An illustration of the White Knight from Lewis Carroll's 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland'. The knight, a portly man with a large nose and a mustache, is wearing full plate armor and riding a white horse. He is holding a sword and looking towards the right. A young girl with blonde hair, wearing a blue and white dress, is standing next to the horse, looking up at the knight. The background is dark and rocky.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's
book magazine

November 1991 No. 71 UK Price £1.90

The Classics

Classics for CHRISTMAS

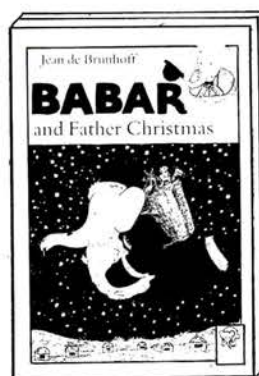
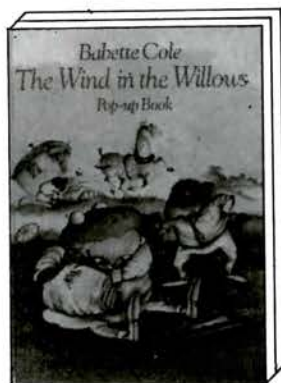
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Methuen Children's Books

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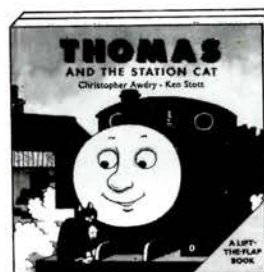
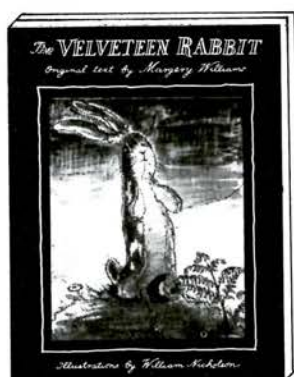
Margery Williams

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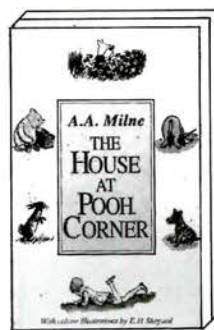
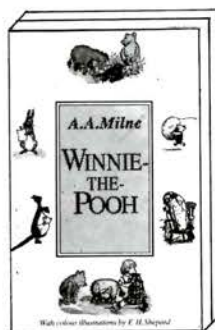
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Cover story

The illustration on the front of **BfK** this month is the cover of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* with illustrations by Sir John Tenniel.

The book is published by Macmillan (0 333 29037 2) at £9.99, and we're grateful for their help in using this picture of Alice and the White Knight.



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EDITOR'S PAGE



Ask a random sample of ten children's book experts to name their Top Ten titles for today's youngsters and the odds are there will be about ten percent overlap and ninety percent divergence. I can offer these figures pretty confidently because that's what happened back in March when Radio 4's **Treasure Islands** undertook just such an exercise. Well might Victor Watson (see page 4) begin his article, 'I was relieved that the question I have to consider is: *what makes a children's classic?*' – and not: *what are the children's classics?*' As Victor makes clear, he sees his response very much as a preliminary, ground-clearing exercise rather than a final stake-out of the subject.

This said, the very improbability of agreement makes any overlap all the more interesting so we make no apologies for the prominence of the **Alice** books and **Treasure Island** in this 'Classics' issue – titles that, by common consent, mark a turning-point in the history of writing for children. Of course, you can rely on **BfK** contributors to attempt an unusual angle even on these much-considered works. On page 24, Shirley Hughes examines the 'look' rather than the literary merits of Robert Louis Stevenson's famous adventure story while, on page 27, Julia MacRae spells out why – if the book had been submitted to her publishing house – she'd have turned it down flat. Well... that's *nearly* what she says.

Our Authorgraph (centre-spread) offers nothing less than a World Exclusive: the only interview with Lewis Carroll on record, here offered in print for the first time ever.



Readers sceptical of its authenticity are assured – hand-on-heart and broad grin firmly in place – that the piece was submitted to us by no less an authority than Naomi Lewis who is, as everyone knows, a fairy. Need we say more?

James Riordan, on pages 14-15, admits to less exotic sources in researching his impending update of Jonathan Swift's **Gulliver's Travels**, one of those awkward narratives which achieved its reputation as a children's book by default – the virtual absence, at the time of publication, of stories for children at all. What his piece makes clear is why the work deserves to survive in an age that's more than corrected the omission. For the survival of classics can't be taken for granted. Our non-fiction Editor, Eleanor von Schweinitz, was astonished to discover that almost all the books of C Walter Hodges are currently out-of-print, including his masterpiece **Shakespeare's Theatre** which she celebrates on page 22. Is there a hint here for some enterprising publisher? Or perhaps for some packager of books-and-video cassette? These days, as demonstrated by Rachel Redford's Audio reviews on page 13, we need to look at every possible vehicle for promoting the best books for children.

In the end, though, what counts is the quality of words and images on the page. Hence Margery Fisher's annotated selection of current classics in print, on pages 28-30, where her personal enthusiasm shines through – and her confidence that, with a little help from their friends, here are titles which can and will survive. Of course, it needs to be the right kind of help. 'The classics,' she says, 'should be tossed to children as interesting food to be sampled not virtuously but as sandwiches whose fillings might surprise them.'

Amen to that.

Chris

REMINDER:

BfK/BFC AUTUMN COMPETITION FOR SCHOOLS

Can the children in your class (minimum group size six, but no upper limit) produce two pages of **BfK** – a double-spread of book-related writing based on any, or all, of our regular features?

Closing Date: 30th December 1991

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The Prizes: A selection of brand new paperbacks and hardbacks valued as follows:

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|---------------------------------|-------|
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Entries must be reducible to **BfK** size for future publication, but otherwise may be hand-drawn or written, typed, computer-set or some combination of all three – let the children choose! See **BfK 70** (September 91), page 23, for full details or send us an s.a.e. marked 'Competition'.

Winners to be announced in our March 92 issue. ■

WHAT MAKES A CHILDREN'S CLASSIC?

Victor Watson



I was relieved that the question I have to consider is: *What makes a children's classic?* – and not: *What are the children's classics?* On the second question, no two readers would ever agree.



Let's try some definitions. 'Books written by dead people' was suggested by a group of ten-year-olds, but when asked for some examples they suggested **Tom's Midnight Garden**, **The BFG** and **The Snowman**. But their judgement was not as confused as it seems, for they clearly knew that the word 'classic' in its many contexts almost always suggests an excellence surviving from a past age. That's not a bad idea to begin with: a children's classic is a book whose popularity has survived the age in which it was written. And I would add that such a book does not simply endure like a fossil in a glass case, but is constantly re-made and improvised upon so that its qualities and its appeal are transformed and revealed to new generations of readers.

But I know there are doubters who point out that whether a book is continually re-issued has more to do with the economics of publishing than with a serious concern for young readers. For if publishers re-issue attractive books from the past, well-meaning adults can hardly be blamed for buying them.

Take **Alice**, for example. The two stories, **Alice's Adventures in Wonderland** and **Through the Looking-Glass**, were published in 1866 and 1871/2 and they have been in print ever since. Yet it's undoubtedly the case that more copies are purchased by adults than read by children. But children *did* read **Alice** in the past. We can generalise from that and suggest that no children's book has become a classic unless it was first enjoyed by a whole generation of young readers. It may be true that the status of the two **Alice** stories as classics is today sustained by adult conviction, but it was established in the first place by the commitment of children.

Our secondhand-bookshops are full of the abandoned relics of an age devoted to didacticism upholding the pieties and properties of the Victorian middle classes. Their instructional authority was reinforced by the fact that most of those stories were given as Sunday School prizes. So what a breath of fresh air **Alice** must have brought to those Victorian nurseries! Here was a young heroine who did what little girls were not permitted to do: she spoke her mind and turned didacticism the other way round. It is the adults who get corrected and rebuked. In a world of lunacies and cruelties, Alice is brave, forthright and intelligent. **Alice's Adventures in Wonderland** and **Through the Looking-Glass** have been analysed by mathematicians, philosophers, clergymen, Freudian psychologists and literary historians, and their views have helped to confirm the books as enduring children's classics. But they would not have become classics in the first place if the children of the 1860s and 1870s had not taken Alice to their hearts.

Subsequently the two stories have attracted the imaginative inventiveness of illustrators, from Tenniel and Rackham to – most recently – Anthony Browne. A children's classic is repeatedly brought to life afresh by later artists, not only illustrators but also dramatists and directors of film and television. Stories are made into plays – or, in the case of **Peter Pan and Wendy**, a play is made into a story; or they are made into full-length feature films (**The Railway Children**, **The BFG**, **Danny the Champion of the World**), or adapted and serialised for television (**Tom's Midnight Garden**, **A Little Princess**). A characteristic of the classic children's story is its capacity to offer from within itself new meanings and fresh emphases while retaining its original integrity. I am cautious about proclaiming that too confidently, for I have in mind the example of Beatrix Potter, whose books are like tiny fortresses resisting all attempts to meddle with their self-contained completeness.

I believe our literature is composed of the books we set aside for re-reading. If that's true of individuals, it is probably true of the whole culture. The great children's classics are those books our national consciousness cannot leave alone. We keep re-making them and reading them afresh. While it is certainly true that thousands of British children have not read them, the two **Alice** stories have become part of the language. Children who have never opened the books know about the Mad Hatter's tea-party, the Queen of Hearts and Tweedledum and Tweedledee. All children who have access to the full cultural possibilities of the varieties of language in our country have access to those images, whether they've read the books or not. The classics are part of our national vocabulary – metaphors, perhaps – reverberating in the wider cultural language which we all share (though not equally, more's the pity). Eeyore with his melancholy burst balloon and empty honeypot is an *idea*, an enactment of meaning, more subtly dramatic than any abstraction could ever be. And so are Ratty and Mole remonstrating with the impossible Toad; and Wendy and the Lost Children in their underground house; and the foolishly trusting Jemima Puddleduck.

I've tried so far to explain children's books in terms of their popularity and significance to the culture. But have they any recognisable characteristics in common? I believe they have.

Among the thousands of books written for children, there appears now and again one which, through some mysterious alchemy, the author has transformed into a metaphor expressing the ways in which children and adults love one another. Children's classics are love stories.

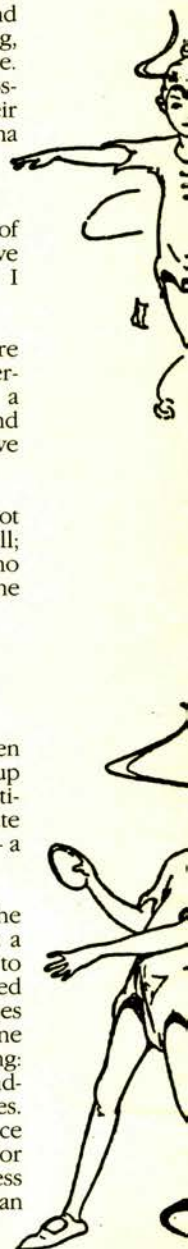
Lewis Carroll was the first to do it. His two stories are not simply stories for children, or stories about Alice Liddell; they express and embody his love for her. There is no doubt that he loved her – he told his readers about the effect she still had upon him:

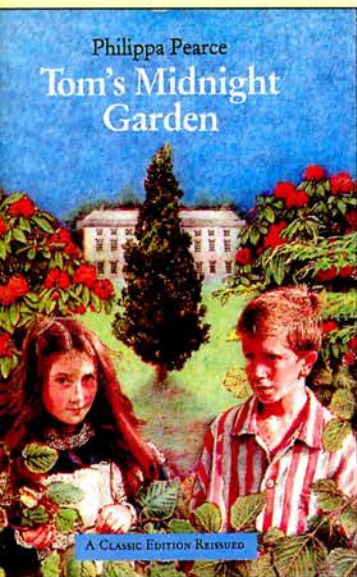
*'Still she haunts me, phantom wise,
Alice moving under skies
Never seen by waking eyes ...'*

Perhaps the stories – especially the second, written when she was no longer a child – were for him a treasuring-up for the future of his memories of her. There is no sentimentalising, just a sustained, witty and affectionate tribute to her good sense, which is at the same time a story – a gift – for her.

Every adult who has loved a child understands that the intimacy which can exist between them has within it a potential poignancy. We may set it aside and refuse to think about it, but we know that loving a child is menaced even more than other relationships are by the processes of change. An intimacy with a child is never an equal one because there is an acute difference of understanding: John Burningham's *Granpa* knows more than his granddaughter about the future and its likely outcomes. *Granpa* is a wise book; it arises from that intimate space that an old man and a little girl create between them. For adults, such spaces are beset with expectations of sadness and loss. Furthermore, their inarticulate dynamics can involve fear, nostalgia, longing and perhaps sexuality.

The analysis of these dynamics must be left to psychologists and social historians. But I believe the stories we regard as classics have this in common: they are born out of that sensitive and problematic area of need and longing. They continue to appeal to us because it is an area





(Oxford)



that is at the heart of family life. Any good novelist, I suppose, could write about it. But a children's classic is not just about a love for a child; it is simultaneously a story for the child, an acknowledgement and welcoming of the child. The great children's classics are stories for children powered by an adult's sense of loss. They enact the relationships they serve.

Frances Hodgson Burnett's **A Little Princess** is overtly a story about a little girl's courage and generosity in humiliating circumstances. But the scenes which have the greatest emotional power are those when Sara says her last goodbye to her father, and when the Indian Gentleman arrives to restore her father's wealth and reputation, and offer himself as a surrogate. The novel is at a deep level a story of a little girl's loss and recovery of her father – an unlikely series of events but profoundly satisfying. It has a great deal in common with E Nesbit's **The Railway Children**. Here is a tale of trains and tunnels and porters, but what makes an ordinary story into an extraordinary classic is that it's driven by another, deeper, story about a daughter rescuing her father. This is a tale of passionate wish-fulfilment – and if you think 'passionate' is too strong a word, re-read the chapter in which Bobbie is re-united with her father at the railway station (or watch your video of the film). In just that brief episode, an authorial yearning surfaces and becomes visible.

Most of the classic tales started as stories for real children. This brings us to **Peter Pan and Wendy**, **The Wind in the Willows**, the two **Pooh Bear** books, and the tales of Beatrix Potter, and in the case of J M Barrie and A A Milne we know that the adult's love for the child was problematical. C S Lewis wrote his books for real children too, but, although they have achieved a cult status, especially in the US, I do not think the **Narnia** books are classics. Despite his undoubted brilliance as a storyteller, Lewis' conception of children is distant and narrow. The perfect union of an adult's love and a storyteller's tact is to be found in the best of the **Swallows and Amazons** stories; Arthur Ransome's affectionate respect for his half-real, half-imagined, children is everywhere felt and nowhere proclaimed.

I believe **Tom's Midnight Garden** is a classic. Furthermore, it exemplifies exactly what I believe the great classics have in common. It has no hint of authorial distress, or sadness, but it is a story about old and young, and how their mutual – but different – needs come together in the form of story. In this narrative, both are participants, though one is more in control than the other. The old woman becomes young again in the storying of her memories – but not perfectly, and not for long. Although Philippa Pearce allows no cheating of the realities of time, in her making of the narrative past, present and future lose their firmness, and the difference of generations is only a difference, not an apartness.

Hattie needs the story because in old age her childhood has come to seem important; Tom knows little of that – he needs the story because he is lonely. In **Tom's Midnight Garden**, it is implicitly acknowledged that the child and the adult regard the story with equal serious-

ness but from different perspectives. For a child, a story is an inviting signal from further along the road; it satisfies immediate needs and predictive interests. But for the adult who's telling it, a story can never be a sign of what lies ahead. The great classics are written by people who understand that difference, and who know how to write a story which welcomes and respects it without making a fuss.

I believe that the classics are stories which appeal, differently, to both children and adults because they arise out of the love that can exist between them. In the very best – as in Philippa Pearce – the writer's firm authorial tact protects the child-reader from an adult's understanding of time and change. A great classic is simultaneously a joyous greeting and a valediction. **Tom's Midnight Garden** ends with a goodbye.

I know this account leaves many questions unanswered and I propose to be honest about that. In particular, several of Beatrix Potter's stories are surely classics – but I cannot accommodate them in the account I have tried to give. There are other anomalies too. Is **The Wizard of Oz** a classic? And if your answer is Yes, are you thinking of the book or of the film? Can a poem be a classic? Or an anthology? Can a continuing sequence of stories (Rupert Bear?) earn classical status? Can a novel for young adults become a classic? (I think not – they are usually too remorselessly self-conscious and explicit.) Then there are the great novels which were not written especially for children – **Robinson Crusoe**, **Jane Eyre**, **David Copperfield**, **Treasure Island** – what about them? And **Rosie's Walk** is probably as familiar to infants today as the First Chapter of Genesis was in the seventeenth century – is it, or will it become, a classic? I leave you with one more question: Roald Dahl is (after Enid Blyton) the most popular children's writer at present; so which of his novels, if any, do you think deserves to become a classic? ■

Victor Watson is a Senior Lecturer in English, specialising in children's books, at Homerton College, Cambridge.

Book details:

For information on **Alice**, see the Authorgraph (centre-spread) and for **The Wind in the Willows**, see Margery Fisher's selection (page 28). **Treasure Island** editions are given with Shirley Hughes's article (page 24).

Tom's Midnight Garden, Philippa Pearce, Oxford, 0 19 271128 8, £7.95; Puffin, 0 14 03.4049 1, £2.99 pbk

The BFG, Roald Dahl, ill. Quentin Blake, Cape, 0 224 02040 4, £8.95; Puffin, 0 14 03.1597 7, £3.50 pbk

The Snowman, Raymond Briggs, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 10004 6, £7.50; Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.350 1, £3.99 pbk

Peter Pan and Wendy, J M Barrie

Reproduction of 1921 edition, ill. Mabel Lucie Attwell, Hodder, 0 340 24629 4, £16.95

Ill. Jan Ormerod, Viking, 0 670 80862 8, £9.99; Puffin, 0 14 03.2007 5, £2.50 pbk

Collins, 0 00 191130 9, £4.95; 0 00 692905 2, £1.95 pbk

Mammoth, ill. Chris Riddell, 0 416 11782 1, £1.95 pbk

Knight, retold May Byron, ill. Mabel Lucie Attwell, 0 340 55657 9, £2.99 pbk

The Railway Children, E Nesbit

Ill. Dinah Dryhurst, Pavilion, 1 85145 700 3, £10.99

Heinemann, 0 434 95456X, £10.95; 0 7497 0551 5, £1.95 pbk

Collins, 0 00 692972 9, £1.95 pbk

Puffin, 0 14 035.005 5, £2.25 pbk

Danny the Champion of the World, Roald Dahl, Cape, 0 224 01201 0, £7.95; Puffin, 0 14 03.2287 6, £2.50 pbk

A Little Princess, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Puffin, 0 14 035.028 4, £2.50 pbk

Granpa, John Burningham, Cape, 0 224 02279 2, £5.95; 0 224 02731 X, £3.95; Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.841 4, £2.50 pbk

Puffin publish **The Wizard of Oz**, L Brank Baum, 0 14 035.001 2, £2.25;

Robinson Crusoe, Daniel Defoe, 0 14 035.072 1, £2.50; and

Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë, 0 14 035.131 0, £2.50.

