes and, a rare and welcome combination, the popular vote in Young Reader awards. In 1980 *Killing Mr Griffin* was the first of her novels to be published in Britain; two of the six are currently in paperback and there is now a well-established and steadily growing audience for the Duncan combination of strong and unusual plots with popular themes and good page-turning writing.

Lois Duncan grew up by the sea in Sarasota, Florida, with her parents and younger brother. Her parents were magazine photographers who worked from home. 'To be creative was "normal",' she recalls, so the dreamy, bookworm daughter who made a hobby of collecting rejection slips from publishers was not considered an oddity. When the braces came off her teeth and the puppy fat dissolved and she decided she rather liked being a girl she, of course, didn't stop writing. After that first success at thirteen, her work appeared regularly in magazines for young people like *Seventeen*, *Senior Prom* and *American Girl*.

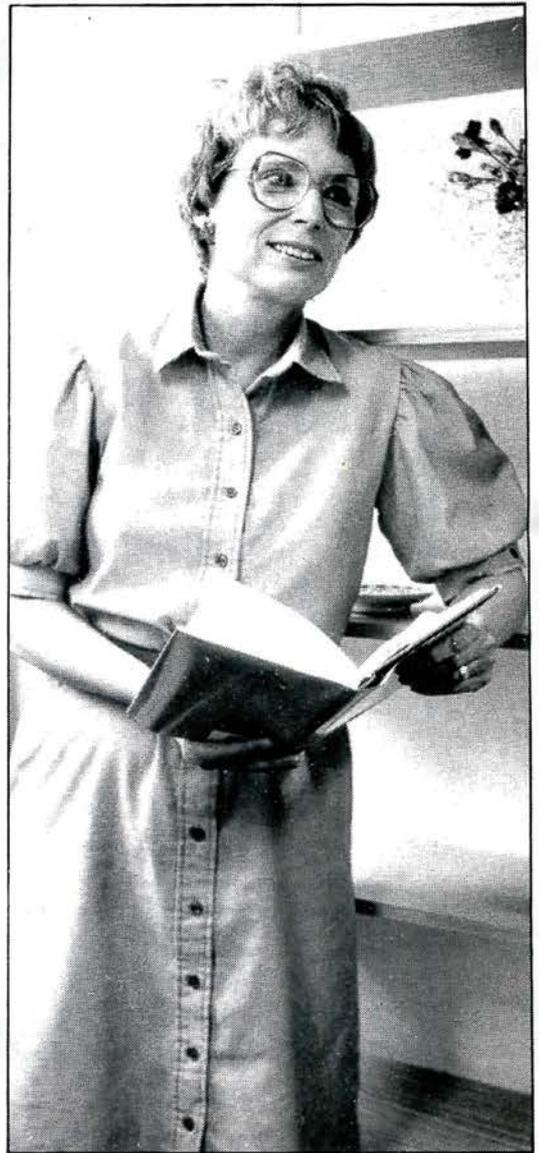
'It was really all I ever wanted to do. I was not a wonderful writer. I was writing for people just like myself in a way they could understand about things they were familiar with.' It was an audience which she has now made her

own again, although much writing and experience has significantly intervened.

At the end of her first year in college she won *Seventeen's* annual short story contest. It carried a prize of 500 dollars. On the strength of this – and not entirely happy with student life – she got married. 'What I should have done with the money,' she says wryly, 'was buy a car. It would have lasted a lot longer.' Eight years later she was divorced with three children. 'I had four books published but they were not really very good. Quite simply I wasn't earning enough to live on so I wrote – for newspapers, magazines, advertising copy, anything. I forced myself to write every day. I learned if you keep hacking away at it day after day, you're bound to make some progress.' For this new life as a single parent and full-time writer Lois Duncan took her family to Albuquerque in New Mexico, a place she had once visited with her parents on a photographic assignment. She lives there still, very happily, with Don, whom she married in 1965, and their two children. Her three older children, whom Don adopted, are now embarked on careers of their own.

Returning to writing for young adults after her second marriage she discovered that everything had changed. 'When I first started writing I had a story returned as not acceptable because I had a nineteen-year-old boy drinking beer. Now there is a whole world of material to draw upon. It's exciting and challenging.' Lois Duncan's novels show young people facing evil in many different forms. 'I like to take a totally realistic background, create realistic characters and then inject something – an act of violence, the supernatural, one very disturbed personality that can throw everything over.' For *Killing Mr Griffin* the catalyst is Mark, a very charismatic boy. 'I drew on the character of my oldest daughter's first boyfriend for Mark. He was so charming but, we discovered, almost psychotic. I had my character. I knew he had to influence a group of young people. I knew I would have boys and girls – four, a manageable number. I had to figure the type of young person who would be led by such a boy, get their background so that it would be logical that they would be weak enough to be led. Then I had to decide what he would do.'

The idea of a high school student plot to terrify a hated English teacher also had its roots in reality. 'Mr Griffin was drawn from a woman drama teacher at my children's school. Everyone hated her; she was so strict, everything had to be perfect. It was only very much later



Photos by Richard Mewton.

her pupils realised how much she had meant to them. There are lots of teachers like that.' From the basis of realism Lois Duncan deals with interesting questions which arise when the plot goes tragically wrong and Mr Griffin dies while held captive. How will the characters cope? Have they murdered him? Should they confess?

*Stranger with My Face* has identical twins, separated at birth, one evil and using astral projections to try to take over the body and the life of the other.

In *The Eyes of Karen Connors* the central character learns to recognise and use her psychic powers. The starting points again were a mix of experience and research.

'Along with other freshman students in my first year at college I was a guinea pig in some experiments into ESP. I was very surprised at the results – not for myself but for others. Some young people have amazing abilities. It's almost like magic. Then, a few years ago, we had a series of murders in Atlanta, Georgia. Many black children had disappeared and the police were using people with psychic powers to try to trace them. That's where *Karen Connors* began.



**Stranger with My Face** meant a lot of research into astral projection particularly among the Navajo Indians of New Mexico. 'I didn't believe it until I started reading the laboratory tests, and since the book has been published I've had a lot of letters from children describing similar experiences. They almost all describe exactly the same sensations, some of which are not in the book.'

Those two books which 'could be true' Lois Duncan separates from **Summer of Fear** (which features witchcraft) and her latest **Locked in Time** (in which a mother and two children remain the same age for generations). 'Those are pure fantasies. I don't believe in the occult - it's like the wicked witch of Oz.'

Fantasies or 'could be true', all Lois Duncan's books have very specific settings and characters. 'I write about upper middle-class America. The few books I've tried to place outside this have not been good. It's hard to get into another culture. It's also hard to set a book in a place you haven't lived. I use New Mexico a lot. As I was writing **Stranger with My Face** which I set in New England I realised that I didn't know what happened there in winter. I had to phone a cousin every month to find out what was happening in Nantucket!'

Middle-class America and New Mexico are as exotic and strange to many of Lois Duncan's readers in the States as

they are to her readers here. What overcomes this strangeness particularly for the inexperienced reader is her ability to create very strong and specific visual images; a skill which she reveals may be derived from an unusual deficiency. 'I have almost no visual memory. I cannot remember what things or people look like. I began to realise that written descriptions would reinforce my visual memory, I wrote word pictures of things I wanted to remember in my diary. Once the words were on paper the picture was mine.'

Another quality which recommends the books particularly to female readers ('I write mostly from the girl's point of view. It's harder to get into the brain of a boy, though **Mr Griffin** and **Summer of Fear** have double viewpoints which means they are used more in schools') is the inclusion, alongside more weighty themes, of the 'Sweet Dreams' staples of American High School life: the Homecoming Dance, the Senior Prom, Graduation and boy-girl relationships. 'To leave them out would be unrealistic. The characters I write about are concerned with their social life; but they grow and change and mature because of what happens to them.'

Lois Duncan welcomes the new freedoms offered in publishing for young adults and admires authors like Robert Cormier and Judy Blume who are, she says, 'writing at the edge'. But she recognises responsibilities. 'I try

always to have an underlying base of morality. **Killing Mr Griffin** is about the dangers of peer group pressure, about how easy it is to be sucked in by a charismatic leader and led a little step at a time until suddenly you are over the line and you can't go back. Everyone can relate to having to deal with the results of following the leader. Taking personal responsibility comes hard for young people.'

But writers have no control over who reads their books. Lois Duncan's readers are getting younger and she has an interesting reaction to this. 'My characters are always High School seniors - eighteen or nineteen-year-olds - because I know young people like to read about those just a little older than themselves. My readers used to be fourteen and fifteen - now they are as likely to be eleven or twelve and I have had letters from nine-year-olds. I'm horrified. I don't think they should be reading these books. Children are growing up too fast - perhaps it's something to do with so much sophisticated television - I feel they are missing a stage of life I enjoyed very much.'

Lois Duncan has an acute sense of the stages of life. Her ability to get inside her characters and make them real owes as much to her recall of living an experience as to her reading of psychology (she's done a lot of that) and her observation of current teenage language and life-style.

She is a professional writer and proud of it. Writing gave her independence, though she had to fight for its recognition as a proper full-time job for a woman. In Albuquerque she went back to college and graduated; for eleven years she taught a course in writing at the University of New Mexico. Now, when she signs a contract for three new books with her publisher she can write what she likes. 'A dreadful freedom. I love it.'

She has just sent off her latest manuscript, **The Twisted Window** - 'the plot is full of twists too.' What about the next book? 'I look around. It's my job.' ■

### The Books

(published in hardback by Hamish Hamilton)

**Locked in Time**, 0 241 11769 0, £6.50

**The Eyes of Karen Connors**, 0 241 11438 1, £5.95; Pan Horizons, 0 330 29248 X, £1.95 pbk

**Stranger with My Face**, 0 241 10193 2, £6.25; Pan Horizons, 0 330 29255 2, £1.75 pbk

**I Know What You Did Last Summer**, 0 241 10723 7, £6.95

**Summer of Fear**, 0 241 10544 7, £6.95

**Killing Mr Griffin**, 0 241 10457 2, £6.95

**Horses of Dreamland**, 0 241 11784 4, £5.95 (picture book in verse for younger children)

# Perfecting the Message

In 1983 the Bodley Head publicity calendar had for illustration a lively picture story showing how a book is made. It was informative, colourful and witty; it also contained instructions for cutting and folding which, if followed, turned the illustration into a miniature book. Such thoroughness in pursuing an idea to its logical conclusion is characteristic of the artist who designed and drew the calendar: it was **Aliki**.

In October **How a Book is Made**, much expanded from the calendar, is published in book form.

