

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

NOV. 1987 No. 47
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Poetry • Errol le Cain • Talking Books Guide



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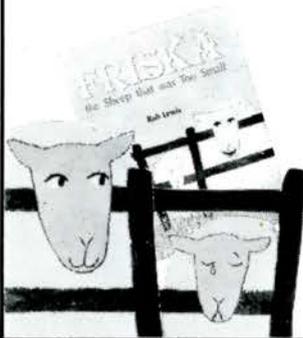


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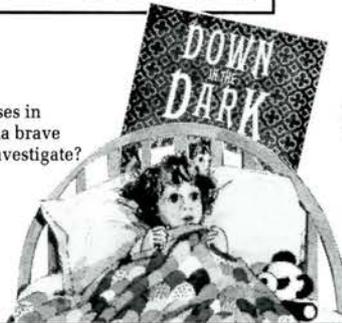


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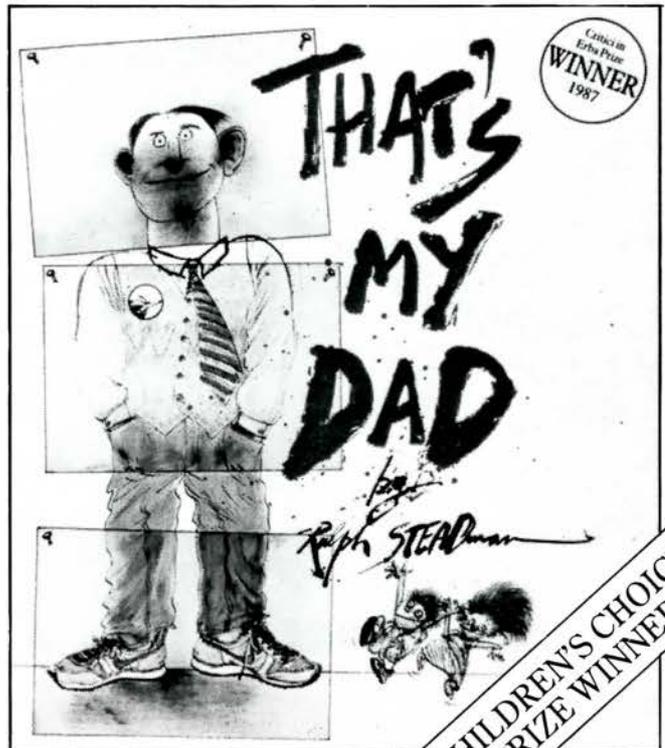
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Cover Story



The illustration on our cover is by Errol Le Cain and is taken from *Christmas 1993* by Leslie Bricusse (Faber, 0 571 14651 1, £7.95). We are grateful to Faber for help in using this illustration.

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EDITOR'S PAGE



Pat

If Children's Book Week is over, can Christmas be far behind? At which point you may be feeling rather like the exhausted and disenchanting Father Christmas who appears on our cover. This is Santa as pictured by Errol Le Cain for Leslie Bricusse's *Christmas 1993* or *Santa's Last Ride*, a cautionary rhyme in which red tape, wars and politics make the annual Yuletide journey increasingly difficult until finally the old man threatens 'No More'. The moral is clear: 'Christmas must be freed/from man's stupidity and greed.' This is Leslie Bricusse's first book for children; he's better known as a writer-composer-lyricist with a string of films, musicals and songs to his credit ('What Kind of Fool Am I?' and 'Goldfinger' for two). He is also a collector of Errol Le Cain originals and hoped that one day Errol might be able to illustrate some of his work. When Errol read *Christmas 1993* he 'thought it very amusing and witty. I liked the warning at the end about the way the world was going. I'd never tackled Father Christmas - it was an opportunity to do lots of things I'd never done before.'

Unusual commissions are a characteristic of this season's Le Cain titles. His other book, *The Enchanter's Daughter* (Cape, 0 224 02399 3, £5.95), has a story which was specially written by Antonia Barber for her adopted Vietnamese daughter, Gemma Tai-Phi-Yen (which means Flying Bird). When Gemma was asked who should illustrate her story she promptly produced a copy of *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*. How could Errol refuse?

Poetry Please

At BfK we are still very much immersed in poetry at the moment. (Our *BfK Guide to Poetry* will be out in the Spring - a bit delayed but well worth waiting for!) Jack Ousbey's article (see page 6) arrived with a sad footnote suggesting that his views 'are not likely to be shared by educational policy makers wherever they work'. Well, *they* may not be cheering but we are and I'm sure we are not alone. All that is most important about education is not susceptible to being neatly packaged and tested. We may have to fight to preserve a place for the unique, individual response to poetry and story against increasingly inflexible standardisation.

Tuning in . . . and out

Jack Ousbey's pleasure in poetry spoken aloud chimes nicely with Chris Powling's comments on 'Talking Books' (page 9) which help developing readers to get the tune off the page. Stories on tape is an expanding enterprise. For a while you'll find some tapes in the record department and some in the bookshop; but this could well improve as producers and distributors get themselves better organised. We'd be pleased to hear of your experiences with tapes and of any you would like to recommend - or warn against.

As far as we know the Beatrix Potter tapes on offer are the real thing - though no doubt Ladybird will soon be on the market with their 'simplified texts'. What can be said about a publisher who decides that Beatrix Potter's stories are so difficult for today's children and their parents that the texts must be rewritten and the pictures replaced with photographs of furry puppets? Sadly I fear that the Ladybird price and widespread availability will sell these unnecessary little books. Will it be long before the furry puppets get on TV? Then we can forget the real Beatrix Potter altogether.

Value for money

Back to real books. We've picked out some value for money hardbacks (page 4). But if your budget really won't stretch that far here are some excellent paperbacks. We've had to wait 23 years but at last OUP have done a paperback edition of Brian Wildsmith's classic *Mother Goose* (0 19 272180 1, £3.95). For the same money you can have an equally handsome edition of *Ghosts and Bogles*, stories by Dinah Starkey and illustrations (amazing design, decorative borders) by Jan Pierkowski (Piccolo, 0 330 29706 6, £3.95). This first appeared in hardback nine years ago from a small publisher, Good Reading. Heinemann had the good sense to reissue it last year - now it's in paperback and the gorgeous dark blue cover with its red, green and gold decoration makes it look worth much more than the asking price. Going up the age-range *When Did You Last Wash Your Feet?* (Fontana Lions, 0 00 672676 3, £2.95), is a remarkable collaboration between Mike Rosen (words) and Tony Pinchuck (pictures) which will keep many teenagers laughing and thinking. Or there's Kevin Crossley-Holland's version of *Beowulf* with Charles Keeping's decidedly unheroic illustrations (OUP, 0 19 272184 4) for only £2.50

Christmas Prizes

Macmillan are hoping to capture a slice of the present-giving market with Graeme Base's *Animalia* (0 333 45444 8, £7.50). It's an alliterative alphabet ('Lazy Lions Lounging in the Local Library') extravagantly illustrated, and there's a competition: make a list of all the things in each picture that begin with the same letter as the one being illustrated. For the person who matches, or best exceeds, Graeme Base's own list there is a week's safari holiday in Kenya to be won. So throw out the Trivial Pursuit, turn off the telly and get counting - well, that (so we are told) is what thousands of Australians did when the book was first published there.

From this year's batch of 'Christmas' books, I'd pick *Good King Wenceslas* - the life story behind the carol - retold and beautifully illustrated in the style of a medieval manuscript by Pauline Baynes (Lutterworth Press, 0 7188 2632 9, £5.95). And if you are looking for a change from the standard carols you could well find something in *Tomie de Paola's Book of Christmas Carols* (Methuen, 0 416 07362 X, £10.95). Words, music and beautiful illustrations combine in this lovely book.

For a gently oblique approach to the Christmas story itself, try *Four Candles for Simon*, Anthea Bell's translation of a story by Gerda Marie Scheidl, with gorgeous illustrations by Marcus Pfister (North-South Books, 0 200 72913 6, £6.95). A boy shepherd in Galilee searches for his lost lamb but finds only those who need the light and warmth of the candles in his lantern more than he does. With one failing candle left he sees a stable; inside is his lamb and a baby. He gives the baby his last candle and suddenly it burns more strongly, spreading its light and filling the room.

Merry Christmas.

WORTH EVERY PENNY

Pat Triggs makes a personal choice from this season's hardbacks

Sometimes only the hardback will do. Paperbacks – thank heavens – are cheap and a plastic jacket prolongs book life. But sometimes the shape and size of a book, the quality of its paper, the proportions of its design, the feel in the hand are such that the best experience of it resides in the hardback original. And then of course some books will be a long time (if ever) coming in paperback. Can we afford to wait for the cheaper edition? What are we losing by saving? Oh, yes. Sometimes it has to be the hardback. Hardbacks like these which I found while reading my way through most of this autumn's publishing.

Animal Numbers

Bert Kitchen, Lutterworth, 0 7188 2681 7, £6.95

We have the late Patrick Hardy to thank for Bert Kitchen's entry into picture books. And there is no doubt that his two earlier books, *Animal Alphabet* and *Mythical Creatures*, were very beautiful. Somehow though they fell into the category of 'collectable classics', the sort of books that are bought as much for adults as for children. *Animal Numbers*, equally beautifully designed and with equally stunning pictures, has that extra quality that invites children and involves them in the page. It is of course a counting book; each number is illustrated by an animal mother and her babies. A swan echoing the shape of a figure two is followed by two cygnets; a green woodpecker drills her way through the downward stroke of the four while the open beaks of her four babies thrust demandingly out of the top of the nest enclosed within its shape; a lizard, her young on her back, drapes her tail sinuously round a five. The shapes of the figures are ingeniously used to provide perches or hold water and beyond the conventional ten we have 15 pigs, 25 garter snakes, 50 sea horses, 75 turtles and 100 frogs (in various stages of development). In each case, the exact number of young are there to be counted and some notes at the back give extra information. The paintings with their elegant black numbers are set in generous white space – a truly aesthetic experience to offer children.

Another counting book

1, 2, 3 to the Zoo

Eric Carle, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 12360 7, £6.95

is a new edition with new artwork of a book which has become a classic since it was first published in 1969. It was Eric Carle's first picture book (the second was *The Very Hungry Caterpillar!*) and it shows how well he understands the way children learn and discover. Each double spread shows a railway truck carrying a number of animals (one to ten) while across the bottom of the page a steam train grows longer as small scale replicas of each picture are added at the turn of the page. In the final triple page fold-out the zoo is full and the train is empty. Lots of opportunities for mathematical development, and a little mouse on each page to add to the fun.

The latest book by another brilliant exponent of collage is also about a mouse.

Nicolas, Where Have You Been?

Leo Lionni, Andersen, 0 86264 172 1, £6.95

is a moral fable which, like Lionni's other tales, makes its point gently and with humour. Nicolas the field mouse learns by experience that 'one bad bird doesn't make a flock' and returns to tell the other mice. The deceptively simple collage shapes which children love because they are so clear are infinitely expressive and subtle – look at Nicolas as he is carried off by the bad bird, as he plunges through the air and lands in another bird's nest; feel the hate and anger in the shapes of the other mice as they think of making war on the birds. Not to be missed.

The birds and animals in William Mayne's 'Animal Library' from Walker Books live closer to reality, sometimes in a harsher co-existence. This is a series which has been out some time so it's not strictly this season; but I've been looking for a chance to recommend it. Better late than never.

Come, Come to My Corner

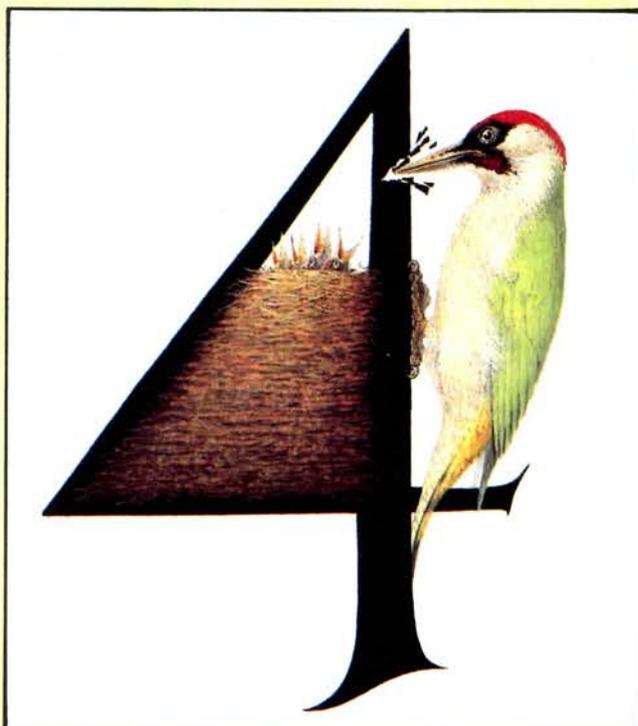
ill. Kenneth Lilly, 0 7445 0534 8

Corbie

ill. Peter Visscher, 0 7445 0536 4

Walker, £5.95 each

are two of the first titles in a series in which a short Mayne text is illus-



From *Animal Numbers* (Lutterworth)

trated by different artists, each with a style well matched to the story. The animals here (like Beatrix Potter's) are given human speech but remain true to their animal natures. *Corbie* is the story of an albino crow; in *Come, Come*, Puss the hare has a life fraught with dangers including being hunted by foxes. The stories are rich with meanings which the excellent full-colour illustrations help to convey, and Mayne's distinctive voice is well worth the trouble of tuning in to.

Birds and humankind live in harmony in another moral tale, this time set in China.

The Fisherman and the Cormorants

Gerald Rose, Bodley Head, 0 370 31060 8, £5.95

is about having and needing and sharing. The fisherman's family has rice and vegetables; the cormorant's chicks have nothing. When he allows the cormorant to take the only fish he has caught the fisherman little thinks that his kindness will be repaid. On a visit to China Gerald Rose saw the fishermen on the River Li who still use the cormorants to fish with; here in an easy, flowing, simple text and lively pictures he suggests the origin of their working relationship.

In The King Bird

Story by A H Benjamin, pictures by Tony Ross, Andersen, 0 86264 173 X, £5.95

birds are the cause of disharmony between king and queen: the king loves them (they fly free everywhere); the queen has had enough. A blow by blow account of the ensuing battle, which is rife with lies, tricks and subterfuge, is revealed in Tony Ross's wild and exuberant pictures. A good old-fashioned compromise brings a cosy reconciliation.

No such easy answers in

Snow Woman

David McKee, Andersen, 0 86264 103 9, £5.95

where the war between the sexes is fought out in the pictures that hang on the walls of a very eighties household. Rupert makes a snowman ("You mean snowperson," said his father.). Kate makes a snow woman ("That's a good girl," said her mother.). And something odd happens. Or perhaps it's not so odd after all. An original and multi-layered book which will intrigue older readers especially.

In Central Africa they order these things differently - at least in the village of Tos in the Cameroons.

In The Village of Round and Square Houses

Ann Grifalconi, Methuen, 0 416 03062 9, £6.95

a girl who grew up in this real village tells the story that explains why



SAT 24 NOV

Sorry, Miss Folio . . .



From **Sorry, Miss Folio**, (Andersen).

the men live in square houses, the women in round ones. It is an account of a dignified, ordered, gentle society illustrated by rich pastel drawings which range from the starkly dramatic to the warmly affectionate. A book to enjoy and to provoke thought and talk about life styles . . . and storytelling.

The life style of the Diamond family is drastically altered when the wind blows their house away overnight in

The Animal House

Ivor Cutler, ill. Helen Oxenbury, Heinemann, 0 434 93353 8, £5.95

Helen Oxenbury's pictures have exactly the right blend of the matter-of-fact and the magical for Ivor Cutler's story of how zoo keeper Diamond with the help of his boss, head keeper Softwater, solved his family's accommodation problem. She displays the same qualities here in her pictures of the quietly optimistic and resourceful Diamonds, delighting in their house made of animals, as she did in **Meal One** – that marvellous romping tale of Helbert and his mum – now happily back in print (Heinemann, 0 434 93350 3, £5.95).

Timmy's grandmother is less riotous than Helbert's mum but she has a way with wishes.

The Tooth Ball

Philippa Pearce, ill. Helen Ganly, Deutsch, 0 233 98062 8, £5.95

is about being shy and making friends. Gran starts the tooth ball by wrapping Timmy's tooth in some gold paper but he goes on adding layers, and then Jim joins in. As it gets bigger, it gets lighter until it floats off with the whole gang of children hanging on in a trail and drops them off in Gran's garden. A simple but engaging tale beautifully told.

Things can fly as well as people.

In Captain Clancy the Flying Clothesline

Tui Simpson, ill. Clare Bowes, Spindlewood, 0 907349 67 6, £5.50

it's a rotary clothes dryer that takes to the sky, fully laden with clothes and with a cat on board. The adventures that follow are told in a simple readable text (set in large clear type) and bright colourful pictures which move from long-shot to close-up in interesting perspectives. Clancy's journey ends satisfyingly among a group of ragged castaways who also happen to have a cat. The short text sustains humour and seriousness – and delightfully remains silent

about the cat. Lots of opportunity for retellings via movement, drama, music, as well as inventing more or similar adventures.

