

# BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's  
book magazine

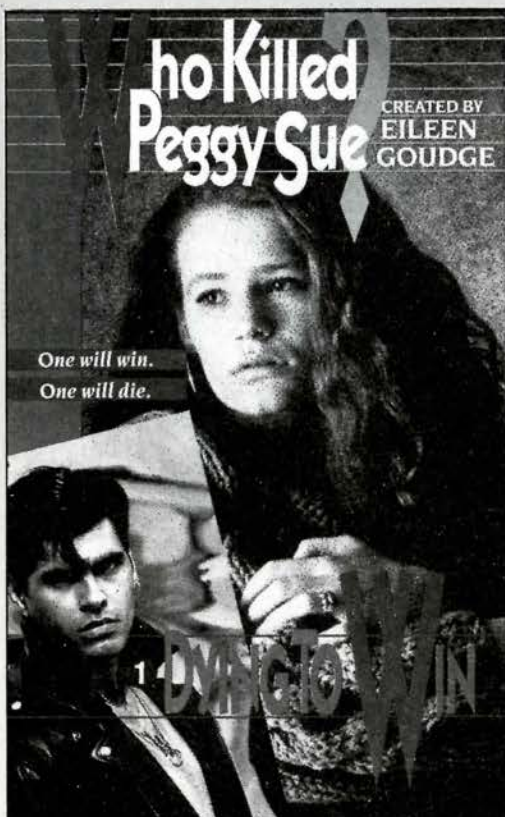
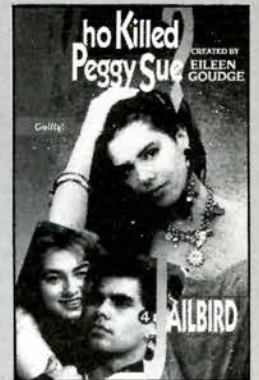
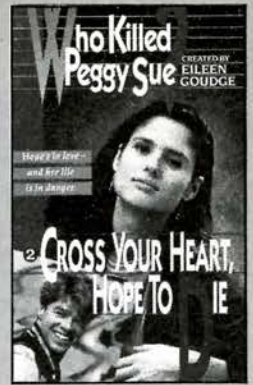
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Every Spring in Paradiso there's a Peach Blossom Festival. This year, the theme is "Pretty Peggy Sue". But as the four finalists wait to hear who's been selected, time runs out for one of them...

# Who Killed Peggy Sue?



Although many secrets and clues are revealed along the way, the killer's identity remains tantalisingly out of reach until the final chapter...

1. *Dying to Win*  
(February, £2.99)

2. *Cross Your Heart, Hope to Die*  
(March, £2.99)

3. *If Looks Could Kill*  
(April, £2.99)

4. *Jailbird*  
(May, £2.99)

*Teens*

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## Cover story

Our cover illustration this month is by Alan Lee from **The Lord of the Rings** by J R R Tolkien. The first-ever colour illustrated edition is now available from HarperCollins (0 261 102230 3) at £30.00. We thank them for their help in reproducing the cover of the book.

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### JANUARY 1992 No. 72

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# EDITOR'S PAGE



Editing BfK, I must admit, brings a perk or two. A weekend in Rome, though, to attend an international conference of Editors of children's book magazines is distinctly above par – not least in November when any trip south is a bonus. How many of us would be there, I wondered? What would we have to say to each other?

Quite a lot, it turned out, on both counts. The conference was the culmination of a month-long exhibition mounted by the Associazione Culturale Sintesi to promote an understanding of the nature and importance of children's books amongst parents, teachers and librarians. 'Information and criticism concerning children's books is difficult to propagate in Italy,' said the programme, 'owing to the undoubted marginality of this sector of publishing.' Now there's a proposition to make me feel at home . . . along with all the other delegates, apparently, from France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. Soon we were in the thick of shared concerns: how 'teacherliness' can compromise enjoyment, for instance, or the possibilities and constraints of 'positive' reviewing in a context where the communication of information about books, and an enthusiasm for books, is as much an imperative as assessing them. To these, and related problems, no easy solutions emerged. On Bertrand Russell's principle that a question well put is a question half answered, however, plenty of progress was made.