**Pat Triggs** talks to **Aliki** about her approach to information books for children.

Aliki is an American artist who has lived in London since 1977. She has a string of delightful picture books to her name and has illustrated stories by her husband, Franz Brandenburg; but in particular she has a unique and distinctive way with information. It is a style which has been developing steadily since her first information books were published in the USA in the sixties.

Returning from Europe to the States, Aliki and her Swiss husband, Franz, settled in New York. She took her art school training into advertising and found she hated everything about it. Looking for a way out she took her portfolio around the publishing houses. The book business was booming and before long she was being offered the chance to produce a book about Dinosaurs. She said, 'I don't know anything about Dinosaurs.' He said, 'Great.'

Looking back to that incident and that book Aliki says, 'Now I know what he meant. I have a friend who knows everything about birds. His books are not successful because he knows too much; he doesn't know what his readers don't know.'

So Aliki started to find out about dinosaurs and the resulting book, **My Visit to the Dinosaurs**, has about it the freshness of a child's first encounter with those compelling, awe-inspiring fossils. How many facts to include, how to present them, what to do about specialised language: these are all problems facing the creators of information books. What goes into an Aliki book is determined by her remarkable ability to see and feel like a child. No matter how exhaustive the research, and it is frequently as extensive and detailed as it would be for an adult book, when the book is being planned, written and drawn Aliki is writing for herself, but with a part of herself which can still conjure up the perspectives, the preoccupations, the responses of childhood. So that first dinosaur book acknowledges that huge dinosaur skeletons can be frightening, that eating and survival and having 1,600 teeth are interesting. Here also are the first of the little jokes and asides that now regularly punctuate the illustrations in an Aliki book, lightening the tone and offering additional information: in the museum beside a notice requesting 'Quiet', children shout and jump with excitement.

In addition to that carried by the pictures and the main text, information Aliki-style comes in speech bubbles, supplementary hand-lettered text, labels, notices. She knows that children are put off by large, dense blocks of words; spreading the commentary on the pictures among different sources makes it possible to simplify or amplify, to smooth out complications, engage interest, point up details. The readers can take as much or as little as they feel able to handle. 'Books are so expensive,' Aliki says, 'you should be able to go back to them again and again and find new things in them.'

That's a criterion her books certainly meet. In the early days her response to a request for a second dinosaur book was, 'Beside their names what is there?' Now it's more a case of when to stop. She is a dedicated researcher. On a visit to London (the one that convinced them to stay) the whole Brandenburg family, but especially children Jason and Alexa, got very excited about the Egyptian mummies in the British Museum. 'I was going to do a book just about unwrapping them - then I found there was so much more.' The 'so much more'



Aliki, courtesy of the Bodley Head.

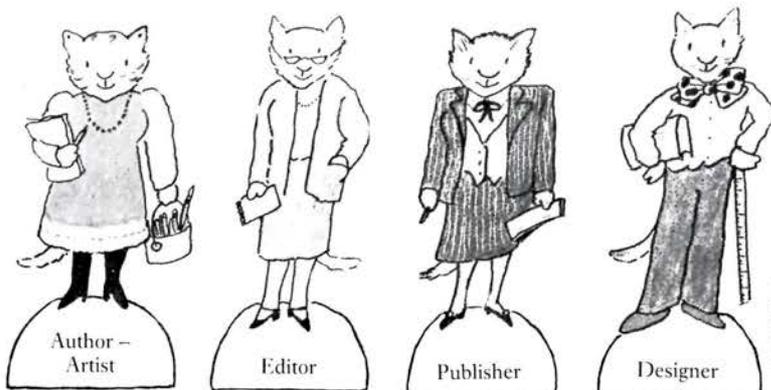
which found its way into **Mummies Made in Egypt** includes information about Egyptian history and religion as well as highly detailed accounts of embalming, tomb building, funeral ceremonies etc. The illustrations are all in the Egyptian style, many adapted from paintings and sculptures found during the research. For this meticulous attention to detail Aliki blames one of her American editors, Barbara Fenton. 'She's the kind of person who goes inside of you and takes out so much more than you think you have. She adds so many facets to whatever I thought I could do. The more questions she asks the more I discover. Now we try to outdo each other with how much more we can get into and out of a book.'

**A Medieval Feast** was commissioned in New York and suggested because of Aliki's love of cooking and baking. 'That book was a direct result of our move here. I wanted to do a book about England and English history. I visited churches, castles, houses with my sketch book. I read and read and read - there was so much I didn't know about flowers, plants, what people grew and ate in the Middle Ages. I'm passionate about gardening too so that was another pleasure.'

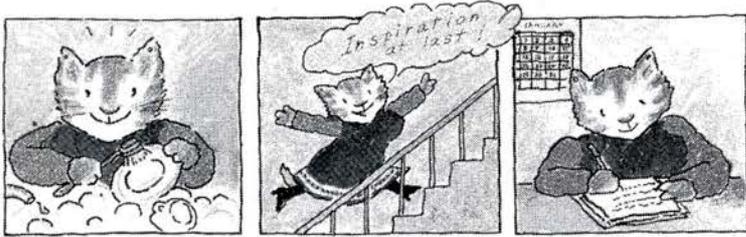
The problem of how to present all this for children was solved with the idea of someone coming to visit. 'A neighbour told me about royal visits and how expensive they were for the hosts.' There was the shape of the story and the cue for the less than delighted expressions on the faces of the lord and lady of Camdenton Manor as they receive news that the king and his court are intending to stay for a few nights. 'Everything in that book comes from a specific source except for the kitchen. I couldn't find a picture of a kitchen. I nearly put a cat in, although I had never seen one in a medieval manuscript. I'm glad I didn't; I've since discovered that cats were bad luck and they were never put into pictures.'

With **How a Book is Made** Aliki must have won the competition for 'getting things in' hands down. There is everything in it from the author getting the idea to the book in the library and bookshop and eventually in the reader's hands. There is technical information about computerised typesetting and the four-colour process, the off-set printing press and book binding, about selling, marketing and publicity. Yet it remains a book that can be enjoyed by children of all ages - younger children can skip the complex bits.

'Who made this book? We all did'. Some of the cast of **HABIM**, including an editor who bears a startling resemblance to Margaret Clark of Bodley Head.



A book starts with an idea.



The AUTHOR thinks of a story.  
She writes it down.



It is harder than she expected.  
Sometimes she can't find the right words.



She has to look things up.

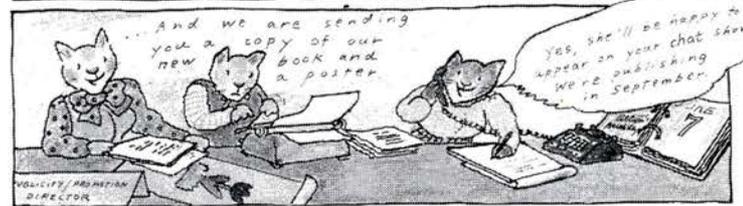
**Aliki in her studio: 'I love the family; but I love to be alone working on a book.'**

'I did most of the research for the calendar and being in books myself I knew some of it very well. But' (familiar caveat) 'I needed to go into some things in greater depth.' The printing process for example. 'I had to understand it completely. I don't have that kind of mind. I used to draw very superficially until Jason was born. He never sat on a see-saw; he was always underneath it finding out how it worked. I've learned so much from him. For this I had to understand exactly how the paper went through, why the paint didn't smudge. Lots of people helped me.'

**How a Book is Made** has a cast of cats. 'I thought it would make it less serious. It could have become very dreary; I thought the cats would allow me to give it more humour, more lightness.' It also meant not having to draw her editor - though everyone in the book is modelled on a real person and sometimes the resemblance is strong, 'even though I didn't intend it to be.'

Almost the first thing Aliki did for **How a Book is Made** was to write the book **The Sunny Day** which is described 'being made'. That's typical of a thoroughness that won't sell children short. If the books are successful it is because so much care and thought has gone into them, often years of thinking and mulling over. 'It takes a long time for a book to come out; the yeast has to rise, you can't force it. When I start I still don't know what will happen until the pen hits the paper. If it's the right time the manuscript comes quickly and I go on to making the dummy, that's the most creative and exciting part. After that it's just a question of perfecting the message.' And perfecting... and perfecting...

**Aliki recalls. 'They asked me to appear at the Sales Conference to announce HABIM. I was so afraid - the table seemed much bigger than the one in the picture.'**



Librarians buy copies for their libraries and schools.



**'My editors insisted that I put my books and Franz's Aunt Nina's Visit in this picture.'**



**The Books**

- My Visit to the Dinosaurs, A & C Black, 0 7136 1148 0, £2.50
- Fossils Tell of Long Ago, A & C Black, 0 7136 1360 2, £2.50
- Digging Up Dinosaurs, Bodley Head, 0 370 30441 1, £4.50
- Mummies Made in Egypt, Bodley Head, 0 370 30322 9, £4.95
- A Medieval Feast, Bodley Head, 0 370 30979 0, £5.95
- How a Book is Made, Bodley Head, 0 370 31003 9, £6.95



Colour Separator



Printer



Publicity and Promotion Director



Salesperson

# Stories for Special Teenagers

**Thelma Davey** is the teacher librarian in a special school. Recently she conducted a survey of staff and pupils about the kind of books they believed were important to them and needed in the school library. Her teacher colleagues voted for more non-fiction; the children wanted more fiction.

With her own class of fifteen 13-14 year olds Thelma decided to embark on a simple investigation of the value of fiction for older children with special needs. From a special school library service loan of picture books and story books which were added to the library the children, with Thelma, chose four or five books each week. By majority vote one of these would be read aloud. The children in Thelma's class have difficulties which are physical, mental or emotional, sometimes all three. They are unable to articulate clearly their problems and needs. For many the task of learning to read is an enormous hurdle to be overcome.

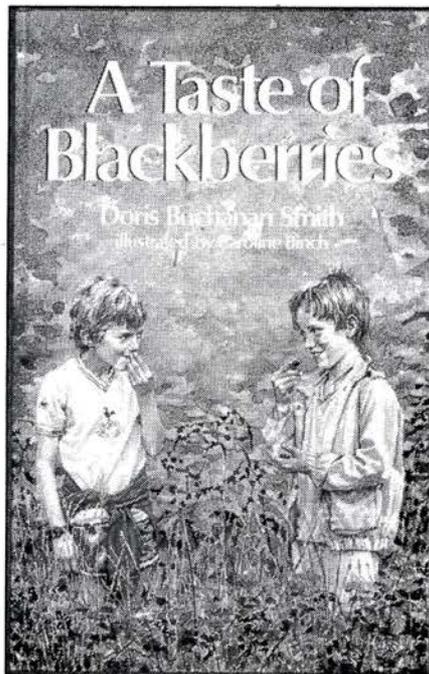
This is Thelma's account of what happened.