Another household item is ingeniously given life in

Leanna and the Genie Trap

Hazel Hutchins, pictures by Catharine O'Neill, OUP, 0 19 279859 6, £3.95

which is based on the familiar theme of things that disappear around the house. Leanna is sure that the genie on the blue box is at the bottom of it and sets out to catch him. Her elaborate traps fail to work and then she is trapped by the real culprit (the sofa) and comes to an arrangement with it. It's a neat idea which balances nicely on the fine line between fantasy and reality – which side to choose depends on the reader.

Original and in similar vein is

Smudge

Mike Dickenson, Deutsch, 0 233 98053 9, £5.50

which tells of a boy-shaped Smudge who escapes from a painting in an art gallery and tries his luck in other masterpieces – the Bayeux Tapestry, a Greek vase, etc. but he doesn't really fit (he and the cherubs lark about so much in the Renaissance nativity that they wake the baby – it's full of jokes like that). Then he discovers that the picture he left has been restored and his place has been filled. Where can he go? The answer, the whole book in fact, could make children look at pictures in quite a new way.

As could The Boy Who Held Back the Sea

Lenny Hort, ill. Thomas Locker, Cape, 0 224 02514 7, £6.50

This is a retelling of the story of the Dutch boy who stopped the hole in the dyke with his hand and saved the town from flooding. It is illustrated throughout with full-page colour plates which deliberately recall the paintings of the Dutch masters of the seventeenth century. They are quite beautiful and repay careful looking in the same way that the story has more to offer than its apparently simple surface.

From art galleries to libraries and one book that everyone involved with books will want NOW.

Sorry, Miss Folio!

Jo Furtado and Frederic Joos, Andersen, 0 86264 176 4, £5.95

is a month by month, excuse by excuse (or story by story) account of why a book hasn't been returned to the library. As we move from January to Christmas the tales become more extravagant and funnier – and appropriate to the season, as do Miss Folio's moods and dress. Four small 'frames' on the right-hand page illustrate the story each month, while on the left a full page shows us the 'storyteller', Miss Folio and the library cat, with date stamp and the textual refrain, 'Sorry, Miss Folio . . .'. Jolly cartoony pictures with a special in-joke – the book is **King Rollo!**

Poetry for keeping, returning to and relishing belongs in hardcovers.

A new collection for children from Charles Causley is a major event.

Jack the Treacle Eater

Macmillan, 0 333 42963 X, £7.50

is his first since **Figgie Hobbin** in 1970 and coincides with Causley's 70th birthday this year. Here are all the qualities that make Causley such a special poet for children: the way he uses and extends familiar, traditional rhyme forms, his humour, a voice that never condescends or patronises. There is a strong sense of real places and real people and, running through all the poems (they are arranged in six sections), a powerful sense of time passing, days and seasons turning, the thread that holds generations. The collection is beautifully illustrated, in colour and black and white, by Charles Keeping; it's a lovely book to look at and handle as well as read.

Keeping fans will also want to look out for

The Tale of Sir Gawain

Neil Philip, Lutterworth, 0 7188 2670 1, £6.95

in which his powerful black and white illustrations are an excellent match for Neil Philip's reworking into one narrative of all the Gawain stories. It's a remarkable achievement; Philip weaves the material from disparate sources into a practically seamless web in which the Arthurian legend is a continuous thread. The teller is the dying Gawain, a device that gives the events an extra resonance and ensures a tight and circular continuity. For older readers who know little or nothing of this essential story, this is the way in.

Retellings are much in evidence this season.

Kevin Crossley-Holland's British Folk Tales

Orchard Books, 1 85213 021 0, £12.95

contains his new versions of 55 stories of all kinds. Scholar and storyteller combine to make this a magical mix; there's something here for reading aloud to all ages from infant to secondary. ●

Taking Care of the Small Box

Jack Ousbey on necessary encounters with poetry

The poet George MacBeth and I share an unusual distinction, worth, perhaps, an entry in a book of sporting records. For 30 minutes before the kick-off of a Wembley cup final I read his collection, **Poems of Love and Death**, and my wife, who was seated alongside me, observed that I must be the only follower in the history of the game to have read poetry on such an occasion. I am, you see, an addict.

I read poetry every day, and always at breakfast time. It is an essential part of my diet and, whilst I can manage without the muesli, I function less well if, for any reason, I am prevented from reading poetry. Often I read a new collection several times, until I feel settled and comfortable with the poems, until they 'fit' well with me, and I with them. Sometimes it is a single poem which demands attention and then I carry away the book so that I can tune in again when I am lurching, or waiting for an appointment, or having my hair cut. Occasionally, a phrase from a poem jumps into my mind at the breakfast table, and detonates, from time to time during the day, with small explosions of pleasure. The compulsion then is to possess the phrase, to consider its implications and reflect on its unfolding meanings. Poetry sets moving the busy traffic of the imagination and does it in the most surprising and varied ways.

Back, though, to George MacBeth and the Wembley experience. A few minutes before the teams ran on to the pitch in front of a 90,000 crowd, I read 'For the Arrival of a New Cat'. It wasn't enough to read it silently. Once read it had to be sounded. I wanted to hear myself reading it aloud:

'... The new cat is coming, is coming, the roses expect him. Upstairs, in the attic, the locked trunks are creaking. Their papers and letters grip their teeth tightly. The new cat is coming, is coming, the books on their white shelves are scattering leaves to receive him, their spines are his servants ...'

and I knew then that this was a poem I wanted to share with children. Not to study; not to question; not to write about; but to taste, as we allowed it to dance and sing in our agreed orchestration of voices. And, of course, the 12-year-olds who joined me in this venture accepted, as young children do, that this was a very reasonable way of tackling poetry. Everyone took part; we talked about the way it should be spoken; we kept on trying it out to see how it fitted together; we made decisions about the appropriate number of voices for the different sections; and we moved the desks to the side of the room so that we could

feel how much better a poem like this sounds when the speakers become a community of voices. At the end of the session one boy told me, 'It was good. It wasn't like real learning at all,' and yet he and his classmates now knew, by heart, large chunks of the poem. As that wise poet and teacher Leonard Clark once observed:

'... there is much to be said for "learning by heart", which is another way of saying "learning by love". Although poetry should not be used merely as a vehicle for developing powers of memory, there are few young children who can long resist the constant encounters with memorable words and haunting rhythms.'



Some time ago a colleague and I worked on a poetry project with the teachers in a junior school. Two co-ordinators were appointed, one for the teachers of younger children and one for those who taught the older pupils. The teachers agreed to use poetry on a daily basis for a term, and set out to find challenging and interesting ways of introducing selected poems to the children. In order to pool their expertise they did a good deal of corporate planning and, on one occasion, a single poem selected for investigation produced 27 ideas for ways of working. In this way teachers who were less secure about poetry teaching were helped to play a full part in the work.



It was not possible to produce evidence, of the kind favoured by scientific research, to show that these constant encounters affected the way children used language, but, at the end of the project the co-ordinators were convinced of the value. One of them felt that the methods that they had adopted led to an active processing of language which was very powerful, and that the regular reading and speaking of poetry had provided many children with a creative stock of language from which they could draw, to transpose and re-shape ideas in words. Children seemed to be able to take hold of language, to possess it for themselves as a result of experiencing the sounds and rhythms of poetry, and one of the most surprising features of the work was the ability of young children to deal with metaphors and images. In describing her experiences with her own daughter, one teacher had this to say:

'This kind of work could be started so much earlier. My daughter is three and a half and everything she remembers, all the things she seems to learn, are to do with poetry or poetic language. I have even read 'Jabberwocky' to her and she has already picked up some of the phrases. She tries to make up things in rhyme and with rhythm because she has such a strong experience of it at a time when she is ready and receptive to it.'

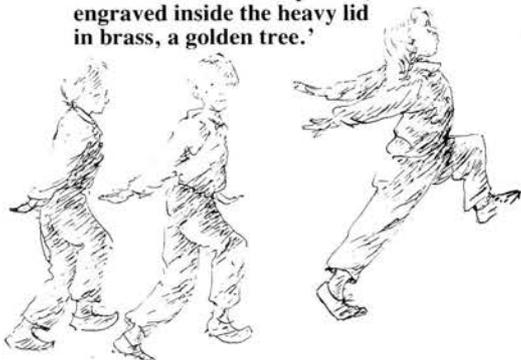
This child, not yet four, is having many of the experiences I have when I encounter poetry. We both like listening to poems and trying bits of them out to see what they sound like, and we both pick up phrases and retain them. Her understanding of what language is, is derived entirely from her active involvement in its use. It seems more than likely that if her encounters include the intense as well as the routine, the visionary as well as the mundane, and bring her into contact, also, with those strange, surprising conjunctions and patterns of which poetry is made, she will grow into an effective and confident language user.

The difference between us, this young child and me, is that she has no metamemorial capacity. She does not know about knowing, nor know how or why she is remembering things. When I read poetry I am aware that I can select and highlight ideas, than I can shuffle them around to give them further meaning, that I can bring previous experiences into contact with new ones and, from the combination, create a picture of richer or different possibilities. Ann Stevenson describes the process better than I am able to:

'... it's the shared comedy of the worst blessed; the sound leading the hand; a wordlife running from mind to mind through the washed rooms of the senses.'

This process of transferral – the 'wordlife running from mind to mind' – happened to me a few months ago when I read a poem by Gillian Clarke, called 'My Box'. It was one of those poems I talked about earlier, which had to be carried away to be re-visited during the vacancy times of a working day. It was so beautifully wrought, and of such immediate appeal, that I committed it to memory. If I couldn't be the writer of such a lovely poem then I would become the next best thing, a part-owner of it. It begins:

**'My box is made of golden oak,
my lover's gift to me.
He fitted hinges and a lock
of brass and a bright key.
He made it out of winter nights
sanded and oiled and planed,
engraved inside the heavy lid
in brass, a golden tree.'**



Some time during that day, by some trick of the imagination and quite without warning, I found myself thinking about two other 'box' poems I had read. In *Katerina Brac*, Christopher Reid has one called 'A Box', and Ted Hughes' *Poetry in the Making* is prefaced with the poem, 'The Small Box', by Vasco Popa. You might think that this kind of memory link is not worth writing about, but I was interested enough to place the three poems alongside each other and reflect on what each poet had selected to put inside his box. And some teacher reading this might be prompted to work with a group of older secondary children on orchestrating the poems for choral presentation (a fascinating job, in itself); might like to use the poems as models for crafting new ones; might encourage each child to make a box, place the poem inside, then decorate and seal it. It would make a good C.D.T. project, but language across the curriculum seems to have died, and whoever heard of a relationship between poetry and technology?



When I started to write this article it was my intention to call it 'Bedding the Ear', a phrase from an essay by Seamus Heaney, but writing about the box poems sent me back to Vasco Popa's poem to look at it again. The little click of recognition, inside the head, was almost audible, for 'The Small Box' holds inside it some of the ideas I have been discussing. Here it is, in full:

**The small box gets its first teeth
And its small length
Its small width and small emptiness
And all that it has got**

**The small box is growing bigger
And now the cupboard is in it
That it was in before**

**And it grows bigger and bigger
And now has in it the room
And the house and the town and
the land
And the world it was in before**

**The small box remembers its
childhood
And by overgreat longing
It becomes a small box again**

**Now in the small box
Is the whole world quite tiny
You can easily put it in a pocket
Easily steal it easily lose it**

Take care of the small box

The small box waits for the reader to open it, and what is pulled out depends to a large degree on whose hand it is that dips inside. It seems to me that Popa is telling us about the truth of the inner world, the world of the spirit and the imagination: that area where the brain, working every day as a creative agent, examines and transforms and assesses the input it receives. And where poetry is concerned, it is not just facts that are taken into this inner world, but the emotions conceived by poetic language. I spoke, earlier, of 'small explosions of pleasure' and the 'little click of recognition' which poetry sponsors. If a poem is good enough, I rehearse the feelings it releases, again and again, whenever I read it. And although that poem may not teach me to feel deeply, it allows me to find out about the way I respond and how my emotions are cultivated.

We live in dangerous times for poetry, and for those who love it and know

what it can do. The current wave of educational reform is based on an instrumental view of human worth. We are told that we must control our children, and each other, by quantification, and if their work and ours doesn't lend itself to measurement criteria, assessment objectives, competency skills, and all the other threadbare trappings of reductionist theory, it seems to be of no value. We shall be told, of course, that literature is important and that its slot on the national curriculum is assured, but you will wait in vain for the announcement of the establishment of City Colleges of Poetry, or for the opening of the first National Centre for Choral Speaking.

At its best, poetry helps children to become vigorous and adventurous and graceful users of words, nourishes the elusive substance of the human imagination, and shows them how to think well. Ted Hughes summed it up, a long time ago now, when he said:

'What matters most, since we are listening to poetry and not to prose, is that we hear the song and dance in the words. The dance and the song engage the deepest roots of our minds and carry the poet's words down into our depths. And the final sway over our minds that the poet has, is largely the sway of the hidden waves of song, and the motion of the dance in phrasing of the words that it compels us to share as we read or hear it.'

I wonder how they will measure that at seven, eleven, fourteen and sixteen? ●

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Jack Ousbey has taught in primary and secondary schools, and was a Senior Lecturer in a college of education. He is a Senior Inspector with the Nottinghamshire Education Authority where he has a special brief to develop effective learning.

The views in this article are a personal statement.

The dancing figures illustrating this article are by Alan Marks, from **Something I Remember**, a delightful collection of poems by Eleanor Farjeon, edited by Anne Harvey (Blackie, 0 216 92272 0, £8.95).

ANDERSEN PRESS



OSCAR GOT THE BLAME

Tony Ross

32pp 230 × 200mm

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October

It's Oscar's imaginary friend, Billy, who brings mud into the house, dresses the dog in Dad's clothes and leaves the taps running. So how come Oscar always gets the blame?? A worthy and irresistible successor to I WANT MY POTTY. Parents beware!

SNOW WOMAN

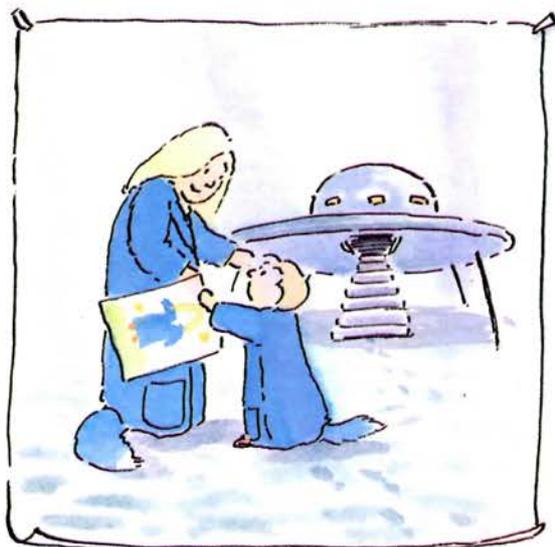
David McKee

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October

Equality rules, OK, for Kate and Rupert: so she builds a snow woman to his snow man. (Mum and Dad wanted a snow person, of course.) A thought-provoking, deceptively simple book about one of today's most sacred cows: sexual stereotyping.



THE LONG, BLUE BLAZER

Jeanne Willis and Susan Varley

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November

Wilson arrives at school one snowy day and won't take off his long, blue blazer. It's not until his people come for him from far away that we find out why... From the team who created MONSTER BED.

TALKING BOOKS



Chris Powling considers the value of stories on tape

For those of us still jittery about the prospect of micro-chips with everything, a book is a reassuringly low-tech object. It requires no power-source, calls for minimal physical dexterity and, best of all, can't go wrong. When did you last hear of a book that failed to switch on at a crucial moment, needed its heads cleaned or – horror of horrors – that chewed up its own text? A book is the ideal audio-visual aid for the terminally non-technological because it never demands audio-visual first aid.

So let's keep it that way, shall we? Why not preserve the status of literature as perfect occupational therapy for Luddites?

Fine, if you're prepared to ignore the fact that times change, bringing with them equipment which almost never lets us down not to mention infants who cope far better than we do if it does. These days cassettes are as handy as paperbacks and often come much more naturally to youngsters. Also they're increasingly available – already they represent thirty percent of sales in American bookshops and a rapidly-growing seventeen million pound industry in Britain. Whatever our objections to stories-on-cassette, they can't be made on practical grounds. Nor, I'd suggest, can there be any objections in principle. What story-tapes offer, for readers of all ages, is an alternative narrative mode that doesn't just support books in a number of important ways, it actually does some things *better*.

Not all things, of course. A tape can't replace a book any more than our ears can make our eyes redundant. It's more a matter of recognising when each has the advantage . . . also when both work best together.

So what is the contribution of cassettes to literacy? And by what standards should we judge them? These questions are linked but not identical. For in trying to get tapes taped, we don't just re-visit familiar issues in a new guise, we're reminded about key aspects of narrative of texts and of the reading process that it is all too easy to overlook. Some of the answers we come up with are bound to be as personal as our responses to . . . well, books.