David Copperfield comes in paperback from, amongst others, Penguin, Oxford and Collins.

Rosie's Walk, Pat Hutchins, Bodley Head, 0 370 00794 8, £5.95; Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.032 4, £2.99 pbk

Pooh Bear books are published by Methuen.

Beatrix Potter titles are available from Frederick Warne.

The Chronicles of Narnia are published in various editions by Collins.

The **Swallows and Amazons** stories are available in hardback from Cape and in paperback from Puffin.



finds his position as King of Julian's toys usurped by newcomer, Ralph Rabbit. Nose out-of-joint, he decides to discover whether life as a real squirrel might not be better. A classic picture book that's as powerful today as it was in 1939. JS



When I Was Your Age
Ken Adams, ill. Val Biro, Simon & Schuster (Jun 91), 0 7500 0451 7, £3.50

This book is pure, outrageous fun. Sammy's Grandpa's reminiscences become increasingly outlandish as he

blithely caps every one of his grandson's achievements. Biro's depiction of the totally deadpan Grandpa, as he announces these feats and is then seen actually doing them, is guaranteed to leave the reader smirking inanely for a very long time! JS

Infant/Junior

The Owl and the Pussycat

Edward Lear, ill. Jan Brett, Simon & Schuster (Mar 91), 0 7500 0774 5, £3.50

Illustrated in brilliant detailed pictures with jewel-like colour and clarity, clear print and on crisp white paper, this version of the old rhyme is delightful. Set in a clear tropical sea, surrounded by exotic fish and plants, the owl and the pussycat carry on their courtship most satisfyingly (except, where is the £5 note?) and in great splendour. Added fun is given by the sub-plot, told in the pictures, of a fish in a bowl and its mate which children enjoy spotting as the pages turn. LW

Nancy Nutall and the Mongrel

Catherine Cookson, ill. Gavin Rowe, Simon & Schuster (Aug 91), 0 7500 0394 4, £3.99

Simon & Schuster keep up the very high quality of their 'Young Books' with this wonderfully sentimental, happy-ever-after story about a little girl who longs for a dog. I defy anyone, child or adult, to read this without smiling at the satisfying outcome of a simply told story of love and good luck!



The paper, print, colour and artwork are as pleasing as the content. Highly recommended for the soft-hearted and hopeful among us. LW

Dog's Dinner and other poems

Irene Rawnsley, Mammoth (Jul 91), 0 7497 0615 5, £2.50

A pleasant collection of poems about everyday activities which are often given an interesting new slant by the author's view of them. These are varied in form, sometimes thought-provoking, with attractive metaphors and ideas. Occasional echoes of other poets (Causley and Ahlberg, for instance) do no harm and the collection has a good deal of fun and interest for reading aloud to younger children just beginning to get beyond nursery rhyme and simple verse. LW

The Lighthouse Keeper's Rescue

Ronda and David Armitage, Picture Puffin (Jul 91), 0 14 054.185 3, £2.99

After *The Lighthouse Keeper's Lunch* (the book that launched a thousand infant technology projects) and *The Lighthouse Keeper's Catastrophe*, this book seems to me to prove the law of diminishing returns. It is, certainly, a perfectly serviceable story about the time when the Lighthouse Keeper faces the sack for falling asleep on the job, but the ending is contrived and the prose flat. It has none of the logic and lateral thinking of the lunch story and none of the suspense of the catastrophe. This makes it rather ordinary. Perhaps the Lighthouse Keeper should be retired, after all. LW

Best Friends

Ed. June Crebbin, ill. Julie Park, Dent (Jun 91), 0 460 88090 X, £2.50

I'm fond of anthologies of stories and verse. The element of surprise and the variety of experience offered by a good collection is often the way into longer books for younger fluent readers and also, let's face it, can be a godsend for those odd minutes when a story or a poem is needed by the teacher or parent to fill in time or calm and settle the children.

This is a good collection, better perhaps in its choice of prose than poetry. It offers a

'Julian' story, one about 'Littlenose' and 'How the Elephant Became' by Ted Hughes among an unusual and thoughtful selection for reading aloud or alone. Other authors include Alison Uttley and Margaret Mahy, and altogether they provide a very good taster of a wide range of literature. LW

Gumdrop and the Pirates

Val Biro, Picture Puffin (Jun 91), 0 14 054.261 2, £2.99

Another jolly story in the thoroughly reliable 'Gumdrop' series. This one, about how Dan, Mr Oldcastle and Gumdrop help an extremely inefficient pirate regain his treasure, is enhanced by some wonderfully comic drawings in true Val Biro style. Silly, but entertaining and well-told, this would be ideal for the rather older reluctant reader as well as for reading aloud or for young fluent readers to enjoy alone. LW

Drac and the Gremlin

Allan Baillie, ill. Jane Tanner, Picture Puffin (Jun 91), 0 14 054.142 X, £2.99

Truly sensational illustrations linked to a very clever story explain why this large-format picture book won the title 'Picture Book of the Year '89' in Australia.

The story is just the sort young children tell themselves while playing... all about wizards, white witches and terrible-tongued dragons. It delves into the world of the imagination and creates a wonderful impression of magic and adventure.

'Drac fights off the Gremlin's treacherous attack'.



Alongside the story run the pictures showing what's really happening... the dragon is the family hound and Queen Drac, the warrior queen of Tirmol Two, is a little girl playing, with her brother, the Gremlin for the purposes of this adventure, in their garden. Very satisfying and full of invitations to talk and imagine. Highly recommended. LW

Stranger Danger?

Anne Fine, Young Puffin (Aug 91), 0 14 03.4302 4, £2.50

Since there are times when it's essential that children talk to strangers and trust them - in hospital or when lost for instance - and since many strangers are perfectly well intentioned and most child abuse comes from family members or friends, I've always felt serious reservations about a campaign that teaches children to distrust and shun any stranger they meet.

These three short, easy-to-read stories tell of Joe who has had the standard police talk at school and finds himself in realistic and worrying dilemmas when he meets strangers later on. The message is that common-sense and care are essential to help a child be both safe and sociable.



It's put across with humour and wit, and in simple, believable language. Younger children will need to talk about the issues as they read, but a wide range will enjoy this book and be helped by it. LW

Bears Don't Like Bananas

John Rice, ill. Charles Fuge, Simon & Schuster (Jul 91), 0 7500 0445 2, £3.50

From the title one might assume this is a book of light-hearted verse, but it's in the poems of a more serious vein – such as 'Symmetry', 'Cousins' and 'Who's There?' – that John Rice best catches the imagination, offering powerful, thought-provoking images and questions.

Interestingly, in some of the weaker animal poems, like the title one, it's the work of the artist in a more flamboyant style which grabs the attention. With some of the stronger, serious poems, Charles Fuge is cleverly more subdued, allowing the reader to let the words paint their own images in the mind.

Worth buying for the classroom collection. The hardback edition at £6.99 (0 7500 0444 4) will probably stand up better to the frequent use the book should get throughout a wide age-range. JB

A Treasury of Stories for Five Year Olds

ill. Polly Noakes, 0 86272 806 1

A Treasury of Stories for Six Year Olds

Ill. Tizzie Knowles, 0 86272 807 X

A Treasury of Stories for Seven Year Olds

Ill. Patricia Ludlow, 0 86272 808 8

Ed. Edward and Nancy Blishen, Kingfisher (Aug 91), £3.50 each

The Blishens have completely overcome my resistance to anthologies with these packages of stories including familiar old favourites such as 'My Naughty Little Sister', beautifully presented traditional folk tales from all over the world, and jewels from authors embracing the constraints of short story formats to produce writing that's powerful, poetic and wonderfully evocative. Not one of these stories failed – a tribute indeed, as they were sometimes sandwiched between activities and often read at the end of busy days! JS



Promise and the Monster

Babette Cole, Picture Lions (Jun 91), 0 00 664006 0, £2.99

This has to be another winner! The comic strip format, detail of illustration and sheer *joie de vivre* make it shimmer with excitement as we gallop from cover to cover sharing the adventures of the ever resourceful pony, Promise. JS

A Cool Kid Like Me

Hans Wilhelm, Simon & Schuster (Mar 91), 0 7500 0863 6, £2.99

This is an extremely disturbing book – for the parent. The

From A Cool Kid Like Me.

children in my class seemed to take it at face value and it was widely borrowed. The general consensus was that they found it reassuring that even a 'cool kid' shared their concerns. The cool kid is popular, knows he has talents and apparently takes most things in his stride. His parents are blithely unaware of his innermost worries and fears and only his grandmother truly relates to him. The book pulls no punches and depicts a particular set of family relationships with devastating honesty that left this parent feeling very distressed! JS

Junior/Middle

William and the Moon Rocket

0 333 55546 5

William and the Space Animal

0 333 55547 3

Richmal Crompton, Macmillan (Apr 91), £3.50 each

What about William? He shows his age and the attempts to create another merchandising triumph to rival Dennis the Menace probably won't succeed. I loved my copies of the stories as a child, I greatly enjoy Martin Jarvis telling them now, but reading them again I'm aware of a thinness at the edges.

These two aren't necessarily the best of the stories, although typical, yet much about them is timeless and they're there to be enjoyed and recognised by children who still function in gangs, trade in sweets and plot their adventures during long, idle days. AJ

Wonderwitch and the Rooftop Cats

Helen Muir, ill. Linda Birch, Simon & Schuster (Jun 91), 0 7500 0886 5, £2.99

Witches on the whole are a pretty rotten lot, but Wonderwitch does have more endearing qualities than most. I do envy her natty line in technicolour leotards.



Wonderwitch, complete with broomstick and pointed black hat, decides she's sick of cats and could do worse than rid the rooftops by selling the lot, at a considerable profit, to her cronies. The venture fails when the cats object to this upset in their routine and, working as a team, connive and scheme to bring about some splendid changes to their lives. PH

Paddy's Pot of Gold

Dick King-Smith, ill. David Parkins, Puffin (Jul 91), 0 14 03.4215 X, £2.50

Yet another very funny book from Dick King-Smith. Paddy makes himself visible to Brigid only after a long list of conditions have been fulfilled. Firstly mistaking him for a carrot, she's delighted when he turns out to be a leprechaun. He becomes a special friend to this lonely girl and his ability to talk to the farm animals and relay weather reports from the badgers helps Brigid gain her parents' affection. Movingly emotional, it deals

with the loss of a close friend and yet skilfully remains an overwhelmingly amusing and compulsive read. PH

Heard It in the POETRY Playground

Allan Ahlberg, ill. Fritz Wegner, Puffin (Jun 91), 0 14 03.2824 6, £2.50

The title says it all, hot scraps of gossip, current jokes, puzzles and word games – every bit of it child-generated. It gives us temporary membership of that most exclusive of clubs: childhood. I loved 'The Sale of Work – Ahlberg's unique interpretation of such a familiar phrase reminds us yet again how we make assumptions about word-meanings. 'The Ghost Teacher', too, gliding around the empty school in effortless silence is made from quite surreal word pictures. Best of the lot for me was 'The Mad Professor's Daughter' – a sinister, well-paced warning about meeting a girl with 'grass-green eyes'. PH

Helen Highwater

Roger McGough, Puffin (Jul 91), 0 14 03.4226 5, £2.50

A splendid tale told in verse with a vigour equal to that of its heroine, one Helen Highwater champion swimmer, who embarks on her longest and most important swim ever: from Land's End to John O'Groats. 'In a



swimming-pool on wheels', to raise one million pounds to save her town, Chucklewick, from being taken over by the dreaded BUMM. But does she make it...? Essential reading-aloud for junior classes. JB

Mightier Than the Sword

Clare Bevan, Puffin (Jun 91), 0 14 03.4598 1, £2.50

Wheelchair-bound Adam is encouraged by a series of coincidences (like being given a pen called Excalibur by a 'magician' of a teacher whose name is an anagram of Merlin) to see himself as a latter-day King Arthur, and gathers a group of primary school friends to play the other legendary roles. Looking for a worthy cause to champion, the group campaigns against a proposed development plan which threatens the village pond and find their villain is a

Dr D More (Mordred). The cleverly worked-out plot and readable style will charm readers of eight and over.

LN

The Great Pig Sprint

0 7445 2010 X

The Dim Thin Ducks

0 7445 2009 6

Judy Allen, Walker
(Jun 91), £2.99 each

Two light, but rewarding books recount the adventures of young Kate when she becomes involved in the development of Lee Road City Farm. The title of the first book refers to Kate's novel idea for a fund-raising event at the Summer Open Day. In the second book, the excavation of a pond for a newly arrived pair of Indian Runner Ducks unearths a nasty piece of urban history.

The stories touch fleetingly, but tellingly, on such issues as sexism between children and the ultimate fate of most farm animals. Both animals and adults are humorously and believably idiosyncratic. Good, earthy reading for juniors interested in ponies, pigs and poultry.

GH

Look Out, It's Lucy Goose!

Steve Weatherill, Young Piper (Jul 91),
0 330 31642 7, £2.99

Quite a lesson in literacy in its broadest sense, this book. Similar in concept to the now well-established 'Jets' series, with complete integration of text and pictures, this amusing little book comprises three short stories about Lucy Goose and her animal friends.



It's packed with wordplay in various forms, and numerous examples of different uses of reading and writing, including the annoying 'junk-mail', legal contracts, signs, posters, several kinds of letters and a telephone directory, are an integral part of the action.

The inviting design might at first suggest this is a book aimed at newly independent readers, but its potential is much wider and indeed the nature of its humour demands some degree of sophistication so that even adults will find much to chuckle over.

JB



Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters

John Steptoe, Hodder
(Jul 91), 0 340 53233 5,
£4.99

A visually enchanting book retelling a traditional African folk tale. Manyara and Nyasha are the beautiful daughters who set off through the forest in an attempt to win the hand of a wife-seeking King. Manyara is proud and harsh, and dismissive of the spirits she meets in the night forest. Nyasha is kind and respectful, and accepts the supernatural guidance she is offered.

A summary does little justice to this simple, but very haunting text. Readers of all ages will be fascinated by both the story and its magnificent illustrations.

GH

Run to Earth

Tom McCaughren, Puffin (Jun 91),
0 14 03.4488 8, £2.99

It's not a *Watership Down* and it does have an uncertain feel about its opening – attempting to place the reader within the life, feelings and surroundings of a group of foxes. But gradually the dramas of survival, against other creatures and man, create a page-turning energy which keep you going to the end. There's a wonderful moment where the animals unite to try and dig beneath the foundations of a dam.

AJ

Limeroons

Noel Ford, Puffin
(Jul 91), 0 14 03.4495 0,
£2.25

If Only . . .

Richard Edwards, ill.
Alison Claire Darke,
Puffin (Jul 91),
0 14 03.2956 0, £2.50

Madtail, Miniwhale and other shape poems

Ed. Wes Magee, Puffin
(Apr 91), 0 14 03.4031 9,
£2.50

The Kingfisher Book of Comic Verse

Ed. Roger McGough,
ill. Caroline Holden,
Kingfisher (Jun 91),
0 86272 785 5, £3.95

I've grouped these books of verse together because they comprise one of the most enjoyable elements of my recent reading.

Limeroons is the lightest of the four. Noel Ford revitalises the overworked limerick formula by populating his book with a menagerie of outlandish animals caught up in bizarre predicaments. The portmanteau word title refers to both the verses and their amusing illustrations.

Each poem in Richard Edwards' enjoyable book starts with the word 'If', and, imitating a daydream, meanders off into a rhythmic and rhyming little fantasy:

*'If I were an explorer
I'd reach that far off land
Called Jumbledup, where
sand was sea
And sea was made of sand,
Where snow fell every
summer
On herds of grazing bees
And cows flew round the
blossom
Of the orange apple trees.'*

Alison Claire Darke's whimsical dreamscapes provide a charming visual counterpoint.

Madtail, Miniwhale is a fascinating collection of shape poems, each one demonstrating in a different way how typographical artistry can combine with wordplay to create a striking piece of pictorial literature.

The Kingfisher Book of Comic Verse is a practically inexhaustible treasure chest of the ludicrous. The book is crammed with over 200 poems, ranging from Lewis Carroll's 'Strange Wild Song', a favourite with my Class 3 kids, to Wendy Cope's brilliant send-up of Peter and Jane (which should be required reading on any primary education course).

All these books represent excellent value for money. The kids loved them and revisited them devotedly. Warmly recommended to readers of all ages.

GH

Magic from the Ground

Margaret Greaves, ill.
Angela McAllister,
Dent (Jul 91),
0 460 88088 8, £2.50

Twelve stories based on traditional folk themes celebrate the magic powers of common plants. Buds of hollyhock, marigold, thyme and hazel grant a hungry gardener a consultation with the fairies; cider suffused with aconite sends an old man flying to the mountains of the moon; a sinister changeling shapeshifts into an elder tree.

These are rich, simple, entrancing stories, boldly illustrated and backed up with a herbal glossary. They're very good for reading aloud and might provide a pleasant narrative accompaniment to ecological project work.

GH

In a Blue Velvet Dress

0 7445 2056 8

The Back House Ghosts

0 7445 2057 6

Catherine Sefton,
Walker (Jun 91),
£2.99 each

Two gems, re-released by Walker over 15 years after their original publication, which should grace the shelves of every 3rd and 4th-year junior classroom.

Both are ghost stories; subtle, gently humorous, observing the private, inner world of the young child confronted by something adults refuse either to acknowledge or understand.



These are beautifully written books, peopled by lovable eccentrics, instantly identifiable mischief-makers and endearing ghosts. Sefton takes her children seriously and the central characters in these books are often wiser than the adults whose responsibility they are. Walker Books can always be relied on to produce something special and these two reasonably priced novels are no exception.

VR

Middle/Secondary

Ghost Stories

Ed. Robert Westall, Kingfisher (Jul 91), 0 86272 802 9, £3.95

What have we here? I spy a publisher's response to National Curriculum – 20th and pre-20th century literature, uniting from other cultures – all pulled together by the ever-popular ghost theme.

No knee-jerk reaction to government legislation, this: Westall has assembled a thoughtful collection with an admirable variety of styles represented. It's excellent value – 22 stories for £3.95 – and should find a place in all but the most impoverished of stock cupboards. One criticism, though – and one I've made before – why 'Sredni Vashtar' again? VR

Just Ferret

Gene Kemp, Puffin (Aug 91), 0 14 03.4589 2, £2.99

Gene Kemp is adept at reader security. She creates a familiar environment in which characters have been encountered before and everything is in its appropriate place. Familiarity can breed contempt, but Kemp's writing, by virtue of its engaging use of language, always leads the reader gently on a step or two, developing awareness and response along the way.



Ferret is a Gowie Corby revisited – superficially hostile, but with a worthy heart. Cricklepit Combined is again the setting and, as expected, the villains are defeated by the anti-hero Ferret.

Kemp entertains, educates and excels at the art of storytelling. Another one to add to the shelves in Years 7 and 8. VR

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Retold by Selina Hastings, ill. Juan Wijngaard, Walker (Jun 91), 0 7445 2005 3, £3.99

Sir Gawain is one of King Arthur's more gallant and romantic knights. This version is a rich introduction to a time-honoured tale. As a rule I avoid adaptations of classics, but this is retold with skill and



sensitivity and much of the glory of the original is retained.