Then again, there was the gossip. It's a well-known adage that when two or three writers are gathered together the talk will be of advances, royalties and agents rather than literature. Off duty, the Editors of children's book magazines seem to follow suit: our circulations, sponsors (if any), advertising levels and financial circumstances (uniformly hand-to-mouth) were discussed as eagerly as the seeking out of any Grand Wheezes we might be sussing (none). Disappointment that, broadly, we were sussing most of the angles and turning most of the tricks was more than compensated for by the sense of a joint purpose variously and often ingeniously pursued.

Rome looked pretty good, too.

Congratulations to the city's Centro Sistema Bibliotecario, in particular Letizia Tarantello, for setting it all up and thereby ushering in '92 with such refreshing Euro-wide gusto.

## A Brace of Bookfairs

Here at home, '91 was ushered out with a similar gusto for me thanks to a pair of spectacularly successful book bonanzas at either end of the country. The North Eastern Children's Bookfair is the UK's largest – involving more than 10,000 children and 40-plus authors, illustrators, poets and storytellers with a fortnight's worth of events at over 100 schools and libraries across eight local authorities between Berwick and Cleveland. Jan Clements, chair of the organising committee, says that the crush on the final Gala Saturday at South Tyneside Leisure Centre on 22nd November was so great 'we had to give up counting the family groups who paid a visit'. To find out more about this kind of enterprise, send £4.50 for their publication **Read On, Write On** (available from Woodfield & Stanley Ltd, Broad Lane, Moldgreen, Huddersfield, HD5 8DD; tel: 0484 421467).

Smaller scale, but hardly less successful, was the three-day Wessex Children's Bookfair. This brought 90 schools and 4,000 children to the Winchester Leisure Centre, culminating in 30th November's Public Day when similarly un-countable visitors bought in excess of 8,500 books – most of them signed by a string of celebrity guests with aching hands to prove it ('the nicest possible writer's cramp', said one). Tribute here must go especially to Judith Lawrence of Wessex Book Supplies who died earlier in the year and to whose memory the Festival, which she first launched eight years ago, was dedicated.

## An Endangered Species?

What both events had in common was the direct involvement of local Schools Library Services – as sole organisers in the North and as joint-organisers down South. Yet how much longer can we count on the energy and expertise of these specialist teams? On page 16, Margaret Smith outlines the Government's new arrangements for financing them which, on the face of it, look reasonable enough . . . till we follow through the implications of her remark that 'schools' funds for the purchase of SLSs may have competing pressures on them, including the need for teaching staff and repairs to buildings'. See Mary Hoffman's account on the facing page of how her own local service has been affected by these changes in funding. The sad fact is that central government has constructed a cast-iron alibi for itself should Schools Library Services disappear altogether – as some already have: the-blame can be shifted instantly to the vagaries of certain education authorities or the choices of particular schools. Small wonder Mary proposes a national campaign to save them. Worth pondering, and all too apposite in this context, is the closing paragraph to Judith Elkin's piece 'Moscow: August 1991' on page 23.

## Tolkien, Teenagers and Poetry

Frodo, from Tolkien, the Illustrated Encyclopaedia.