The Value of Story-Cassettes

First, two obvious points. Cassettes can entertain children with texts that might otherwise be beyond their competence; also they're infinitely patient – on tap encores with guaranteed quality control. Who wouldn't be content, for instance, to hand over to Carol Boyd and Peter Bartlett's spritely reading of Allan Ahlberg's **Happy Families** (Tellastory) or their rendition of **The Tales of Beatrix Potter** (Tellastory)? Yes, they'll keep kids quiet for hours . . . but is that enough? You don't have to be an expert to appreciate that (valuable as it is) the developing reader needs a more active and varied engagement with stories than endless repetition, even of particular favourites. There's enough on offer already – from the Rev. Awdry's **Thomas the Tank Engine**, read by Johnny Morris and Willie Rushton (Argo) to **Rat Tales**, read by Roland 'imself' (Tempo Talking Stories) – to satisfy the most divergent of young appetites, but I'd still prefer them to be whetted first by a real-life grown-up. After all, you can't cuddle a cassette. Or ask it questions. Or glance at it for reassurance in the scary bits. Nor may a child listening alone pause to ponder an element that in most worthwhile books for beginning-readers is at least as important as the words, namely the pictures.

Going-it-alone with a book can be greatly helped by following on cassette a text that is being well read. The BBC's 'Listen and Read' series was demonstrating this years ago. But if the prime role of a cassette is to be a sort of benign drill-sergeant square-bashing kids across the page, then consider me a deserter from the regiment. I'd rather they merely *listened*. For the real value of cassettes lies in the prominence they give to the human voice. They're a healthy reminder that texts are nothing more or less than premeditated speech. Stories, however elaborately worked over, are rooted crucially in the jokes, anecdotes and gossip of everyday life and if cassettes help children to make the connection with their own talk, and better still their own writing, a 'lip' service has been done for us for which we should all give hearty thanks.

It's a service which applies to all age-groups, moreover. Take, for instance, the ability to distinguish between a novel's real author and its 'implied' author. If you can't see the

difference then you think **Black Beauty** was written by a horse. Luckily, most ten-year-olds are up to it and are therefore in a position to compare Angela Rippon's version (Puffin Cover to Cover) identifying presumably with Anna Sewell, and David Davis's (DEA Storytellers) which is bound to focus on **Black Beauty** himself. Similarly, older readers might like to compare the way in which David Buck (Cover to Cover) and Anthony Bate (Listen for Pleasure) cope with the switch from Jim Hawkins to Dr Livesey as narrator of **Treasure Island**. Should there have been two readers here? If this seems a bit academic then consider a dimension of narrative sometimes very difficult to lift off the page but greatly eased in its passage by appropriate reading aloud: humour. Well do I remember my first encounter with Jane Austen. I liked her writing a lot but the one aspect I couldn't fathom was why it was supposed to be *funny*. Joanna Lumley's **Northanger Abbey** (Hamlyn) would have been a great help – even more so if I'd encountered the droll and ironic at a younger age through, say, David Healy's low-key interpretation of Jeff Brown's **Flat Stanley** or Derek Griffiths' brilliant narration of Catherine Storr's **Clever Polly and the Stupid Wolf** (Puffin Cover to Cover). The most compelling reason for taking stories-on-cassette seriously is the access they give to features of texts that readers, both experienced and inexperienced, might otherwise miss.

The Quality of Reading

Mind you, much depends on how good the reading actually is. The attraction of this sort of work for actors was succinctly put by Martin Jarvis on an edition of **Meridian** (BBC World Service) earlier this year describing his work on **Great Expectations** for Cover to Cover: 'There's a performing joy, of course, in that there are certain roles I shall never get to play . . . I might perhaps be able to play Mr Jaggers when I'm a little older, but I don't think I shall ever be giving my Miss Havisham in any media except this one! Here you get to play them all.' In his case, magnificently. Other opportunities superbly grabbed by leading performers include Nicol Williamson's **The Hobbit** (Conifer), Ian Richardson's **The Jungle Book** and Glenda Jackson's **The Secret Garden** (both on Argo). What better solution could there be to the problem of introducing classic writers like Tolkien and

Kipling and Burnett to an age much less wordy than their own? Of course, personal preference is certain to loom large. Nothing on earth, or on air rather, will convince me that Martin Jarvis's **Just William** stories, unrecorded so far as I know, but heard by chance on Radio 4, don't do much better justice to Richmal Crompton than the Argo version which seems mainly concerned with doing justice to Kenneth Williams. Sometimes a simple lover of the text conveys far more than virtuoso razzle-dazzle. **The Wind in the Willows**, for example, has also been tackled by Kenneth Williams (Listen for Pleasure), by Patrick Wymark, Richard Gooden and Norman Shelley (Argo) and by Frank Duncan (DEA Storytellers), but my favourite version remains a full-length reading by David Davis (Unicorn-Kanchana) which may lack their polish but is so flawlessly true to the spirit of Kenneth Grahame's original we might almost be listening to the author himself. In the case of **You Can't Catch Me** (André Deutsch) and **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory** (Caedmon) we are listening to the authors themselves – Michael Rosen and Roald Dahl promoting their own work with a flair few other writers will be able to match, though I'd like to see many more having a try. However well Brian Glover, David King and Una Stubbs collaborate on Terry Jones's **Fairy Tales** (Argo) I can't believe they'd bring writer and reader together as profitably as the actual voice of Terry Jones at any rate on the evidence of the Puffin Promotion tape I came across in a Lancashire school. More please, tape producers.

If they need any urging, that is. The industry is expanding so rapidly it's hard to keep track of it. Here's my attempt to bring order to the current cornucopia:

(1) Candyfloss Cassettes

Not to be condemned, of course, unless you're the type for whom Little Noddy is an Enemy of the People. My **Little Pony** (Tempo) may well have most adults stampeding in the opposite direction but plenty of kids love it. Oh how they love it. Console yourself with the notion that just as candyfloss only rots the teeth if consumed by the ton, it takes consumption on a similar scale for such tapes to rot the brain. Much of the pre-school material is similarly dire – songs, rhymes and stories alongside which the old **Listen With Mother** has the status of a Dimpleby Lecture. Don't despair, though, just divert attention to the good stuff because there's plenty of this as well. To find it, look up Rachel Redford's **Hear to Read** (Book Trust) or consult Tapeworm (details below), a specialist company which cares about quality in cassettes and knows what it's talking about.

(2) Plain, but relatively wholesome

Equally popular but with longer and wittier texts are **The Mister Men** (BBC) and **Postman Pat** (Tempo and Tellastory). All safe bets not least from being TV tie-ins. So, alas, is Our Enid though on tape her prose comes across more than ever like gum somebody else has chewed. Peter Davison's Listen for Pleasure version is the best of a poor bunch. Maybe even Schofield would sink under a blitz of Blyton.

(3) Teacher Fodder

No, I don't mean dual-language tapes – being pioneered by small companies like Mantra, Side-by-Side and Harmony. These, and what are called 'Heritage' tapes, are still in regrettably short supply. At their best they belong to the next section. What I'm referring to here is the sort of tape which is designed as a drill exercise – it usually goes



'ping' when you're supposed to turn over the page and that's frequently the most exciting thing that happens. My favourite is an account of David and Goliath, backed by the Pastoral Symphony no less, which runs: 'Then David ran towards the giant, putting one – ping! – of the smooth round stones into his sling as he went . . . ' thereby guaranteed to make most of the poor and reluctant readers I know wet themselves with mirth. If you think this kind of support is really necessary, it's surely better to produce your own material, real books chosen by real teachers for real children. And if you detect a certain bias in my comments maybe it's because I'm anxious to move on to

(4) Gourmet Grub

This is the McCoy, the 'real' tape challenge to the 'scheme' tapes just described. The

leading company currently must be Helen Nicoll's Cover to Cover now taken over by Puffin. All its productions are complete, unabridged and, so far, superb – you simply pays your money and takes your choice. My own best buy for tinies is **Meg At Sea** and **Meg on the Moon**, an astonishing tour-de-force in which Maureen Lipman and a radiophonic workshop combine so brilliantly I felt I could 'see' the equivalent of those marvellous Pienkowski spreads in the original. For older readers, I'd opt for Stephen Thorne's **The Sheep Pig**, straightforward in comparison, but as *rap* a rendering as even Dick King-Smith could hope for – or so my ten-year-old daughter would have said if I'd dared interrupt her listening. Try your luck with any of these though. It's sure to hold good with this company. Also, to be fair, with a number of others, providing they've come to terms with an issue every tape-producer must face.



The Problem of Abridgement

For Helen Nicoll there's no problem at all: you don't. Her Cover to Cover tapes run for as long as it takes to read the book – thirty minutes for **Flat Stanley**, seven hours thirty minutes for **Treasure Island**, twenty one hours thirty minutes for **Jane Eyre**. Not all producers have her nerve, however. Most tapes are shortened to what's considered to be a commercially viable length, hence Listen for Pleasure's **Treasure Island** is only a third as long as Cover to Cover's. In itself, this needn't mean malpractice. Both Argo's **Nicholas Nickleby** and Conifer's **David Copperfield**, for example, are based commendably on the excerpts used by Dickens himself for his Public Readings. Nor is anybody likely to be fooled by crass re-tellings such as Pickwick's **The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde** based on a text which has been given the Kiss of Death by Ladybird. Much more worrying is **Gulliver's Travels** from Tellastory. Here the words are undeniably Swift's own . . . except there aren't many of them. We get only two of the four travels, much speeded up by the removal of any excess baggage thought to clog the storyline: little items like the disgust and the satire, for instance. The result is a truncated and misleading version of half a book – admittedly consistent with its fate for more than two centuries but it would have been nice to have *some* indication on the cassette of what the producers were about.

Let the buyer beware, then. For safety's sake, I'd recommend the asking of five simple questions when considering a particular tape . . .

1. Will it help develop the children as readers and the 'reading' relationship I already have with them or am I just after a quiet life?
2. Is it a recording of a *real* book or no more than the Walkman equivalent of Ronald Ridout?
3. Is the text complete and unabridged? If so, is it suitable (children can be bored by tapes as well as books) and if not, why not – and how well has it been cut?
4. Are there any reasons for *not* choosing it – an intractable race, sex or class bias, for instance?
5. How good is the performance?

. . . and if these questions seem uncannily reminiscent of the criteria you already operate for choosing *books*, so much the better.

Apart from the last, that is. Performance is the hidden extra, the crock of gold at the end of the headset. 'I see it very much as projecting a kind of movie,' explains Martin Jarvis, 'so that after a bit the listeners, the receivers of the picture at the other end, in a curious way forget they're being read to and see the story going on in their own minds.' Helen Nicoll, who, as co-author of the 'Meg and Mog' books, has impeccable credentials as a producer of books *for looking at*, is still quick to endorse this tribute to the power of the human voice in its age-old storytelling mode. 'No silent reading puts pictures in the mind in quite the same way,' she says.

Who will disagree with that? ●

Hear to Read

Selected and annotated by Rachel Redford, Book Trust (1986), £1.50 inc. p&p (£1.00 to members), available from Book Trust, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ.

Tapeworm

32 Kingsway, London SW14 7HS.

WHO'S PRODUCING WHAT

Academy Sound and Vision

The source of the very popular double cassette of **The Chronicles of Narnia**, read by Michael Hordern.

179 North End Road, London W14. From bookshops.

Argo

The spoken word division of Decca which has been producing quality recordings (unabridged Shakespeare for instance) for over 30 years – at first on disc but now on cassette. Good for poetry – Eliot, Betjeman reading their own work; **Under Milk Wood** with Richard Burton. Children's material includes **The Iron Man**, the Rev. Awdry stories and A A Milne. Available through major booksellers and some record shops.

Catalogue (200 items) from Argo Spoken Word, P O Box 2JH, 52-54 Maddox Street, London W1 (tel: 01-491 4600, ext. 337).

Audio Learning International

Storytapes Classics are 65-minute readings plus incidental music of abridged and adapted stories like **The Wizard of Oz**, **The Railway Children**. Each cassette is accompanied by a 64-page book which allows the listener to follow word for word (and colour in the pictures!). £2.99 for cassette and book. Available through some chainstores or direct.

Phone or write for catalogue to 740 Holloway Road, London N19 3JF (tel: 01-281 2393/5).

Chivers Audio Books

About 18 months ago Chivers started to add children's stories to their 300-strong adult list of titles (all unabridged). Authors include Judy Blume, Dick King-Smith, Margaret Mahy. Betsy Byars' **Cracker Jackson** is among the new titles this autumn. (£8.65 for two cassettes; £11.25 for three.)

Full listing from Chivers Press, Windsor Bridge Road, Bath BA2 3AX (tel: 0225 335336).

Collins-Caedmon

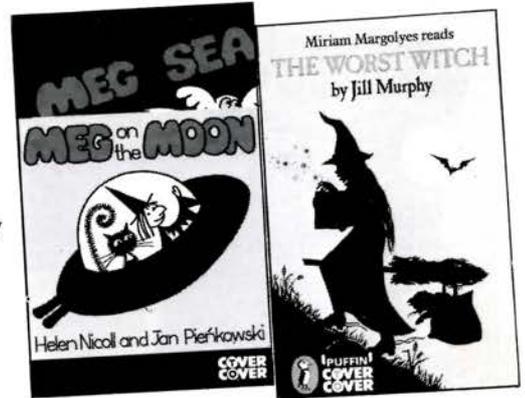
A new, just launched venture between children's publisher Collins and Caedmon, one of the first record companies to enter the spoken word market in the fifties.

Claire Bloom reads **The Secret Garden**, Ian Richardson, **The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe** (and the other Narnia books), Michael Bond, his own **A Bear Called Paddington**, and Peter Ustinov, Russell Hoban's classic **The Mouse and His Child**. 36 titles in one-tape versions appear in the launch list including Dylan Thomas reading **A Child's Christmas in Wales**, one of the first Caedmon recordings. (40-66 mins., £3.99 each, available in bookshops.) More promised next year.

Conifer

A specialist distributor of other producers' tapes, Conifer also produces a limited number of own-label cassettes including **The Hobbit** read by Nicol Williamson (three cassettes, £7.49), **The Little Prince** read by Peter Ustinov (two cassettes, £5.35), **Watership Down** read by Roy Dotrice (three cassettes, £7.49), and Jon Pertwee reading Barbara Euphan Todd's original **Worzel Gummidge** stories (six single cassettes, £1.99 each). Available from record/bookshops.

Enquiries and list available from: Horton Road, West Drayton, Middlesex UB7 8JL (tel: 0895 447707).



Cover to Cover (also Puffin)

Specialist in unabridged readings of adult and children's titles. The children's list is now being marketed, distributed and developed by Puffin (available in bookshops). First titles, including Maureen Lipman's reading of **Meg and Mog**, were launched in July. Autumn titles include **A Bad Spell for the Worst Witch** read by Miriam Margolyes. (£3.99 single tapes; £6.99 twin packs).

For adult tapes: Dene House, Lockeridge, Marlborough, Wiltshire (tel: 067 286 495).

Eloquent Reels

Four-cassette (six-hour) versions of classics like **Wuthering Heights**, **Great Expectations**, **Far from the Madding Crowd**, **Treasure Island**, **The Three Musketeers** and poetry are in preparation. £12.95 per pack. Available through some booksellers or direct.

Send sae for brochure to Althampton, Shepton Mallett, Somerset BA4 6PZ (tel: 0749 86593).

Hippo (Scholastic Publications)

Book-plus-cassette packs of **Postman Pat** (£2.99) from bookshops.

Listen for Pleasure

Favourite titles including Dahl and Blyton. Two-cassette packs (£4.99) produced by EMI Records. Available in record departments.

Listen Productions

Traditional stories (including many less well-known tales) and fairy tales. All single cassettes (20-75 minutes), £2.25 – £3.75 each (discounts available on request). Available via other distributors or direct.

For catalogue – 3 Earls Terrace, London W8 6LP (tel: 01-602 9664).

Pickwick International

Tell-a-Tale series and **Well Loved Tales** series in association with Ladybird. Re-tellings, 'new' or heavily abridged versions of such as **Thomas the Tank Engine**, traditional fairy tales, **Treasure Island**, **Tom Sawyer** and Beatrix Potter. Also **Transformers**, **Masters of the Universe** and **Puddle Lane**.

Also the **Ditto** range – twin cassette packs of longer stories, Barbara Euphan Todd's **Worzel Gummidge**, Nigel Hinton's **Beaver Towers** (£2.49).

From bookshops/chainstores etc.

Price Stern Sloan (PSS)

An American based company, which produces the Roger Hargreaves **Mr Men** and **Little Miss** books, have recently introduced the **Wee Sing** range – book/activity/tape packs of songs, rhymes and games (£3.99).

Information from: The Avenue, Cliftonville, Northampton NN1 5BT (tel: 0604 230344).



Rainbow Communications

Some sources suggest Rainbow has 40% of the current cassette market. Book and cassette packs (£2.49) include Walt Disney titles, **The Care Bears**, **The Muppet Babies**. (Tapes usually 15-20 minutes.) Also dramatised versions of Dahl and Blyton in the **Theatre for Children** series; **Teen Eastenders** coming this autumn. A new departure is Activity Packs (£2.99) of stickers, felt pens, tape of read-along story, songs and instructions.