I was in the library dealing with the books on special loan which had just arrived; a group of eight children from my class were helping. Despite what is sometimes said about poor readers not being interested in books, this group were obviously enjoying sorting and helping to categorise the new books.

We were chatting and I casually mentioned my idea of choosing a book a week to read to them. I was promptly handed **A Taste of Blackberries** by Doris Buchanan Smith (Heinemann, 0 434 93015 6, £6.95) and told 'This is a nice one, read this one to us.' I did not know the book and asked, 'Why that one?' They said it had a nice picture on the front. Playing for time I said we'd probably be able to read it later; but after break the book was thrust at me again and I was pressed to read it. Clearly the credibility of my project was in danger so, cursing myself for casual remarks, I decided there was nothing for it but to break all the rules and start reading a book I had no knowledge of.

It soon became clear that the book was nothing like its title implied or like the attractive front cover. It was on a theme not usually discussed - death - and what is more the death of a child. I pointed out that this was going to be a sad story and perhaps they would like another. But it was clear their interest had been captured; I was told, 'Go on, it's good.'

The bell rang at the end of the afternoon and a chorus of children cried out, 'Go on, don't stop.'



Next morning the first three children to come to class asked in quick succession, 'You going to finish that story, Miss?'

Later that afternoon the story was read to its conclusion and it was met with silence. I remarked, 'There, I told you it was going to be very sad,' but Shiree replied, 'I like to read that myself - can I read that?' meaning -

'Is my reading ability good enough for me to read the book on my own?' She took the book home to read that night.

The book is written in the first person throughout, it tells of the accidental death of Jamie who, unknown to everyone, was allergic to bees and dies suddenly as a result of bee stings. The story tells us of Jamie's best friend's reaction to all that happened. It is a difficult subject but is dealt with with a sensitivity and perception which the listeners appeared to appreciate. It made it easier for me to emphasise that the death of a young person, particularly a child, is unusual and happens on occasions as a result of an accident or serious illness. We discussed the various aspects of death and they told me of grans and grandpas who had died. One child made the remark that she particularly liked the part of the story when the friend described 'the happy times they had shared together'. Alan, the first of the three to arrive that morning, remained silent but had listened intently. He is still suffering from the loss of his father two years ago.

This was not a topic I would have chosen to read so early in the term to the class and with so little preparation. Later that week another member of the group lost his father tragically in a road accident. The shared experience of the story made it easier to talk to the class and to ask them to show extra care and understanding towards their class-mate in the days ahead.

The book has since been read by several of the children. Some of the children are labelled educationally sub-normal but in reality they have an awareness and an experience of life which is far beyond their years and mentality and they had displayed this during the discussion.

During the first week proper of the 'experiment' the shortlist we chose together was:

**Dogger**, Shirley Hughes, Bodley Head, 0 370 30006 8, £5.50; Fontana Picture Lions, 0 00 661464 7, £1.50 pbk

**My New Mum and Me**, Betty Wright, Basil Blackwell, 0 86256 008 X, £4.95

**I Can't Always Hear You**, Betty Wright, Basil Blackwell, 0 86256 009 8, £4.95

**Green-eyed Ghost Cat**, Michael Grater, Piccadilly Press, 0 946826 60 9, £4.50

By a majority vote the class chose **I Can't Always Hear You** for reading aloud. They named children at school they know as being partially deaf and wearing hearing aids. The book has lots of illustrations. It is American in origin. Kim, the central character, is Chinese; the teacher is Black and it is a multi-racial class. The print is not over-large (120 words per page) and I felt the level was about right for most of the class.

Before beginning the story we began by putting our fingers in our ears and imagining what it was like to be deaf. We then removed them and listened to the sounds around us. The windows were open and we could hear the shouts from the football field, a younger child calling from the sandpit and Margaret talked about the rustling of the trees around the school.

The story tells us of Kim and the problems she encounters in an ordinary school; previously she had attended a school for the deaf. Kim wears a hearing aid but despite this she makes blunders and is made to feel foolish because she misunderstands instructions. Despite being a good runner, excellent at drawing and the best in Maths, she becomes unhappy and feels conspicuous because of her handicap. She asks to see the head-teacher as she wishes to leave the school. During the interview the head reveals her hearing aid, at which point Madhur in class remarked aloud, 'O my God, the teacher she got one too.' The group had listened intently and were obviously sad when the story came to its understanding conclusion. I was surprised at the eager responses to my questions. We talked about children we know at our own school who wear hearing aids, of parents and friends with this handicap. I told them of my visit to a deaf school and how its quiet atmosphere was so unlike the hurly-burly of our own school. Then of my own father who was profoundly deaf. One talked of his mum who could not hear properly.

I then asked them if, like Kim in the story, they ever felt they were different in some ways from others. Their quick replies were both revealing and enlightening. Susan felt different because she attended a Special School and several agreed this was so. Alan said he was different because he had no Dad and John, whose father had died earlier that week, said quietly, 'I got no Dad now.' Another child pointed out that John visited the toilet frequently - his problem of incontinence is something he is trying hard to overcome. Matthew told us he did not live with his family but with foster parents. Evelyn said she lived with an aunt and very bluntly that her Mum did not want her. Christopher said he could not spell. Madhur, a very lively hyperactive and colourful 13-year-old, said 'I chat too much!' Jane hated wearing her glasses. Michael on one of his rare days at school said, 'I hate school'. I then told them how I had always been teased about being short and how I

wanted to be tall and fair; the lesson came to an end amidst some laughter. The discussion continued at different times for many days.

The next week **Little Dog Lost** by Nina Warner Hooke (Puffin, 0 14 03.1738 4, £1.25) was chosen in front of:

**The Magic Finger**, Roald Dahl, Young Puffin, 0 14 03.0704 4, £1.25

**The October Animal**, Denise Hill, Hamish Hamilton Gazelle, 0 241 11252 4, £2.50

**How Mole Nearly Won a Lottery**, Kurt Bracharz, Macmillan, 0 333 33984 3, £1.95

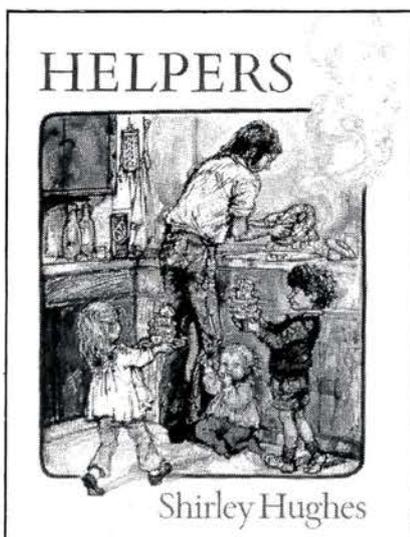
It's a lengthy story but the appealing front cover picture of a little black and white mongrel puppy influenced its choice. I was also told, 'You will like it too'. (Every Friday afternoon we have clubs - I usually run the pets' club - hence the remark.)

Pepito is a bright-eyed, cheerful little dog, with ears too big for his head and a funny short tail. He lives in an old soap-powder box amidst the hubbub of a Spanish fruit market - until the rubbish collectors come to clean up the square. He is eventually dumped at the bottom of a disused quarry, miles outside the town and, abandoned and alone, his adventures begin. His search for a loving home has a happy ending.

The story was read at intervals over the next two weeks (with some editing by me) and it held their interest despite its length. The book was kept on the mantelpiece in the classroom and handed to me at every opportunity.

Normally our children recognise only their immediate surroundings but as this story was set in Spain it was an opportunity to find this place on a map; one child had recently been on holiday to Spain. Most of the children appear to have had a pet of some kind.

They were able to write their own stories entitled 'My Pet' and we discussed the meaning of the 'hard' words and phrases - quarantine, alibi, smuggled, deputation to the Major, etc. They were also encouraged to find other animal stories in the library to read themselves.



Our next choice involved two books from the following shortlist:

**A Thousand Yards at Sea**, Adele Geras, Hodder & Stoughton, o/p

**The Children Next Door**, Margery Sharp, Heinemann, 0 434 95878 6, o/p

**Helpers**, Shirley Hughes, Bodley Head, 0 370 10756 X, £5.50

**Grasshopper and Butterfly**, Helen Piers, Viking Kestrel, o/p

**Arthur's Funny Birthday**, Sophie Davis, Hodder & Stoughton, o/p

The vote for **The Children Next Door** was almost unanimous but one small voice insisted on **Helpers**. Christopher is the least able child within the group. The children are encouraged to help him in most tasks whenever possible and although some of them declared very loudly that the book was 'too easy', when I continued to hold it up alongside the next popular choice, they finally agreed to it being read first. The book was quick and easy to read and I believe more of them enjoyed it than would admit to it. They agreed the illustrations were amusing and some joined in by reading aloud the single sentence or caption.

The group were then eager to begin **The Children Next Door** and it was obvious that they were attracted to the front page with its high-rise dwellings and the three pencilled drawings of two teenagers and a small lad. Shiree thought the name of the story sounded good and, 'I want know what they like next door - I think that be good.'

I read the preface explaining that the setting took place chiefly in the city of London. We discovered that over half the class had either been born in, lived in or had visited the big city and were therefore familiar with its busy overcrowded streets. Susan commented that 'it's got nice writing inside and you can read it' when asked to give their reasons as to why they had chosen that particular book. Matthew also remarked, 'it's not a baby book, is it?'

The group listened well and were intrigued with the unexpected twist to the plot. The three main characters were lonely, having lived previously in a small friendly village. They were overawed by life in this large, and to them seemingly friendless, capital city. They invented three imaginary friends and the problems this caused obviously amused my listeners. Eventually the story tells us that two teenagers arrive to live in the flat below and they no longer have to lie to the adults about their imaginary friends. The tale has a happy ending when the two families unite and return to live in the village in the country.

The reaction of the group to this story provoked a great deal of discussion about their own neighbourhood and for many of them the lack of friends. Many of the children travel a fair distance to school each day and it appears that their friendships are formed in the coach or at school. In keeping with an all-age-range school, it is not unusual for them to have friends much younger or older than themselves. Few of them have friends near home or among the children attending their local neighbourhood schools. Two of the group live in flats within the city and obviously related to the children in the story.