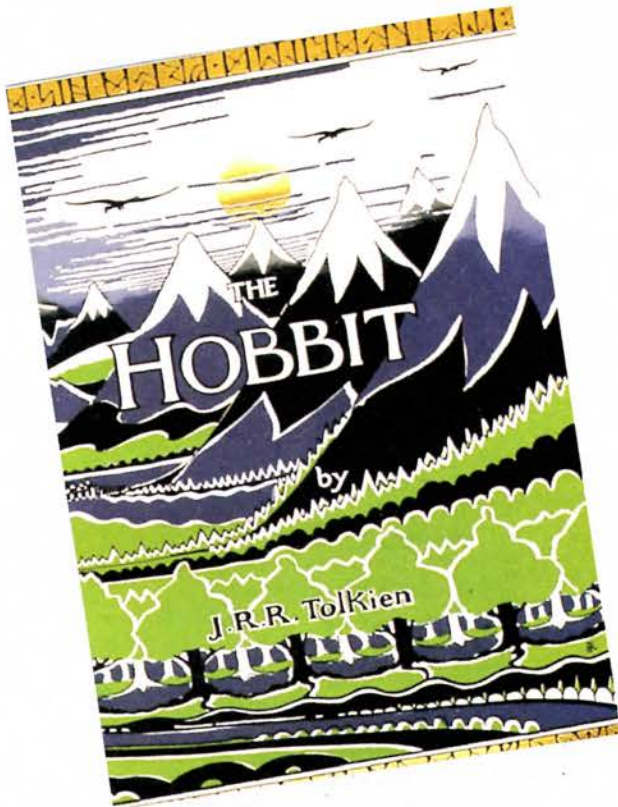


Mercifully, the rest of the magazine is less contentious. Few will take serious issue with Morag Styles' Authorgraph of James Berry (centre-spread), Robert Hull's assessment of current poetry anthologies (pages 20-21), Stephanie Nettell's selection of recent fiction for teenagers (back page) or even, perhaps, Nick Tucker's review of Winifred Whitehead's important study **Old Lies Revisited** (page 19). About the work of J R R Tolkien, though, I'm less sure. Can I be alone in resisting its allure? For a more sympathetic approach to the Tolkien opus, turn to David Day's centenary celebration on pages 4 and 5 which explores why, for millions of readers world-wide, Frodo and Co still live.

Happy Reading . . . and Happy New Year! ■

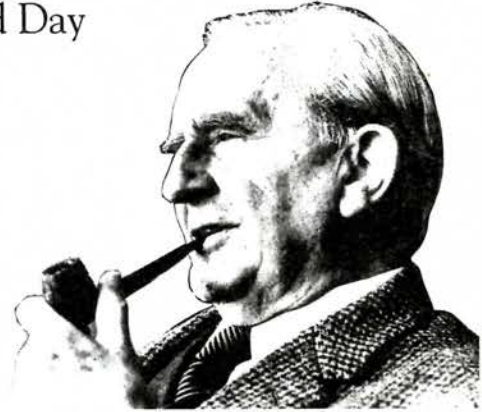
*Chris*





# THE TOLKIEN CENTENNIEL

David Day



J.R.R. Tolkien.

If you've never heard of J.R.R. Tolkien and know absolutely nothing about his books, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, the only possible explanation is that you have spent your entire life living at the bottom of a coal pit on the other side of the galaxy.

Even for those who have never read a word of his writing, Tolkien's influence has been inescapable. The virtual inventor of the epic fantasy genre, he's been followed by thousands of 'sword and sorcery' imitators with an avalanche of books and films.

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was born of British parents in Bloemfontein, South Africa on 3rd January 1892. Orphaned in childhood, he survived the carnage of the Great War and went on to a career as a noted Anglo-Saxon scholar at Oxford before becoming the author of imaginative fiction.

As authors go, Tolkien was a late starter. Although he was a relatively youthful 45 when his first work of fiction, *The Hobbit*, was published, it was not until 1954, when he was 62 years old, that his second novel, the epic fantasy *The Lord of the Rings*, appeared.

He never published another novel during his lifetime, but in the 19 years between the publication of *The Lord of the Rings* and his death in 1973, he became one of the most celebrated and widely-read authors of the twentieth century.

Since then, the success of his novels (and posthumously published writings) has continued to thrive and grow. Sales of his books number in the hundreds of millions and they are published in every major language on the planet.

Today, Tolkien's Hobbits are as convincingly a part of the English heritage as leprechauns are to the Irish, gnomes are to the Germans, and trolls to the Scandinavians.