Available in supermarkets, chainstores, etc.

Sound Beam

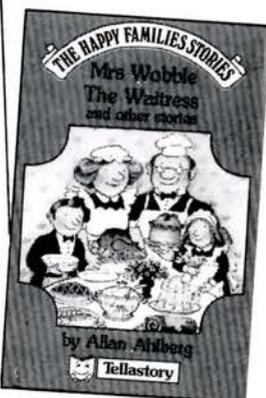
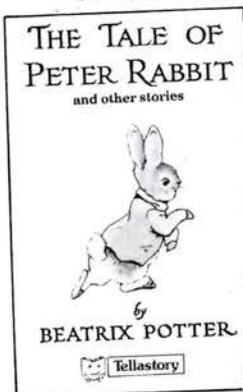
Set up as a distributor earlier this year (over 800 titles in its current catalogue), Sound Beam are launching adult own-label titles this autumn - **The Greengage Summer**, **The Riddle of the Sands** among others of interest to secondary librarians. (Two cassettes, approx. three hours, £5.99.) Children's titles are planned for 1988. From bookshops, chainstores, etc.

Write for current listing to 10 Barley Mow Passage, Chiswick, London W4 4PH (tel: 01-994 6477).

The Talking Tape Company

Unabridged short stories (approx. one hour) by Graham Greene, Thomas Hardy, Somerset Maugham, P G Wodehouse and others. BBC radio plays, poetry and **The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole** (slightly abridged, two cassettes) also in the catalogue. Prices range from £3.49 to £5.99 per cassette. Available through some distributors or direct.

Telephone or send sae for catalogue to 186 Fulham Road, London SW10 9PN (tel: 01-352 7620).



Tellastory

50 titles in this range from Bartlett Bliss Productions. Mostly an hour long, the series includes **Orlando the Marmalade Cat** and **Milly-Molly-Mandy** (the two first tapes and still popular), Frank Muir reading his **What-a-Mess** stories, **Postman Pat**, Allan Ahlberg's **Tales from Ten in a Bed**, and Beatrix Potter (the original!). New this

autumn Astrid Lindgren's **Pippi Longstocking** and for older listeners H G Wells' **The Magic Shop** and **The Red Room**. £3.50 inc. VAT for one cassette. Available from book, record and toy shops.

Send sae for list to 39 Warwick Gardens, London W14 8PH (tel: 01-603 2451 or 01-385 3614).



Tempo

Another mass market company whose products are available in a wide range of outlets. **Talking Stories** (book and cassette) take in **Postman Pat**, **Rupert**, **Little Grey Rabbit** and **Paddington** (£2.49). **Story Tapes** (cassette only) include **My Little Pony**, **Spot**, **Dahl** (£2.25). **Twin Cassettes** range from **The Wind in the Willows** to **SuperTed** (£1.99). **Story Time** series includes **The Snowman** and **Brambly Hedge** (£2.99).

Catalogue from Multiple Sound Holdings (MSD), Sales Dept, 3 Standard Road, Park Royal Industrial Estate, London NW10 6EY (tel: 01-961 5646).



Whigmaleerie

Stories and songs from Scotland, produced by a small (but growing) Scottish company set up in 1985. **Highland Fairy Tales**, told by Mollie Hunter, **Greyfriars Bobby**, and Mairi Hedderwick's **Tales of Katie Morag** are just some of an interesting list. Prices range from £2.99 to £3.99. Available through some bookshops or direct.

For catalogue/price list, send sae to 7 Main Street, Belerno, Edinburgh EH14 7EQ (tel: 031-449 5893).

OUP and Macdonald produce tapes of rhymes and songs for the youngest.

For details of dual-language material, see the **Books for Keeps Guide to Children's Books for a Multi-cultural Society 0-7**, available from BfK, 1 Effingham Road, Lee, London SE12 8NZ, price £2.50 inc. p&p.

Weston Woods, 14 Friday Street, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire RG9 1AH (tel: 0491 577033), offers tape slide/film strip packages based on books. ●

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Photographs by Richard Mewton, taken with the kind co-operation of the staff, parents and children of May Park School, Bristol.

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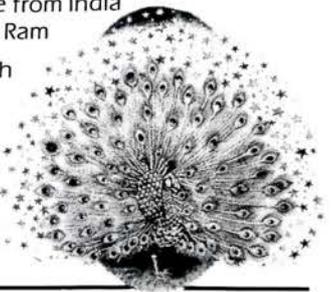
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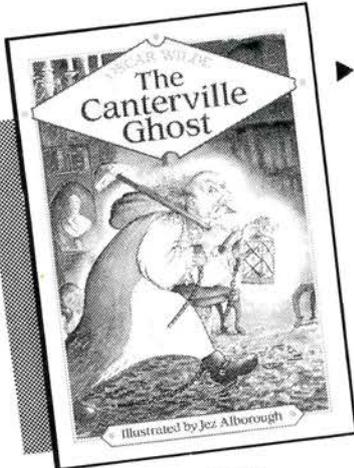
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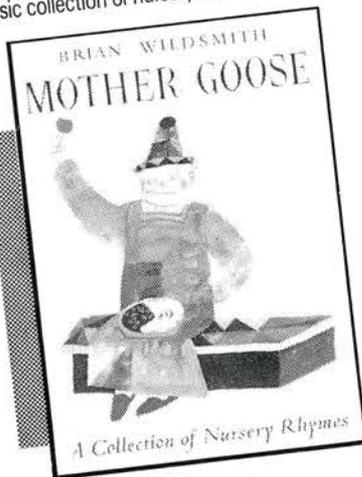
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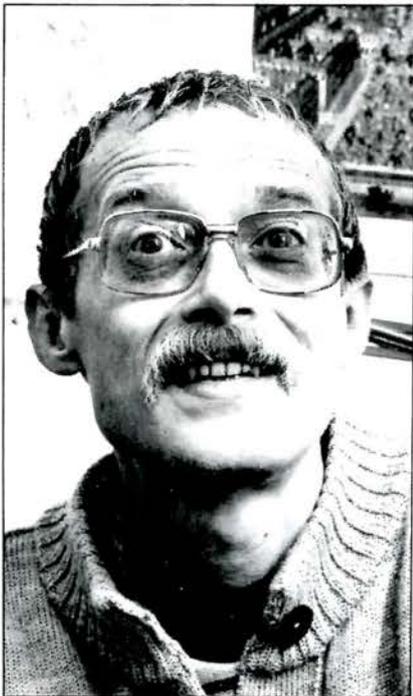
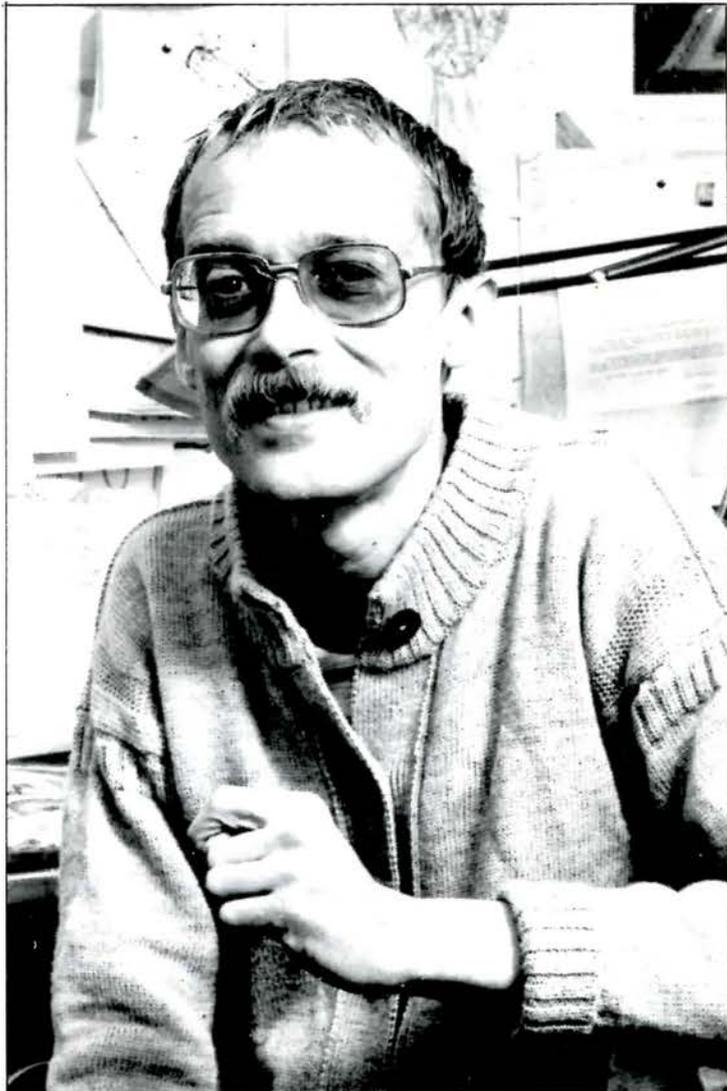
OXFORD BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

Authorgraph No. 47

If Errol Le Cain were asked what had most influenced him throughout his life, he would almost certainly reply 'Hollywood'. Even his name is owed to that fantasy world of the film moguls: his mother's favourite film star was Errol Flynn. (His surname comes from his French-Canadian great-grandfather, 'a person of great mystery', who came to Singapore and married a local girl distantly connected with the royal family of Tonga. 'So I am of royal blood!') Errol himself, slight and diffident, his essential gentleness laced with an acute and impish humour, could hardly present a greater contrast to his swashbuckling namesake; yet in the last 20 years he too has created worlds of fantasy, not only between the covers of books but on film.

Born in Singapore in 1941, he was hastily evacuated to India when only a year old to escape the Japanese invasion so his earliest childhood memories are of Agra, the dust-storms, the hail-storms and the smells. And the Taj Mahal, which he passed every day – it was just 'that old building on the way to school'. The highlights of his life were the annual visits of the puppet man, who set up his stage in the dusty courtyard and with his large-size puppets, 'glittering and golden and magical', performed plays about gods and goddesses from the **Ramayana**. 'They invariably ended with a dust-storm starting. He seemed to be the magic man, who was blown in and out on a dust-storm.' Errol spent much of his time with his grandmother, helping to make the Indian dolls she sold to the American soldiers. There were no books, and he vividly remembers being shown when he was about four 'the first picture book I'd ever seen – it always remained in my head.' The book was **Alice in Wonderland**, with Tenniel's illustrations.

Back in Singapore after the war Errol found himself very much on his own. He was an only child, and with his Eurasian background but white appearance he was not fully accepted by the European or Asian communities. For company he again turned to his grandmother.



'I remember her telling me the story of Aladdin, and I made a picture book of it. Someone gave me a copy of Hans Andersen which wasn't illustrated, so wherever there was a space I'd draw a picture for it.'

Errol attended the local Catholic schools in Agra and Singapore but his formal art training was minimal. 'I was banned from art classes at my kindergarten,' he says cheerfully. 'I ruined all my shiny coloured paper by cutting out my own shapes instead of the ones the teacher had drawn, and after that I wasn't allowed to do any art.' At school in Singapore 'I found the art classes incredibly tedious. We were made to draw boring subjects in very hard pencil and the paintings I did were not what the teachers wanted. Art wasn't considered a proper subject, more a thing you grew out of. As I was always drawing and painting at home it didn't bother me much!'

At home, though Errol was an avid reader, there were still hardly any books, just comics. 'Everything was visually geared. Classics Illustrated – and of course Mickey Mouse!' But there was also the Roxy Cinema, conveniently next door. 'The Roxy was really where I was educated. It used to change its programmes twice a week, and I knew how to get in behind the screen so I'd

see the films back to front. I saw *everything*. Those films were my art training.'

At the Roxy there were MGM Productions: next door there were GMG Productions. 'I'd turn my room into a theatre. I had a repertory company of players and, like the Roxy, we changed programmes twice a week which meant new costumes, scenery and scripts. The stories were highly sophisticated versions of what I'd seen in the cinema – can you imagine **Casablanca** in ten minutes? I was totally obsessed and absorbed in this world and I wanted to be in films.

'Then when I was 11 a friend of mine bought an 8mm camera and I branched out into animation. I did a scene of a cricket walking across a bridge carrying a knapsack on its back and to my amazement it worked. So I wrote a story called **The Enchanted Mouse** and made a ten-minute cartoon feature using cut-outs. Then my parents gave me a 16mm camera and some colour film, and I made **The Littlest Goatherd**.'

When Errol left school at 15 'no one knew what to do with me', but then the local agents for Pearl & Dean Films saw his work and offered to pay his fare to England to train as an animator. And so Errol came to London, flung in at the deep end of the

world of animation. After some years he was asked to join Richard Williams Studios, with which company he has worked ever since, doing everything that came to hand including the titles for such films as **The Charge of the Light Brigade**. He has also worked with BBC Television on productions like **The Snow Queen** and Leon Garfield's **The Ghost Downstairs**.

Errol's first picture book, **King Arthur's Sword**, began life as the storyboard for a film that was never made; but the designs for it were shown to Faber and Errol was launched on his career as a picture book artist. 'It had been something I'd always wanted to do, to illustrate children's books, but I'd never known how to set about it.'

Where Errol's books are concerned 'I'm a thieving magpie. This is because I work in the cinema and think theatrically rather than as an illustrator. People who work for films, set designers, tend to find the key to a story's setting through looking at various paintings. There isn't actually anything original around; the only original thing is you as the filter through which all your experiences pass. **The Cabbage Princess**, my first real book, happened to come out of a book I was looking at about the *commedia dell'arte*. That was the key, but I didn't rigidly sit down and study it, it was just the inspiration. The spinning-wheel scene in **Thorn Rose** was actually inspired by Rembrandt, and yet when you look at it now it isn't at all Rembrandt. And I always loved the way the grass is laid out in those 'Lady and the Unicorn' tapestries, spangled with flowers... But I don't sit with the thing in front of me, copying it, I just remember what I've seen.

'I don't go for an authentic period setting – as a magpie I see elements from various periods. The costumes in **Cinderella** span several centuries. I wanted to give **Thorn Rose** a medieval setting, with the Prince a 100 years later Elizabethan.' As for the gorgeously costumed **Twelve Dancing Princesses**, 'this is where Hollywood was so helpful. I remembered a film I'd seen as a child, where everyone was dressed in Louis XVI costumes, white hair, moonlight on porcelain skin... I was very short-sighted, so I never saw Hollywood in sharp clarity, I used to see it through an impressionistic blur.'

Errol also draws on a strong sense of place. 'When I see old buildings and streets I people them from the past. When I was in Paris I could pick any century, I had the feeling that I'd been there, I knew what it was like. And I had a sense of outrage – why am I behaving like a tourist when I really belong to this place because I know it so well? I try to get that feeling into my drawings.'

Of all his books **Beauty and the Beast** most demonstrates Errol's sense of theatre, its pictures resembling stage-sets with only one close-up. 'I always think in terms of film, working out different angles to lead you dramatically through the book.' But by then Errol was having problems with traditional fairy tales – 'I was running out of variations on the happy-ending scene. **The Twelve Dancing Princesses** had not one but twelve of them!' So he welcomed the idea of illustrating **Hiawatha's Childhood**, the picture book which at last won him the Kate Greenaway Medal to which he had three times been runner-up with earlier books. 'I'd always loved the poem and had a feel for Canada, I suppose because of my great-grandfather.' In this case he did a great deal of preliminary reading, discovering that although Longfellow had actually borrowed many of the 'Indian' traditions from Norse myths Hiawatha himself was a real historical character, a chief of the Ojibwe tribe by the shores of Lake Superior alias Gitché Gumee.



But **Hiawatha** had a deeper appeal for Errol, who shares the belief of the North American Indians that 'man and his environment are one – they are in tune with nature and know the interdependence of the land and the human.' Since 1975 Errol has been a Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist, following the essentially practical teachings of a thirteenth-century Japanese Buddha. After his strict Catholic upbringing Buddhism came as a revelation to him although 'Buddhism is something which is latent in all of us. It's really very practical and logical rather than mysterious and esoteric. Buddhism says that you have the means within yourself to change things. You draw the strength and the wisdom from within yourself through the chant: Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.'

Hiawatha's Childhood marked a turning-point in Errol's career and since then his picture books have been very diverse. **Growltiger's Last Stand**, based on some of T S Eliot's **Old Possum** poems, celebrated with wicked humour Errol's love of cats. **Crisis at Crabtree**, a story by his friend and fellow-Buddhist, the late Sally Miles, described the resistance of a group of historic houses to the building of a motorway. Errol accepted it as a challenge but 'it was one of the most difficult books I've had to illustrate. They're houses and they're static. The problem was to give them character and movement without making them too Disneyish.' The book was being published in association with the National Trust and the architecture had to be exactly right. (Errol's grandfather, winner of Singapore's Queen's Scholarship in Architecture, would no doubt have approved.)