The illustrations, in the style of ancient, illuminated manuscripts, are overwhelmingly beautiful; like glowing jewels they vie strongly with the text for first attention and give an air of authenticity. Incidentally they're a wonderful stimulus for art lessons. PH

Twenty School Mini-Mysteries

Dina Anastasio, ill. George Parkin, Hippo (Aug 91), 0 590 76534 5, £1.95

Here is a book for dipping into. The 20 short stories have merit of their own and are superb for making speaking and listening skills real fun. Stimulating natural and non-threatening participation in a conversation after reading isn't easy, but these whodunnits manage to capture enthusiasm and imagination, and fulfil attainment targets as well! Very useful and good fun at an affordable price. PH

The Five Hundred

Eilís Dillon, ill. Gareth Floyd, O'Brien Press (Sep 91), 0 86278 262 7, £3.95

Set amid the rich bustle in the Roman markets, Pierino's family have been saving for a car for as long as he could remember. When the last five thousand Lira note is earned they go to their friend Amleto to collect their Fiat 500.

Suddenly intrigue and action come thick and fast as jealous competition from the other stall-holders and nasty remarks culminate in the disappearance of the car. An excited flurry of very Italian police bungling and a nail-biting break-in result in a nick-of-time ending. I loved it. It was refreshingly different in its setting and story-line. This book has a well-deserved place in my classroom collection. PH

Science Fiction Stories

Ed. Edward Blishen, ill. Karin Littlewood, Kingfisher (Jul 91), 0 86272 803 7, £3.95

With 20 stories and extracts, this is very good value and despite the conservative nature of the selection – mostly male writers and little recent work – it's worth buying. It makes an excellent addition to the teacher's collection with some good things to read from. The extract from *The Wizard of Earthsea*, where Ged fights the dragons, reminded me how good that book was and immediately became a way of introducing the book to someone who was undecided about taking on the full version. I found a lot of old favourites plus some that were new to me. The drawings are the one sign of cost saving. AJ

Against the Storm

Gaye Hıçılmaz, Puffin (Jun 91), 0 14 03.4234 6, £2.99

When Mehmet's family is drawn away from their country roots by the promise of quick and certain wealth in the city, they become a small addition to Ankara's poor. The disillusionment is deeply realised in a sequence of injustices and sufferings.



Experience seems to batter Mehmet but the author holds out a vision of colour and happiness despite the mud and madness. It's impressive and well judged as children's reading. Teachers will probably want to share the story and the ideas. AJ

The Kingfisher Book of Myths and Legends

Retold by Anthony Horowitz, Kingfisher (Jun 91), 0 86272 786 3, £3.95

Great value for money! Extensively indexed to make it a reference book as well as a valuable collection of 35 of the best stories ever told, these narratives are culled from the cultures of the world and relayed in a witty, very engaging style – 'Hypaepae didn't have a village green. It had a village mouldy brown', etc, etc.



In the best oral tradition these tales yell to be read aloud and shared with children of all ages and key stages. Every class teacher should be supplied with a copy. My reading groupies devoured it. DB

The Lifeguard

Richie Tankersley Cusick, Hippo (Jun 91), 0 590 76524 8, £1.95

Frantic, melodramatic action pervades this slightly repetitive, long tale about goings-on at Beverley Island. Teens with names like Kelsey, Donna, Neal, Justin and Skip unravel more and more of the plot, whilst the eye-patched local madman, Old Isaac, croaks unheeded stereotyped prophesies. Miraculously, most of the bodies come alive at the end!

Likely to appeal to youngsters who need lots of fast action and an entertaining suspense read. DB



A Flower of Jet

Bel Mooney, Puffin (Jun 91), 0 14 03.4573 6, £2.99

Set in the north of England during the miners' strikes, this novel follows the fortunes of two families and the difficult friendship between teenagers Tom and Melanie. Melanie's parents are ardent strike supporters, while Tom's father is labelled 'scab' for his belief that pit closures are inevitable;

this allows the author to present the implications of the conflict from opposing sides. Credibility is somewhat strained by two combined strokes of luck with enable Tom's family to escape, but the straightforward style and abundance of incident will appeal to readers of 12 and over. LN

Came back to show you I could fly
Robin Klein, Puffin (Jun 91), 0 14 03.4254 0, £2.50

This fine novel, which has deservedly collected mantelshelves full of awards in Australia, merits a wide



audience here. The lives of the two main characters are depressingly sad, yet together they generate hope for each other as well as for the reader. The story wraps itself around your heart. It's a pity the cover blurb gives away Seymour's discovery about Angie. DB

Older Readers

Deep Wizardry

Diane Duane, Corgi (Jul 91), 0 552 52646 0, £2.99

This is No. 2 in a trilogy which sets intellectual challenges for fantasy lovers with its inventiveness and the wide scope of its ideas. Nita and Kit from *So You Want to be a Wizard* (0 552 526452, £2.50) are now sucked into the troubled affairs of the undersea world. The sea wizards are desperately seeking to halt the fatal re-awakenings of the Lone Power whose ascendancy will herald destruction for the sea-bed and mankind. The price Nita must pay by accepting the role of the Silent Lord entails a fatal involvement, which only a miracle can reverse. DB

Personal Effects

Chris Westwood, Kestrel (Jul 91), 0 670 83879 9, £6.99

When Stephen Roth, chameleon, the man of her dreams, whisks Leigh away from an awful introduction agency party, her world turns technicolour after being very monochrome. However, she realises too late that '... one thing existed only to destroy the other. For every positive, a negative.' Her brief happiness requires the highest price. The dialogue creaks a bit and character motivation is suspect, but teenagers should find this an acceptable suspense/horror read. DB

Absolute Trust

Will Gatti, Pan Horizons (Aug 91), 0 330 31932 0, £3.50

This political thriller is set in 1999 in London, now a satellite of the United States, with democracy an outdated concept. Jeremiah Talent, son of the US Ambassador, is seen by militant campaigners as a target. Some readers may be put off by the cryptic style and the abrupt changes of scene and viewpoint in the opening pages, but those who persevere will be hooked by the excitement of the plot. LN

Perhaps You Should Talk to Someone and other stories

Ed. Julia Eccleshare, Plus (Jul 91), 0 14 03.2896 3, £2.99

Astute packaging dresses writers of the calibre of Penelope Lively, Virginia Woolf, Nadine Gordimer and Salman Rushdie in the familiar colours of 'Penguin Plus' – the collection is therefore likely to catch the eye of teenagers who may not otherwise sample these authors. The design avoids any suggestion of textbookishness, though at £2.99 for 13 wide-ranging stories the collection may well appeal to teachers in search of good GCSE materials. Excellent contributions from Susan Hill, Carson McCullers and Graham Swift, too. LN

Point Horror: Funhouse

Diane Hohn, Scholastic (Aug 91), 0 590 76532 9, £1.95

Don't Look Behind You

Lois Duncan, Plus (Jul 91), 0 14 03.4022 X, £3.50



Mystery and horror are the lynchpins of much fiction produced for teenagers. The effectiveness of this combination is obvious in the 'Point Horror' series – girls in Upper School worry at me for the newest title.

The initial attraction lies in the

dramatic, fluorescent covers and modest price; their further appeal is secured by similarity in the construction of the plots. The protagonists are female, with attendant boyfriends, and settings determinedly rooted in the everyday. A small circle of stereotyped – and therefore comfortably familiar – friends alternately support or undermine the heroine. The security which the reader gains from fore-knowledge of plot and character is seasoned with the excitement generated by the red herring.

Duncan employs the same strategies with equal success – but her work is a progression from the Point Horror collection. It's the subtlety of style and sustained quality of the narrative which elevate her. The reader is still comfortably caught in a web of linguistic certainty, but has more freedom to interpret and respond.

Both books offer challenges – Point Horror is addictive and book box material for older readers ready to tackle a book, but needing closely defined limits. Duncan could be offered as a class set for GCSE – perfect as a component for a study of the thriller genre. VR



Never Pa's Girl
Robbie Branscum, Viking (Jul 91), 0 670 83165 4, £6.50

15-year-old Modiene is the daughter of a hill-farmer living in one of America's strongly patriarchal rural communities.

Mo fights against her father's attempts to control her life. She's strongly attracted to Jake and defies her father in order to see him. When, innocently, she becomes pregnant she must give up her dreams of a college education and become part of the life she'd planned to escape.

Branscum successfully convinces the reader of the hardships which unite the community and the families who sustain it. Modiene's initiation into this milieu, with the birth of her daughter, is less convincing and the resulting sentimentality jars against the realism of the remainder of the book. VR

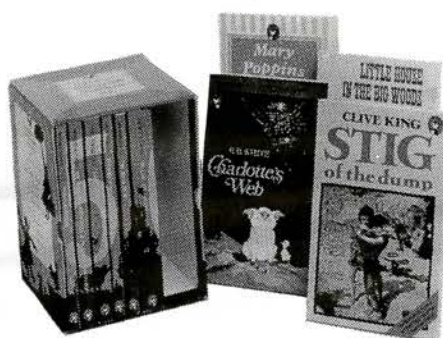
The Little Prince

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Mammoth (Jul 91), 0 9497 0723 2, £3.99



A thoughtful book that has deeper meanings than the cover implies. I found myself reading and re-reading to understand the allegorical symbols. Each of the prince's magical stories seem to provoke searching questions about human behaviour on Earth. The prince's naive wisdom about his tiny planet with three volcanoes and a lone but lovely flower are hauntingly pervasive. We learn a lot about ourselves through his perceptions.

A good read for older pupils who enjoy the challenge of a more complex plot. PH



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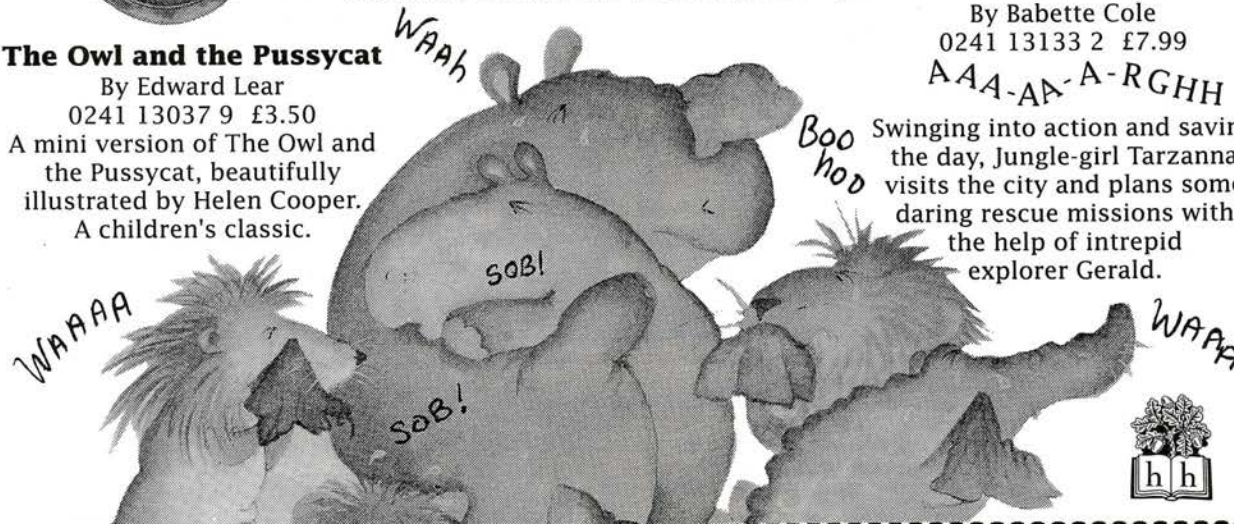
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AAA-AP-A-RGHH

Swinging into action and saving the day, Jungle-girl Tarzanna visits the city and plans some daring rescue missions with the help of intrepid explorer Gerald.



Audio Classics

Rachel Redford reviews a selection of recent story tapes.

Reviews are listed in roughly ascending order of listening age. Prices include VAT unless otherwise stated.

Winnie the Pooh

A A Milne, read by Lionel Jeffries, Listen for Pleasure, two cassettes, 2 hrs, £6.99

Winnie the Pooh with The House at Pooh Corner

A A Milne, read by Alan Bennett, BBC Radio Collection, two cassettes, 3 hrs, £6.99
Pooh, the beloved Bear of Little Brain, with his ponderous hums and his clock stopped at smacker time, is loved as much by nostalgic parents as by children. These careful abridgements include all Pooh's friends: desultory Eeyore moping on his birthday, Kanga with her wonderful Australian twang bathing Roo, Piglet philosophising with Pooh in his distinctive Piglet way – in fact all the Essential Pooh. Choice of narration is between the classic, vigorous storytelling of Lionel Jeffries and the idiosyncratic presentation of Alan Bennett which is exactly right for Pooh's quirky humour tinged with light melancholy. Both are excellent.

Peter Pan

J M Barrie, read by Wendy Craig, Listen for Pleasure, two cassettes, 2 hrs 30 mins, £6.99
Stage production, BBC Radio Collection, two cassettes, 2 hrs 40 mins, £6.99

Wendy Craig's reading is pleasant and gentle, yet she creates contrasting characters: the gruff Mr Darling as he mutters amidst the household chaos and the warm, loving Mrs Darling, concerned and curious, as she folds away Peter's shadow. The abridgement also allows for a little of Barrie's whimsical reflection on the magical quality of childhood. The BBC version is the lively 1989 stage production with Graham McGrath as Peter Pan and Alec McCowan as J M Barrie with a dramatic and effective part played by the BBC Concert Orchestra.

The Wind in the Willows

Kenneth Grahame, read by Patrick Wymark with Norman Shelley and cast, Listen for Pleasure Argo, two cassettes, 1 hr 45 mins, £6.99

Read by Alan Bennett, BBC Radio Collection, two cassettes, 3 hrs, £6.99

Read by Kenneth Williams, Listen for Pleasure, two cassettes, 2 hrs 30 mins, £6.99

For today's children *The Wind in the Willows* is probably improved by the abridgement on these three recordings. Choice is a matter of personal preference. Kenneth Williams' delivery is deliberately theatrical; Alan Bennett's retains the humour and is more in affectionate sympathy with the spirit of the characters. Argo's is the audio stage version with Patrick Wymark as the narrator and Mole, Toad, Rat and Badger given their different definitive characters by the cast. Singing birds and sound effects enhance the delightful stage effect. Toad's canary-coloured cart, Ratty and Mole's picnic and tramp through dark, infested woods are all here for discovery and re-discovery.

Alice in Wonderland

Lewis Carroll, read by William Rushton, Listen for Pleasure, two cassettes, 2 hrs, £6.99

Read by Alan Bennett, BBC Radio Collection, two cassettes, 2 hrs 30 mins, £6.99

Read by Patricia Routledge, Cover to Cover, three cassettes, unabridged, 3hrs 10 mins, £10.00
Lewis Carroll first told his story of Alice who went 'straight down a rabbit hole... without the least idea of what would happen next' to the Liddell girls in 1862. It has never lost its appeal. Patricia Routledge's reading is probably the connoisseur's: beautifully modulated and, because it's unabridged, encouraging an appreciation of Dodgson on a deeper level. William Rushton's version is longer than Alan Bennett's (which includes *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*) and both are characteristically individual readings exactly matching the zany spirit of Lewis Carroll's original, be it Bennett's very cross Red Queen or Rushton's nearly asleep dormouse. The treatment of the songs and rhymes greatly enhance the productions.

The Secret Garden

Frances Hodgson Burnett, read by Gwen Watford, Listen for Pleasure, two cassettes, 2 hrs 30 mins, £6.99

Gwen Watford is a wonderfully warm narrator who is never patronising. The haughtiness of Mary Lennox, previously dependent on her Indian servant, is captured as

successfully as the Yorkshire motherliness of Dickon's mother. The gradual change in Mary from selfishness to sensitivity, as she is transformed through the magic of the garden and by Dickon's communion with animals, is conveyed through Gwen Watford's subtly changing tones. Her voice registers the sympathy as Mary's melting aloofness develops into concern for sickly Dickon. Another story which benefits from abridgement.

Treasure Island

Robert Louis Stevenson, read by David Buck, Cover to Cover, six cassettes, unabridged, 7 hours, £21.00

Read by Anthony Bate, Listen for Pleasure, two cassettes, 2 hrs 30 mins, £6.99

The choice here is between the unabridged on Cover to Cover and the abridged on LfP: the real thing or a more accessible version. *Treasure Island* has all the ingredients of an exciting adventure classic – tension and drama in a complex, action-packed plot which includes a sea chest

hiding an awful secret and a pirate treasure map. David Buck's narration is in sympathy with the Stevenson spirit, ranging from a masterful portrayal of the terrifying Long John Silver to the moving courage of Dr Livesey. Anthony Bate maintains a cracking pace throughout his version. ■



Anglo-German Attitudes: How Do We See Each Other?

A British-German seminar and exhibition on the changing attitudes of young people in Britain and Germany

28/29 November 1991

The stereotyping of different nationalities has always been used to stir up prejudice against foreigners at home and abroad. This two-day seminar organized with the British Council Germany will discuss national stereotypes in the depiction of British and German people in contemporary children's and young people's literature. It aims to provide a forum for examining the extent to which children and young people are confronted with and influenced by national stereotypes. Does stereotyping exert a wholly negative influence or can it also have a positive educational value?

In co-operation with the British Council Germany and the International Youth Library Munich, one of Europe's most important institutions for children's and young people's literature, the Goethe-Institut London additionally presents an exhibition of around 300 British and German publications from 29 November-19 December, which will later tour Manchester and Glasgow.

Seminar participation: £ 3 (incl refreshments). Tickets must be booked in advance. Lunch: £ 10 per day, per person (to be booked before 20 Nov). Please send your application, cheque and s.a.e. to Carole Sterckx, Goethe-Institut, 50 Princes Gate, Exhibition Road, London SW7 2PH.

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GULLIVER IN THE SPACE AGE

James Riordan
on updating a children's classic.

It must be a doddle to rewrite the classics for modern children. Money for old rope. What next? Shakespeare's *Bedtime Stories*? Chaucer's *The Spaceman's Tale*? Henry Miller's *Tropical Adventures*?

Well, maybe. Have you never felt you could improve on the classics? Like the syrupy-sentimental ending to Andersen's *Little Match Girl* or Wilde's *Selfish Giant*, or the snobbery of Grahame's *Wind in the Willows*, or the awful families in Barrie, Milne or Blyton? How much easier it is to write for today's children today!

Yet the classics are classics because they endure: in the case of *Gulliver's Travels* and *Robinson Crusoe*, for nigh on three centuries. Neither was written for children, but both have become children's classics. Even so, the original stories are largely indigestible for today's youngsters owing to their archaic vocabulary and arcane message.

This is where the 'moderniser' comes in: to transpose the archaic into modern idiom and to unravel (or 'edit out') the arcane. The finished product has to retain the philosophy, humour, satire, adventure and uniqueness of the original, and at the same time meet commercial requirements – i.e. sell as many copies as possible in competition with Postman Pat and other W H Smith offerings. That is the moderniser's job and dilemma.

Where to start?