The group were reluctant at first to discuss the invention of imaginary friends and so I told them of my own child and her imaginary friend and the problems this caused me as a mother. They laughed and then visibly relaxed. Susan, an only child, said quietly, 'I had a rabbit as my friend.' I asked if she meant a real pet rabbit and she replied, 'No, I pretended; he could stand up and he wore a green hat and talked to me. His name was Poppins, is that daft? It was my best friend.'

The group were reassured that many children had 'made up' or pretend friends at some time or other and then both Jane and John admitted to having such companions when they were much younger. Madhur, always very forthright, said 'Susan, why you have a friend like that?' We talked of people wanting a special friend, usually to chat and confide their problems and secrets. The children concluded it had been a good story and one they had all enjoyed.

With Shiree, Madhur and Evelyn in our group, I felt it was time to look at stories of children from other countries, in particular Pakistan, India and Jamaica. The class quickly understood the reason for this request. Their choice for the next week included:

**Sunshine Island Moonshine Baby**, Clare Cherrington, Collins, 0 00 184776 7, £4.95; Fontana Lions, 0 00 672560 0, £1.25 pbk

**Jafta - The Wedding**, Hugh Lewin, Bell & Hyman/Evans, 0 237 45546 3, £3.50; Dinosaur, 0 85122 398 2, 95p pbk

**Feelings**, Richard Allington & Kathleen Krull, Basil Blackwell, o/p

**Tariq Learns to Swim**, Hassina Khan, Bodley Head, 0 370 30530 2, £5.25

We decided to read **Tariq Learns to Swim** first. Shiree with her poor reading ability and limited English vocabulary was delighted by the short text and authentic illustrations of this book and Margaret remarked that Shiree 'liked a book for herself'.

## Tariq Learns to Swim

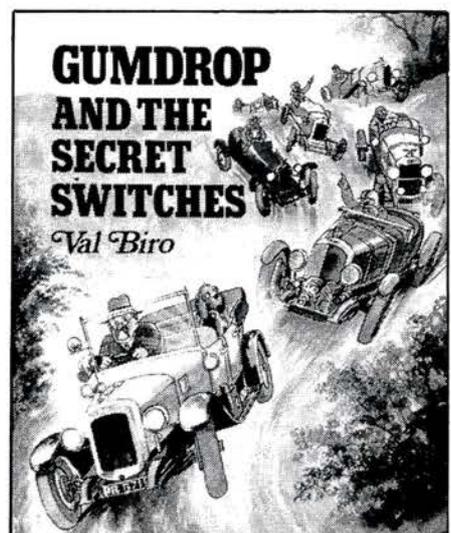
Hassina Khan

Illustrated by Bal Athalye



Evelyn, an able reader, preferred to read **Sunshine Island Moonshine Baby** on her own but was prepared to talk later of the members of her family still living in Jamaica.

Having pleased me by choosing a 'multi-cultural book', the children then proceeded to please themselves. The popular choice was **Gumdrop and the Secret Switches** by Val Biro (Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 26276 1, £4.50). They enjoyed the adventures of this old car (some said it was like the car in the film **Chitty Chitty Bang Bang**); they loved the humour and the colourful cartoon-like illustrations. The style is simple with clearly-drawn characters. The children's verdict: 'a funny book'. I then had to read thirteen other titles in the series.



The choice of books for the last week shows clearly the wide ability range within the group:

Janet and Allan Ahlberg,  
Heinemann, 0 434 92500 4, £4.95; Fontana  
Picture Lions, 0 00 661486 8, £1.50 pbk

**Bertie and the Big Red Ball**, Beryl Cook and  
Edward Lucie-Smith, John Murray,  
0 7195 3976 5, £5.95

**A Friend Can Help**, John Berger, Macdonald  
Raintree, o/p

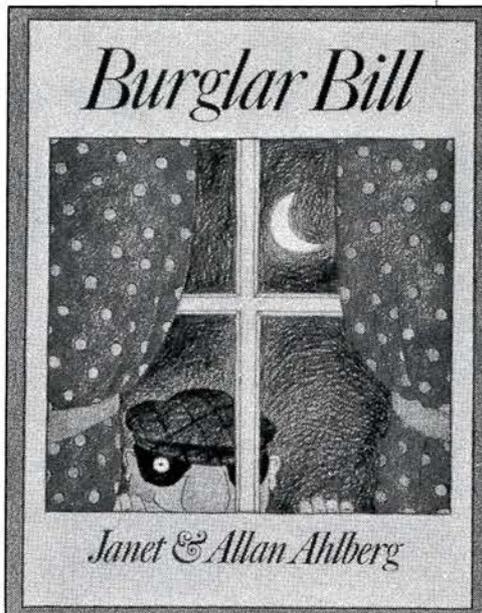
**The Steel Band**, Wendy Green, Hamish  
Hamilton Antelope, 0 241 10777 6, £3.25;  
Beaver, 0 600 20723 4, 85p pbk

**A Bit of Give and Take**, Bernard Ashley,  
Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 11301 6, £3.25;  
Corgi, 0 552 52348 8, £1.50 pbk

**Burglar Bill** appealed to us all. I was asked  
to read it again the next day. On both  
occasions the reactions were spontaneous  
delight. The colourful, amusing pictures and  
clear repetitive text had great appeal. The  
theme of good triumphing over evil never  
fails to be popular and satisfying.

What did I learn from the experiment?

On evidence of the response of my class the  
children were right about their need for  
more fiction. The time spent sharing stories  
seemed to release them from the limitations  
of their vocabulary, and from their inability  
to express their feelings and their needs with  
clarity, more effectively than anything else  
we have done together. Picture and  
storybooks promoted conversation and  
animation even among those with the most  
severe speech and vocabulary difficulties.  
The imaginative content, the language, the  
pictures met their needs in this area more  
directly than the curriculum-based  
information books. Perhaps because they  
were involved in the choosing and because  
of the particular atmosphere reading aloud  
and talking about stories creates, they were



less inhibited and were stimulated to use  
their own words. I did the reading aloud but  
from the illustrations – drawings,  
photographs, cartoons – they were able to  
follow the sequence and could re-tell the  
story in their own sentences. Visual literacy  
developed as they made the pictures  
function as language. Some re-read for  
themselves or together.

Many of my class will, we hope, enter the  
world of work in some way. For them  
writing is a difficult and laborious task; for  
their own personal survival they must be as  
confident and as able orally as we can make  
them. Here they were confident about their

relationship with the books and with the fact  
that they had something to say. They also  
listened to each other with interest and  
respect. It was clear too that some of the  
stories touched many of the children deeply  
and that many experienced the particular  
pleasure of being 'lost' in a book –  
something of importance to offer to those  
who after school will find no employment  
and face boredom and frustration.

I am aware that I am not the first to come to  
these conclusions. I read Dorothy Butler's  
account of the part played by books in the  
life of multiply-handicapped Cushla, and felt  
that what she showed must be true for *all*  
children with special educational needs. But  
with the insistent pressures and many  
demands of the teaching day it's easy to go  
on doing what some might consider more  
important or more orthodox things. Without  
the requirement to do something for a  
course I might never have got round to it.  
I'm glad I did. Perhaps we all have to  
'reinvent the wheel' for ourselves before we  
see its potential. If you haven't, I urge you  
to experiment for yourselves. ■

# WALKER BOOKS

## The Children's Book Publisher

### LITTLE DRACULA

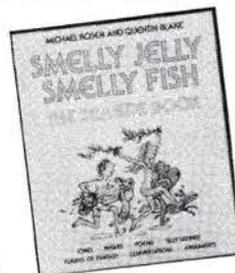
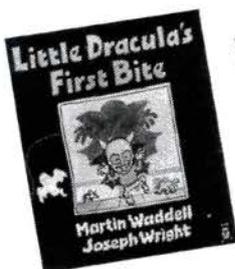
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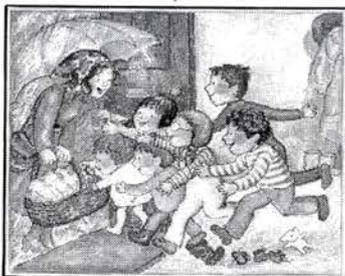
**Walker Books Ltd, 184-192 Drummond Street, London NW1 3HP.**

# REVIEWS

## Nursery/Infant

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

**Aunt Nina's Visit**  
Franz Brandenburg, ill.  
Aliko, Piccolo,  
0 330 29232 3, £1.75



Aunt Nina must surely be every child's idea of the perfect aunt: her timely arrival not only provides the desired audience for the cousin's puppet show, but a basket of kittens too. The latter do create something of a distraction during the performance; in fact they turn out to be real show stoppers, stealing the show in more ways than one; but the children are delighted when at the end they each receive a pet of their own. The illustrations are full of delightful, amusing domestic details, each scene abounding with energy and fun. JB

**Mr Bill and the Runaway Sausages**  
Georgie Adams, ill.  
Margaret Chamberlain,  
Picture Corgi,  
0 552 52310 0, £1.50

When Mrs Bill, sausage maker extraordinaire, falls sick her customers still demand their favourite food but what can Mr Bill do? Then help seems to come in the form of a travelling salesman from whom Mr B. buys enormous quantities of Instant Super Sausage Mix. But before long the whole town is festooned with strings of flying sausages and the chase is on. Finally, the Bills become florists – a far safer occupation – and all is well. For me the strongest feature of the book is Margaret Chamberlain's humorous illustrations each of which is full of movement and colour. JB

**Posy and Sam go on a Picnic**  
Ruth Silcock, ill. Lisa Kopper, Dinosaur,  
0 85122 566 7, £1.50

Posy, Mum and Dad, plus their shaggy mongrel go on a picnic. It's a pity that this has such a dull text; obviously it

has been written for the benefit of beginner readers but surely they deserve better than this present-tense, stilted style. I'd be inclined to suggest ignoring same and telling the tale from Lisa Kopper's splendidly funny pictures each of which is an opportunity for storytelling in itself. Another family picnic in... JB

**Having a Picnic**  
Sarah Garland, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.519 9,  
£1.75



Sarah Garland has got it exactly right. Here we meet the same family whom we saw in *Going Shopping* and *Doing the Washing* preparing for the picnic, trundling off to the park, feeding the ducks and then having some of the more greedy ones stealing their buns; and of course, they return home tired but happy. It's one of those books where one actually feels a part of the story, experiencing the struggle up the hill and the pleasure of the meal, and what's more it's one that learner readers delight in over and over. JB



**Can't Catch Me!**  
John Prater, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.526 1,  
£1.75

This doesn't really live up to the promise of the artist's first book *On Friday Something Funny Happened* which was

outstanding. *Can't Catch Me!* is Jack's cry as he dashes away from the increasing chain of adults who chase after him in his attempts to avoid his bedtime bath – something which becomes an absolute necessity in the end. Somehow the story fails to come to life despite some robust illustrations and the oft-repeated catch phrase. A disappointment. JB