For Christmas 1987 Errol has produced two very different books. **Christmas 1993**, ominously subtitled **Santa's Last Ride**, is based on verses by the lyricist Leslie Bricusse, in which an overworked and disillusioned Father Christmas laments the

bureaucratic complexities of an unappreciative modern world. But with **The Enchanter's Daughter**, written by Antonia Barber for her adopted Vietnamese daughter, Errol returns most happily to the East, giving the story a setting that exquisitely mingles Japanese, Chinese and Vietnamese.

And the future? It's busy. For over 20 years Errol has been working with Dick Williams on a major animated feature film and now at last it's taking shape. He also contemplates a daunting number of picture book ideas. 'One of my dreams, when I was thinking in terms of film, was to do a series of legends from all over the world. In a way that's coming about through the books – I've touched Russia, Japan, France, Thailand... He would like to do an Indian picture book drawing on his early memories; he has ideas for a Chinese fairy tale and some Buddhist tales. Meanwhile he is working on a retelling of **The Pied Piper of Hamelin** by Sara and Stephen Corrin. His studio is scattered with holiday brochures from the half-timbered towns of North Germany, and a painting of a group of burghers clad in rich shades of red, orange and russet glows from his desk. Pictures by Alfi, aged eight, and Frederika, aged three, are pinned on the wall. ('Frederika loves painting. Alfi's a film buff – he's into James Bond, Dr Who, all the fantasies. But he doesn't have the Roxy next door!') Outside in the narrow street two lorry-drivers are having an argument, and a whiff of eastern spice drifts in through the window. Errol finds that the multi-ethnic Bristol suburb where he now lives reminds him very much of his early life in Singapore. 'I feel at home.'

Errol Le Cain was interviewed by Penny Sibson.

Photographs by Richard Mewton.

Books illustrated by Errol Le Cain

(published in hardback by Faber unless otherwise stated)

Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp, Andrew Lang, 0 571 11656 6, £4.95 hbk

Beauty and the Beast, Rosemary Harris, 0 571 11374 5, £4.95 hbk

The Child in the Bamboo Grove, Rosemary Harris, Faber, 0 571 09565 8, £2.95 hbk

Christmas 1993, Leslie Bricusse, 0 571 14651 1, £7.95 hbk

Cinderella, Charles Perrault, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.137 1, £1.75 pbk

Collected Rhymes and Verses, Walter de la Mare, Faber, 0 571 11157 2, £2.50 pbk

Crisis at Crabtree, Sally Miles, Lutterworth, 0 7188 2651 5, £6.95 hbk

Cupid and Psyche, Walter Pater, 0 571 11115 7, £4.50 hbk

The Enchanter's Daughter, Antonia Barber, Cape, 0 224 02399 3, £5.95 hbk

Growltiger's Last Stand, T S Eliot, 0 571 13882 9, £5.95 hbk

Hiawatha's Childhood, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 0 571 13286 3, £5.95 hbk

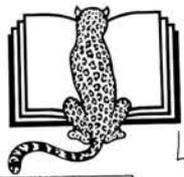
The Lotus and the Grail, Rosemary Harris, Faber, 0 571 13536 6, £4.95 pbk

Mollie Whuppie, Walter de la Mare, 0 571 11942 5, £4.95 hbk; Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.440 0, £1.50 pbk

Thorn Rose, Brothers Grimm, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.222 X, £1.75 pbk

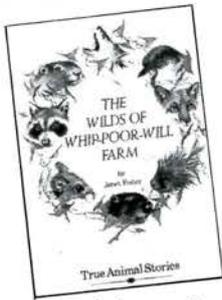
The Twelve Dancing Princesses, Brothers Grimm, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.322 6, £1.50 pbk

The White Cat, 0 571 10185 2, £4.95 hbk; Picturemac, 0 333 40833 0, £2.50 pbk



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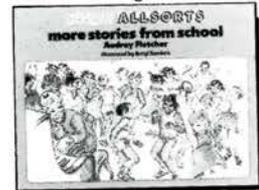
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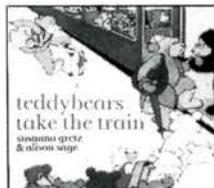
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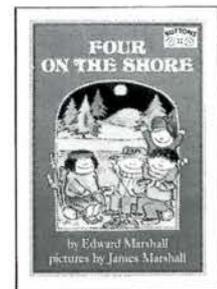
The teddybears take a train journey and Louise is rescued by the very bears she had thought were strange because they looked different . . .
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Four on the Shore

Edward Marshall
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Tom, Zack and Emmie in Winter

Amy Ehrlich
Illustrated by *Steven Kellogg*

It's a busy winter for the three best friends, Tom, Zack and Emmie when they join forces to build a whole family out of snow.

A & C Black

REVIEWS

Nursery/Infant

Diddle Diddle Dumpling

0 416 02722 9

The Three Little Kittens

0 416 02712 1

Tomie de Paula,
Magnet, £1.95 each

A pair of delightful paperbacks extracted from Tomie de Paula's beautiful *Mother Goose*.

'What are little boys made of?' and 'Rub a dub dub, three men in a tub' are two of the old familiar rhymes to be found in *Diddle Diddle Dumpling*. 'Curly Locks' is in there too and 'Little Miss Muffet' with a pretty spotted bonnet and 'Simple Simon' trying to heat his snowball up at the fire! If anything *The Three Little Kittens* has an even more attractive collection. There's 'Little Poll Parrot, sat in his garret' and 'Pussy Cat Pussy Cat, where have you been?', as well as the title rhyme.

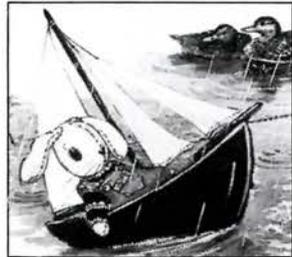
Both books match in size and shape and are decorated with Tomie de Paula's illustrations with their pleasant soft colours, their patterns, humour and clarity. Separately or together these books would be a pleasure for any small child to possess and keep; and would certainly go a long way towards proving that joyful experiences come from books.

MS

Alpaca in the Park

Rosemary Billam, ill.
Vanessa Julian-Ottie,
Picture Lions,

0 00 662753 6, £1.95



The toy rabbit Alpaca is a firm favourite with our infants and this one has been as popular as the others. The story, of how Alpaca gets left behind in the park and nearly taken away by various people who find him, has a pleasant tension about it and his plight quite worried the more tender-hearted among the class. The strength of these stories lies in their hero. Alpaca always behaves like the toy he is; he is helpless

and has to lie around waiting to be carried, he can't talk and so can't respond; but at the same time the text lets us feel what he must be thinking and feeling so that there is a kind of external and internal narrative. This makes for thoughtful reading and the clear and lively pictures support this depth of meaning. A satisfying book, both for listening and reading.

LW

Teddy's Birthday

Amanda Davidson,
Picture Lions,
0 00 662752 8, £1.95

A pleasant story about Teddy who has his birthday on a rainy day... a very good subject for small children who (unlike the rest of us) anticipate birthdays with enormous pleasure. But this is not a book to be used with large groups of Nursery age children. On 10 pages out of the total of 22 there are four or more pictures set out as in a comic strip. Too small to see at a distance and confusing to follow for those inexperienced in print conventions. Used one to one, to develop understanding of a sequence or show how a story can be told in pictures, this could be successful.

MS

Melissa Mouse's Birthday Surprise

Maria Claret, Magnet,
0 416 04452 2, £1.95

Another birthday story: Melissa Mouse is getting ready for her birthday party and dreaming about owning a car. Everyone comes to the party but no one brings any presents. At the end however Melissa gets an amazing surprise when she finds that they have all clubbed together to buy her a car!

The book is beautifully produced on good quality paper but I find the story lacking in style and with very little of the rhythm and beat essential to a satisfactory story line. It borders on the sentimental as do the illustrations which I find too fussy and cluttered to enjoy. Certainly not one for my list of favourites.

MS

The Pushchair Adventure

Michel Gay, Magnet,
0 416 61880 4, £1.95

Gentle pictures illustrate this unusual fantasy about a small child sharing his pushchair with different animals which

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.



live in the wood. Using the familiar device of the characters falling asleep and dreaming the story, we find mother and child dozing off at the beginning and the child, probably in the dream, wandering off into the wood and meeting a butterfly, a frog, a duck, a cat, a fox and a little bear. All ends happily as the animals make sure the baby is restored to his mother who, without seeing the animals, suggests going for a walk in the woods.

I really liked this one; it has just enough adventure in it for a small person, and the animal characters are realistic and not too frightening. A worthwhile buy for home, school or playgroup.

MS

Our Cat Flossie

Ruth Brown, Beaver,
0 09 947580 4, £2.50

Ruth Brown has a growing reputation for excellence; this book certainly matches up to her others. It is a series of beautiful pictures with a simple text about a cat, Flossie, and all the things she likes to do.

Small children enjoy anticipating what each page reveals and find reassurance in identifying familiar things around the house as the cat's eccentricities are shown with humour and understanding. This shiny square picture book should appeal to most children especially if they have a cat about the house.

MS

Crocodile Teeth

Marjorie Ann Watts,
Beaver, 0 09 954100 9,
£2.50

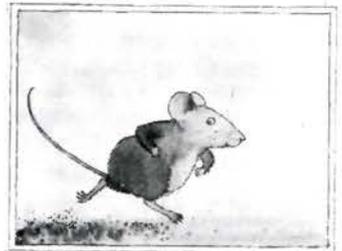
Though the story gets rather bogged down in its hospital setting, this tale of a croc's first visit to the dentist has some good gentle characterisation and should help children get over fears. To be read aloud to fours to sixes: though 'go it aloners' may have difficulty with some eccentric spacing of text and pictures - surprisingly cramped when one looks at the price.

CM

See Mouse Run

Sally Grindley, ill.
Priscilla Lamont,
Piccolo, 0 330 29362 1,
£1.95

Despite my strong prejudice against any text which uses the word 'see' instead of 'look at' (shades of 'see the boats, John!') I have to allow that in this case it does sound far less odd than one would expect and that this is a charming and very successful book.



Something has frightened mouse and set him running through the farmyard. What is making that awful noise? A cheerful, easy to read chase through the pages (with plenty of animal noises and interesting pictures) reveals the source of all the trouble. Fun for little ones to try and guess before all is revealed and success for both shared reading and younger read-alones. Older children were a bit sniffy about it once they knew... but did enjoy reading it to nursery or reception children.

This could well become a classic; it has all the right 'feel' to it.

LW

Cromwell's Glasses

Holly Keller, Hippo,
0 590 70722 1, £1.75

I have never come across the sort of situation that this book describes. I know several children who have to wear glasses but none of them has

ever been made miserable by teasing from other children. In case I had been being smugly unseeing ('We have no racial tension in our playground'), I asked my daughter, who had to wear glasses at the age of nine, if she had come across such a thing and she assured me that glasses were so common in schools now that no one bothered about it.

Certainly the four children in my current class who wear glasses and their friends were puzzled by Holly Keller's latest social problem offering and found it difficult to believe in the situation. That said, however, Holly Keller's characters always have charm and Cromwell is no exception; children enjoyed the story. It has not been borrowed a great deal though; I think simply because it didn't really strike home with anyone. If you have this problem in your class or with your own child, however, Cromwell may well help you to deal with it. LW

If You Give a Mouse a Cookie

Laura Joffe Numeroff, ill. Felicia Bond, Knight, 0 340 41095 7, £2.50

It was, at first, difficult to tell which the children enjoyed more . . . the story, or the name of the author! Once the novelty of such a beautifully



exotic appellation had worn off, however, it was apparent that this is going to be a classic.

It is a sort of literary **Michael Finnigan**; when the end of the story is reached, it leads straight back to the beginning again; a ploy occasionally used by eager-for-a-bit-more-reading-time children! If you give a mouse a cookie, you see, he will want a glass of milk, a mirror, a story and all sorts of logically linked items. Until, of course, he is hungry and wants a cookie and if you give it to him, then . . .

Ideal for reading aloud to, or for reading with, younger children, this is also an inviting

simple first text for just-reading older ones. The illustrations are supportive and cheerfully attractive. LW

Pound Puppies Heathrow

0 590 70713 2

Pound Puppies Honeypot

0 590 70712 4

Pound Puppies Max

0 590 70710 8

Pound Puppies Willerby

0 590 70711 6

Hippo, £1.75 each

A series of four (so far) titles which have been imported from the USA but adapted for the home market. No author or artist is credited. The stories centre on the canine inhabitants of Mr and Mrs Crabtrees' 'Happy Haven Home' or The Pound. Each book features a different dog: Heathrow, who is found wandering on the runway at the airport; Honeypot, who previously inhabited a rubbish dump; Max, whose owners could not cope with his boisterous activities; and Willerby, abandoned in a plastic carrier bag. Each puppy is found an appropriate home by the Crabtrees.

Though worthy in intent – making the point that dogs are a responsibility not playthings, both stories and pictures are too sentimental for my taste. The predictable stories are presumably intended for sharing with young children but this is not a task I would undertake with any enthusiasm. JB

Carrot Tops

Joan Wyatt, ill. Margery Gill, Young Puffin, 0 14 03.1039 8, £1.50

15 independent stories about young children coming to know the world. The fascinating thing is that many of the 'plots' are simply conversations between children and grown-ups, based upon the youngsters asking about ordinary, everyday events. They are heightened by novelty, of course, for four to sixes. Going shopping, running a jumble sale, feeding ducks, visiting Kew Gardens take on a significance as the writer is able to catch the newness.

Not earth-shattering writing: I feel the author could spread her wings a little. But well worth reading one or two aloud, as I have with children in their first weeks in school. They certainly got my listeners talking, and asking their own questions. CM

Infant/Junior

The Hairy Book

Babette Cole, Magnet, 0 416 95760 9, £1.95



A nonsense verse celebration of hair, hairlilariously illustrated. There are hairy knees, hairy frogs, hairy vests, hairy food, a hairy fairy and much more besides. In my experience this easy-to-read romp of a book has been relished by countless readers since it first appeared in hardback and this paperback should now disappear into a good many hairy pockets: Beware! JB

Colvin and the Snake Basket

Sam McBratney, Magnet, 0 416 04492 1, £1.50

Colvin is a thoroughly realistic little boy in a very recognisable home and school setting. The snake basket of the title is the washing basket that Colvin hides in whenever life becomes too much for him . . . such as when he cuts his sister's doll's hair off to enter her in a competition or after the awful affair of the school gerbil. The difference between this and many other tales of naughty children is the insight we as readers are given into Colvin's view of the world and the reasons for his actions. Like the adults in his world, we know that his thinking will lead to disaster but like Colvin we feel it is unfair that it should!

It is a very funny book. To an adult reader the dialogue, especially of the school scenes, is just right; to children Colvin is just *them* in all their hopefulness and good intentions. My school loved it.

It is a longish book, split into chapters; one for fluent readers (right up to adulthood) or for having read to you if you are, at a guess, six or older. LW

Harriet and William and the Terrible Creature

Valerie Carey, ill. Lynne Cherry, Beaver, 0 09 343690 6, £2.50

If you were to meet a dragonish thing eating rocks on a strange planet, it might not occur to you that what he needs is a flower garden. The Terrible Creature of this book is an unhappy soul who has to eat rocks because there is nothing left on his planet; Harriet (intrepid space traveller who has landed on his planet) has the idea of getting her green-fingered brother to plant a flower garden for the creature.

This book produced several unexpected 'readings' from my children. I thought it was a story about being kind, even to ugly beings, because 'even dragonish things must have feelings'. Several of the class thought that too; but several thought that it was about not wasting time helping people 'because he's only going to eat the flowers again so it wasn't worth the effort' and one small boy thought it about 'a real whim. Why doesn't he just use his wings and fly somewhere else?' Neither reaction is likely to be what the author and her friends at the Princeton Centre for

Energy and Environment Studies intended!

A good book, nonetheless, and with lovely illustrations and a lot to talk about, as you see. LW

Nosey Mrs Rat

Jeffrey Allen and James Marshall, Piccolo, 0 330 29799 6, £1.95



A wonderfully endearing character is Mrs Rat, the nosey neighbour who minds everybody else's business. The artistry is superbly shrewd: catching the views Mrs R. gets through peep holes and telescopes. She gets her come-uppance when Buster Blackstone videos her snooping through the garbage. Look at the episode when the neighbourhood watch the replay of the video at a public

showing of Mrs R. being caught out. That's how a gifted artist touches on the visual nature of today's children's literary competence. The end is high irony. A wonderful reading experience for sixes up - so much in a deceptively accessible picture book. **CM**

Loudmouth George and the Big Race

Nancy Carlson, Picture Corgi, 0 552 52438 7, £1.95

A highly moral tale, this, with a message for anyone who prefers talking to doing. George boasts of his athletic abilities but is too lazy to practise and too greedy to control his diet (you see what I mean by a moral tale... I was consumed with guilt all through it). As a result, of course, the big race is a disaster.



At first, both I and the class thought this was going to be a revamp of *The Hare and the Tortoise*, an impression reinforced by the fact that George is a rabbit. It is more original than that, however, and is perhaps summed up by saying that slow and steady might win races, but slow and flabby certainly does not!