1. Read the original *Gulliver*, all four books – for our hero travels all over the place, not just to Lilliput and Brobdingnag: to Laputa, Balnibarbi, Luggnagg, Glubbdubdrip, Houyhnhnms, even Japan, meeting hairy Yahoos and Struldbrugg superior beings, as well as persons, little and large. (I actually did most of my *Gulliver* writing in an Olympic village apartment during the Seoul 1988 Olympic Games – but not for creative atmosphere or exotic location.)
2. Examine as many books on Swift as possible.
3. Study other updated versions, even translations (e.g. into French), to be aware of possible pitfalls, misinterpretations and differing styles – also notions and devices worth borrowing.

Only then does the full complexity of the task begin to dawn: the pervasive political and religious satire, Swift's wonderful achievement as storyteller, the hilarious, sometimes ribald, humour, the ubiquitous censorship (including, alas, my own) – designed to protect tender eyes from 'lewdness' or anti-establishment thoughts.

Let's start with the man. Jonathan Swift was born in Dublin of English parents in 1667. A profound, though unconventional, religious man, he was ordained at 27 and became Dean of St Patrick's in Dublin at 46, writing profusely on Church affairs. He was also a politician, starting out, like Churchill, as a Whig and crossing over to the Tories. His pen espoused his causes: defence of Ireland, anti-Whiggery, peace, aid for the poor and infirm (he helped found St Patrick's Hospital for Imbeciles). Dean Swift wrote much in poetry and prose, almost always anonymously and gratuitously, and was hated and loved as few men have ever been.

Macaulay, Thackeray and Dr Johnson disliked his irreverence and coarseness, branding him a man who degraded humanity. Pope, Voltaire and Henry Fielding compared him to Cervantes and Rabelais; for Fielding he was 'the greatest master of humour that ever wrote'. Centuries later, George Orwell included *Gulliver* in his top six all-time greats.

Swift's writings were not solely works of art, amusement or education; they were seen by friend and foe as primarily political and partisan. He was writing, after all, in the incredibly intense eighteenth-century world of fanatical Whigs and Tories. As Kathleen Williams wrote, 'never was there a reading public more politically minded, and of course Swift himself contributed to this hectic atmosphere by the wholeheartedness of his own commitment to political causes'.

So Swift was a rebel, a pacifist, a defender of Ireland, an 'atheist priest' as his detractors called him, an enemy of cant, privilege and hypocrisy. Like all good writers, he was 'of unsound mind and memory' as his doctor attested. In other words, he was a sort of latter-day mutant of Oscar Wilde, the Bishop of Durham and Salman Rushdie.

Gulliver's Travels

Swift was 54 when he began what he called his 'merry work'. He had no cause to be merry. He had just been turned down by the Church for a bishopric in England; his Tory government had fallen; he was suffering agonies from boils and piles, and had fallen victim to a chronic disease that made him deaf and giddy. He faced these nuisances with his usual cheery outlook: 'When you are melancholy, read amusing books; that's my recipe.' He wrote one instead.

Like all his writing it was a political satire on the events of the day. *Gulliver* (a name suggesting 'gullibility') ends the war with Blefuscu (France) by a naval victory (Dunkirk). The evil Flimnap is Walpole, attacked by Swift for oppressing Ireland and impeaching his friends Oxford and Bolingbroke. Big-Endians are the Catholics, Small-Endians the Anglicans; the Emperor who cut his finger on an egg (symbolising Easter) was Henry VIII (over his break with Rome). The search of *Gulliver's* pockets ridicules the investigation by the Whig Committee of Secrecy. King George I favoured the Whigs, so he is the treacherous Emperor of Lilliput, and so on. *Gulliver* is Everyman, Pilgrim, Cyrano de Bergerac, Pantagruel (but not Swift himself who, unlike his hero, preached toleration and optimism).

Understandably, the book was used by Swift's enemies as a stick with which to beat their political and religious foe; it provided proof of his wickedness as a political turncoat and atheist priest. Thackeray described the book as 'filthy in word, filthy in thought, furious, raging and obscene'.

The original publisher was the first of many to alter the text, cutting out or toning down the satire. All the same, the book was an astonishing bestseller, selling several thousand copies in a week, over ten thousand in three weeks, and being translated into French, German and Dutch.

Apart from the satire, much of the book's attraction is Swift's use of the sci-fi technique of describing fantastic events and people with such circumstantial detail that they seem perfectly credible. So the reader becomes intimately involved in the hero's adventures (just as with those of *Robinson Crusoe* written seven years earlier). It is a mock traveller's tale and a rattling good story, full of puzzles and riddles and laced with delicious humour.

Some of the humour was too near the knuckle for 'educated society'. As recently as 1915 the Clarendon Press felt it necessary to omit passages from the original (adult) version. Oxford is a prudish place. But OUP permits me to retain *Gulliver* attending to his (torrential and wheelbarrow-ful) needs of nature in Lilliput, and describing the naked flesh of giant ladies in Brobdingnag (not a pretty sight). It is I, however, who omit the tiny *Gulliver* riding on the nipple of a 16-year-old maid of honour, for fear of offending adult taste (children would enjoy it).

Linguistically, apart from a word shrinkage by over two-thirds, it is easy to update *Summerset* to *somersault*, *sideling* to *sideways*, *four Double* to *four deep*, *towardly* to *promising*, *concor* to *concerts*, and *suchlike*. Nor is it unconsciona-

ble to make Plantations colonies, Fopperies – silly tricks, Mechanics – workers, Foot-cloths – carpets, even The Pox (well, no, let's leave that be). But what do you do with maritime lore so popular when Brits ruled the waves? For example:

'Finding it was like to overblow, we took in our Sprit-sail, and stood by to hand the Fore-sail; but making foul, we looked the Guns were all fast, and handed the Missen. The ship lay very broad off, so we thought it better spooning before the Sea, than trying or hulling. We reefed the Fore-sail and set him, we hawled aft the Fore-sheet; the Helm was hard a Weather.'

And so on for three pages. Riordan, a Pompey lad, says: '... we ran into a violent storm which blew us off course' – spare my blushes.

Then we have imperial measures – for those giant Maids of Honour 'discharged what they had drunk to the Quantity of at least two Hogsheads in a Vessel that held above three Tuns'. Somehow 0.46 and 5.73 litres do not fit the bill. Hogsheads are so much more expressive.

Perhaps the most difficult interpretation is that of Swift's philosophy which is so worth conveying and yet is hardly expressed in the language of school morning assembly. Thus, when the king of Brobdingnag takes Gulliver to task for his country's politics, he says:

'You have made a most admirable Pengyrick upon your Country. You have clearly proved that Ignorance, Idleness, and Vice are the proper ingredients for qualifying a Legislator. That Laws are best explained, interpreted, and applied by those whose Interest and Abilities lie in perverting, confounding, and eluding them . . . It doth not appear how any one Perfection is required towards the Procurement of any one Station among you; much less that Men are ennobled on Account of their Virtue, that Priests are advanced for their Piety or Learning, Soldiers for their Conduct or Valour, Judges for their Integrity, Senators for the Love of their Country. I cannot but conclude that the Bulk of your Natives, to be the most pernicious Race of little odious Vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the Surface of the Earth.'

To omit it as many transcribers have done would be to traduce Swift, and to insult children's intelligence. So it stays in with a minimum of editing:

'You have given an admirable account of your country. And you have clearly proved that ignorance, idleness and vice are the proper qualifications for governing it. Your laws are applied by people who are interested only in breaking and avoiding them. It does not appear that a man has to have any one virtue to obtain a high post in England, much less that men become nobles through virtue, priests are promoted through their learning, soldiers for their valour, judges for their honesty, Members of Parliament for love of their country . . . I conclude that Englishmen are the nastiest race of odious little vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth.'

The greatest attraction to me of *Gulliver's Travels* is constantly to see everyday life from an unusual angle, through both ends of the telescope, and to have 'natural' values and ethics stood on their head. In Lilliput government ministers are chosen for their balancing acts: the ones who show the greatest tightrope skill take top posts (John Major would appreciate that, with his circus background). Again, in Lilliput, boys and girls are brought up in public nurseries (parents are the last to be trusted with education of their own children), with schooling the same for both sexes, so that girls learn wisdom and courage and eschew all personal ornaments. And the old and sick are supported free by public hospitals; begging is unknown.

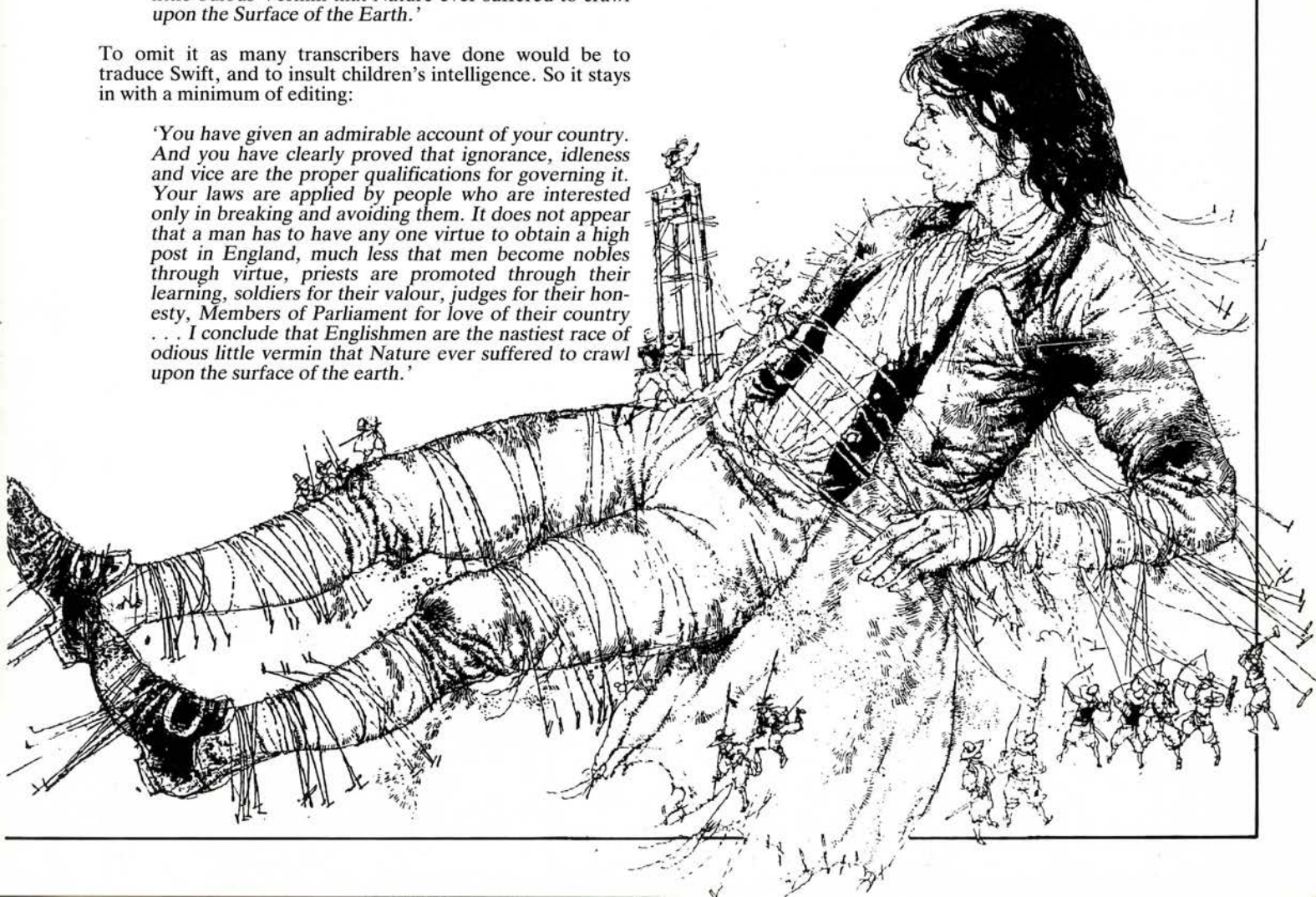
Much of the story, humour and satire therefore has as much relevance today as 300 years ago. What is remarkable, however, is the book's appeal to those for whom it was not meant. The poet Richard Payne Knight, writing in 1805, hits the nail on the head:

'We have a work in which the most extravagant and improbable fictions are rendered, by the same means (improbability of detail) sufficiently plausible to interest, in a high degree, those readers who do not perceive the moral or meaning of the stories . . . I have known ignorant and very young persons who read (the Travels) without even suspecting the satire, more readily entertained and delighted than any learned or scientific readers, who perceived the intent from the beginning, have ever been.'

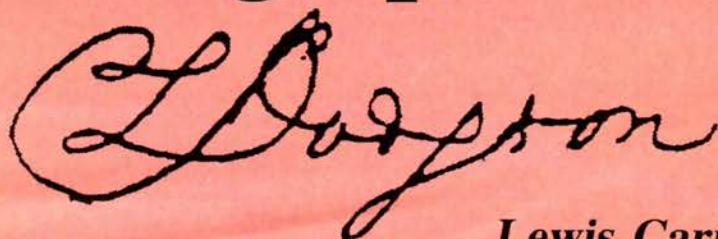
Now, there's a starting point for a moderniser . . . ■

James Riordan is a Professor in Russian Studies at the University of Surrey. His many books for children include *The Woman in the Moon* (ill. Angela Barrett), 0 09 174078 9, £4.99; *The Snowmaiden* (ill. Stephen Lambert), 0 09 173861 X, £6.95; and *Thumbelina* (ill. Wayne Anderson), 0 09 174329 X, £6.95. All are published by Hutchinson.

His version of *Gulliver's Travels*, with illustrations by Victor Ambrus, will be published by Oxford in June 1992 priced at £9.95.



Authorgraph No. 71



Lewis Carroll



This manuscript, found in an Oxford attic and published now for the first time, is the only known account of an *interview* with Lewis Carroll.

My name is Rhoda Raven. I am 24 years of age. At the time of writing (July 1885) I am working as a governess to the little daughter of Mr and Mrs Now I have long had a wish to meet and speak with the author of *Alice* and the later books of fantasy by Mr Carroll, all of which I have carefully read.

Fortune gave me two cards. Firstly, it happened that my little charge, a sweet and biddable child, with the currently popular name of Alice, has a close resemblance to the little Alice Liddell whose photograph ends the recently published facsimile edition of the first draft of the tale, *Alice's Adventures under Ground*. Her hair, which is dark brown (unlike the fair-haired girl of Mr Tenniel's pictures) is cut in the same way, fairly short with a fringe over her forehead. Secondly, I lately acquired a sympathetic friend, a Miss Gertrude Thomson, whose drawings of children have made her both friend and assistant to Mr Carroll, as I shall call him here. She informed me where he usually took his afternoon walk, and so it chanced that he came face to face with little Alice and myself, also taking a stroll. Seeing us, he stood transfixed. Questions were asked; names were given; I mentioned Miss Thomson; even my own name Rhoda pleased him ('Ah, little Rhoda Liddell') – finally, there was an invitation to take tea in his rooms.

I must reveal that I had with me a small notebook which I held on my lap beneath the table. In a 'short-hand' of my own devising, I wrote down all that was said. On returning home, before my memory blurred, I made sense of the web of notes. This is the exact fair copy.

First I will set down this circumstance. On the tea-table, with the cake and fine bread and butter, was a plate of strawberry tarts. The little girl turned to me.

Alice: May I ask a question?

Rhoda: You may indeed.

Alice: Did the Queen of Hearts make these tarts?

Mr Carroll: That is a valuable question. I shall certainly make enquiries. All I know at present is that they appeared on this table half an hour ago, and we have not even been introduced. Would you care to be introduced?

Alice: No, no – for how then could I eat one?

Mr Carroll: I see that you have another question in your mind. Now questions are far more interesting than answers, and much cleverer. So I am going to tell you the answer to what is in your mind, and you tell me if I have the right question. Yes? You wish to ask if the Knave of Hearts has been invited to this tea-party? No, he has not; the tarts are quite safe. Was that the question?

Alice: Yes, Mr Wonderland.



After tea he placed her on the sofa with a little puzzle to solve. It was, I think about red and white roses. But the day had been tiring, and in a few minutes our five-year-old had fallen asleep. Mr Carroll refused to let me wake her.

Mr Carroll: I would really like to sketch her, but I begin to doubt my powers. We must invite Miss Thomson one of these days. But seeing this little girl, on this particular date moreover, July 4th, has taken me back many years.

Rhoda: You show great kindness and understanding to this dear child, and to others, I believe.

Mr Carroll: Oh, that is easy enough to explain. I was the oldest boy in a family of eleven – seven girls and four boys. Only two girls were older than myself, and not by many years. In our remote Rectory at Daresbury in Cheshire we had to make our own diversions. I was full of ideas and invention and it was a pleasure to me to entertain and amuse these little ones. I was surrounded by their admiration and love. Conjur-ing tricks, a marionette theatre, a railway game with strict rules, family magazines – these were among my devisings. All this did not prepare me for the harshness of Rugby School.

Rhoda: You were unhappy there?

Mr Carroll: No earthly consideration would induce me to go through my three years there again. But I worked hard, and gained my place at Christ Church College, and did sufficiently well, especially in Mathematics, to be recommended for a Studentship – usually called a Fellowship in other colleges. This award was for life – so long as the holder did not marry. My dear father, who also gained a Studentship, relinquished it for marriage, but I have never felt tempted to do likewise. Children of very large families often choose to remain single, I have noted. Mathematically speaking, this is just as well! I see children when I wish and not otherwise, and only those of my choice. That excludes boys. To me they are not an attractive race of beings. Even in the case of girls, childhood passes quickly enough. About nine out of ten of my child-friendships get shipwrecked at the critical point 'where the stream and river meet'. The experience of many years has taught me that there are few things in the world more evanes-cent than a child's love. Therefore I continue to make new little friends. But this little girl – she is sleeping still – affects me strangely. She recalls both my little sisters and Alice Liddell as I knew her first.

Rhoda: How did you come to meet her?

Mr Carroll: Without one thing Alice might never have been written. That was my camera. And I owe my start in photo-graphy to my uncle Skeffington Lutwidge. It was he who showed me the workings of the telescope and the microscope, and other such marvels. But when he demonstrated the camera, I was wholly captivated. I knew that I must acquire my own machine. 'I want some other occupation than mere reading and writing,' I told my uncle. By the beginning of 1856, as well as my Studentship I had been appointed College Lecturer in Mathematics, and felt sufficiently in funds to buy a camera. I went to London with a friend and bought the machine. It cost £15 – without the numerous extras. It was

heavy, cumbrous, terrible to move around with all the glass and chemicals; it needed summer daylight for results – but it was my passport everywhere. It was enough of a novelty to give me access to the eminent (Tennyson, Rossetti, many another), to beautiful children, and to the family at the Deanery. The Liddell children soon became close friends and regular subjects.

Rhoda: You say that all your child-friends change. But Alice herself, the real original Alice – was she different?