Indeed, many people are now unaware that Hobbits were invented by Tolkien, and assume that – like fairies and pixies – they have, more or less, always been with us. However, Hobbits are not the only creations of Tolkien's mind that have invaded our world. His Orcs, Ents and Balrogs have found their way through, and the Elf, the Dwarf, the Wizard and the Dragon are very different creatures today because of Tolkien.

As time passes, more and more of Tolkien's world invades our own. Computers are called Gandalf, hovercraft called

Shadowfax, bookstores called Bilbo's, restaurants called Frodo's, multi-national corporations called Aragorn, and computer games called: Gondor, Rohan, Imladris, Lothlorien.

Tolkien's world of Middle-earth has so thoroughly become part of our own age that it's difficult to believe that only 38 years have passed since the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*. However, to be strictly accurate, its creator did not see Middle-earth as an alternate fantasy world at all.

'Many reviewers seem to assume that Middle-earth is another planet!' Tolkien wrote in a letter of the 1950s. He found this a perplexing conclusion, because in his own mind he had not the least doubt about its locality: 'Middle-earth is not an imaginary world. The name is the modern form of midden-erd-middel-erd, an ancient name for the oikoumene, the abiding place of Men, the objectively real world, in use specifically opposed to imaginary worlds (as Fairyland) or unseen worlds (as Heaven or Hell).'

A decade later, Tolkien gave a journalist an exact geographic fix: 'The action of the story takes place in North-west of Middle-earth, equivalent in latitude to the coastline of Europe and the north shore of the Mediterranean.'

The trick of Tolkien's world is not the where, but the when: 'The theatre of my tale is the earth, the one in which we now live, but the historical period is imaginary.' And in another letter: 'I have, I suppose, constructed an imaginary time, but kept my feet on my own mother-earth for place.'

That imaginary time is a mythical one just before the first recorded human histories and the rise of any recorded historic civilization. It begins with a new creation myth which results in the making of a flat planet within spheres of air and light. It is inhabited by pagan gods, Elves, Dwarves and eventually humans.

We are 30,000 years into the history of this world, however, before the human race actually appears. Another 3,900 years pass before the cataclysmic destruction of the Atlantis-like culture of Numenor resulted in this mythical world's transformation into the globed world we know today. The events of the remaining 4,000 years of Tolkien's annals were then intended to lead on 'eventually and inevitably to ordinary history'.

All this creation and tailoring and these extraordinarily detailed chronologies beg another obvious question about



Tolkien's world: Why? Why did Tolkien choose basically to re-invent our world by giving it a new history (or a mythic prehistory) in an imaginary time?

'I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own, not of the quality that I sought, and found in legends of other lands. There was Greek, and Celtic, and Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian, and Finnish; but nothing English, save impoverished chap-book stuff.'

This was Tolkien's life ambition. So great was this obsession that it could be argued that the undoubted literary merits of Tolkien's epic tale of *The Lord of the Rings* was almost a secondary concern. Important as the novel was, any analysis of Tolkien's life and work makes one aware that his greatest passion and grandest ambition was focused on the creation of an entire mythological system for the English people.

'I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story . . . which I could dedicate simply: to England; to my country.'

The enormity of this undertaking is staggering. It would be as if Homer, before writing the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, had first to invent the whole of Greek mythology and history.

The degree to which he has actually succeeded is remarkable. In large part Tolkien's invented mythology in the popular imagination has definitely become that of England. It is certainly the most complex and detailed invented world in all literature.

However, this creation of an English mythology does not, in itself, really explain how Tolkien's books were suddenly catapulted into the block-buster success league of publishing during the 1960s.

Retrospectively, it seems very unlikely that such a self-confessed 'old fogey' of an Anglo-Saxon professor could suddenly find a huge American campus cult following in the midst of the radical, politically-charged 1960s. Tolkien was nobody's idea of a radical campus professor, so what was it in his writing that was suddenly so relevant to the lives and politics of the youth culture of the 1960s?