A good read-aloud, this one, but not an easy text for independent reading; a certain sophistication is needed for the flow of the language. Middle to Tops managed better. **LW**



Simon's Secret
Judith Worthy, ill.
Lorraine Hannay,
Angus & Robertson,
0 207 15573 9, £1.95

The new kitten is deaf and an orphan within the first few pages. Simon is deaf, too.

Eventually these two strike up a relationship when the kitten finds comfort in Simon's cubby. (That's a den in England. This is an Australian story but it doesn't show.)

The author avoids making this a tract for understanding the deaf. Simon's rejection by his peers is factually described: he simply can't hear the rules of the game even when they are yelled at him. Meeting the unquestioning, affectionate cat is just what Simon needs.

The climax of the book, when the whole neighbourhood searches for Simon who is only found when the cat's cries are heard, is well written. The resolution of Simon's social problems may seem a little easy but it rings true. Lorraine Hannay's illustrations suit well. A stimulating book for seven/eight year olds. **BJ**

The Emperor's New Clothes

Retold and illustrated by Nadine Bernard Westcott, Magnet, 0 416 97080 X, £1.95

This version of the Andersen classic is a treat from the front cover with its title lettering fashioned from articles of clothing, to the last page showing the nude king, cheeks aglow, receding into the distance. The king has clothes to play in, clothes to look handsome in, clothes to look super in, clothes to look brave in and clothes to look smart in, and the author/illustrator has great fun unleashing her imagination on the vast wardrobe and the various characters in the story. **JB**

The Arrow

Alex Brychta, Oxford, 0 19 272166 6, 95p

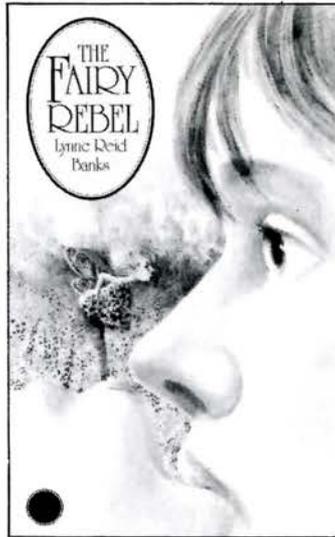
One of the 'Cat on the Mat Books' series intended for beginning readers, this highly imaginative little book could be enjoyed by anyone. The story is told almost entirely by the amusing pictures, the text being confined to speech (or noise) bubbles, as an arrow fired by a cat at first misses its target and travels '... DING, BANG, CRACK...' around the world before landing 'THOP' right in the gold. **JB**

The Fairy Rebel

Lynne Reid Banks, ill.
William Geldart,
Dragon, 0 583 30963 1,
£1.95

Compulsive reading! This fairy tale has its roots firmly in everyday life - a sympathetic couple can't have children. The eponymous fairy 'provides' one... (Top Infant and Lower Junior teachers get round that one!)

The transition from fact to fantasy is smoothly made. The rebel fairy has many of the concerns and interests of her young readers: clothes, food, authority. But she does not



understand some human emotions - loneliness, for instance.

This is a fascinating, funny, multi-levelled read. William Geldart's black and white pictures capture perfectly the mix of real and other worlds. **BJ**

Fiona Finds Her Tongue

Diana Hendry, Young Puffin, 0 14 03.2276 0, £1.25

At home Fiona is a real chatterbox, conversing with everyone and everything, even her shoes. But once outside the house it's a different story; she doesn't say a word to anyone. So when she starts school things get really difficult: 'On that first morning at school Fiona's word tap was so stuck that even if you were the biggest, strongest plumber in all the world, you could not have turned it on.'

But then poor Tai is in an even worse position; coming from Vietnam he can't speak or even understand English. Happily after a morning's painting session Fiona has found her tongue and Tai has four new English words not to mention an English friend to help him.

This sensitively written story is labelled 'Read Alone' and although with its approachable format it is ideal for solo reading, don't forget that the Young Puffin categories are not intended to be rigid: try sharing it with a group of infants too. **JB**

Dragon Fire

Ann Ruffell, ill. Andrew Brown, Young Corgi, 0 552 52445 X, £1.75

For older infants or lower juniors, I think; this is more of an early novel and demands a fair degree of stamina from independent readers (although it is printed in clear type and well broken, by pictures and chapters, into manageable and undaunting chunks). I found that younger children were not as interested as I expected in listening to the story. The

dragon catches a bad cold and is therefore unable to cook his breakfast. His search for both breakfast and a cure is told in quite adult language and with sophistication but somehow without the warmth that would have made it accessible to the children in my class. And they could make no sense of 'a shoulder of mutton'!

Older, more worldly-wise children would enjoy this book, however. It is original and amusing enough for the more mature reader and the format invites the less confident. **LW**

What's Under My Bed?

0 330 29848 8

The Great Big Especially Beautiful Easter Egg

0 330 29898 4

James Stevenson,
Piccolo Picture Books,
£1.95 each

In each of these books, Grandpa tells Mary Anne and Louie tales of his boyhood. He recounts his own fears of bedtime sights and sounds in *What's Under My Bed?* In *Easter Egg*, there's a fantastic story of his adventurous quest after the world's biggest egg.



The flashing back and forth between the here-and-now and Grandpa's childhood is witty and dashing, building upon techniques the readers know well from TV and video. Six to eights enjoy the gentle teasing camaraderie between the young and the old. This writer/artist has a quirky, generous sense of humour. **CM**

Hank Prank and Hot Henrietta

Jules Older, ill. Lisa Kopper, Young Puffin, 0 14 03.2125 X, £1.50

12 lively, well-rounded episodes about Hank and his little sister Henrietta - spirited and rumbustious children, the bane of parents and teachers. Cleverly alternated chapters - one about Hank, one about

Henrietta – keep the interest. There are some vivid school and playground scenes: my sixes particularly liked the one about a class's first encounter with a new (male) teacher. Super dialogue and the jokes are fresh and tangy. CM

Not So Fast Songololo

Niki Daly, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.715 9, £1.95

No primary classroom should be without a copy of this fine book. Set in South Africa, it centres on Shepherd (Songololo) and his granny

Gogo's shopping trip to town. Gogo is slow and Shepherd likes to do things slowly too so he is her ideal companion. Gogo finds the pace and traffic of the city somewhat frantic: 'The little green man mixes me up' she says; but Shepherd is an expert at crossing the road. The shopping trip is successful especially for Shepherd who

becomes the delighted and proud owner of a pair of brand new red tackies (trainers). A simple domestic story told both in words and through the illustrations with great sensitivity. JB

Junior/Middle

Mystery Cat

Susan Saunders, ill. Lesley Smith, Corgi, 0 552 52425 5, £1.75

Feline fanciers will warm to this pleasant story about the double life of a rogue tom-cat with two homes and two young 'owners' whom he leads into adventure . . .

Middle Juniors (girls especially) will feel a rapport with the two heroines. With careful attention to detail Susan Saunders depicts Kelly Ann's homely family, a neat foil for Hilary's affluent yet sterile existence. Neither background is criticised, yet the warmth of human companionship is emphasised, and materialism takes its rightful place in the background.

A good formula here and we are promised a sequel soon. Incidentally, the illustrations are an accurate reflection of the text and of a good quality. NS

As each tale is spun, the reader can rejoice with the hero/heroine at the happiness which is wrought.

Paperback paper quality leaves Ossie Murray's black and white drawings sadly blurred, though Jenny Tylden-Wright's cover illustration is excellent, and aptly suggests the anthology's theme. Strongly recommended. NS

Many Happy Returns and Other Stories

Kathryn Cave, ill. David Mostyn, Corgi, 0 552 52434 4, £1.95

In this successful collection of stories fantastic and ordinary happenings are recounted in everyday contexts. All the stories are comic in varying degrees – from the belly-laugh to the wry smile. 'Winters Tale' and 'Tall Story' are particularly good because they deal with the power of storytelling. 'Many Happy Returns' and 'Like Brother and Sister' will fulfil many fantasies – we usually have to wait until after the unwelcome event to concoct a satisfying response. In these two stories we can enjoy the satisfaction at the time with the young protagonists. The target for the young is usually an adult – especially obtuse in 'The Scientific Approach' – which will make scoring a bull's-eye even more pleasurable for Junior readers. The black and white line drawings are almost incidental but welcome. BJ

Your Guess is as Good as Mine

Bernard Ashley, ill. David Parkins, Young Corgi, 0 552 42450 6, £1.50

'Never Go with Strangers' could be the alternative title to this sensitively handled tale about a boy who, in spite of everything he has been told, does accept a lift from a person who takes him for a frightening adventure.

Enhanced by quality black and white illustrations, this story tackles head on the growing menace of child molestation and, though nothing awful happens to the hero in this episode, the message is most clear. That the story so simply and concisely shows that not all adults are what they seem, is a tribute to author Bernard



Ashley, and an example that children's fiction can still be didactic and good.

The large print and easy vocabulary are ideal for the Middle Junior who has just gained reading confidence. I shall try it as a class reader too. NS

The Revenge of the Brain Sharpeners

Philip Curtis, ill. Tony Ross, Beaver, 0 09 954090 8, £1.50

I suppose we shouldn't mind that teachers are often made the butt of authors' tales; we should be able to laugh at ourselves, shouldn't we? But it would be nice to find a few friendly teachers – they do exist!

In this story the headmaster is the caricature. Bald and self-seeking, in the grasp of alien powers, he is hellbent on luring innocent children to their doom. Of course he is foiled by the children, and a good and funny adventure is had by all . . . NS

Radio Alert

John Escott, ill. Trevor Stubley, Young Puffin, 0 14 03.2124 1, £1.50

The hero of this story is involved in the running of a children's programme for a local radio station.

The programme in question is threatened with the axe, and the book tells how it is saved (to appear again in other stories). The story line involving some deadly gas canisters is certainly plausible, and there is a likeable heroine too who has a good line in

decisiveness and common sense. Gratifying that both male and female characters share equal, if varied, limelight. The cover illustration stacks the odds in favour of boys however!

Another Young Puffin 'good read' designed for the lower to middle junior who is growing in reading maturity. NS

Guilt and Gingerbread

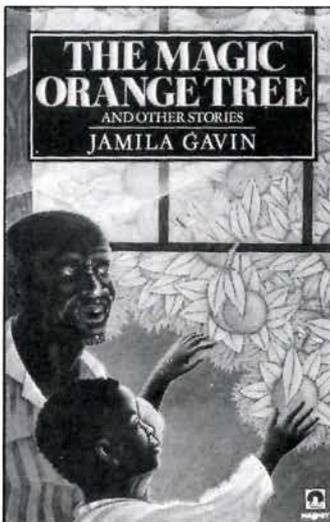
Leon Garfield, ill. Fritz Wegner, Puffin, 0 14 03.2195 0, £1.50

This is a classic tale of poor boy, Giorgio, leaving home in search of fortune and fame. The aged crone who crosses his path provides him with magic scissors and thread so that he may steal the princess's golden heart. The subsequent transplants lead to trouble: the sheep's heart turns out to be a pig's – making the princess hunt for truffles and roll in the mud; the beautiful rose which replaces the pig's heart brings the princess close to death as summer fades.

Garfield has beautifully woven an ingenious tale. He propels the reader smoothly and swiftly through to an ending which meets all the statutory requirements but which is far from stereotyped: 'They knew the worst and the best of each other: what remained was the truth of love, and that was the middle ground.' Fritz Wegner's black and white illustrations are a perfect complement.



This fairy tale, in the best traditions and of a very high quality, will satisfy a wide age range of junior readers. BJ



The Magic Orange Tree and Other Stories

Jamila Gavin, ill. Ossie Murray, Magnet, 0 416 07322 0, £1.75

The Magic Orange Tree is a gem of a collection. It takes the harsh reality of city life today, shrouds it in imagination, and produces a memorable experience for the child at the centre of each of these stories. The magic of the mind is universal; here it is at work in many ethnic groups: Poles, Chinese, Welsh, Jamaican, Irish, Scottish, Greek and Asian.

Gruesome and Bloodsocks Move House

Jane Holiday, ill. Steven Appleby, Dragon, 0 583 31141 5, £1.75

I know eights to tens who've enjoyed **Gruesome and Bloodsocks** (also in Dragon paperback) and they'll not be disappointed by this new one. Gussie's a vampire with a soft heart; Bloodsocks, her familiar cat. They have a lively cast of acquaintances, all exotically named. My favourite is Wriggioletto, the grass snake.



There's some clever word-play here. My readers particularly liked the weird concoctions of food – spinach-flavoured ice lollies will give you a taste. A fast-moving plot, and a lively sense of place when they all move to London. CM

George H. Gástly to the Rescue

Ritchie Perry, ill. Chris Winn, Beaver, 0 09 952030 3, £1.50

A sequel to **George H. Gástly**, this continues the hilarious romps of a benign ghost who, having found he cannot frighten folk, spends his time amusing them. The humour is as good (and bad) as before, and certainly appeals to Junior-aged children. For light relief the book could be an ideal class reader, and a capable eight/nine year old would probably be able to

cope alone. My class and I look forward to more ghostly groans in this format. NS

The Nervous Wreck

Robert Lee, ill. Caroline Holden, Magnet, 0 416 04512 X, £1.75

To find a 'plaice' for this book of fishy nonsense, 'cod' be hard, for this is a story about a hero, Rock Salmon, and his investigations into piscine codswallop... If this strikes you as a load of 'haddock', then just imagine a whole book written in this vein, for **The Nervous Wreck** is just such a one.

My 10-year-old son loved it, and revelled in names like Tina Tuna (the singer), Hurricane Haddock (pool player), and Raypresto (the magician). I preferred some of



the over-written descriptions: 'The nervous wreck... was a cradle of horror, a hotbed of terror... the core of Rock's being...'

Clever, and the storyline is strong, but it does take a strong stomach to finish! NS

Middle/Secondary

Slade

John Tully, Puffin, 0 14 03.2213 2, £1.50

Full marks to John Tully for an inventive opening, which will catch potential readers and, hopefully, sustain them through some dry passages. Eddie is certain there is something distinctly odd about Slade when he meets him in the park; but that doesn't stop him from 'nicking' Slade's bag. So how does Slade follow Eddie home? What does he really want? He must be after more than 'where I can find foods'. In the local supermarket, Slade's total lack of knowledge of the British basic diet, tinned foods, leads Eddie to a growing conviction that his new friend may not be of this world, or planet at least. Still, friends who can number among their talents, looking into the future, have their uses, particularly on an afternoon at the races! BB

Creeps

Tim Schoch, Hippo, 0 590 70625 X, £1.50

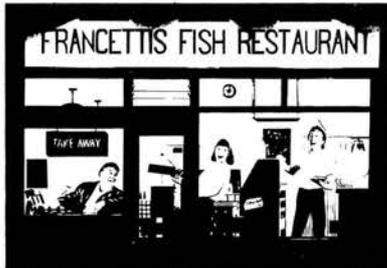
It's the end of summer holidays and back to school. The usual kids are there, same old gossip, same old teachers, everything as it should be. Then Kaybee Keeper appears, 'the strangest girl I'd ever seen', bright orange dress with red fish decorating it. Kaybee Keeper is most definitely 'extraordinarily freaky' but she's also extremely bright, which annoys the other kids even more. But once Kaybee starts to behave in an even more outlandish way, some of the other kids decide there might be more to her than just mere zaniness. Is she an alien? Just how strange is she? It's quite fun reading this to find out. BB

Frying as Usual

Joan Lingard, Puffin, 0 14 03.2370 8, £1.50

A cheerful little book, this, and likely to appeal to first-year pupils. Joan Lingard's straightforward, entertaining writing brings us the story of the Francetti family, Italian fish and chip shop owners.

The accident-prone Francetti father is confined to hospital and it falls on the rest of the family to run the shop. They all contribute, from the imaginative Rosita to the dour Toni and the problems are satisfactorily resolved in a comforting happy ending.



Each member of the family is clearly and simply brought to life and given a place in the story. That's the appeal of Lingard's work – its homely predictability and the careful placing of all the component parts.

Not great literature, certainly, but safe to give to the whole range of first-year abilities; a refreshing quality in the face of the current, often unpleasant, precocity in children's literature. VR

The Jellyfish Season

Mary Downing Hahn, Corgi, 0 552 52452 2, £1.95

12-year-old Kathleen's father

has lost his job and the family go to live with an aunt and uncle several hundred miles away from their home. The problem is Kathleen's cousin Fay – 14 years old but involved with a 20-year-old sailor and a subsequent web of deception which she expects Kathleen to sustain.

Set against a backdrop of family problems the story provides many areas of identification for teenagers but it achieves nothing remarkable. The weakness of the book is its central character, Kathleen – overly passive, impossibly easy to manipulate and incessantly tearful. Add to this the cheap paper on which the book is printed and the large type, likely to be perceived as an insult by the 13- or 14-year-old at whom this is aimed, and you cannot fail to have serious reservations about this offering. VR

The Wild Ride and Other Scottish Stories

Chosen by Gordon Jarvie, Puffin, 0 14 03.2035 0, £1.75

This little grey book holds a treasure trove of funny, strange and magical stories.