Mr Carroll: Alice Liddell . . . Why does one human affect us beyond any other? There is no reason, and yet it is so. In Euclidean terms, we must take it as an axiom. Without it, much of poetry and fiction would vanish I suppose. The strange thing is that, though little Alice stirred my imagination more than any child I have known, yet I have to admit to myself that she was not, herself, deeply imaginative. All the Liddell children were delightful; their good looks were exceptional; they were wonderful companions. Alice was not quite five when I first saw her; Edith was two years younger; Lorina three years older. Whenever the parents were absent (there was a long holiday in Madeira) or more than usually occupied – a royal visit, another birth, the three would beg me to come and tell stories. Though in the book Alice is seven or eight, in life she was ten on that July day in 1862 when we went up river to Godstow, and the Wonderland story began. My colleague, Robinson Duckworth, who helped to row, and to entertain with his singing, was also a listener. 'Are you inventing this just now?' he asked. I said that this was so. Alice especially begged me to write it down and the rest is well enough known. My publishers, Messrs Macmillan, and my artists, suffered greatly, I am well aware, from my exigences – but their skill remains part of the whole – an essential part.

Rhoda: As a governess, I know parents can sometimes be difficult . . .

Mr Carroll: Mrs Liddell was always a problem. She was proud of her aristocratic connections, ambitious, tempera-mental, and determined that her daughters should marry well. She liked the camera, but she did not care for the insis-tent young Mr Nobody who operated it. There were long periods when I had no contact with the Deanery at all. There was a fondness, I believe, between Alice at 17 or so and Prince Leopold, the Queen's youngest son, who was studying at the University. He was a serious, very likeable young man, but his health was uncertain, for he suffered from haemo-phililia. But neither the Palace nor the Deanery found this acceptable, and both married other partners. I write at times to a Mrs Hargreaves, sending her some new edition of *Alice* maybe; she replies with the same civil formality, and only memory and a name link her with the enchanting little girl at the Godstow picnic. I have to say that, when Lorina and Alice were married, – sadly, Edith died on the eve of her wedding – Mrs Liddell attempted to renew the old connection. I was now, to be sure, somewhat known as an author.

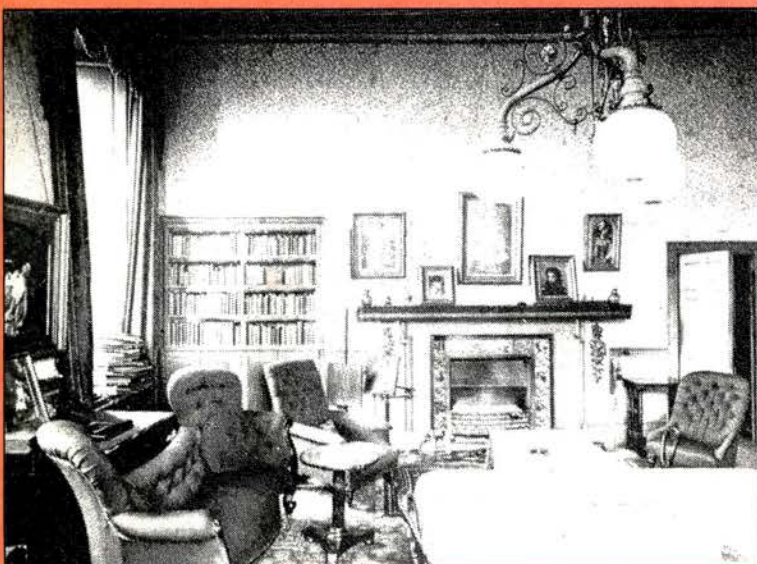
Rhoda: The Alice books are full of private reference, I believe?

Mr Carroll: That is true. Dinah was one of two tabby kittens owned by the Liddell children; they were named Villikins and Dinah after the popular song. Poor Villikins died, it was thought of poisoning, but Dinah lives a tenth life on the printed page. Elsie, Lacie and Tillie are the girls, disguised a lot by anagram or initial. Speaking of cats, I recently took on the task of finding the kindest way of ending the sufferings of our aged college cat. I am beginning to be aware of many aspects of cruelty that did not touch me earlier. The animals in my books are really humanized fantasies. My sister Henrietta, who takes in many stray cats, has drawn my atten-tion to the ill-use of horse, aptly described she tells me, in a recent book by a Miss Anna Sewell. But what rouses me most is the terrible practice of vivisection. I have written to Lord Salisbury, to the *Fortnightly Review* and to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, pointing out the harmful effect on the vivisector as well as on the tortured animal.

Rhoda: Mr Browning thinks exactly as you do. He would forbid it completely.

Mr Carroll: In a hundred years time, will it seem an unbe-lievable barbarism? Or not? I begin to fear that the growing Wonderland of science has no sane Alice to give it order and moderation. But now let me tell you something quaint. I had a number of Alice books printed on cheaper paper with plain

Continued on page 19 . . .



Lewis Carroll's room at Christ Church College.

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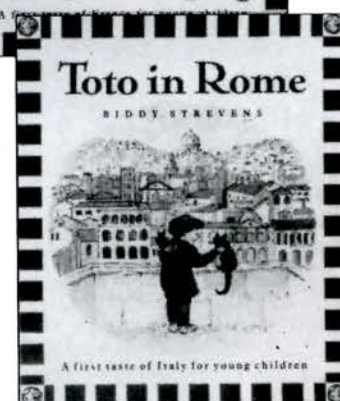
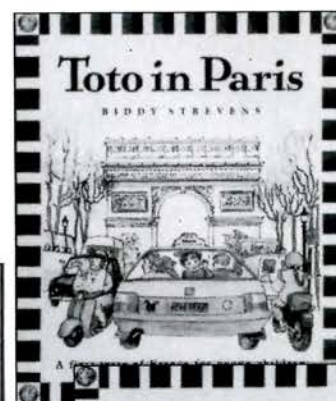
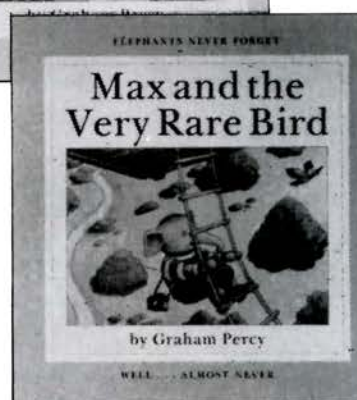
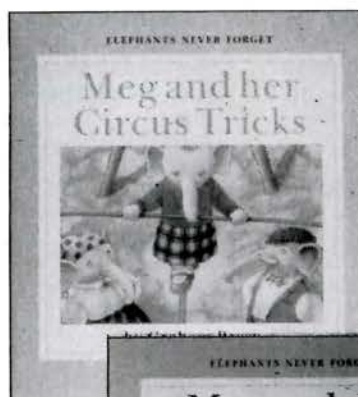
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Alice herself...



... and by Tenniel.

bindings to distribute to poor sick children in hospitals and convalescent homes, where books have hard wear and a short life. Reading of this offer, a 'Lady Superior', as she called herself, wrote to ask to see a copy first, as she had to be very careful, all the children being Roman Catholics, as to what 'religious reading' they were given. I wrote to say, you may certainly see it first if you wish, but I can guarantee that the books have no religious teaching whatever in them. In fact, they do not teach anything at all. Another hospital manager wrote that he knew of a place where there were a number of sick children, but he was afraid that I would like to give them books - 'because they are Jews!' I wrote to say, why in the world shouldn't little Israelites read *Alice* as well as other children?

Rhoda: The absence of the usual moral adds to the pleasure of the book for all young readers. But there is something to be learnt. Alice has courage and independence, and she knows how to behave in all circumstances.

Mr Carroll: You are right, Miss Rhoda. Manners are of the first importance. But if the books do hold a lesson, it is that words should be used with the utmost care and thought. They hold the key of logic, and logic governs every turn in the story. The word 'nonsense' has often been used of my children's books and verses. There is no absence of sense in *Alice*. It is, rather, a journey through a garden of reason, with unusual plants, perhaps, and growing rather wild.

Rhoda: Is it not true that you have been thought over-bold in making fun of the improving songs and verses that children - in my childhood at least - were forced to learn and recite?

Mr Carroll: I am told that my parodies are rather better known today than the originals. Yet sometimes the original has recurred to me with a new interest. 'Tis the voice of the sluggard' for instance. How easily this might be one's self. There is a line: 'He told me his dreams' - But *what* were his dreams? The line teases and perplexes me. Dreams are important to me. Much of my writing has come to me in a kind of waking dream - almost the whole of *Wonderland*, though I later added some persons and episodes. The design

of *Through the Looking-Glass* was more deliberate, yet that too took its own course. Both books are dream situations. *The Hunting of the Snark* grew from a single line - the last. 'For the Snark was a Boojum, you see.' It came to me as I walked in a serious mood on the Downs one morning. I had spent the night at the bedside of a sick young cousin, soon to die. I knew not what it meant then; I know not what it means now, but I wrote it down. Some time afterwards the rest of the stanza occurred to me. The rest followed quite naturally. I am told that the poem gave pleasure to Cardinal Newman. It is a strange and haunting piece; even I continue to find it so. In the case of *Jabberwocky*, the first verse was the starting point. I had written it in 1855, I think, as a mock-stanza of Anglo-Saxon poetry. I have since learnt, to my shame, that it in no way resembles Anglo-Saxon verse or language - but let that pass. When I used the term Anglo-Saxon attitudes, I was, I think, less in error. Look for yourself at the pictures in the history books.

Rhoda: Would you tell me a little about *Sylvie and Bruno*?

Mr Carroll: Now that is the most *conscious* story I have written. Though it moves through dream country - Outland, Fairyland and the modern human world, though its characters can be both fairy and human, adult and young in one person, I have left little to wayward chance or 'dream'. I wished to avoid any likeness to the *Alice* tales - except perhaps in the occasional verses within. My hope was for more gravitas; to suggest some thoughts not wholly out of harmony with the graver cadences of life. Years of writing, and many of my preoccupations - secular, theological, scientific, human, are contained in it. Mr Furniss has illustrated it superbly. So far, it has not had the success that I hoped, but I think that this will come.

At this point there was a sound. Little Alice slid from the sofa with the paper in her hand.

Alice: I think I have done the puzzle...

Mr Carroll: I shall mark this day with a white stone.

This was, I think, meant as praise. ■



Christ Church.

Chapter 1



Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do: once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it

From Carroll's original *Alice's Adventures under Ground*.

Information

Interview supplied by Naomi Lewis

Illustrations on this Authorgraph are taken from Macmillan's *Alice*. The photographs are from *Lewis Carroll and his world* by John Pudney, from Thames & Hudson now, sadly, out-of-print.

Almost every publisher has an edition of the *Alice* books on their list: Collins, Dent, Dover, Everyman, Firefly, Gollancz, Heinemann, Hippo, Hutchinson, Julia MacRae, Methuen, O'Mara, Oxford, Puffin and Purnell. Our front cover features Macmillan's edition of *Through the Looking-Glass* (0 333 29037 2, £9.99) with Sir John Tenniel's original illustrations.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, ill. Sir John Tenniel, Macmillan, 0 333 29038 0, £9.99

The Hunting of the Snark, ill. Helen Oxenbury, Heinemann, 0 434 96680 0, £6.95

Sylvie and Bruno, Dover, 0 486 25588 3, £5.95

Alice's Adventures under Ground, 1 85145 471 3, is published by Pavilion in association with The British Library at £9.99.

REVIEWS – Non Fiction

The Great Dinosaur Atlas

William Lindsay, illustrated
Giuliano Fornari, Dorling
Kindersley, 0 86318 628 9, £9.99
JUNIOR UPWARDS

Many dinosaur books bore me stiff – being merely illustrated lists of species, frequently giving little detail about age, distribution, lifestyle or discovery of the creatures they show, and depicting only physical features in boring outline, so that one would suppose the whole earth to have been evenly populated by them all at once – strolling about in a sort of prehistoric Serengeti.

By hanging the dino-fauna upon the discipline of an atlas, Lindsay and the Dorling Kindersley team have effortlessly avoided all these pitfalls and have produced a splendid guide, proceeding continent by continent and introducing everything from *Albertosaurus* to *Vulcanodon* (top marks for the index too) on the way.

What emerges irresistibly from this treatment is the image of dino-archaeology as a global million-piece jigsaw, painstakingly put together by a mixture of experience, intuition, luck and sheer dedicated labour to provide the overall picture of 150 million years of dino-evolution that so fascinates us now.

Matching the subject, the style and scale of this book are impressive. Lindsay's text provides a buoyant mix of fact and 'fancy that!' information (the Australian *Atlascoposaurus*, for instance, is named after the machinery used to excavate it); and Fornari's illustrations offer not only good colour and meticulous detail but provide a marvellous impression of the creatures' varying textures. Relative scale is well handled too – human walkers and cyclists provide the necessary comparisons.

There is a wealth of scholarship here, and the skills of author, artist and design team make it highly accessible and entertaining – the Great Atlas is rightly named. At 14 inches high it will be a pain to shelve in any library, but its appeal should ensure that it never needs to be. TP

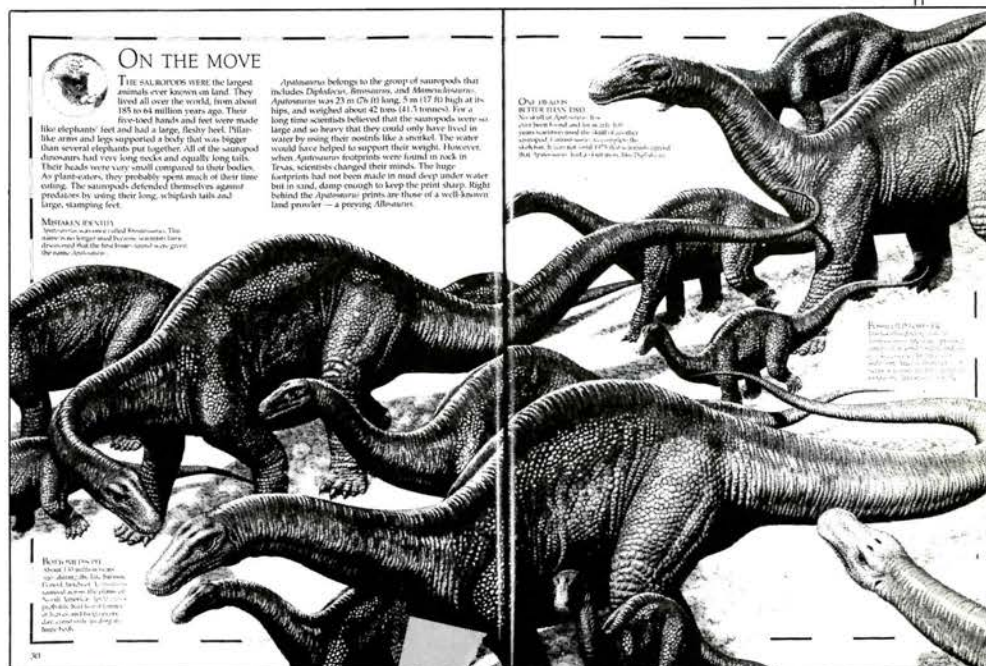
Litter

Donna Bailey, Franklin Watts
(What we can do about series),
0 7496 0406 9, £6.99
JUNIOR/MIDDLE

The first thing we can do about litter is be aware of it, and this is a helpfully simple look at the various ways places get littered – carelessness, wilful dumping, industrial malpractice, etc. The next thing we can do is avoid littering, and we get clear advice about spurning excess packaging. Further to that we can cooperatively clean up our neighbourhood and campaign against its further fouling.



All this is clearly expressed in a straightforward 'series' text with good explanatory photographs. I liked the inclusion of a bilingual notice saying 'Don't litter this area – Hong Kong is watching' and am saddened to see that most of the examples of good clean-up and recycling initiatives are taken from other countries; but that, at the moment, is life, and this plain primer explains that well. TP



Dreaming in the Night

0 7496 0252 X

Learning a Lesson

0 7496 0231 1

Munching a Meal

0 7496 0170 1

Running a Race

0 7496 0169 8

Steve Parker, Franklin Watts
(The Body in Action series),
£7.99 each

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

A silly book I once read about exercise made the remarkable claim that 'you can skate nearly a mile on one slice of bread'. The vision of Sonja Henie doing a thousand yards with only a vertical slice of Mother's Pride between her and the ice has remained with me.

'The Body in Action' series makes a far better job of explaining, among other things, the food/energy/exercise relationship and is distinguished throughout its four volumes by the plainness of its statements and the breadth with which each of its subjects is considered.

So *Munching a Meal* pulls together dietary constituents, common crops, senses, salivary glands and dental hygiene before launching into the digestion story. *Learning a Lesson* is subtitled 'how you see, think and remember' – and touches on senses, illusions, experience, reflexes, voluntary actions and mnemonics. *Dreaming* deals with getting ready for bed, the nature and virtues of sleep as well as three pages of absolute common-sense about dreaming (Sigmund who? ... never heard of him). *Running* is more straightforward, dealing with skeleton and muscles, respiration, circulation (Charlotte Corday fans will rejoice to see that a heart pumps enough blood to fill a bath tub in about 13 minutes) and food/energy.

The four volumes make a synergic information web whose effect is much enhanced by excellent layout and illustrations and gains much credibility from the editors' decision to use just one person as the photographer's model for each title.

This avoids much of the shabby tokenism displayed by some other works of this ilk. So – Andeep, Anna, Laureen and Thomas – thanks for adding to our knowledge in so pleasant a way and not least for allowing us to deduce that a jet airliner can fly 300 metres on 40 bars of chocolate. The rest of you have to guess which one that comes from. TP

Ships, Sailors and the Sea

Richard Humble, 0 7496 0548 0

Flight, Fliers and Flying Machines

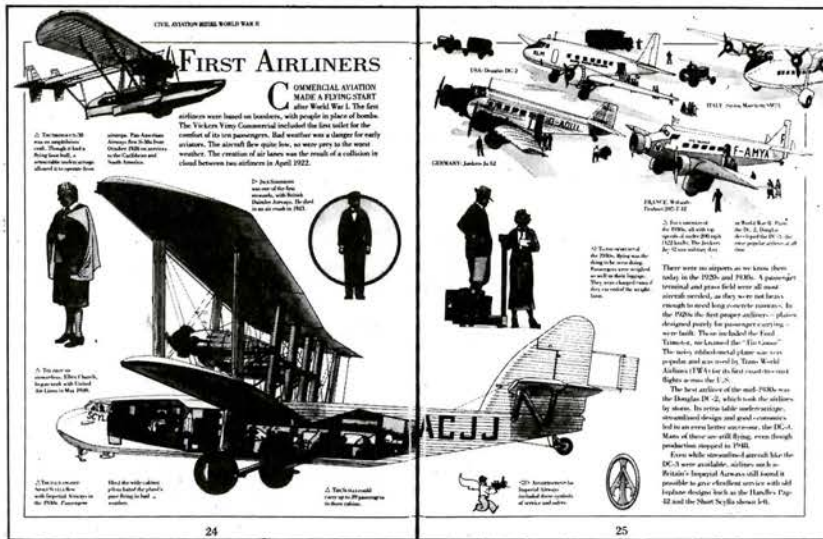
David Jefferis, 0 7496 0616 9
Franklin Watts (Timeline series),
£7.99 each

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

Flight and *Ships* are appropriate titles to launch the new 'Timeline' series – which aims to show how technological and social factors have affected development. *Flight* is probably the more successful being able to show an evolutionary development of a couple of hundred years, where *Ships* has to try to pinpoint maritime highlights of five thousand.

The books contain a good mixture of the vital and the trivial – readers may be as interested to know that in 1830 a Mrs Graham was saved by her billowing skirts after falling from a balloon as that it was the development of the lightweight petrol engine that enabled the age of flying early this century.