**Teddy Bear Gardener**  
Phoebe and Joan Worthington, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.501 6,  
£1.50

Fans of the previous 'Teddy Bear' stories will doubtless enjoy this one wherein Teddy Bear follows a horticultural career tending both his neighbour's and his own garden, and selling produce from the latter. Somehow I've never fallen for the old-world charm these books seem to have for the very young but I can't help sharing in the delight of one eight-year-old who insists this is his favourite book – it was the first he managed to read right through completely independently. JB

**Hairy Maclary's Bone**  
Lynley Dodd, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.558 X,  
£1.75

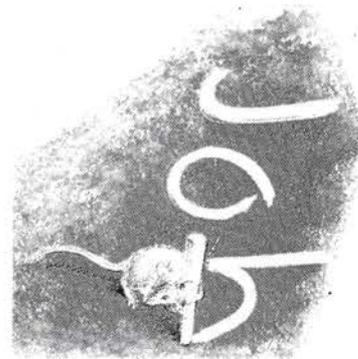
In this, his second adventure, Hairy Maclary successfully loses all the would-be consumers of his tasty titbit as he makes his way home to Donaldson's dairy. Told in rollicking, rhyming text and humorous pictures, this is another splendid 'shaggy dog' story which will delight both very young listeners and those learning to read who adore getting their tongues round such names as Schnitzel von Krumm and Bitzer Maloney. JB

**Sophie and Jack**  
Judy Taylor, ill. Susan Ganter, Picture Corgi,  
0 552 52307 0, £1.50

Just perfect for beginning readers is this enchantingly simple story wherein the hippos picnic and play hide-and-seek. Susan Ganter's summery waterside scenes, especially those of Sophie and Jack ridiculously 'unhidden' in their hiding places, till the final turn anyway, are utterly beguiling. JB

**Sunnyside Up**  
Diane Wilmer, ill. Paul Dowling, Dinosaur,  
0 85122 531 4, £1.50

A rather silly story of Sammy and his father's trip to market and the muddle which ensues when the boxes containing Granny Knox's Stilton cheese and Mrs Smith's wedding hat get mixed up. A weak text with some creaky attempts at rhyming is greatly enlivened by Paul Dowling's comical illustrations but even so this one isn't worth £1.50 of my money. JB



**John the Mouse who Learned to Read**  
Beverley Randall, ill.  
Noela Young, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.474 5,  
£1.75

This may be the story of how a mouse learned to read but I certainly hope it isn't the story of how children learn to read any longer. The story was first written over thirty years ago when Janet and John was the vogue and I feel – at least I hope – that the joke may well be lost on today's learner readers who have not been subjected to the likes of 'Come here, John'. The book is printed in two colours and the illustrations look decidedly dated. I'm not sure why Puffin have chosen to publish this oddity; it didn't raise a smile among those I have shared it with. JB

**Rumplestiltskin**  
Retold by Shirley Greenway, ill. Jane Bottomley, Piccolo,  
0 330 29273 0, £1.50

This is one of my favourite tales from Grimm but it is one where the manner of telling is vital; it needs to be direct and lively. The retelling here is neither; its style is mannered and doesn't flow easily from the tongue when read aloud. Jane Bottomley's illustrative

style is certainly in keeping with the manner of the telling but like the prose it leaves me feeling cold. Not a version I would choose to use or recommend JB

### When Robert Went to Play Group

Anne Rooke, Magnet, 0 416 62870 2, £1.50

Twenty very brief episodes centring on Robert and his activities at Mrs May's play

group. The stories of the everyday situations are told with a quiet humour and the book should be a useful addition to the shelves of anyone who has dealings with preschoolers. JB

### Kitten Can . . .

Bruce Macmillan, Hippo, 0 590 70496 6, £1.75

### Guinea Pigs Don't Read Books

Colleen Stanley Bare, Hippo, 0 590 70528 8, £1.50

**Kitten Can** is a sequence of colour photographs showing the things a tortoiseshell kitten can do: things like 'scratch', 'step', 'sniff', 'hide', 'dig' and so on. This book, a companion volume to **Here a Chick, There a Chick** is designed to help young children broaden their

understanding of the various action verbs used but can also be enjoyed by beginner readers and all cat lovers.

**Guinea Pigs Don't Read Books** is the arresting title of another book of colour photographs, this time of a favourite domestic pet which we are shown can come in many shapes and colours. An unusual way of introducing young readers to the habits of this small mammal. JB

## Infant/Junior

### A Book of Pig Tales

Compiled by Rosemary Debnam, ill. David McKee, Beaver, 0 09 943700 7, £1.25

A generous helping of poems and stories ranging from Jacobs' 'Three Little Pigs' to a very snappy modern story by Linda Allen. In between, there are some gems: Lewis Carroll's 'Pig Tale'; Hans Christian Andersen; Alison Uttley (delightful). I enjoyed the extract from **Charlotte's Web** and hope it will lead sevens and eights to the original.

The compiler skilfully balances and contrasts ensuring that this is no rag-bag. Still, there's a nice sense of serendipity to it. McKee's pictures are integral and funny, as always. I'll share this a lot with sixes to nines and encourage them to make their own collections. CM

### King Rollo's Letter and other stories

David McKee, Beaver, 0 09 947610 X, £1.95

Four self-standing stories about the likeable, absent-minded King, popular from the TV versions of his exploits. Given the attraction of the characters (Queen Gwen is my favourite – a super invention in one-upwomanship) and the talent of McKee, it's a pity that this doesn't quite succeed. Is it because the pattern of TV stories is different – quicker, more immediate than storyreading? Do they need the cumulative action and surprise that's missing in this four-square, static format? I'll video one of the TV versions, then get the kids to tell me about the differences as I don't want those who queue in the bookshop for **Not Now, Bernard** to be disappointed. CM

### The Fairy Caravan

Beatrix Potter, Young Puffin, 0 14 03.1823 2, £1.95

### Mrs Tiggy-Winkle and Friends

Dramatized by Rona Laurie, Puffin, 0 14 03.2047 4, £1.75

**The Fairy Caravan**, later stories about a travelling circus of animals who performed only for other animals, never achieved the fame of Potter's earlier work. But they read very well, still, and well-motivated seven-ups will warm to the jig-dancing Paddy Pig, the bagpipe-playing terrier and (my favourite) the Fat Dormouse of Salisbury. The author's preface should be an important part of modern children's reading experience: she never thought to have them published. Read one or two out aloud: they'll then find their readers.

Six short plays have been adapted by Rona Laurie from the earlier classic Potter tales. Among them are **Mrs Tiggy-Winkle's Washing Day** and **The Mystery of the Pie and the Patty-pan**, which works predictably well. There are pace and action here and the preface is humane and helpful to young actors and teacher producers. There's careful advice on staging and props. The directions (French's Acting Edition-style) may be over-zealous but I like the inclusion of the narrator, Miss Potter. Literate plays for juniors are so rare that these are worth looking at when ideas for assemblies or end of term plays get jaded: there's lots of potential for music, too. CM

### A School Bewitched

Naomi Lewis (from a story by E. Nesbit), ill. Errol Le Cain, 0 333 41902 2

### The King's Flower

Mitsumasa Anno, 0 333 41977 4

### Hugh and the Ministry of Holidays

Tony Ross, 0 333 41981 2

### Picturemac, £2.25 each

I group these three together just to applaud the diversity of this pleasing paperback imprint from Macmillan. It's good to see the lack of uniformity both in form (they're all shapes and sizes) and content. They're reasonably sturdy and will cope with the handling and re-reading they'll all get.

Ms Lewis' adaptation is characteristically literate and sensitive, telling the story of a magician who takes over a special girls' school. The text improves on the original in that the adaptor has the advantage of hindsight, and deep knowledge, of the particularly Edwardian blend of arch manners and fairy tale possibility that pervaded Nesbit's stories. It's a rich collaboration of writer and artist, too: Le Cain's pictures are integral when the topsyturvy has to be conveyed by the clever use of perspective. Moreover, codes and maps have to be deciphered if the tale's to be fully enjoyed. One to be introduced to eight-ups as the appeal may not be immediate, but worth the effort.

Anno's tale of the King who wanted everything he had to be bigger than everyone else's is beautifully reproduced. Wide, generous, double-page spreads are essential and I value the keeping of the rich borders from the original hardback. No corners cut. Don't let the readers (fives up?) miss the artist's afterword.

I've longed for Ross's smashing fable about the mouse who made big wishes to reach a wider audience. This paperback, in particularly strong binding, should do that. It's a lovely one for those just beginning to have doubts about Father Christmas, as it's about wishing and wanting – and still believing that you could get what you wanted on certain big days. The episode when Santa decides that it's better to let *parents* fill the stockings is a triumph of tact and artistic insight. Not to be missed. CM

### A Walk in the Park

Picturemac, 0 333 41688 0, £2.25

### Willy the Wimp

Magnet, 0 416 53230 6, £1.75

### Anthony Browne

It is good to have sturdy paperback editions of two of the finest books from one of our more imaginative picture book artists.

**A Walk in the Park** is vintage Browne: funny, quirky, wry and moving. Straight and unproblematic text tells the story of the two families who take a trip with their dogs to the park. The adults don't relate; only the children try to communicate. As well as reading the story, the young look at the surreal pictures, taking time over the diversity. I hope that this edition means that more children and teachers will read it together and talk about it.