The answer was that Tolkien's approach to the grand theme of his Ring Quest was as unconventional and inventive as his unlikely heroes, the Hobbits.

Tolkien turned the tradition of the quest on its head. Of all the scores of ring legends found the world over, Tolkien's is the only tale where the object of that quest is not the seizing of power, but in the rejection of it. The heroes, although not – strictly speaking – pacifists, are actively refusing the corrupting influence of wealth and power.

This was widely seen as a provocatively 'anti-establishment' stance and it was this interpretation of the hero as a 'drop out' from the system which made it relevant to the concerns and temper of the times.

Although Tolkien always rejected the idea of any allegorical reading of *The Lord of the Rings*, certain accidents of history made some parallels seem inescapable. In a letter written as early as 1956, Tolkien found it necessary to state: 'Of course my story is not an allegory of Atomic power, but of Power (exerted for Domination).'

However, he had to acknowledge that in a larger sense this message or moral certainly did not exclude Atomic power. 'Nuclear physics can be used for that purpose [bombs]. But they need not be. They need not be used at all. If there is any contemporary reference in my story at all, it is to what seems to me the most widespread assumption of our time: that if a thing can be done, it must be done. This seems to me wholly false. The greatest examples of the action of the spirit and of reason are in abnegation. When you say Atomic Power is "here to stay" you remind me that Chesterton said that whenever he heard that, he knew that whatever it referred to would soon be replaced. So-called "atomic" power is rather bigger than anything he was thinking of (I have heard it of trams, gas-light, steam-trains). But it surely is clear that there will have to be some "abnegation" in its use, a deliberate refusal to do some of the things it is possible to do with it, or nothing will stay!'

Gollum, from Tolkien, the Illustrated Encyclopedia.



*The Lord of the Rings* proved to be the perfect student counter-culture book. It was full of action and adventure, but it appeared to hold an anti-establishment, pacifist message. Frodo Baggins might not have been exactly a Hobbit Ghandi, but he did reject the temptations of worldly power, and the student anti-war and anti-nuclear movement of the sixties saw a connection with the Hobbits' humble values.

Ultimately, the greatest strength of Tolkien's Hobbits in their epic struggles against all odds was their basic human decency. It was their essential humanity, their simple but pure human spirits, that allowed them to triumph in the end. And it is this human element combined with the grandeur and pomp of a magnificently-conceived mythic world that has been the key to Tolkien's continued popularity ever since.

In his Hobbit, Tolkien found an Everyman that has, and will continue to have, universal appeal to people of any time and any place. ■

David Day is a poet and writer with particular interest in the environment as well as Tolkien. He is the author of *Tolkien, the Illustrated Encyclopedia* published by Mitchell Beazley (0 85533 924 1, £17.99). His recent children's titles include *Noah's Choice* published by Puffin (0 14 03.1906 9, £3.50 pbk) and *The Big Lie* published by Piccadilly Press (1 85340 110 2, £8.95).

The complete works of Tolkien were reissued by HarperCollins in Autumn 1991.



# REVIEWS

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

## Nursery/Infant

### Walk for Me, Baby!

Melanie Wakley, ill.  
Vanessa Julian-Ottie,  
Hodder & Stoughton  
(Oct 91), 0 340 56360 1,  
£3.99

Mary-Ann has a baby brother and she's trying to help him learn to walk. Finally she succeeds, but then isn't sure it was such a clever idea as he steals her biscuit. The story covers a pleasing topic and offers comfort to youngsters who may find having babies around rather difficult. Good repetitive phrases in the text lure the listening child to take part. MS

### Fur

Jan Mark, ill. Charlotte  
Voake, Walker  
(Aug 91), 0 7445 2025 8,  
£2.99



An ideal book for small children. It has clear, simple large-print text and delightful pictures of a cat and her furry kittens. Thoroughly recommended for 2-4 year-olds and their adults. MS