The designer, David Salariya, has given both books a very distinctive visual appeal. Use of double page spreads is imaginative and informative – as many as seventeen illustrations are included in one spread, on another a single long cutaway is chosen. Content is generally sound and thorough but there are frustrations (such as the mention of the link between Roman and Carthaginian ships but a total lack of any information about the latter). The timeline section is useful and the glossary very necessary when the text includes statements like 'Columbus had her re-rigged as a square sail caravela redonda'. GB

A double spread from *Flight, Fliers and Flying Machines*.

The Secrets of Vesuvius

Sara Bisel, Hodder and Stoughton (Time Quest series), 0 340 54352 3, £6.95

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

This attractive volume, profusely illustrated with colour photographs and artwork, provides an immensely enjoyable way of absorbing history as well as a fascinating glimpse of an archaeologist and anthropologist at work.

In 1982 Sara Bisel, one of the world's specialists in ancient bones, flew to Herculaneum in response to an urgent request for assistance – workmen digging near the ruins had discovered some skeletons. Because the Roman custom was for cremation, very few skeletons existed; this would be a unique opportunity to reconstruct a microcosm of Roman life tragically ended when Vesuvius erupted in AD 79.

Dr Bisel's narrative is a model blend of erudition and enthusiasm. She effortlessly mingles information about her work and the significance of the finds with details about Roman life in general and Herculaneum in particular. Interwoven amongst all this is an imaginative fictional reconstruction of events in the lives of some of the inhabitants on those fateful August days.

This is a compelling read from start to finish. Sara Bisel originally expected to stay in Herculaneum for five days – she ended up spending most of the next six years analysing the bones and 'making them talk'. VH



'When I examine a skull closely, I can usually tell what kind of features a person had. The soldier's skull, for example, shows that he had a large nose. By "clothing" the skull with muscles and nerves, we can show what the soldier might have looked like'. From *The Secrets of Vesuvius*.

A Question of Green – the not so trivial quiz book

Steve Skidmore, Hodder and Stoughton, 0 340 54632 8, £2.99

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

For another way of skinning the green cat, conscientious readers are advised to consult Skidmore's 'not so trivial quiz book'. This examines the green canon and the reader's knowledge of it at the same time, mixing straightforward quiz questions – e.g. 'What is CFC short for?' – a) Chlorofluorocarbon, b) Cauliflower Cheese, c) CandyFloss Company' with brief passages of punchy fact, very much in the manner of the author's cardinal contributions to Cassell's splendid 'Spaceship Earth' series.

In his introduction Skidmore says 'this book should not only test your knowledge about green issues but should also help you learn some green facts.' And you can test your greenness with the Green Day quiz (watch out for the minus signs in the score-counts though). The address list at the end has all the right answers too.

This is a book to be bought and shared widely until the constant page-flipping its arrangement commands has worn it out. First class for the back seat of the lead-free limo. TP

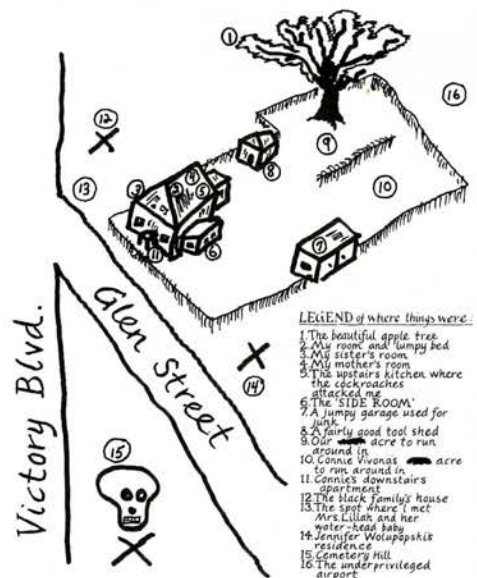
The Pigman and Me

Paul Zindel, Bodley Head, 0 370 31611 8, £8.99

SECONDARY

Many people would include Paul Zindel's *The Pigman* on their list of significant teenage novels. Now, more than twenty years after it was published, Zindel has written an 'autobiography' of the time in his teens when he met his own Pigman, Nonno Frankie, who made him laugh, cry and think and taught him 'the greatest secret of life'.

OUR HOUSE IN TRAVIS



It's a story with which teenagers will identify as Zindel recalls moments of embarrassment, guilt, and fear (the terrors of a new school and encountering the local hoodlums). But perhaps most memorable is the sheer zaniness of Zindel's home life shared with the wonderful Vivona family and twenty odd Lassie lookalikes, bought to restore the family fortune!

Biographies for teenagers tend to be worthy but uninspiring. *The Pigman and Me* is a powerful, funny and touching read; it will be enjoyed by a wide age range of existing Zindel fans and will make some new ones. A very good addition to the biography shelves. GB



Geoff Brown is a Divisional Coordinator with Hertfordshire Schools Library Service.

Veronica Holliday is North Regional Schools Librarian for Hampshire.

Ted Percy is a Divisional Children's Librarian with Buckinghamshire County Library.

Non-fiction Reviews Editor: Eleanor von Schweinitz.

A CLASSIC INFORMATION BOOK

Eleanor von Schweinitz pays tribute to Shakespeare's Theatre by C Walter Hodges.

Built-in obsolescence seems to characterise non-fiction books today. Destined (or designed?) for a short print run and replacement by a new title in yet another series, they appear to have no pretensions to lasting qualities.

Shakespeare's Theatre by C Walter Hodges is one of the few post-war non-fiction titles to merit consideration as a classic – produced by a man with an extraordinary combination of talents: an acknowledged subject expert and an accomplished illustrator and writer of fiction and non-fiction. He was awarded the 1964 Kate Greenaway medal for his illustrations to **Shakespeare's Theatre** and must be unique in having his novel, *The Namesake*, in the running for the Carnegie medal in the same year. In 1966 he received international recognition – being placed on the Honours List of the Hans Christian Andersen award.

His reputation as an expert on Shakespeare's theatre grew out of a passionate interest and wide reading rather than the conventional route of academic scholarship. In 1953 he published *The Globe Restored*, the first of his adult writings on the Elizabethan theatre. His expertise in the staging of Elizabethan drama found practical expression in his work with Bernard Miles at the Mermaid Theatre and his design of the Elizabethan stage for the St George's Theatre. In the 70s and 80s he got drawn further into the world of Shakespeare studies, becoming well known on the conference circuit and taking up visiting lectureships at Cambridge and in the United States. Prominent in the current debate following the excavation of the Rose Theatre site, he worked closely with the Museum of London on their recent exhibition.

These are formidable credentials for producing a classic on Shakespeare's theatre. Completely in control of his material, Hodges provides a wonderfully rounded treatment of his subject. The evolution of the Elizabethan theatre, the audiences and the players, the plays and their staging are not each filleted out and dealt with in a double-page spread but effortlessly interwoven, the audience seen as a vital element in the performance, the production and staging an integral part of the drama.

Hodges is an expert and he respects his readers. He invites us to consider ideas, not just facts. Furthermore he unobtrusively reminds us that many of these 'facts' are no more than informed speculation – evidence resting on a limited range of sources.

Although it is the illustrations which first catch the eye – bustling with life and colour, conjuring up a vivid picture of the theatre and its multifarious audience – the text soon commands equal attention. This is due not merely to the careful integration of the text and illustration on the page but to the

unending interaction between them. The constant dialogue between visual and verbal is only possible because both have been crafted by a single creative personality.

Here is an example of how he talks us through a couple of his illustrations (imagine yourself turning the page at the second paragraph):

'On this page we see a view of the auditorium taken from the stage. Notice the three spectator galleries, the yard, the two pillars which hold up the stage roof, and the main entrance, through which some children are peeping to see what is going on. What is going on in fact is a management discussion about the gate money.'

Here now is a view from the other direction, showing all the stage. It is a very plain stage. The roof over it is thatched, though the posts that support it are elaborate and make a handsome show.'

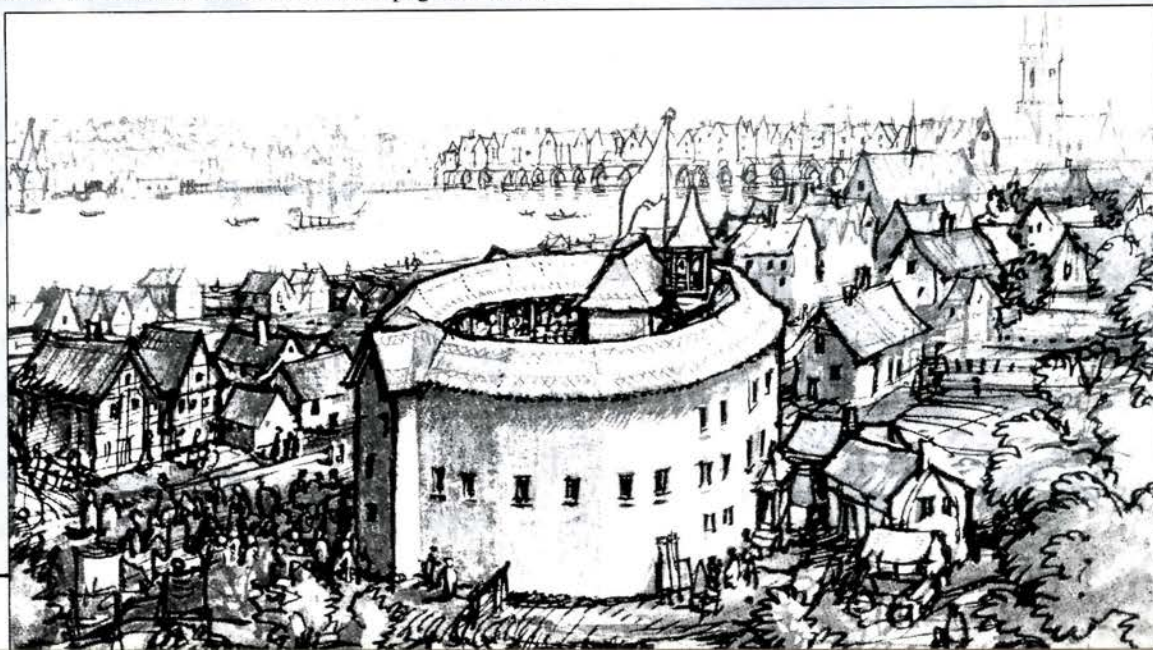
The text bubbles with an infectious enthusiasm for its subject and Hodges slips easily from one narrative mode to another – often addressing his readers directly and drawing us into closer and closer involvement with his subject – as when we observe a performance of Julius Caesar:

'From within the painted Heavens overhead a rumbling and rolling sound fills the house – drums and cannon-balls up there in the loft, but loud thunder down here in the streets of Rome, where Casca meets Cassius in the storm ...'

Unlike so many books today, **Shakespeare's Theatre** is designed to be read not dipped into. It develops its points at a relaxed pace, allowing facts to be absorbed and reinforced, ideas considered. It demands the same sort of commitment from its readers as a well-written novel – although it reads aloud well and lends itself to discussion (which widens its potential audience).

When it was published in 1964, Oxford University Press gave it the lavish treatment it deserved: full colour on every page opening; generous page layout with, most lavish of all, lots of open white spaces (which no editor today could resist cramming with yet more pictures and facts).

Shakespeare's Theatre remained in print for over twenty years. If you find it on your library shelves, cherish it and draw it to the attention of any young person who will respond to Hodges' enthusiasm. Like an inspired teacher it can breathe life into Shakespeare, showing his plays as part of a popular, living tradition. ■



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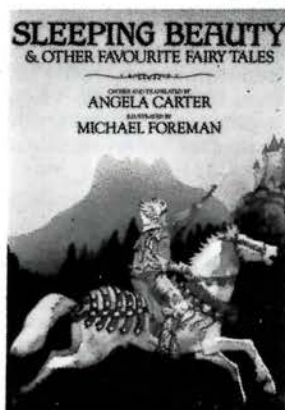
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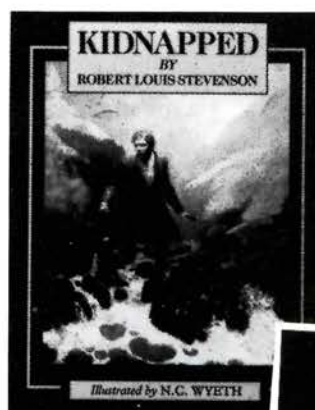
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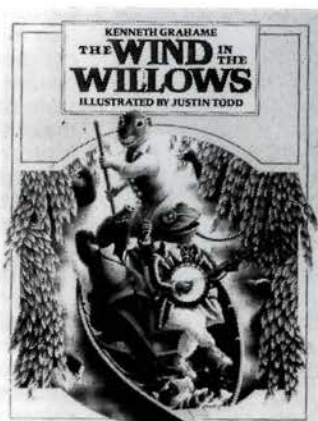
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G and Gollancz Editions of These Classics are the Ones to Cherish

Picturing

Shirley Hughes

Robert Louis Stevenson's **Treasure Island** has never had the 'Alice' treatment. This is to say that in triumphantly surviving for nearly a century as one of the best adventure stories ever written it has never been associated with any particular set of visual images. Long John Silver's strength as a character is in the words. He has the advantage of entering the reader's imagination unfettered by the kind of indelible first interpretation which Tenniel gave to Lewis Carroll's Alice.

Yet it's a story which cries out for pictures. The stunning prose, bowling along as it does, so beautifully crafted, so intensely *readable* – how did Stevenson keep it up, page after page, with such brilliance? Genius, I suppose – conjuring up one memorable character after another. But it is Silver, that most charming of villains, the man with 'a face as big as a ham – plain and pale but intelligent and smiling' who must surely represent the central challenge to any illustrator.

N C Wyeth, Big Daddy of American illustration during the golden years and father of the painter Andrew Wyeth, made his **Treasure Island** illustrations for Scribners in 1911. Those of us who saw the originals when they were on show here in Britain a few years ago were astonished by their size-large bravura oil paintings executed in strong, confidently handled brushwork. But their reduction to colour-plates has not decreased their impact, rather intensified it. He is a superb figure artist (an illustrator's training in his time included rigorous life-drawing discipline as a matter of course). His great strengths are the exactness with which he places his figures within the frame to give maximum excitement to the action and above all his command of light and dark.

Often he floods his pictures with light, but always dramatic shadows are cast. In one place the watching Ben Gunn emerges from the gloom of the forest with only his face and upper arm brilliantly lit by a single shaft beam. In another the buccaneers swarm over the stockade towards us framed against a hot pink and blue sky, and drop down into shadow. In a third a sinister group of men bend over a book and a knife by the lurid glow of a lantern. But a looming dark figure, bending eagerly forward, dominates the foreground and hides the light-source – a device which since Caravaggio and Rembrandt has been used successfully to create dramatic intensity. Wyeth's Silver is best shown when with burly brutality, all

pretence at geniality gone, he drags Jim on a rope 'for all the world . . . like a dancing bear'.

Wyeth's painterliness and his great sense of theatre make him a difficult act to follow. Rowland Hilder, widely known in the 1930s as an accomplished landscape painter as well as an illustrator, brought some of the same qualities to the OUP 1944 edition. His effects are created by bold black line combined with colour wash. A capacity to get inside the characters is not his strongest point. His Silver is more predictable than Wyeth's and he has not attempted a close-up of the horrible blind Pew. But his line drawings – half titles, chapter headings and endpieces, beautifully placed boxes, very dark with lots of solid black – are executed with powerful elegance and are very memorable.

Even more memorable, to some children scarifyingly so, are Mervyn Peake's black and white illustrations for the Eyre and Spottiswoode 1949 edition. Colour in this case would be a complete irrelevance. Peake's meticulously hatched style is full of shadowy subtleties of tone. He gets right to the heart of Silver, has his devious charm, his viciousness, to the

Silver by Mervyn Peake.



Ralph Steadman's
Jim Hawkins.

life. (Peake, it is worth remembering, had as a war artist witnessed some grim sights only a few years before.) He often uses uncluttered areas of shadow to enhance a single telling figure, as with the gorilla-like old sea dog, his eyes glazed with rum, or Jim Hawkins, alert inside the stockade, or Israel Hands' body in terrifying free fall from the mizzen-shrouds into the sea. Jim, so often characterised simply as a sturdy lad among a vivid cast of adults, is here shown as a very eighteenth-century figure, slender and full of resolution.

Peake has an eye for the grotesque. He draws foliage as though it were seaweed or fungus. He is strongly aware of the lurking violence in the story. Unforgettable details such as the horror of the almost finicky gesture with which the man with two missing fingers displays his maimed hand, and the macabre profile of Pew, peering sightlessly from under his eye-shade, are what make this a unique and outstanding interpretation. Anyone lucky enough to own a copy, now regrettably out of print, should treasure it.

Looking at contemporary editions it is surprising how few are enhanced by distinguished illustrations. John Lawrence has brought a lavish generosity to the handsome Heinemann 1990 volume, with a colour or line illustration on most spreads. He draws with robust freedom. The pale washes of his colour work are given strength by vigorous pen hatching. He has not



N C Wyeth's Blind Pew (Gollancz).

involved himself too deeply in the darker side of the story. Challenging dramatic highpoints such as Pew's death under the horses' hoofs are a touch too perfunctory and polite. Silver, though characterised piratically enough, is a round-faced Ardizzone-like fellow. But the island itself is dreamily, magically evoked with some fine vistas of the ship lying at anchor and the shadowy lagoon.

Ralph Steadman has the advantage of a boldly recognisable style. Sometimes he almost verges on a parody of himself, though he can hardly be held responsible for his many imitators. He is a fine illustrator, brushing all conventions aside, attacking the page with the spluttery point of his pen with enormous gusto.

His illustrations for the Harrap **Treasure Island** (1985) do not spare the gore. Silver is represented as a splendidly venomous grotesque, Jim Hawkins a shock-headed figure from a fairy-tale. His blind Pew is an effectively frightening double-visaged creature shrouded in diaphanous shadowy washes. In some cases, such as the picture of the buccaneers storming the stockade, Steadman has simply let go in a welter of blood, an element with which he is very much at home. But he contrasts this with some marvellous moments of restraint – the double-page spread of the 'Admiral Benbow' Inn under a misty Kentish moon with Jim and his mother seen as two tiny figures fleeing into the marshy landscape, or

the brooding calm of the island, dark against the sky, done in finely-graduated tones of sepia, lavender and grey.

Treasure Island is one of the few classics written in the last century which never has to be skipped or edited when read aloud to a group of modern children. There are no long descriptions, no authorly interventions to hold up the narrative. Every phrase is necessary and gripping. But, much as we admirers of the novel may regret it, the fact has to be faced that many children's experience of the book will be in a shortened popular

Below, by John Lawrence.



edition. Will it lead them to the real thing? If only we knew for sure. The publishers of these editions have a huge responsibility to their audience and the quality of the illustrations is crucial.

The current Ladybird edition with illustrations by Dennis Manton falls down sadly both in the re-telling – we all know about the necessity for a limited vocabulary but does it have to plod along so woodenly? – and in the pictures which are wooden too. One has the impression of a lot of bright local colour reminiscent of a DIY catalogue. Peter Dennis's illustrations for the Usborne Picture Classics paperback have a bit more life to them. The story is treated almost as a strip cartoon without the formal boxes or speech balloons, and there is a more considered attempt at atmospheric colour.