The text tells a similarly 'straight' story in **Willy the Wimp**. Again, the untold stories are in the pictures: shady, menacing, yet always humane. I warm to Willy, who tries to obtain machismo but doesn't quite make it. Like all of Browne's work, I believe it



From  
**A School Bewitched.**

Charles picked a flower and gave it to Smudge.



has to be read collaboratively with those much younger than me (here, around eight or nine). They teach us how they turn the pictures they see into stories they read. This one works best when they draw upon their televisual

experiences of storytelling. Why not use these both to have a Browne fortnight in the classroom? All ages. CM

### A Bit of Give and Take

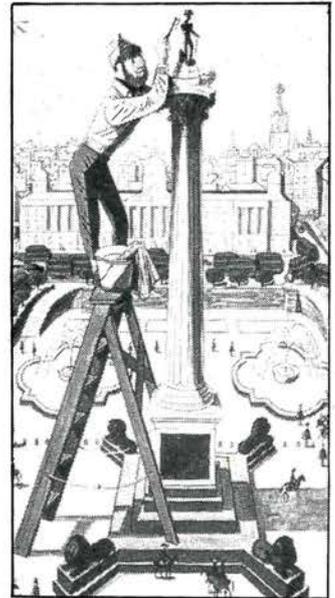
Bernard Ashley, Young Corgi, 0 552 53348 8, £1.50

A short tightly-constructed adventure that deals with feelings as well as action. Bernard Ashley, as usual, has his finger on the pulse of city life, high rise flats and the impulses of the young. Scott, desperate to keep his found kitten, proves to be a likeable and enterprising hero. Large type may help developing readers. Trevor Stubble's line drawings which genuinely complement the text will for sure. PT

### All About the Giant Alexander

Frank Herrmann and George Him, Piccolo, 0 330 29274 9, £1.95

A very welcome paperback edition of the one-volume collection of four illustrated stories of this amiable giant. Not widely available these stories are not as universally known as they should be. The Giant Alexander's adventures are always of the gentlest kind, helping conventionally-sized people in socially useful ways: scrubbing Nelson's Column with his old toothbrush for instance, or rescuing astronauts in distress. George Him's pictures are sadly not here in colour but reasonable quality paper means that the reproduction in black and white is an acceptable alternative for the price. Don't miss this. PT



## Junior/Middle

### Something Special

Emily Rodda, ill. Noela Young, Young Puffin, 0 14 03.2078 4, £1.25



A thought-provoking and eerie tale about the preparations for a school fête. The clothes that are left at Lizzie's house take on a life of their own; two children get caught up in the lives of their owners. Rare in a book for this age group (sevens to nines), the writer has the courage *not* to explain everything.

She catches quite brilliantly the dash, excitement and movement of the preparations. Yet she slows down the action effectively when time needs to stand still (how does she do that?). Sevens will like having this read to them: it takes a skilled reading to catch the rhythms. Older readers will go it alone and be challenged and captivated. This writer's work is acclaimed in Australia, deservedly so. CM

### Rat Saturday

Margaret Nash, ill. Maggie Ling, Young Puffin, 0 14 03.1845 3, £1.50

I mean it as praise when I say that this fairly conventional story of a boy's befriending of an old hermit-like man who has a mutual liking for rats made me wish that the writer would be more ambitious next time.

I think the reason is that beyond content and characterisation she catches the voices of the hero, of his (girl) friend, of his parents and of the bullies in school with precision. Sevens to nines will probably enjoy this well enough, but I'd like them to read a fuller version of the story of the boy who's badgered by his Mum to take care, of the exasperation that the young feel at the stubborn old, of the friendships that grow between boys and girls before things get complicated. I'd trust Ms Nash with all that. CM

### Jim at the Corner

Eleanor Farjeon, ill. Edward Ardizzone, Magnet, 0 416 63710 8, £1.50

The freshness and vigour of these salty tales, told by Jim, the old man who always sits at the corner of the street, makes one marvel at the fact that they're now over fifty years old.

Keen readers of seven up will enjoy them as solo flights, but they're richest when read aloud, with lots of dramatization. Try starting with 'The Star that Watches the Moon' - the one with the lovely poems - to tune listeners and potential readers into a wonderfully musical



storyteller's voice. Ardizzone's pictures are rather marred by some harsh, smudgy reproduction in my copy. But the cover is a classic. CM

### Leaf Magic and Five other favourites

Margaret Mahy, ill. Margaret Chamberlain, Magnet, 0 416 63780 9, £1.50

It's a mark of this writer's genius that even an ill-matched selection of her (previously published) short stories lets the magic shine through. I wish it weren't so patchily put together; a reader's way through could be difficult - without help. The appeal of the best stories here is just to different age groups.

But skilled tellers and sharers will read 'Stepmother', about the risky negotiations that the young and the adult have to do with those assigned to love them, and 'Leaf Magic' a cleverly extended wish, to those they judge ready for them.

'The Rare Spotted Birthday Party' works wonders with what could easily become hackneyed (why should the boy with measles be the odd-one-out at a party). I want all juniors to be in touch with this writer so copies, please, for all junior classes. The sevens to tens need to get to know **The Chewing Gum Rescue** (a much better-integrated and sensitively-balanced collection, also paperbacked by Magnet). CM

### The Inflatable Shop

Willis Hall, ill. Babette Cole, Fontana Lions, 0 00 672436 1, £1.75

Excellent, well worth including in any Junior library or bookshop. Able readers will revel in the plausible adventure and laugh at the antics of the assorted characters, many of whom are very recognisable. (A wicked sense of humour has Mr Hall).

Like many a good tale this has a simple basis: hydrogen gas inflates some rubber toys which are tied to a small shop; it lifts and floats out to sea with hero Henry and three adults. Their adventures and the exploits of those seeking their return make a thoroughly absorbing read (or listen). One small niggle: the shop has a corrugated iron roof, not the tiled one depicted on the front cover. I wish illustrators would read the stories they work on. NS

### Harry's Mad

Dick King-Smith, ill. Jill Bennett, Puffin, 0 14 03.1897 6, £1.50



A lovely book: beautifully written, clearly printed and charmingly illustrated. The idea of an American parrot living with an English family may not seem particularly engaging; but Madison is no ordinary parrot (he's been taught to talk *and* think) so life

with him is never dull. In addition to the fun and good humour Dick King-Smith had some thoughtful things to say about the way humans run our world, and the pathos of Harry's search for the missing Madison is very affecting. A winner, one I'll share with the class and put in the bookshop. NS

### Bunnacula

James and Deborah Howe, Dragon Grafton, 0 583 30801 5, £1.50

The tale of a rabbit who is a vegetarian vampire (green stuff is bled white after he's been at it) told by a dog with help from a cat. An American setting and the feeling that 'anything might happen, and it probably will'. A parody on the Dracula theme which might appeal to some. (Lovers of animal stories?) I found it unappealing and children found it overlong - one good idea stretched far too thin. The print is clear and bold; the illustrations the reverse. NS

### Juliet Joins the Guides

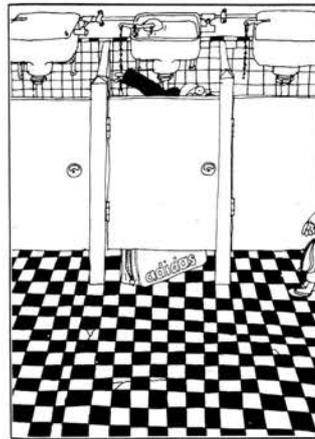
Pamela Sykes, Beaver, 0 09 943110 6, £1.50

A rather overbearingly didactic story. Children tend to see things in black and white, so does this author. Grey is not a tenable moral shade. Juliet, the outsider, is accepted by her peers by becoming a Guide, and a 'good' guide too. Not a first choice for teachers but will probably be enjoyed by Junior girls, especially those in or aspiring to be in the Guide Movement. One good point: realistic line drawings and a cover which cues the reader exactly about what is inside. NS

### Flossie Teacake Strikes Back

Hunter Davies, Fontana Lions, 0 00 672555 4, £1.75

The third book in a series about an 'unthin' ten-year-old. Flossie Teacake (gorgeous name) is the type of child we have all met: can be obstinate, longs to be eighteen, loves food and fashion. But Flossie has access to a magic coat which offers her the experiences all maturing self-aware individuals yearn for and the self-respect they need to possess. Hunter Davies knows exactly how important certain issues are to young minds and Flossie's Walter Mitty-like adventures do help her to cope with the manifest unfairness of it all.



New readers may find the mention of the magic coat (20 pages in) a little surprising but will be swept along. Top juniors will recognise the scenes and the excellent cover is bound to arouse curiosity - how many children's book covers feature the inside of a public loo? A good buy. NS

### The Little Vampire on the Farm

Angela Sommer-Bodenburg, Hippo, 0 590 70443 5, £1.25

Linked with the TVS children's series, this is the fourth book of the adventures of Tony and his pal, Rudolph the Vampire. Tony isn't that keen on the idea of country life to start with, so when complications arise, as is inevitable through the activities of his fanged friend, things begin to look even gloomier. When Rudolph wants a meal, Tony can't bear the thought of his voracious crony sinking his fangs into a baby lamb's jugular, so alternative arrangements have to be made! Then, as if everything wasn't in sufficient turmoil, local vampire hunter arrives on the scene to create further chaos. Definitely one for members of the Vampire Appreciation Society to get their teeth into! BB

### Callie's Castle

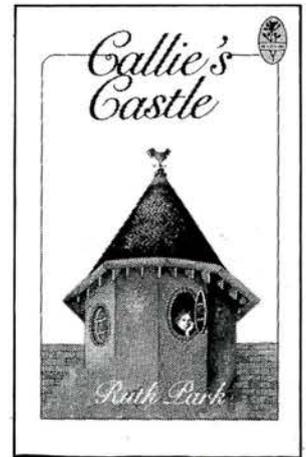
Ruth Park, 0 207 15187 3

### The Ghost and the Goggle Box

Duncan Ball, 0 207 15176 8

Angus & Robertson, Bluegum, £1.95 each

Two more in this new paperback imprint from Angus & Robertson, originally published in Australia. Large format, spacious layout, good type-size and well conceived line illustrations make these a good bet for the middle range from the design and production point of view.