Mollie Hunter tells the tale of the bearded Uncle Archibald and his religious fanaticism, about his uncaten birthday cake and the disgrace his daughter brings to him.

Joan Lingard gives us modern family life with her own brand of down-to-earth humour in a story about a fur coat full of money and the dilemma about how it should be spent, until Granny sells the coat by mistake and the dilemma is no more.

Stories by George Mackay Brown, Ian Crichton Smith and Bernard McLaverty are

all here to be enjoyed but my favourite has to be Lavinia Derwent's, 'The Consolation Prize'. Maybe it's because I am sure that this is a true story, or maybe it's just her turn of phrase, or maybe I share her sense of humour but this wee story made me laugh from start to finish and I wouldn't have missed it for anything!

However if Puffin hope to sell a lot of these they'll have to cheer up the cover... or alternatively get every bookseller in the land to read it before it goes on the shelves so that they know what an excellent collection is hiding in there. MS

Tangara

Nan Chauncy, ill. Brian Wildsmith, Puffin, 0 14 03.2185 3, £1.95

Tangara ('Let us set off again') dates from 1960 and it shows. The opening is not promising – geographical detail, complicated sentence structures, some stilted conversation: "How's Snowy?" "Bubbling with inward excitement..." Given the stamina to get through the introductions to place and character, the committed top junior reader will find it well worthwhile. Steeped in the history of the indigenous Tasmanians, Nan Chauncy weaves a complex tale of ordinary white farmers, age-old, earth-rooted Aborigines and the strange friendship that develops between the white girl and the black. Strange because Merrina, the young Aborigine, can evoke the spirits and events of her race's past. The white girl is confronted with some unsavoury home truths. While the style continues a trifle stilted, the events and characters are strong enough

to compel the reader on to the exciting and moving finish.

Brian Wildsmith's illustrations are a great enhancement to an intriguing book. **BJ**

Stringybark Summer

Judith O'Neill, Magnet, 0 416 01582 4, £1.75

Mother is 42 and is going to have a baby; father is a 'wastrel'; Sophie is the daughter but she wields an axe and chops a mean log, because 'chopping wood is woman's work', or so we are told. It is set in Australia, so there's lots of local colour thrown in, gum trees and the like. Sophie can't stay to witness mum having the baby because mum's 42 and going to have problems (again), so Sophie goes to stay with Uncle Ted and Auntie Dot. Now because Trivial Pursuits hasn't reached Stringybark yet, they all sit round of an evening singing popular songs like: 'Swing hard on your axe now boys and bring the big one down/ Strike her on her timbers boys and tip her on her crown.' **BB**

Grange Hill Rebels

Phil Redmond and David Angus, Magnet, 0 416 03182 X, £1.75

Zammo's much-publicised heroin addiction is behind him and, with the help of girlfriend Jackie, he's resitting his exams, but Banksie is intent on breaking up that little party. Meanwhile, Fay is still in a state after her affair with a science teacher and Danny Kendall is truanting from his sick bed to be in school creating havoc with the staff's nerves - oh, and Emelda Davies loses her wig!

If, like me, you find watching *Grange Hill* too much like work, the above will leave you perplexed. Fans however will no doubt relish this latest *Grange Hill* - THE BOOK. **DB**

MacGyver on Ice

Mark Daniel, Armada, 0 00 692733 5, £1.95

Required reading for anyone planning a trip to Alaska or The North Pole. All the survival information and tricks



you could possibly need are packed into these snowy pages. Other useful advice is given on what to do when a Commie-hating American war veteran sets himself up in the Arctic Circle with a greenhouse and an outfit capable of rocketing designer bacteria across to the USSR. Naturally MacGyver, the spy who knits, and his boffin and

beautiful female sidekick save the world with seconds to spare.

A fast thriller/adventure based on the TV series, which should appeal to adventure series fans. **DB**

Star Wind

Linda Woolverton, Corgi, 0 552 52459 X, £1.95

It's middle-class USA again. Camden, yes Camden, goes to summer camp. Whether she does this because her parents 'were big on books' feeling 'reading opened doors to the imagination' and subsequently subjected her to games of Scrabble on the living-room floor, or to avoid her mother's cooking, is left to the reader's imagination. Mother 'had been learning to cook for the past 10 years' and it makes her nervous, even though she teaches English at Santa Monica High and sells real estate at the weekend (when she isn't cooking)! 'So,' Camden's father said, 'read any good books lately?' **BB**

Older Readers

You Win Some, You Lose Some

Jean Ure, Corgi Freeway, 0 552 52431 X, £1.95

Jamie, aspiring ballet star first seen in *A Proper Little Nooryeff*, continues his adventures. Ure's touch falters somewhat in this sequel, however, and what was humorous in *Nooryeff* occasionally becomes heavy-handed here.

The storyline charts Jamie's attempts to lure female members of his dance class into his bed. Plenty of opportunities for humour - unfortunately, too much of it predictable and relying heavily on an almost ludicrous level of gullibility on Jamie's part.

The least believable - and, indeed, most badly-written section of the book is that dealing with Steven's homosexual advances towards Jamie. Intended, I imagine, as an amusing subplot, it is embarrassing and clumsy.

There are redeeming features, however - notably the realistic sketches of ballet school life and its accompanying larger-than-life characters. I'd offer this to third-years upwards but not wholeheartedly. **VR**

Please Don't Go

Peggy Woodford, Corgi Freeway, 0 552 52457 3, £1.95

Peggy Woodford has edited a number of creditable collections of short stories and this offering in her own right is equally commendable.

It is a love story, intelligently written and likely to appeal to third-, fourth- and fifth-year readers - perhaps most profitably as part of a wide-ranging GCSE study of love stories/romance.

Mary Meredith tells the story of two summers spent in France on a French/English exchange during which she falls in love with Joel, son of a local family. The narrative is refreshingly direct and low key, the setting believably recreated and the turbulent feelings of a 15-year-old girl explored with sensitivity.

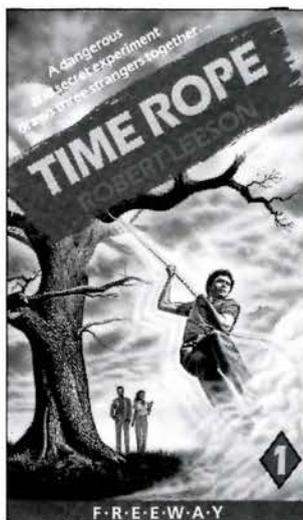
There are some awkwardnesses - a trite deathbed scene and a powerful attraction for an older man conveniently soured by an overhead conversation. However, this is, undeniably, one of the better offerings from Corgi's new 'Freeway' series for teenage readers and worth a second look. **VR**

Time Rope

Robert Leeson, Corgi Freeway, 0 552 52344 5, £1.95

The first of the 'Time Rope' quartet introduces the three principal characters - Fiona, Tod and Roller. The story moves through time sketching in their forebears - embracing slave traders, Regency England and the Spanish Civil War.

The twists of the plot may confuse less able readers, as may the time slip experiment central to the plot - although reinforcement abounds in the early chapters.



The wide range of subject matter, selected to appeal to both sexes, ethnic minorities and the disadvantaged, results in a rather self-conscious attempt to capture the widest possible teenage market and render the book not entirely convincing. Adolescent readers might strongly disagree - I've a feeling this quartet will be popular. **VR**

The Stalker

Joan Lowery Nixon, Corgi Freeway, 0 552 52369 0, £1.95

Jennifer's best friend Bobbie is accused of murdering her own mother - Jennifer is convinced Bobbie is innocent and sets out to prove it with the assistance of Lucas Maldonado, immediately recognisable as the gallant but ageing hero of a thousand American 'cop' movies.

The storyline moves at an accelerating pace and slickly covers the subject areas expected of a thriller - hard drugs, credit card swindles, multiple murders - with the tried and tested red herring thrown in for good measure.

It begins to grip the reader - probably an average or less able third-, fourth- or fifth-year pupil - about half way through. It offers fast-paced entertainment without tears - literary merit is there none. **VR**

Zak

Frances Thomas, Corgi Freeway, 0 552 52362 3, £1.95

Frances Thomas feels her way uncertainly into the first three chapters of the story; lots of overidentification her teenage audience here. The obscurities are intrusive and unnecessary, the private language spoken by Mark and his friend Wellington irritating.

After I'd despaired of the book the narrative changed tack and explored less frenetically the story of Zak, a maladjusted teenager who holds a large part of William Wordsworth School in thrall.

The story unfolds predictably - Zak lies about his name, his 'rock star' father, his source of financial support and Mark struggles with feelings of irritation and pity to become the most solid element in Zak's life.

The book tries hard - too hard - and fails to offer teenage readers a really convincing or stimulating read. Perhaps next time? **VR**

The Fat Girl

Marilyn Sachs, Corgi
Freeway, 0 552 52406 9,
£1.95

Well done, Corgi – at last, a paperback version of **The Fat Girl**. The book is deservedly popular – it has a message to communicate and does it well. Jeff, handsome, worldly and arrogant, adopts 'the fat girl' – Ellen de Luca – as a cause; he's determined to turn her away from her talk of suicide. The real motivating factor, however, is Ellen's open adoration of him – a powerful drug he cannot resist.

Jeff becomes increasingly uneasy as Ellen begins to lose weight and gain friends and self-confidence. His attempts to control and manipulate her lose ground, culminating in her rejection of the exotic golden gown he has bought for her to wear at the High School Prom. He wanted her to be different – a goddess; she, after years of rejection because she was so unlike everyone else, chose another dress – and, ultimately, another boyfriend.

The book is about male manipulation, insensitivity, control – the moral is direct and hard-hitting. An essential buy; as a part of GCSE wider reading programme or as a class set for the third-year upwards. VR

This Time of Darkness

H. M. Hoover, Puffin, 0
14 03.1872 0, £1.75

The Priests of Ferris

Maurice Gee, Puffin,
0 14 03.2061 X, £1.95

When you've only ever been told lies how can you identify the truth? How can untruths bestow a wicked kind of power and control? Here are two recommended fantasies that explore these important issues. In Ms Hoover's book Amy often longs to escape The City to see whether there really is an Outside. When Axel enters her life he can confirm her ideas – he is from Outside, but trapped like everyone else in the drab endlessness of Amy's underground world. A daring escape is made, fraught with unexpected dangers and startling revelations: '... if you're not taught the truth, you don't know. Like we didn't know we had to come all the way up here to reach the surface.'

As a future-world tale this makes exciting and thought-provoking reading. There's an irony perhaps that the very fact that she is able to read is the key to Amy's escape from the injustice of untruth to freedom. Recommended for lower to mid-secondary.

Maurice Gee's story is a sequel to **The Halfmen of O** and has all the fast pace and gripping invention of its

forerunner. Much of the first section really needs a knowledge of the earlier adventure for complete comprehension but with a bit of tenacity new readers could get by.

Susan Ferris feels drawn to return to O and when she gets there with her cousin Nick she finds that not only have 100 years elapsed, but in her name the land is gripped, vice-like, by the evil, ruthless Priests of Ferris, led by their insane High Priest for whom, 'lies are part of the system, and cruelty means fear and fear means control.' Susan and her allies are set the daunting, blood-strewn task of turning that system around and restoring the truth, banishing fear. All fantasy readers will relish this one. DB

Angel Face

Norma Klein, Pan
Horizons, 0 330 29982 4,
£1.95

'Okay, so there you have it. Your typical American family. We're not in jail, we're not in debt, we'll probably all go to college, but still it kind of makes you wonder, if you're the wondering type.' Indeed; the parents' rocky 27-year marriage has collapsed after several affairs on both sides; 17-year-old Tyler is regularly sleeping with his girlfriend with her parents' blessing; Andy, a law student, is having an affair with a married man;



Erin is anorexic and Angel Face Jason himself is a 15-year-old, pot-smoking, school hating virgin anxious to reverse the latter state of affairs – self absorption seems to be the norm. Yet amongst the racy talk and furtive groping in the dark there is some tenderness and by the end we can only feel pity for the state this 'typical American family' has got itself into. Definitely for older readers. DB

WINTER WINNERS FROM GOLLANCZ

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illustrated by Caroline Binch

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£7.95 0 575 04099 8

A FREE MAN ON SUNDAY

by Fay Sampson

An enthralling account of the mass trespass on Kinder Scout in 1932, as seen through a child's eyes. Young readers will not fail to recognise parallels in what is happening to our countryside today.

£7.95 0 575 04114 5

DUALISTS

by Stephen Bowkett

Once again school life, science fiction and romance are successfully combined to produce a spine-chilling drama. By the author of *Spellbinder* and *Gameplayers* – 'A strong treatment of fantasy and reality that catches the stuff of adolescence' – **Observer**

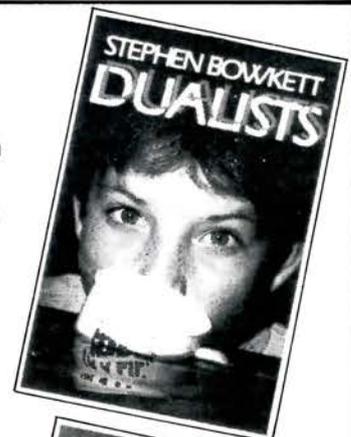
£7.95 0 575 04106 4

MASTER OF FIENDS

by Douglas Hill

This tense and exciting fantasy adventure concludes the story that began with *Blade of the Poisoner*. A tale of survival against the odds, by the author of the immensely popular *Last Legionary* books.

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Gollancz

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The ever-popular lad from Huddersgate is back in another misadventure

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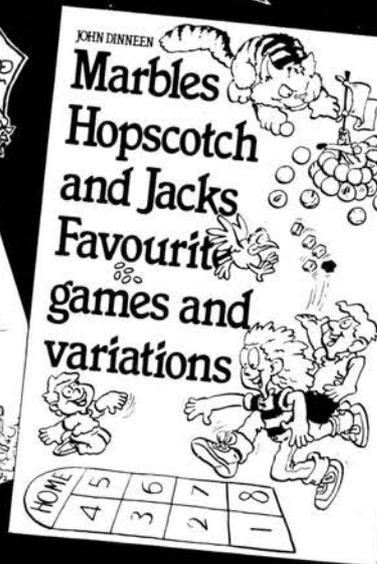
Written and illustrated by Bob Wilson

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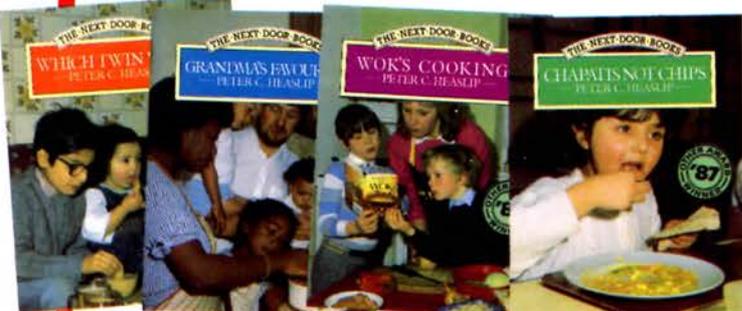
THE OTHER AWARD 1987

The panel for the 1987 Other Award has chosen four winners and two runners-up to honour for this, its thirteenth, presentation.

The idea of several 'equal winners' is a characteristic of the Other Award, as is the fact that the panel considers books for children and young people from a wide range of publishing – educational, community, Black and gay as well as mainstream. Set up to be different from established awards the Other Award has ended up influencing them while itself remaining constant in its focus on the presentation of gender, race, class and disability alongside literary and aesthetic merit. There are no prizes for the winners. 'The only real prize for an author or illustrator is their book reaching readers it would not otherwise have found,' says Rosemary Stones, co-founder of the award with Andrew Mann. This may well be happening. Publishers report that the Other Award – now paradoxically very much part of the children's books establishment – actually increases sales; and the Other Award posters are much in demand for libraries, schools and bookshops.

The Winners and the award panel's comments

Grandma's Favourite, 0 423 51720 1 **Wok's Cooking**, 0 423 51740 6
Which Twin Wins?, 0 423 51750 3 **Chapatis not Chips**, 0 423 51730 9
 Peter Heaslip, Methuen 'Next Door Books' series, £1.75 each



Everyday incidents for primary school age children are vividly and amusingly told in these four 'Next Door Books': a mixed marriage family prepares for a christening (**Grandma's Favourite**); bi-lingual (Urdu/English) twins vie with each other to teach their baby sister words from each language (**Which Twin Wins?**); a white family learns to cook with a wok (**Wok's Cooking**); and an Asian mum comes into school to show how to make chapatis (**Chapatis not Chips**). Part of a series for developing readers and illustrated with lively, full-colour photographs. These deceptively simple stories are a vital addition to a literature for younger readers which reflects the multi-racial society.

The Palestinians

David McDowall, Franklin Watts 'Issues' series, 0 86313 484 X, £5.25

'The plight of the Palestinians is one of the most serious and controversial issues facing the world,' says David McDowall in this exceptionally clear and well-written account of the history and present-day situation of the Palestinian people. This is the first book to be published in Britain for young readers on this complex subject which can rouse strongly partisan feelings. With its well-judged text illustrated with charts and photographs, **The Palestinians** sensitively presents the issues and explains the differing interests that have created this twentieth-century tragedy.