Perhaps it is too testing to consider these efforts alongside illustrations of the calibre of Wyeth's or Peake's. Dennis, after all, has been required to do around 128 pictures all in full colour for the Usborne book. But a mass market production, even allowing for the struggle to keep down costs, can have a little gusto, a touch of panache to feed the child's interest. These have neither, only the dreary, listless air of something churned out to feed a market.

It is fascinating to speculate about possible **Treasure Island** illustrators to come, though sad to ponder what Charles Keeping, an obvious candidate for this book, would have made of it had he lived.

Will someone persuade Patrick Benson to attempt the challenge? Or Patrick Lynch? I hope so. One wonders if the success of Gary Blythe's illustrations for **The Whales' Song** will tempt some young artists away from water-colours and inks and back to full bodied oil paint – a medium less often used now than in the first half of this century.

One thing is sure, that **Treasure Island** has the power and attraction to survive and will yet inspire illustrations we have not even dreamed of. ■

Editions of **Treasure Island** mentioned in this piece:

The Hilder, Peake and Steadman editions are sadly now out of print.

III. N C Wyeth, Gollancz, 0 575 03149 2, £8.95

III. John Lawrence, Heinemann, 0 434 96508 1, £10.95

III. Dennis Manton, Ladybird, 0 7214 0597 5, £1.30

III. Peter Dennis, Usborne, 0 86020 574 6, £2.50

Shirley Hughes is one of Britain's best known illustrators. Her next book is **The Big Alfie Out-of-Doors Storybook**, due from The Bodley Head in Spring 1992. Her version of **The Secret Garden** (see Margaret Fisher's article on page 28) is published by Gollancz, 0 575 04168 4, at £10.95.



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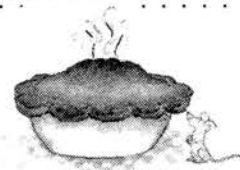
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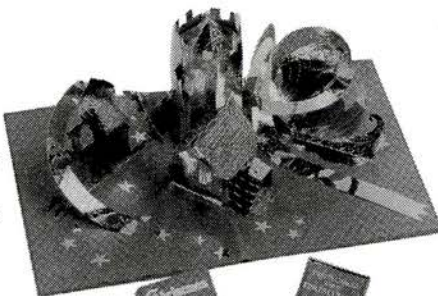
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BLIND SPOT

JUMPING SHIP...

Julia MacRae refuses to set sail on the Hispaniola.

Once upon a time I had three great cultural blind spots: Bach's *Mass in B Minor*, Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. Then a luminous performance of the Bach Mass in Christ Church, Spitalfields converted me to the first, and working with Anthony Browne on an edition of *Alice* opened my eyes, through his, to the real delights of the second. There remained *Treasure Island*. My first reaction on being asked to write about it was, 'Oh Lord, I'll have to read the wretched thing again', coupled with a sneaking suspicion that perhaps this third and last bastion would fall in the light of a supposedly more mature reading (I was ten when I first learned to loathe it).

So I read it again and nothing has changed – I still dislike it intensely. It's not easy to be negative about a 'classic', nor indeed is it very easy to define just *why* I don't like this book, since it is a gut reaction and not an academic one. But here goes...

In the very opening pages I came across something which I clearly remembering bothering me all those years ago. 'The old sea dog' who comes clumping into the 'Admiral Benbow' says, 'This is a handy cove... and a pleasant sittuated grog shop'. Sittuated? What sort of a word is *that*? Even at ten I was a fanatical speller (with not much sense of humour) and I remember being thoroughly irritated by this grating word. If the child is father to the man, then at an early age I was apparently very much a blue pencil person, already wanting to 'edit' what seemed to me contrived and unconvincing speech patterns. I must have been an impossible little prig but I can't help that – I didn't like the way Stevenson wrote, and I didn't like the way he seemed to rely on conveying character by changing speech patterns and not much else.

At that stage I recall liking my characters to be silent men of action. Usually men – in the 'forties the bulk of my reading was not really written for children at all, very little of it featured women, and most of the 'heroes' were adults, notably, for me, Tarzan and a fighter pilot improbably named Rockfist Rogan (in the pages of *Champion*). Tarzan (in the film version) was certainly a man of very few words; all he ever did was emit a bloodcurdling sexy yodel at which

elephants would drop everything and come running from all over. Rockfist Rogan gave out a bit of RAF slang now and then, but mostly he just hit people. Whereas Jim Hawkins – Jim went on and on and on, never sounding the least like anybody *real* to me, neither child nor man. I did not care a fig what happened to him. He talked too much.

And there were (are) other problems. What is one to make of Long John Silver? Is he a goodie or a baddie? I never knew and I still don't. I did not like this ambiguity. It may be a sign of Stevenson's genius, but I wanted to know one way or the other and could never really make up my mind, which I resented. As a pirate he failed to convince, and his parrot drove me mad. (Rafael Sabatini, a writer who entranced me and is virtually unheard of today, created *The Sea Hawk*, every word of which thrilled – *that* was how a swashbuckling pirate story should be written!) Silver was an enigma, and he didn't frighten me in the least.

But old blind Pew did – terribly. He was the stuff of nightmares as he came tap-tapping his way to the Inn. I was truly frightened by this character, and it was a while before I could view blindness with compassion and not with horror. On re-reading *Treasure Island* I was struck by the fact that much of the revulsion engendered by Stevenson's villains is triggered by his description of physical disability – Long John Silver has only one leg, Black Dog is missing two fingers, Pew is blind. The child/adult in me still feels Stevenson relies on speech and physical characteristics to delineate character – for me, his people have no convincing inner depth. It is all external.

And I remember being bothered by Squire Trelawney. Growing up in Australia gave me no first-hand experience of the English class-structure, but I had become aware through my reading that most English rural communities had a squire and that the squire was usually rich, frequently pompous and spoke better English than everybody else. Squire Trelawney seemed to me to be a blithering idiot. How could one take seriously a character who, upon learning that some of the crew are treacherously inclined, expostulates, "And to think they're all Englishmen!" Really, this book is peopled with stereotypes, but perhaps Stevenson invented the stereotype.

But the main reason I dislike *Treasure Island* is that it bored me then and it bores me now. It was written as a serial, and only achieved popularity after its publication in book form, but to me it still *reads* as a serial, with that



artificial and disjointed attempt to find a suitable cliffhanging incident for each instalment. It does not *flow*. Yet it has been called 'the greatest adventure story ever written'. Good heavens! What about *She*, or *Beau Geste*, or *The Thirty-Nine Steps* or even – perish the thought! – *Susannah of the Mounties*, each of which gave me a far greater sense of adventure and excitement than the long-winded goings-on of all those people on the Hispaniola? They roar about from one incident to the next, woodenly playing out their roles. I never felt, nor wanted to be, a part of it.

But others clearly did. Some time ago I went to see an exhibition of works by America's dynastic painting family, the Wyeths, at the Fitzwilliam in Cambridge. There, before my truly astonished eyes, were the original N C Wyeth illustrations for the Scribner edition of *Treasure Island*. They defy description. To begin with, they are as big as billiard tables, and I fail utterly to understand how the printers of the time coped with them. And they have such *power*: the painting of the demonic Pew must surely be one of the most remarkable portraits ever made to illustrate a book. I do not believe a boring text could have inspired so great a picture and so I must concede, albeit reluctantly, that the failure to appreciate *Treasure Island* is my blind spot, and no fault of Robert Louis Stevenson. But don't ask me to read it again. ■

After training as a children's librarian, Julia MacRae left her native Australia in 1960 and came to London. She worked for Constable, Collins and Hamish Hamilton before launching Julia MacRae Books twelve years ago with her colleagues, Delia Huddy and Linda Summers. Both, along with her present Managing Editor, Susie Reid, moved with her to Random Century in 1990. Julia is adamant that her imprint owes its strength to team enterprise rather than any one individual.

Illustrations here are by Ralph Steadman and Mervyn Peake. Details of these and other versions of *Treasure Island* are given in Shirley Hughes's 'Picturing Treasure Island' on page 24.

Also available are Puffin (0 14 035.016 0) £2.50; and Collins (0 00 693437 4) £2.25 pbks.

For audio tapes, see page 13.



SURPRISE SANDWICHES

Margery Fisher chooses Classics currently in print

Kenneth Grahame once wrote 'What the Boy chiefly dabbled in was natural history and fairy tales and he just took them as they came, in a sandwich sort of way, without any distinctions; and really his course of reading strikes me as rather sensible.' I agree. The 'classics' should be tossed to children as interesting food to be sampled not virtuously but as sandwiches whose fillings might surprise them.

Stories lead the young into innumerable worlds, some like their own, others unfamiliar. The imagined worlds of fantasy are often the easiest to appreciate because they stir universal feelings. George Macdonald's enduring tales, *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872) and *The Princess and Curdie* (1882), describe a little girl of eight climbing resolutely at night to the attic of an old house and a boy four years older tracking hostile goblins in the tunnels of a silver-mine; Irene's fear and Curdie's cocky courage can be understood after more than a century. Folklore motifs also hold out a familiar hand to young readers; grotesque creatures like the rock they live in, an old

different expectations of fiction. The villains in *The Hobbit* include goblins, huge spiders and a dragon, and folktale motifs abound, like honey and wings, keys and incantations. But here is no virtuous Victorian hero. Young readers have acquired (mainly from the media) a sense of irony, a scepticism about motives which should make Bilbo Baggins understandable. Bilbo, who enjoys his cosy burrow and his pipe, who describes himself as no hero but a burglar, is perhaps the first anti-hero in children's literature. Chosen by the wizard Gandalf to redress wrong in traditional fashion, he must travel dangerously to win back a treasure stolen from the dwarfs by Smaug the dragon. His success comes sometimes from luck, sometimes from judicious retreat, sometimes from quick wits or sheer doggedness; typically, he scorns heroic combat ('Swords . . . are mostly blunt') and his chief weapon is a ring of invisibility, won in a riddling contest. *The Hobbit* has a sardonic tone and a hint of parody and it ends in anti-climax when Bilbo returns home to find he has been presumed dead and his property is being auctioned – a fine homecoming for a hero. This is a wonderfully generous book, full of donnish chat and coloured by magnificently invented scenes in a believable world. Above all it is accessible not just because the author addresses his readers as 'you', but because it belongs to our own climate.

The sense of place in *The Little Grey Men* and *Down the Bright Stream* is intensified by B.B.'s naturalist knowledge. The 'last gnomes in England' belong to folktale but the books are essentially celebrations of the English countryside. Each one describes a journey. In the first, Dodder, Baldmoney and Sneezewort voyage up the Folly Brook in search of their missing brother, restless Cloudberry; in the second, the stream is diverted for commercial purposes and the gnomes set out bravely, downstream this time in the direction of Ireland, where they hope to find safe haven. Through their eyes we visualise Dark Wood and Giant Grim's lines of murdered animals, we feel the mouseskin coracle spinning in the mill-race, we sense the vast space of the estate lake where a lost clockwork launch provides, for a time, food and shelter. While words precisely map the journey, time is marked by seasonable changes and just as naturally the gnomes relate to their animal neighbours. Heron, owl, robin and others only extend their behaviour when necessary – Barny the owl tows the gnomes to Ireland on a cleverly contrived glider. Meanwhile the gnomes themselves are humans, inches high, and they solve the problems of their secret life logically in our terms. Literal-minded children are told just what materials were found for the glider, how a frying-pan was contrived from an empty cartridge-case, who supplied the moleskins for winter clothes. The mixture of inventive fancy and scrupulous accuracy is perfectly judged.

The same practical detail has helped to ensure a permanent place on the shelves for *The Wind in the Willows*. Nowadays children usually come to this book by way of a play about Toad, but though his exploits do provide something of a central plot, the riverbank is the true subject. Read like this, the chapter entitled 'The Piper at the Gates of Dawn', a stumbling block for many readers, fits in as Pan is seen as the presiding spirit, as he is for the *Little Grey Men*.

There may be more description in Grahame's book than the present generation is used to but his most stately polysyllables are easily taken by the ear, given a good reader-aloud. Conceited Toad, the civilised water-vole and his more rustic friends have become household words because of the confident, comic/serious humanisation, and the middle-class world of 1908, with the exciting advent of the motor-car and the social hierarchy of police and washerwomen, squire and poachers, has been introduced to hundreds of children in this ageless narrative.

Kipling in his *Just So Stories* humanised animals to entertain his small daughter and to instruct her gently in certain aspects of animal life. This is an authorial voice which can be uncomfortable to present-day ears. Strong sentence-rhythms and repetitions ask for reading aloud, but what will a parent today make of contrived abbreviations like 'a small 'stute fish' and the Elephant's Child's 'satiable curiosity' or of parentheses like the shipwrecked mariner's excuse 'He had his Mummy's leave to paddle, or else he would never have done it, because he was a man of infinite-resource-and-sagacity'? I can only suggest that it is worth putting up with period and personal devices like these for the sake of the intoxicating rush of words in 'The Sing-Song of Old Man Kangaroo' or the pleasure of meeting phrases like the Djinn's greeting to the Camel, 'My long and bubbling friend'. Besides, the mock-evolution of the Rhino's skin, the Leopard's spots and the Armadillo's carapace has a lunatic logic and the ballooning fancy is tethered by snatches of proper geography. Children of today should not miss these fantastically presented presentations of animal life and parents can use the highly orchestrated pieces for a bravura performance at bedtime.



From *The Princess and the Curdie*.

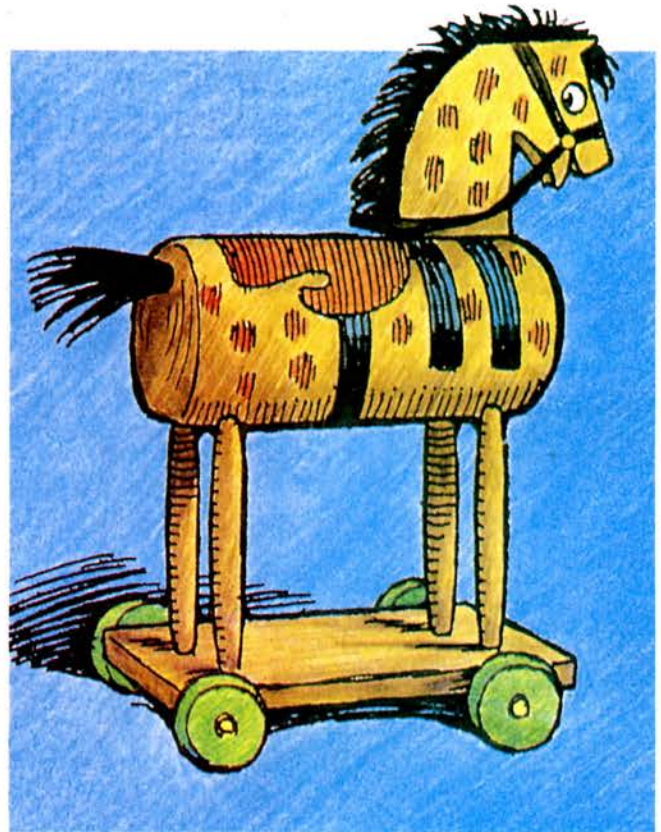
woman spinning, an enchanted thread marking a perilous path, define the little Princess as a traditional heroine, while Curdie the miner's son is the ageless humble hero who rescues the child from underground and in time becomes a king. The moral theme of good and evil is deepened in the second book, when Irene and Curdie save her royal father from rebellious courtiers; his health, ruined by poison, is restored by fresh bread and wine, and he learns to rule more wisely. The gravity in the stories may be lightened to young readers by the pictorial style and the ageless plot of children battling against enemies but above all the atmosphere of mountain, old house and winding tunnels speak to the imagination in every generation.

More than half a century later a comparable magic world of towering heights and dark underground was created for readers with



The Camel about to inherit his Humph, from *Just So Stories*.

It is a large step from Kipling's tall-stories to the didacticism of *Black Beauty*, where accurate details of animal lives are used to illustrate the wrongs done to them by humans, pleading the cause of carriage horses tormented by the fashionable bearing-rein, hunters brought to death by reckless riding, horses ruined by lazy grooms

Above: *The Adventures of the Little Wooden Horse* (Harrap).Left: *The Wind in the Willows* (Gollancz).Right: *Black Beauty*.

and ostlers. Anna Sewall's burning sincerity reaches out over the generations to children and their elders; Charles Keeping, whose superb illustrations for the book were among his last pictures, dedicated his edition 'To all those concerned with the care and welfare of horses and ponies'. The various names given to the central character (Darkie, Black Auster, Jack, Old Crony, as well as Black Beauty) designate his various homes – a country estate, a farm, a livery stable, a London cabstand, allowing for a procession of Victorian classes and types seen through animal eyes.

Beauty's first sight of a steam-train, his terror in a stable fire, his sympathy for Ginger, the ill-treated chestnut mare, are translated into human speech and thought, but in no way distorted from nature. As well as being a social manifesto, the book is a study in education; horses must learn to obey and work hard and their masters must learn to care for them sensibly and responsibly. As a story *Black Beauty* is accessible even after a hundred and fourteen years with its direct style and its varying incidents (a night dash over a flooded river, hazards in London traffic, a horse-fair, a glimpse of the Crimean War). So long as children and horses come together in amity this is a classic that will endure.

From animal worlds where we see ourselves sideways to straight domestic novels for the young. *The Secret Garden*, published in 1910, speaks timelessly about children who are churlish because they feel unwanted and who find unexpected happiness when they learn to forget themselves. Sallow Mary, rushed from cholera-struck India to windy Yorkshire moorland, Colin brooding at night over his supposedly crooked back – here are characters in period setting wholly recognisable today. In a dance-like arrangement of scenes, Dickon and his

housemaid sister Martha, healthy and unpretentious, work their magic, as the garden does too, on the lonely boy and girl so much more fortunate in material ways. Each event, from Mary's first taste of porridge to her brave venture in the dark to trace the distant crying, with that wonderful moment when 'She was standing *inside* the garden', is described simply, but this is a layered book and there will come a time of re-reading when the pattern of sickness and health, depression and joy, is seen to extend to the pervasive presence of Mr Craven, with his bent back and warped nature.

For decades now a fashion for strictly child-oriented fiction has too often consigned adults and their problems to the background, depriving the growing middle years of an important dimension. With this in mind, I have chosen two junior novels of our own times as future classics. The first, Nina Bawden's *Carrie's War*, is in fact already eighteen years old but continuously read, partly for its popular World War II setting, partly (I am sure) for the way young and old interact. When twelve-year-old Carrie and her younger brother Nick were billeted on gloomy Mr Evans in his Welsh chemist's shop, they were at first obsessed by the constraints laid on them by their host (they must walk on the sides of the stairs to save the carpet) but soon they were drawn by their respective sympathies to understand something of Samuel Evans's tangle of greed and anxiety over his bedridden sister and his sister Lou's lonely craving for affection. The contrast and conflict between the characters is paralleled by the contrast between the comfortless town shop and the warmth of the farmhouse deep in the valley where Hepzibah rules invalid, chickens and homesick children with her special brand of offhand kindness. The story is told from the children's point of view, but because it is narrated by Carrie to her own children many

From *The Secret Garden*.