The story content here is also good quality. *Callie's Castle* by the excellent Ruth Park exactly captures the feelings of a ten-year-old for whom nothing is going right. Family tensions, exciting discoveries as Grandpa helps Callie to find a place for herself literally and figuratively. *The Ghost and the Goggle Box* is a less reflective, more robust tale in which Roger encounters a strangely haunted TV set. Exciting and amusing and not without insights into a whole range of human behaviour. PT

## Middle/Secondary

### Dear Emily

Maureen Stewart, Puffin, 0 14 03.2059 8, £1.75

Sophisticated town-dwelling teenager Maria finds herself a country cousin for a penpal, in the person of little old Emily. Her 'Dear Emily . . .' letters provide the amusing content of this slim volume of adolescent confidences. 'I am an intensely interesting person . . . My mother is an executive with a cosmetic company (actually she sells Avon stuff door to door, but what I said sounds more impressive).' Like all developing friendships, there comes a stage when the relationship either flourishes, or goes downhill fast! The same is obviously true of penpal correspondence. 'In vain I have waited for a letter.' Sadness turns to defiance, and then optimism. 'I am advertising for a new country penfriend and I hope that she

will be tolerant and interesting.' Moderately amusing as a catalogue of teenage growing pains, but not a book that anybody is going to get wildly excited about reading. BB

### Marrying Off Mother

Christine Nostlinger, Beaver, 0 09 942160 7, £1.50

Maudlin matrimonial ramble aimed at goodness knows which audience range - has it slipped away from a passing Mills and Boon bookstand? Sue and Julia as dutiful daughters want their separated mother to get married again, because this will provide them with a proper home again, and free them from the strictures of a succession of grandmothers, aunts and great aunts. Exactly who mother marries seems to be rather a haphazard business . . . it could be their teacher, or the dentist, surely not the

milkman. No, you've guessed it, father comes home! Well, I never, what a surprise! BB

### The Ghost Girl

Catherine Sefton, Magnet, 0 416 613530 9, £1.50

Clare's father is a Protestant shopkeeper in IRA border territory of Northern Ireland. His shop is petrol bombed and his business ruined. The family's immediate thoughts are to leave the troubled country and start a new life in Scotland. After going to Scotland to look for new premises, father decides that he is 'as Irish as the IRA any day, even if he was a Protestant . . . and wasn't going to let the Provos chase us off.' So he starts to rebuild the shop, right where the old one was. Lots of praise for Catherine Sefton in tackling honestly a vital and relevant contemporary issue, and for doing so in an interesting



manner, with a story written in an objective and non-emotive style. BB



**Anastasia Krupnik**  
Lois Lowry, Fontana  
Lions, 0 00 672635 6,  
£1.75

A superb book, which incredibly has taken seven years to reach paperback publication in Britain, after its 1979 appearance in America. So much about it hits the target. The feelings of an, often puzzled, early adolescent at the behaviour of the world around her. The non-comprehension of inflexible school teachers at any attempts at real creativity ('What kind of poem is this? It doesn't rhyme at all,' said Mrs Westvessel) against Anastasia's valid defence ('It's a poem of sounds . . . it doesn't have sentences or capital letters because I wanted it to look on the page like small creatures moving in the dark'). The absolute dictatorship of the formal learning situation decrees F for failure. Brilliant, understandable to child and caring adult alike. BB



**Paris, Pee Wee and Big Dog**

Rosa Guy, Puffin,  
0 14 03.1992 1, £1.50

Paris, Pee Wee and Big Dog, of the title, are three Black youngsters, growing up in New York. Their 'street adventures' are very much similar to those of their British inner-city contemporaries, and as such, equally relevant to young readers here. Wherever, the themes are always similar, peer group conflicts and neighbourhood bullies being the same the world over. 'Marvin was thirteen years old, and tough, and he hated Paris.' Of its type then, Paris & company comes under the category of a good, easy read, with subliminal social comment, fortunately not heavily underlined. BB

**Cora Ravenwing**  
Gina Wilson, Puffin,  
0 14 03.1902 6, £1.75

A novel about that commodity which girls guard so fiercely – friendship. (In one of my classes I don't so much teach a particular gang of four girls as referee them!)

Becky's problem of making friends in a new place is complicated by her attraction on one side to the village outcast of the title, and to the 'rich, smug and stupid' trio of Hermione, Barbara and Susan on the other. Public opinion and natural inclination is weighted towards the latter, but it is the secret friendship with the sensitive Cora that eventually proves of the most significance and depth.

It seems a touch precious at times, perhaps too much so for my coven of four; but it might strike chords with some lower secondary girls. DB

**Vampires, Werewolves & Phantoms of the Night**

Winifred Finlay,  
Magnet, 0 416 62260 7,  
£1.50

'Demonic Tales from different lands' is the slightly suspect sub-title of this collection of 10 folk tales in which unfortunate mortals compete with darker powers and sources. Conn in 'Conn and the Other People' needs to wait until he's twenty-one to destroy the Dispossessed Ones who have duped and subjugated his father; poor old Sigmund and Sinfjoth themselves become werewolves, 'The Norwegian Monsters', which requires a desperate cure; whilst Charles De Sauveterre finds himself married to a beautiful werewolf, now minus one be-jewelled hand in 'The Beast of Auvergne'. It's not a bad selection if you feel your pupils need this kind of stuff. DB

**Letters of Fire**

Adele Geras, Fontana  
Lions, 0 00 672556 2,  
£1.75

Eight unsettling stories in this collection, where mundane things and ordinary-seeming persons have a disconcerting knack of sucking out the vital bits of fairly likeable kids; Melanie White, the Poppycrunch kid, falls prey to Camera One and Bel is possessed by a revengeful reflection in a mirror, whilst the poor violinist in 'Live Music' has her talent sucked away by the musically, vampireish Miss Waverley. However, in the title story, Moony does manage to use a malevolent washing machine to advantage by coaxing it to devour his enemy, Hilda Bolt. A useful book to add to the growing number of such collections, probably for lower/middle secondary. DB

**Tatty Apple**  
Jenny Nimmo, ill.  
Priscilla Lamont,  
Magnet, 0 416 52500 8,  
£1.50

Owen Owen and his three siblings are being reared by their widowed mother in the Welsh hills. It is spring and Owen remembers his father's last visit home from the oil rig when he promised a ride along the valley on the steam train – just the two of them.

Tatty Apple is a magical rabbit who pops into Owen's life and becomes his 'pet'. Through the mischievous and delightful rabbit Owen is helped to do a lot of growing up; coming to terms with his grief at his father's death and learning to experience and cope with conflicting emotions.

The mix of reality and fantasy succeeds in many ways. It does not patronise its young readers either in language or content, presenting a convincing and sympathetic picture of hectic family life. (The one dud patch is Mrs Drain, a stereotyped 'wicked old woman'.)

The story is tightly knit and fast-moving, the characters are three-dimensional, a strong sense of place is evoked. The book makes demands of its readers which are fully repaid. BJ

**Watch for the ghost**

Sheila Haigh, Magnet,  
0 416 95420 0, £1.50

Dan is nearly 11 and he can't read. School is well meaning but ineffectual. His parents are unsympathetic. His twin sister is literate. Not nice – but literate. He has no friends.

Under stress Dan escapes from school, and makes friends with a Labrador. When the dog is knocked down Dan meets his owners and Gran – the ghost at the window – who helps him learn to read.

Sheila Haigh has written a gripping, touching tale. The book is to be strongly recommended for its rich array of characters and situations; for its head-on look at the plight of a boy who sees no one in his immediate orbit able to answer his most crying need. The final chapters in which Dan suffers his family's rejection, finds a new friend and learns of Gran's death are strong meat but provide a fitting end to a satisfying, provocative read. BJ

**We hate everything but boys . . .**

Linda Lewis, Corgi,  
0 552 52321 6, £1.50

Do not be taken in by the cover. The book is set in an American High School. For the rest – read on.

'I couldn't wait to find out if Jeff was going to be in my class again. Last year he was in my class. I could have had a great time with him all year long. Unfortunately I didn't realise

what wonderful creatures boys are until the last few months of school.' Page 7.

'He shook his hair back from his face and grinned. His teeth were so white! His eyes were so blue! I sat there in the middle of the gym with my hand in his staring into his eyes.' Page 8.

'(The boys) hadn't forgotten to get even with me after all! My backside hurt, but I felt great!' Page 16.

'"Scrumptious? Well he does look cute!" Harley had rolled up his white tee shirt to show off his dark skin.' Page 38.

'My heart beat wildly. My eyes were wide open. At least I didn't have to worry about what to do. He was doing all the work! . . . So that's what it was like to be really kissed!' Page 121.

Need a reviewer say more? BJ

**Playing Beatie Bow**  
Ruth Park, Puffin,  
0 14 03.1460 1, £1.50

This 1981 Australian Children's Books Award winner is both historical and contemporary. Abigail at 14, still numbed by a sense of betrayal (her father left when she was 10), is appalled by her mother's decision to live with him again. She time-slips to 1873, is cared for by Orkney immigrants, now New South Welshmen, – trapped too, since she's the stranger who will ensure that the family gift survives. Victorian Sydney is made wonderfully vivid. Its squalor and its humanity astound Abigail. She, the other characters and their stories are compelling and convincing. I enjoyed the book enormously and had a good snuffle at the end when past and present connect. Recommend it to 12-ups. Consider reading it with 3rd/4th years. TD

**The Cats of Seroster**

Robert Westall, Piccolo,  
0 330 29239 0, £1.95

A long story to bury yourself in. It's a medieval other world whose landscapes, populations and rituals are both strange and familiar. We travel with the Miw, great golden cats, and with Cam whose quest is laid on him and also demanded by his own nature. The writing is incantatory, muscular and shot through with humour. Though the cast is large and the plot complex, tension and a sharp focus are maintained. Chapters are short. People who aren't used to a really long read may well be grabbed and sustained, though they'll need to be predisposed to high fantasy adventure. Those who are hooked will be difficult to prise away from the book. I loved it. TD

# Older Readers

## The True Story of Lilli Stubeck

James Aldridge, Puffin Plus, 0 14 03.2055 5, £1.95

I found this Australian Children's Book of the Year 1985 an absorbing and thought-provoking read; the sort of book that makes demands on readers and challenges them to examine the complexity of human nature. Little wonder it is in Puffin Plus; some adults I know would balk at its relatively slow pace.

Lilli Stubeck's strange gypsy character, the epitome of self-reliance, fierce independence and most importantly individualism is set against the self-same qualities of Miss Dalglish, a wealthy ageing spinster. Their private battle to gain the upper hand is told objectively by Kit Quayle, who becomes involved mostly with Lilli, whom he finds as unfathomable as her benefactress. Lilli looks as though she has lost by the time the spinster dies, but then she has an unexpected card to play...

DB

## White Peak Farm

Berlie Doherty, Fontana Lions, 0 00 672431 0, £1.50

This collection of ten stories forms a whole to tell of the Tanner family whose home is a farm set in the Derbyshire Peak District. The strained relationship of the parents suffers even more as first Kathleen, then Martin and finally Jeannie leave the nest and break the ties of both family and tradition. 'We all have to look at things in our own way.' Yet the leavings seem to give the parents space to grow towards each other, aided by the father's being disabled in a tractor accident.

It's no surprise that two of these tales were used on Radio 4's Morning Story. They are largely about adults, told by a child, which perhaps makes them hard to place. I'll try this with mid-secondary readers who enjoy a gentle book.

DB

## All Ends Up

Gina Wilson, Puffin Plus, 0 14 03.1901 8, £1.95

Should go down well in the library, though fairly demanding. Crisp style, delving, developing story

tending to psychology rather than plot, with several points of view slipped in though, really, we're with Claudia. Savage, unhappy, interesting, intelligent and fun, she purports to hate her illegitimacy, her mother, the man-friend, her own friends and sometimes her great-aunt. This, you've guessed, is a product of her self-doubt. Other characters guess too – they're exasperated, generous and patient. It took me a second reading to respond as nicely and I haven't done justice to the book's warmth and interest. Do try it.