Push Me, Pull Me

Sandra Chick, Women's Press 'Livewire', 0 7043 4901 9, £2.95

14-year-old Cathy's world falls apart when her mum's boyfriend, Bob, moves in and begins to sexually assault and rape her, confident

that Cathy will never tell her mum what's going on. When Bob finally leaves, the painful and courageous process of making a new life begins for Cathy. Uncompromisingly honest about causes and effects, **Push Me, Pull Me** shows in many ways, large and small, where sexual abuse fits into larger social injustices and distortions. No easy read, this novel for teenagers is both moving and compelling.

Rosa Guy

The Other Award has only once before singled out an individual writer for an outstanding overall contribution to children's literature. In 1977 Frederick Grice was honoured for his novels (which include **The Bonny Pit Laddie**) which embody the history and spirit of the Durham mining community he grew up in. Now in 1987 the Other Award is honouring Rosa Guy, one of America's leading Black writers who has, over the years, made a unique and outstanding contribution to a literature for teenagers in which the Black experience is central.

Rosa Guy's first trilogy (**The Friends**, **Edith Jackson**, **Ruby**) focuses primarily on the lives of girls and women and is a sensitive and perceptive portrayal of the cultural divide between Black Americans and people from the Caribbean. All three of these powerful novels stand on their own; **The Friends**, in particular, is an established favourite with teenagers in Britain. Rosa Guy's second trilogy (**The Disappearance**, **New Guys Around the Block**, **And I Heard a Bird Sing**) also addresses themes of racial prejudice, violence and society's indifference to the needs of Black youth. Rosa Guy's style here is fast moving, and dramatic tension is sustained with the introduction of crime and thrilling dénouements.

Rosa Guy's versatility and originality as a writer are clearly shown in her recent and very different poetic novel set in a Caribbean island, **My Love, My Love** (Virago Upstarts) in which she looks, via the story of Desirée Dieu-Donné, a peasant girl, and her love for rich and handsome Daniel Beauxhomme, at the destiny of poor peasants eking out their existence in a society in which prejudice of colour, race and class, creates a descending spiral of deprivation, despair and destruction.

With **Paris**, **Pee Wee** and **Big Dog**, the tale of three friends' adventures in the streets of New York, Rosa Guy has now also turned her attention to writing for a younger audience (8 to 12-year-olds).

Rosa Guy's novels are published by Gollancz and Puffin.

The Runners-up

Piggybook

Anthony Browne, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 268 7, £5.95

Mr Piggott and sons Patrick and Simon lead such important lives they barely notice Mrs Piggott as she cooks, cleans and goes out to work – until the day she's no longer there. A witty picture book full of surreal detail and a moral tale about sex roles. For six-year-olds and upwards.

Words by Heart

Ouida Sebestyen, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 12083 7, £6.95

Lena's is the first Black family in the district and when Lena wins the scripture reciting competition, unspoken hostility becomes open. This powerful novel for teenagers is a moving evocation of share cropping life in the southern states of America in the early years of the century. ●

There may be a copy of the Other Award poster with this issue of **Books for Keeps**. If not, or if you would like an extra copy, write to Rosemary Stones, 4 Aldebert Terrace, London SW8 1BH, enclosing an A4 stamped, self-addressed envelope.

The Observer Teenage Fiction Prize

The winner for 1987 is

Memory by Margaret Mahy
(Dent, 0 460 06269 7, £7.95)

19-year-old Jonny, troubled, drunk and desperately needing to make some sense out of some powerful and confused memories (especially those connected with his older sister's death five years ago) encounters old Sophie West, equally confused but without memory, suffering from senile dementia. An unlikely relationship is depicted with humour and understanding as Jonny, drawn into Sophie's present, begins to make sense of his own past.

Also shortlisted were:

Wise Child, Monica Furlong, Gollancz, 0 575 04046 7, £7.95

Madame Doubtfire, Anne Fine, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 12001 2, £6.95

Isaac Champion, Janni Howker, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 270 9, £5.95

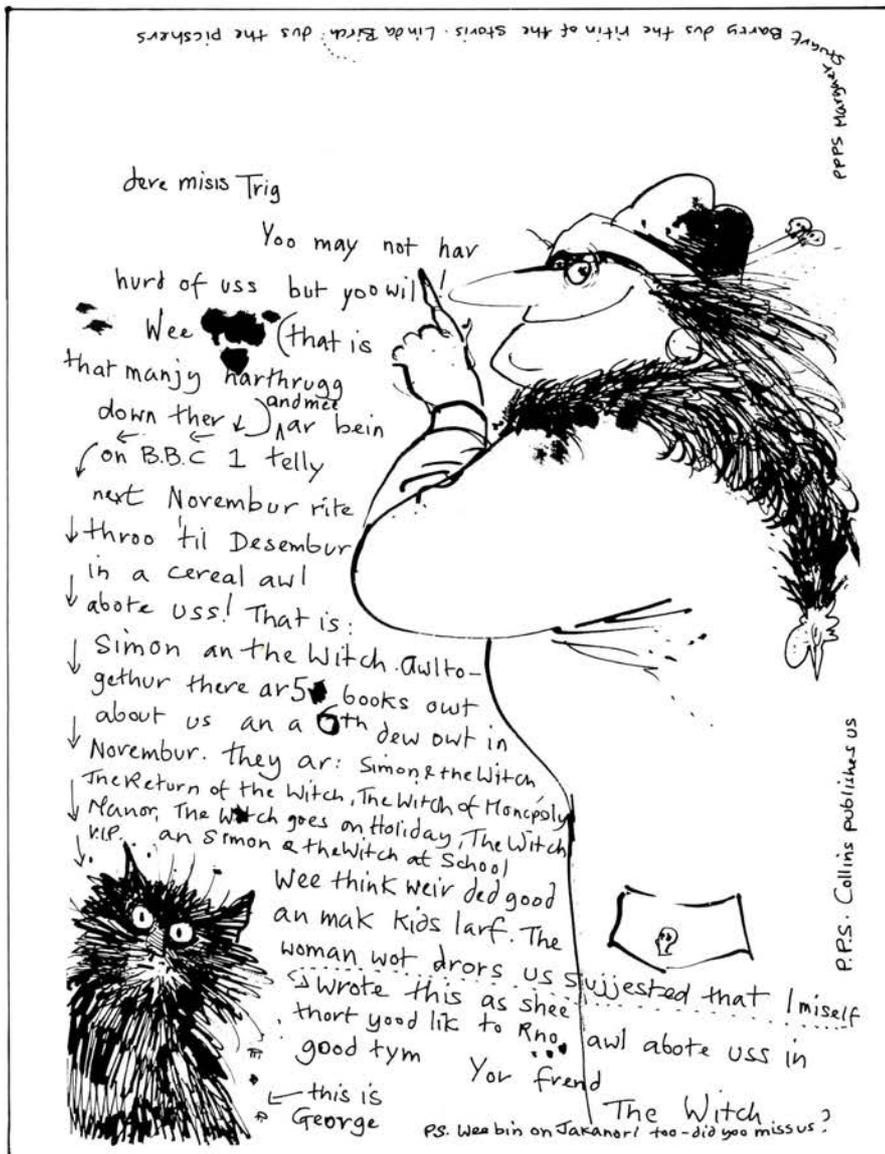
The Mysterious Mr Ross, Vivien Alcock, Methuen, 0 416 01312 0, £7.50

Push Me, Pull Me, Sandra Chick, Women's Press 'Livewire', 0 7043 4901 9, £2.95

The six adult members of the jury were joined this year by 16-year-old Philip Chamberlain. ●

SOUND & VISION

Letter from "The Witch"



It's not every day that **Books for Keeps** gets a letter from a witch – so we thought you'd like to read this one.

We understand from the BBC that the witch is right! **Simon and the Witch** started a thirteen episode series on 16th November. It appears on Mondays (at 4.45) and Tuesdays (4.20) and runs until December 29th (BBC 1).

Margaret Stuart Barry has written the storyline for the series based on her original characters. The latest book **Simon and the Witch in School** is based on the TV series.

Elizabeth Spriggs plays the witch, Jean Sims, Lady Fox Custard and Hugh Pollard is Simon. The series is produced by Angela Beeching.

The 'woman wot droos the picshers' for the books is Linda Birch.

Hardbacks:

The Witch VIP, 0 00 184955 7, £4.95

The Witch on Holiday, 0 00 184932 8, £5.25

Simon and the Witch in School,

0 00 184874 7, £4.95 (published on 19th October)

Paperbacks:

Simon and the Witch, 0 00 672064 1, £1.75

The Return of the Witch, 0 00 672063 3, £1.75

The Witch of Monopoly Manor, 0 00 671788 8, £1.75

The Witch on Holiday, 0 00 672300 4, £1.75

Aliens in the Family

Margaret Mahy's gripping SF adventure has been adapted for television by Allan Baker. The six episode series runs until December 23rd and is screened on BBC 1 on Wednesdays. Grant Thatcher, shown here on the TV tie-in cover from Hippo (0 590 70557 1, £1.50) plays Bond, the strange fugitive boy befriended by Dora, Lewis and their step-sister Jake. Why is he so secretive? Why wont he be separated from his transistor? Find out in a story which is as much about belonging in families as it is about other worlds.

Aliens in the Family is directed by Christine Secombe and produced by Paul Stone. ●

Children's Book Week – The Right Direction

Bob Cattell, CBW Organiser at Book Trust It's over! But did it work?

That's a question for you not me. And the answer will much depend on where you are standing. There are strong indications, however, that Children's Book Week gained a great deal of ground from the regional emphasis of Book Cover UK and the Roadshows. The strong local identification of book events this year has led to a real leap forward in the media coverage the campaign has received and consequently we have had an explosion in the numbers of enquiries from schools, libraries and even bookshops.

The crude statistics are not too meaningful – but sales of promotional material were up

more than 50% (mind you, I challenge anyone to do better than Tony Ross's designs for this year) and we estimate that nearly 5,000 events took place involving in one way or another about 1,500,000 children.

But how good were they? I suspect some were brilliant and some diabolical. I know some were brilliant. My experience travelling with the northern roadshow bus took me to Belfast and Millom – the two events for which I have the highest praise. Quite different from each other – the Northern Ireland Y.L.G. had put together a vast programme with authors covering most of the province; the Millom event was very local, very friendly. But both were professionally organised, attention was paid to smallest details and the result was not lacking the slightest spontaneity. They were fun

for all involved, press coverage was brilliant, thousands of children experienced one of the best outings they'd known and I stood by in admiration.

I'm told by the hardened travellers on the southern bus that the events in Exmouth and Blackburn were every bit as good. And others were pretty good, and every now and then we came up against poor planning and lack of courtesy to authors and thought, 'We've still got a long way to go.' Astonishingly some organisers still haven't grasped the basics such as the idea that authors arriving for a full afternoon session might possibly be given something to eat and drink before they begin.

But this isn't the time for moans and gripes. What has made my involvement with Children's Book Week so enjoyable has been the



enthusiasm of people all over the country. There appears to be a very good chance that a new sponsor will be secured for the 1988 campaign. And I am quite sure it will once again be bigger and better than ever. ●



Lloyds Bank

Sponsors Videos for Schools

THE SHAKESPEARE VIDEO WORKSHOPS

Three 60-minute workshops produced by the Learning Resources Branch of the Inner London Education Authority primarily for 'O' and 'A' level students. However, a detailed knowledge of the texts is not assumed and the programmes will be enjoyed by students from the middle years of secondary school upwards. Written and presented by David Whitworth and acted by members of the New Shakespeare Company, whose schools matinees at the Open Air Theatre, Regent's Park, have been famous for many years.

THE TORTURED MIND This programme examines Shakespeare's portrayal of the mind under intolerable stress in his four great tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*.

THE COMIC SPIRIT Looks at Shakespeare's use of the many aspects of comedy from straightforward clowning to subtle irony in the plays *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Much Ado About Nothing*.

THE ROMAN TRAGEDIES Explores *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* giving particular attention to Shakespeare's treatment of the themes of leadership and loyalty, tyranny and tyrannicide, and political and personal treachery. Parallels between the modern world and that of Shakespeare are drawn and appreciation of the playwright's relationship to his own time and relevance to our own is thereby heightened.



Renee Asherson (Volumnia) and John Nettles (Coriolanus) and Philippa Gail (Virgilia) in *The Roman Tragedies*.

Produced and directed by Noël Hardy, all three videos have won awards at International Film and Video Festivals in the Education categories.

Price: £20 each including VAT, post and packing for VHS or Betamax formats from:
CFL Vision, Sales Department, Gerrards Cross, Bucks. SL9 8TN.

In addition to the above, Lloyds Bank has also sponsored other schools videos—one describing the work of the Young National Trust Theatre, and another 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.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS
NEWS

FIRST DIRECTOR OF THE CHILDREN'S BOOK FOUNDATION



The Children's Book Foundation is a newly-created part of Book Trust (formerly the National Book League) which will take over all its activities for the under-sixteens. The first Director of this important and exciting division is Eunice McMullen who started her new job at the beginning of October.

Eunice is well-qualified for her new post. She was for several years an English teacher in a middle school in Rochdale where she had charge of the library. During that time she organised book fairs, ran an award-winning school bookshop and, with her husband Nigel, produced *Bookworm*, a magazine for children. She eventually left teaching to work for Penguin where she has been running the Puffin Club and the new school bookselling projects. She is also the author of two children's books.

We hope to hear from Eunice about her plans for the future when she has had time to settle in. Meanwhile we wish her and the Foundation every success and the best of luck.

Help with Books – from Librarians

Take Off Into Reading comes from **Hampshire County Libraries**. A useful fold-out leaflet for parents (and teachers) with an annotated selection of 34 books arranged under First Steps, Gaining Confidence, Taking Off. There's also a short list of Books for Parents.

Now Read On from **Camden Libraries** lists 100 titles (no annotations) arranged under First Steps, Getting Going, Moving On and Taking Off. Titles range from John Burningham's *The Blanket* and Ron Maris' *Better Move on Frog!* to *Granny* and *Tom's Midnight Garden*. Each title is prefixed by a star which children are invited to colour in: 'red for the best, yellow for good, blue for OK'. There's a page of advice to adults which stresses sharing, enjoyment.

Also from Camden Libraries **Your Child in Hospital** – advice and annotated booklist compiled in association with NAWCH.

Developing Readers by Judith Graham and Elizabeth Plackett comes from the **School Library Association**. A selection made with the older child in mind 'who needs encouragement to read'. Nevertheless the annotations would be of interest to anyone involved with children and books. The experience of the authors as teachers and researchers (both worked with Margaret Meek on *Achieving Literacy*) shines through and their comments are worth reading even if you know the books! In their introduction they say they have chosen books 'by authors who have a real story to tell and who have taken pride and care in the telling of it'. None 'were written expressly to teach "reading" or to be useful for "remedials"'. The invitation of each text is that the reader should engage with the author, and thus discover more about reading itself.'

Obtainable from SLA, Liden Library, Barrington Close, Liden, Swindon SN3 6HF. £2.90 (£2.40 to SLA members).

The Third Class Genie on stage

Bob Leeson has adapted his very popular and funny fantasy adventure for the stage. The work was specially commissioned by the Phoenix Arts Theatre in Leicester and

will have its world premiere on 26th November. Performances, matinee and evening, Tuesdays to Saturdays, will continue until 23rd January.

Details from the Phoenix Box Office (tel: 0533 554854).

Price Increase

Sorry but we will be increasing the price of the annual UK subscription to **Books for**

Keeps from £6.90 to £7.20 as from 1st January 1988.

A NEW PUBLISHER ON THE SCENE

The American publishers Simon and Schuster now have a new company in Britain with a rapidly developing children's list. So far they have published moving picture books and novelty books (lift the flaps, re-usable stickers); for the future they promise teenage fiction, information books and 'innovative activity books'.

From the first months' output we'd pick

Goodnight Jessie (0 671 65463 2) and **Hurry Up Jessie** (0 671 65462 4) by Harriet Ziefert and Mavis Smith, £3.95 each. In each book Jessie searches for and gathers up her possessions while Mum waits and calls off-page. Ingeniously designed die cuts in the page give the reader Jessie's view from *outside* the cupboard, drawer, washing machine, etc., and then, as the page turns, a view of Jessie from *inside*. Nicely shaped cumulative tales with lots of opportunities for reader involvement.



Old Henry (0 671 65478 0, £5.95), a rhyming story by Joan W Blos with gorgeous pictures by Stephen Gammell, is a gently moral tale, a plea for mutual tolerance which ends optimistically. Stephen Gammell's pictures give vibrant life to the unorthodox Henry in his neglected old house and to his tidy-minded neighbours.



The Children's Choice

Janet and Allan Ahlberg (and Jessica) take delivery from Keith Chegwin of a specially designed post box, their prize from the Federation of Children's Book Groups as winners of this year's Children's Book Award for **The Jolly Postman**. Over 5,000 children from thirteen regions took part in the testing and judging of this, the only children's book award in which the children have a voice.