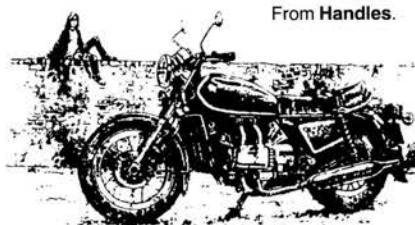
years after the event, adult considerations are everywhere in the duplicated experiences, remembered and immediate.

Jan Mark has placed her young heroine, Erica Timperley, plumb in the centre of

Handles. Her visit from the city to an East Anglian village is the impetus for scenes set mainly in a messy, chaotic garage where a man puzzlingly called Elsie carries on an oddly casual business. The story relies less on action than on an accumulation of small episodes contained by weather and talk, chat which shakes Erica out of her superficial judgement of the grown-ups. The story provokes as much by what it doesn't say as by what it does; attentive readers might appreciate this – it is a quality rare in children's fiction. Crisp colloquial language hides a careful selection of material and a genius for dialogue – not ephemeral slang but individual idiom, from LC's elliptical, larky words and his censorious wife's icy syllables to Auntie Joan's dialectal pronouncements and the expressive silences of the terrible small child whose 'handle' is 'the Gremlin'. Dialogue can be a persuasive factor in leading young readers to quality in fiction and, in **Handles**, to a future classic.

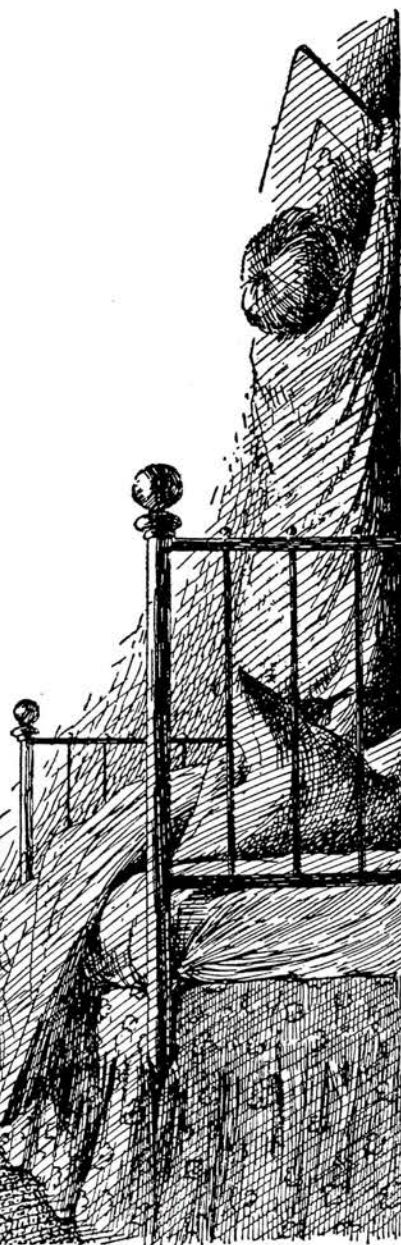
Contemporary domestic fiction is apt to date. It is easier to predict twentieth-century classics in a fantasy mode. The use of miniature figures to represent ourselves is as old as stories and Mary Norton used the Tom Thumb device brilliantly in her tales of **The Borrowers**, almost forty years ago. The Clocks (Pod, Homily and Arietty) are convinced that humans exist solely to supply them with scraps of coal and vegetables, pins and cotton reels for their livelihood and that bedridden Miss Sophy and her servants are the only 'human beans' in the world. But one day Arietty is 'seen' by a Boy and their troubles begin as they are driven from one precarious home to another, from an old boot in a hedge to the walls of a gamekeeper's cottage, from a miniature village to imprisonment in the attic of the money-grubbing Platters. The fate of refugees in the 1940s and thereafter inevitably comes to mind but there is no overt moral in the five 'Borrower' books. Mrs May, describing to her niece in the 1940s the Edwardian country world, comments 'Given a struggle for life people react very much alike – according to a type of course – whatever their size and station.' Children finding out how to propel a knife-box on a stream, cook a grain-pudding over a candle-end, climb a curtain by the bobbles with the aid of wool and a pin, will realise by themselves the endurance of human personality as it is presented in miniature in these incomparable fantasies.

Ursula Moray Williams made a traditional hero from an old-fashioned push-along toy with improbable coloured stripes but a proper horse's head. Her **Adventures of the Little Wooden Horse** is set in a timeless European storyland where an honest craftsman falls on bad times and the finest horse he had ever made ventures into unknown places to sell himself for his master's survival. As he works for a brutal farmer, rescues ponies trapped in a mine, walks the high wire in a circus, patiently disciplines boisterous children and admires the better-behaved royal offspring, he is battered but indomitable, managing more than once on three legs and stowing his earnings, with some contortions of limbs, in his hollow body. It is not easy to describe convincingly a wooden toy talking on equal terms with humans and moving independently on its wheels. The rapid movement of the story leaves no time for

From **Handles**.

doubt and a shrewd understanding of the way people treat outsiders gives depth to a nursery-tale with an abiding faith in the values of courage and loyalty. Forty-three years old, the tale is as fresh as it ever was and the new edition is especially welcome for Joyce Lankester Brisley's original drawings and colour-plates which lend personality to the congenial toy, making his improbable adventures eternally credible.

There is no substitute for the pleasure of reading stories whose words and ideas have been expertly arranged to stir the imagination and to persuade children to enter into the experience of characters who may be people, animals, spirits or toys but who seem both pleasantly familiar and enticingly strange. Those of us who have the privilege of introducing books to the young need tact as well as knowledge, enthusiasm as well as discrimination, to induce them to approach what we call classics not as chores or curriculum nominations but as prime entertainment. ■

From **The Borrowers Omnibus**.

Margery Fisher is the author of **Classics for Children and Young People**, a Signal Book Guide (0 903355 20 5, £3.95, available from Thimble Press, Lockwood, Station Road, South Woodchester, Stroud, Glos GL5 5EQ). Working virtually single-handed, she has been the Editor of **Growing Point** since May 1962. It ceases publication next March after 30 years.



Some popular editions of the Classics mentioned:

The Princess and the Goblin, 0 14 035.029 2
The Princess and Curdie, 0 14 035.031 4
 George Macdonald, Puffin, £2.50 each

The Hobbit, J R R Tolkien, Harper Collins, 0 261 10200 1, £9.99; 0 261 10221 4, £3.99

The Little Grey Men, 0 7497 1033 0
Down the Bright Stream, 0 7497 0900 6
 'B.B.', ill. D Watkins-Pitchford, re-issues due from Mammoth in Jan '92, £2.50 each

The Wind in the Willows, Kenneth Grahame
 Ill. Justin Todd, Gollancz, 0 575 04604 X, £7.99 pbk
 Ill. John Burningham, Viking Kestrel, 0 670 80764 8, £10.99; Puffin, 0 14 03.1544 6, £2.50 pbk
 Ill. E H Shepard, Methuen, full colour edition, 0 416 20620 4, £9.95; b/w line drawings, 0 416 39360 8, £7.95; 0 7497 0042 4, £2.99 pbk
 Ill. Arthur Rackham, Methuen, 0 416 53260 8, £12.95
 Ill. Michael Hague, Methuen, 0 416 16980 5, £9.95 Collins, 0 00 692096 9, £1.95 pbk

Just So Stories, Rudyard Kipling
 Ill. by the author in 1902, Macmillan, 0 333 08793 3, £7.95
 Ill. Michael Foreman, Puffin, 0 14 03.1795 3, £2.50 pbk
 Pan Macmillan, 0 330 24258 X, £2.99 pbk
 Collins, 0 00 184425 3, £4.95

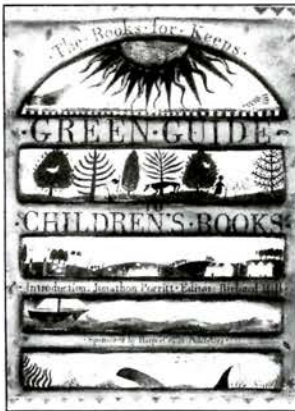
Black Beauty, Anna Sewell
 Ill. Charles Keeping, Gollancz, 0 575 04847 6, £6.95 pbk
 Puffin, 0 14 035.107 8, £2.50 pbk
 Collins, 0 00 693398 X, £2.25 pbk

The Secret Garden, Frances Hodgson Burnett
 Ill. Shirley Hughes, Gollancz, 0 575 04168 4, £10.95
 Ill. Pamela Kay, Heinemann, 0 434 92989 1, £12.95
 Ill. Jenny Williams, Dent, 0 460 05101 6, £8.50
 Collins, 0 00 693033 6, £2.25 pbk
 Puffin, 0 14 035.004 7, £2.50 pbk

Carrie's War, Nina Bawden
 Ill. Faith Jaques, Gollancz, 0 575 01631 0, £7.95
 Puffin, 0 14 03.0689 7, £2.50 pbk

Handles, Jan Mark, Viking, 0 670 80536 X, £7.99; Puffin, 0 14 03.1587 X, £1.99 pbk

The Borrowers Omnibus, Mary Norton, ill. Diana Stanley, Dent, 0 460 88044 6, £12.95
The Borrowers Avenged, Mary Norton, ill. Pauline Baynes, Viking, 0 7226 5804 4, £8.50
Adventures of the Little Wooden Horse, Ursula Moray Williams
 Ill. Joyce Lankester Brisley, Harrap, 0 245 60213 5, £6.95
 Puffin, 0 14 03.0125 9, £2.25 pbk



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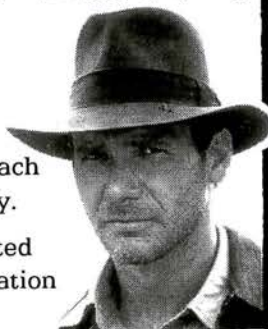
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BOOKS FOR KEEPS NEWS

The Earthworm Award



Billed as 'the Prize for books that help children to enjoy and care for the Earth', this is an award dear to BfK – how could it be otherwise in a year in which we published our own *Green Guide to Children's Books*?

The winning title for 1992, selected from a shortlist of nine, was *The Last Rabbit* edited by Jennifer Curry (Methuen, 0 416 15792 0, £8.95; Mammoth, 0 7497 0252 4, £2.50 pbk). It was described by the judges as 'a collection which will endure. The skill of the anthologist was to place modern poems, some by children, alongside the classics and to juxtapose celebration with warning.' Jennifer Curry received a cheque for £2,000 plus a bronze Earthworm statuette.

The two runners-up, each of whom received a cheque for £500 together with a bronze Earthworm bookmark, were *The Elephant Book* by Ian Redmond (Walker, 0 7445 1855 5, £12.99; 0 7445 1773 7, £5.99 pbk) and *Whales, Dolphins and Seals* by Patrick Geistdoerfer (Moonlight, 1 85103 101 4, £3.50).

100 Best Books

First the bad news . . . no *Children's Books of the Year* for 1991 – that invaluable list of more than 300 titles which, for the last three years, has been compiled and annotated by Julia Eccleshare and published by Andersen Press. Now the good news . . . the enterprise hasn't disappeared altogether. Taken over by The Children's Book Foundation, a slimmed-down version called *100 Best Books* is issued with the CBF's Autumn 1991 Newsletter. It's still the work of Julia Eccleshare, is as sharp and lively as ever, and offers a range of titles from picture books for pre-school children to fiction for older readers by way of fairy tales, poetry and short-story collections.

Available from The Children's Book Foundation, Book House, 45 East Hill, Wandsworth, London SW18 2QZ (tel: 081 870 9055).

Start with a Story

As every infant and nursery teacher knows, stories can be an invaluable resource for helping young children explore their feelings, experiences and the issues that concern them. How are books best used, though, to stimulate their talk, to extend and clarify their ideas and to help them make sense of the world? Birmingham's Development Education Centre has come up with a handbook of imaginative activities which do just that – exploring themes like gender, learning about other countries, disability, conflict and environmental awareness. Every suggestion has been developed by practising

classroom teachers in the context of the National Curriculum – and is illustrated by children's work, their comments during the activities, topic webs and photographs. All this, along with a grid which indicates how the skills the youngsters develop relate to subjects right across the National Curriculum . . . Highly recommended says BfK.

Available from:
Development Education
Centre, Gillett Centre,
998 Bristol Road,
Selly Oak, Birmingham
B29 6LE, for £6.00 inc.
p&p. Or contact Catherine
McFarlane on 021 472 3255.



CLASSIC VARIATIONS

Chris Powling looks at some newly-issued hardbacks



To survive as a classic, a book must retain integrity through infinite variation – a boardbook or pop-up, on tape or stage, condensed for the small screen, expanded for the big screen, animated, set to music and generally given the full multi-media, mass-market treatment. Sometimes, though, there's a danger in staying close to the original... at least where prickly critics are concerned. For instance Random Century takes real risks with its new series 'Little Greats'. This offers ten 'favourite classic picture-books' re-published in hardback but reduced to a standard format at a price – £3.99 each – not much more, these days, than a paperback. The last is the key point. Here we have a starter-kit for parents and teachers that's both durable and affordable. It's also in my view, a triumph.

Yes, certainly there's a trade-off. The colours in Quentin Blake's **Mister Magnolia** (1 85681 192 1) aren't quite so rich as in the first edition (is it really more than a decade old already?) and it's instructive how something so slight as a reduced margin in Edward Ardizzone's **Ship's Cook Ginger** (1 85681 132 8) can compromise its wonderful sense of space. Only **Mr Potter's Pigeon** (1 85681 202 2), with which Reg Cartwright so astonished the Mother Goose panel back in 1979, really suffers, however, and – for me – not nearly enough to compromise this exercise in availability.

There are plenty of compensations, what's more – having Marjorie Flack and Kurt Wiese's **The Story About Ping** (1 85681 212 X) back in print, for example, or being reminded of early John Burningham by his admirable **Borka** (1 85681 172 7) published nearly thirty years ago. Bought as a batch, the set offers revealing comparisons even to beginners as they move from the bold words and images of Gene Zion and Margaret Bloy Graham in **Harry the Dirty Dog** (1 85681 162 X), so very fifties-ish, to the arch-literariness and painterliness of William Mayne and Nicola Bayley in **The Patchwork Cat** (1 85681 182 4) in 1981. Others in the set are welcome simply as affirmation of old favourites – Shirley Hughes's **Dogger** (1 85681 152 2) or Pat Hutchins' **Titch** (1 85681 142 5). Another, Jane Hissey's **Little Bear's Trousers** (1 85681 222 7), actually looks better in its new design.



'And Titch's seed grew and grew.'
From **Titch** (Random Century).

But that's arguable, of course. So is Random Century's choice of this particular Top Ten, 1935-1986, to launch what they call a 'classic collectable library'. Why not write to them with further suggestions? For this, surely, is a series which will run and run.

One mark of a classic text is quotability. Who hasn't heard these lines?

*'... And always keep a hold of Nurse
For fear of finding something worse.'*

Jim, according to Hilaire Belloc, didn't – and fell foul of a lion as a consequence. Belloc's **Algernon and Other Cautionary Tales** (0 224 03114 7), along with **The Bad Child's Book of Beasts** (0 224 03154 6) and **Matilda Who Told Such Dreadful Lies** (0 224 03097 3), have just been re-issued at £7.99 each by Jonathan Cape in volumes illustrated by Quentin Blake, Tony Ross and Posy Simmonds respectively. They have a hard act to follow, let it be said. The original illustrator, using the initials B.T.B., was Lord Basil Blackwood who supplied drawings at least as funny as the words – albeit reflecting only too well Belloc's tendency to be anti-semitic. No trace of that here, I'm glad to say, as each artist rises splendidly to occasional verses which specialise in the sort of taboo-on-tenderness guaranteed to delight youngsters and send critics of nervous or high-minded disposition screaming for other covers:

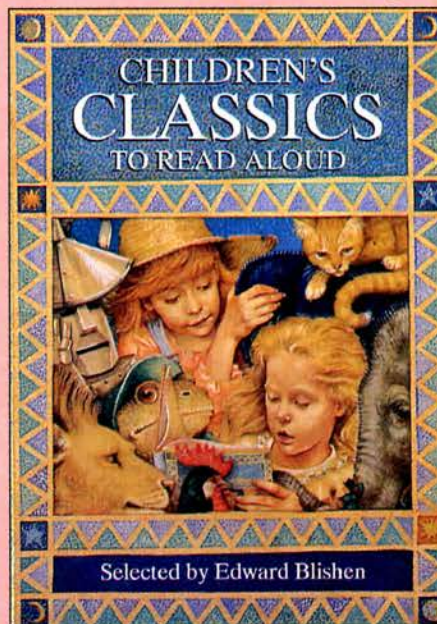
*'For every time she shouted "Fire!"
They only answered "Little Liar!"
And therefore when her Aunt
returned
Matilda, and the House, were burned.'*



*Matilda told such Dreadful Lies.
It made one Gasp and Stretch one's Eyes.*

From **Matilda Who told such Dreadful Lies**... (Cape).

Today's children won't need this namesake to remind them of Belloc's spiritual successor – though curiously Roald Dahl's most celebrated illustrator fares least well of the three. The typeface of **Algernon** is so at odds with Quentin Blake's spikily inventive drawings that it's hard to believe their uncharacteristically sombre colouring isn't some kind of protest. More satisfying overall is the tinted cartoonery of Tony Ross's volume and the tongue-in-cheek drollness of Posy Simmonds'. All three books beg for performance.



From the cover of **Children's Classics to read Aloud** (Kingfisher).

But then, according to Edward Blishen, so do all the classics. In his introduction to **Children's Classics to Read Aloud** published by Kingfisher (0 86272 787 1, £9.95), he declares:

'... hearing a book read aloud as well as possible is no form of idleness: it is a great stimulant of the imagination, as well as being one of the best means of helping us to feel the shape of the language, its rhythms, the great richness of the words and the thrilling effect of the surprisingly right word in the surprisingly right place.'

Wise words. Of course, you must pick the right passages at the outset. As a writer, broadcaster and former teacher, few are better able to do this than Edward Blishen himself who offers a personal choice of extracts aiming at both adult and child appeal, lasting quality, a wide-range of ages, tastes and provenance, yet – while luring the reader back to the full-length version – retaining some sense of completeness.

Astonishingly, the collection scores a bulls-eye on all these targets. True, some will quibble over what's missing as well as what's there – F Anstey and Norman Lindsay instead of, say, John Ruskin and Richmal Crompton? – but quibbling is all it will be. We're even told how long each reading will last: from eight minutes for the shortest (Andersen's 'The Emperor's New Clothes') to 35 minutes for the longest (from Anstey's 'Vice Versa'). Backed-up by linking commentary of Edward Blishen's own as well as a word guide and colour-plates from leading contemporary illustrators, this is an anthology of classic texts which already has the feel of a classic anthology. ■

In January's BfK:

David Day on J R R Tolkien ● Nicholas Tucker on Old Lies Re-visited ● Stephanie Nettell on Teenage Fiction
Robert Hull's Poetry Round-up ● Judith Elkin in Moscow ● Margaret Smith on The Future of Schools' Library Services
James Berry in Authorgraph ● plus... Reviews... reviews... reviews