TD

## Here Comes the Night

Frank Willmott, Fontana Lions, 0 00 672453 1, £1.75

An exploration of the self-deception of image and self-image; Willmott's concerns here are in territory we might have thought of as Cormier's. As the novel reaches its shattering climax the end-pieces of the chapters fall into place and events, disturbing and perplexing at the time, begin to solidify until we are told that the story has been, in fact, that of James Raynor, a diagnosed paranoid schizophrenic, involved in the

psychiatric probing techniques of Dr Reuben Lydie. Pretty strong stuff! The style is racy, requiring reading before recommending, and the readers, probably upper secondary, will need staying power.

DB

## Hey, Didi Darling

S. A. Kennedy, Puffin Plus, 0 14 03.2034 2, £1.75

A quick, easy read by a Californian children's librarian, now turned puppet-playwright. Those who read quickly and easily will find choppy chapters and sentences carrying a story of girls who transvest, nerve-rackingly, because only male rock-groups are acceptable. Take time and trouble, as must those at whom this short, largish-print first novel is aimed, and you may find some interesting subtleties about the narrator, her peers and their parents. If you still encounter groups of older, less-able girls (ditto mixed or why not boys?) this could be a sufficiently sensational/sensitive book to read with them. Consider it for the library anyway.

TD

## PUFFIN BOOKS ARE DELIGHTED TO ANNOUNCE THE 2000TH PUFFIN!

### I LIKE THIS STORY

A taste of fifty favourites chosen by Kaye Webb



From *Charlotte's Web* to *The BFG*, from *The Borrowers* to *Watership Down* – this fascinating selection transports you into 50 different worlds – and leaves you longing for more!



# Videos for Schools sponsored by



## Lloyds Bank

### YOUNG NATIONAL TRUST THEATRE VIDEO BRINGS HISTORY ALIVE

The Young National Trust Theatre is a professional theatre-in-education company which aims to involve children directly to help them learn about the past. The actors, who are usually also trained teachers, take the principal roles, but the audience of schoolchildren (aged 9-16) take part in the drama. In this way they learn about life and behaviour in past centuries, including music, dance, language and etiquette. Detailed notes are sent to every school taking part so that preparations may be made for the performance.

The video 'HISTORY ALIVE' (25 minutes) shows schoolchildren re-enacting history with the YNTT in sequences from a Royal Progress by Queen Elizabeth I, staged at Knowle (Sevenoaks), Charlecote Park (Stratford-upon-Avon) and Montacute (Yeovil). All are historic National Trust houses associated with the period.

Its particular aim is to bring the work of the YNTT to the attention of teachers of History, Drama and English, and the growing number of educationalists who value theatre-in-education as a way of bringing to life subjects which children tend to consider dull. It will also appeal to members of the public interested in heritage and conservation.

Copies of the video 'HISTORY ALIVE' are available for a refundable £10 deposit from Sandra Sheppard (administrator of YNTT) 8 Church Street, Lacock, nr Chippenham, Wiltshire (Tel: 0249 73569).



The video was made for the National Trust by Kadek Vision, directed by Avril Lethbridge and Mike Bennett, produced by Paul Rutherford. As well as the Royal Progress sequences the video includes John Hodgson, the Trust's education adviser, discussing the work of the YNTT with its administrator, Sandra Sheppard, artistic director Andrew Dickson, and researcher Adrian Tinniswood.



In addition to the above, Lloyds Bank has also sponsored other schools videos – a series of three Shakespearean workshops dealing with the Tragedies, Comedies and Roman Tragedies, and a video made for Ballet Rambert for use by students of CSE, 'O' and 'A' level dance.

Further information from: Sponsorship Section, CCD, Lloyds Bank Plc, 152/156 Upper Thames Street, London EC4R 3UJ.

# NEWS

## The Other Award: 1986



From the cover of *The People Could Fly*.

The Other Award was inaugurated in 1975 to draw attention to important new writing and illustration for children, and to give due recognition to those writers and illustrators who are taking positive steps to widen the literary experience of young people today. It is an 'alternative award' given for 'progressive books of literary merit'.

This year four books have been declared equal winners by the Other Award panel of judges.

**Say it Again, Granny**, John Agard, ill. Susanna Gretz, Bodley Head, 0 370 30676 7, £5.50.

This witty collection of poems by Guyanese poet John Agard is based on Caribbean proverbs. These proverb poems make for good reading aloud and are a marvellous introduction to the oral tradition of Caribbean literature for children who don't know it, as well as bringing something well-loved and familiar to those who do. Lively drawings by Susanna Gretz.

**The Bus Driver**, Anne Stewart, photos by Chris Fairclough, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 11739 9, £3.95

**The Bus Driver** is a most welcome addition to the few books on working lives for younger readers which do feature women. Oxford bus driver Pip Walker operates her bus, collects fares, pays in takings and meets up with colleagues in the station canteen. With its clear, simple

text and friendly, informative photographs **The Bus Driver** also conveys the responsibility and care shown by bus drivers in the provision of this vital public service.

**Starry Night**, Catherine Sefton, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 11795 X, £5.95

Fifteen-year-old Kathleen, who lives on a farm near the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic, moves from innocence to painful awareness as she tries to unearth a family secret. Kathleen forms and discards theories while arguing with a friend from Belfast about sex, politics, Ireland. This sensitively written novel in which family relations, rural life and romantic Republicanism are intimately probed raises many important issues with teenage readers.

**The People Could Fly**, Virginia Hamilton, ill. Leo and Diane Dillon, Walker Books, 0 7445 0524 0, £9.95

These splendidly shaped Black American folk tales make up a collection to delight both ear and eye which will appeal both to the very young and to young adults. Animal stories, tales of enchantment and romance, tall tales, riddling stories and slaves' stories are all included and told in a colloquial idiom which reflects the shared linguistic patterns of speech and dialect between West Indians and Black Americans. Powerful black and white illustrations complement and enhance the work.

The panel named three runners-up.

**More Valuable Than Gold** by Striking Miners' Children, ed Martin Hoyles and Susan Hemmings, Martin Hoyles Publishing, 0 9510697 0 5, £1.50. Trade distribution: Turnaround. Copies by post from MVTG, 10 West Bank, London N16 5DG.

Poems and short essays by young people from seven to sixteen; a unique response and a historical record as well as being both moving and exhilarating to read. Proceeds of the book go to Women Against Pit Closures.

**Jyoti's Journey**, Helen Ganly, Deutsch, 0 233 97899 2, £5.95

Indian girl Jyoti goes to a village wedding and then leaves for England with her mother to join her father and start a new life. Feelings and moods are strongly conveyed by the textures and colours in the stunning collage pictures.

**A Little Love**, Virginia Hamilton, Gollancz, 0 575 03651 6, £6.95

Sheema sets off with her boyfriend, Forrest, to trace the father she has never met in the hope that finding him will make her feel complete. She comes to realise that it is within herself to make life what she wants it to be. A fine novel that conveys perceptively the experience of a young Black American and her family.

A poster featuring the four winners is available FREE from The Other Award, 4 Aldebert Terrace, London SW8 1BL. (Please enclose a large stamped addressed envelope).

### Books Events Ahead

#### Huddersfield Book Binge

A fish finger and chip tea followed by lots of entertaining authors is the menu for an exciting book event organised by the **Children's Bookshop** in Huddersfield and sponsored by the local paper - *The Huddersfield Examiner*.

Special guests: Tommy Boyd (of TVAM Wide Awake Club), Paul Jackson (paper folder extraordinaire), Ann Jungman (creator of Vlad the vegetarian vampire), Gene Kemp (who needs no introduction) and Little Dracula (from Martin Waddell's cartoon books; he is coming with his 'Mum' who passes on his messages as he is very shy).

Fancy dress will be worn.

Monday, October 20th - 4.00-6.00. Ladbroke Mercury Hotel. Tickets £2.50.

#### Search for a new Picture Book talent

##### The Macmillan Prize

Last year Macmillan Children's Books announced a

prize for a child's picture book from an unpublished student artist. Well over 100 entries were received from art colleges all over the country and the standard was high.

First prize (£500) went to John Watson of the Royal College of Art for **The Secret Club**.

'John Watson's book combines visual and verbal humour to create a zany world of secret helpers tackling bizarre problems with ingenuity. The underlying theme of **The Secret Club** provides a consistent background to a series of original and very funny jokes portrayed in wonderfully vigorous drawings.'

Second prize (£300) went to Mark Southgate of Manchester Polytechnic for **The White Cat**.

'The story is a retelling of a traditional tale. Mark Southgate's delicate line and water colour illustrations show a fairy tale world where wooden horses can fly and a tiny dog is found in an acorn.'

Third prize (£100) went to Andrew Midgley of Salford College of Technology for **Imagine**.

'What does the world look like to a fly, a dog, a bird, a sloth? Andrew Midgley shows us

entertaining and unusual views to make a book which lives up to its title.'

The jury for the prize consisted of Allan Ahlberg, Quentin Blake, Raymond Briggs, Jill Murphy and Michael Wace, Publishing Director of Macmillan Children's Books.

Watch out for the winning books to be published. Macmillan are repeating the competition in 1986/87.

#### Northern Children's Book Festival: 3rd-8th November

Seven local authorities join with schools, libraries, bookshops, publishers and other groups in a great burst of events and activities. Thirty authors, illustrators and storytellers will meet children in schools and libraries across the north-east region.

Saturday, November 8th is **Gala Day** at Eldon Square Recreation Centre, Newcastle. Everyone welcome. It's FREE.

Contact: Elizabeth Hammill, The Bookhouse, Ridley Place, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Tel. 091 2616128.

### Sound & Vision Extra

- Don't forget to watch out for **The Worst Witch**, a one-hour film based on Jill Murphy's stories - promised on ITV around Hallowe'en.
- **The Antelope Company** returns. A new series featuring the intrepid Lilliputians from **Return of the Antelope** will be shown soon. Bodley Head have Willis Hall's story version of his screenplay: **The Antelope Company Ashore**.
- The film of S. E. Hinton's **That was Then, This is Now** is due for release this autumn.
- Guardian award-winning **Henry's Leg** by Ann Pilling has been adapted for TV in six parts. To be screened twice-weekly on ITV (Mondays and Thursdays) starting on October 27th.

#### PRICE INCREASE

Sorry but we've had to increase the price of the UK **BfK** annual subscription by 4.5% from £6.60 to £6.90 as from 1st September 1986. ■