### Animal Friends

0 7497 0626 0

### Wild Animals

0 7497 0625 2

Bettina Paterson, Little  
Mammoth (Oct 91),  
£2.99 each

Two delightful picture books for small children with different animals displayed clearly on every page. The colours in the collage illustrations are vivid and easily recognisable. For children unlikely to see some of the animals depicted in real life, though, the sizes may confuse – moose and goose

face each other across a page, as do parrot and hippopotamus. Be warned! MS

### Mary's Tiger

Rex Harley, ill. Sue  
Porter, Orchard  
(Aug 91), 1 85213 323 6,  
£2.99



A charmingly illustrated book about a child who takes her painting home from playgroup or nursery and shows it to everyone in her family. They all ask about it and she explains that it's a tiger; she calls him Grin and hangs him on her bedroom wall. During the night he mysteriously turns into a friendly tiger who hides under her pillow. An unusual story with a hint of fantasy that's great fun to read aloud. MS

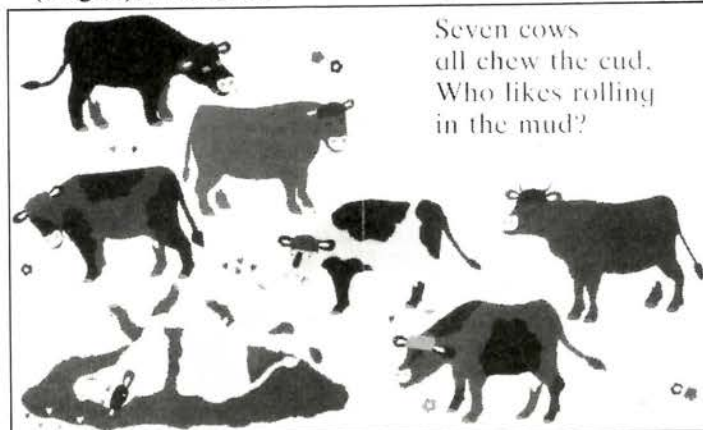
### Guess Who?

0 7445 2034 7

### Guess What?

0 7445 2035 5

Pam Ayres, ill. Julie  
Lacome, Walker  
(Aug 91), £2.99 each



A pair of excellent picture books for very young children. The bright, colourful illustrations give plenty of visual stimulation and the clear, bold text ends with a question on each double-spread. Both books are thought-provoking and entertaining, helping children to sort out their world. MS

### Animal Seasons

0 19 272175 5

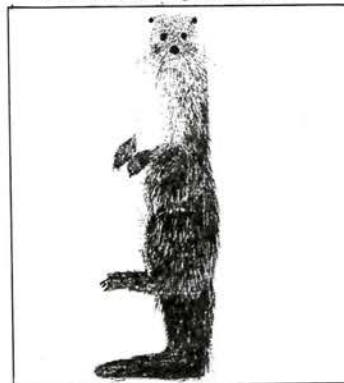
### Animal Tricks

0 19 272176 3

Brian Wildsmith,  
Oxford (Sept 91),  
£2.50 each

Brian Wildsmith's picture books are always superb. His animals, in particular, manage to be both naturalistic and imaginative (often funny, too) and are therefore a welcome alternative to the cartoony or the photographic.

Here, *Animal Seasons* are evoked by a simple succession of creatures doing appropriate things. Few of these are original in themselves... squirrels gather nuts, robins hop through snow... but the short, clear text and Wildsmith's visual style make them interesting and fresh.



Above, from *Animal Tricks*.

Below, from *Guess Who?*

*Animal Tricks* is more inventive, showing a variety of creatures doing, mainly, silly things such as a penguin lifting a rhino.

It's important for very young children to talk through the difference between what animals can really do and what is just imagined. This is perhaps a weakness in presenting these two books in what appears to be a series format. Well worth exploring, however. LW

### Rub-a-Dub-Dub

Val Biro's  
77 Favourite Nursery  
Rhymes

Blackie (Sept 91),  
0 216 93091 X, £4.95

A nice, fat book crammed with nursery rhymes of all sorts – traditional ones, unusual ones, riddles and tongue-twisters. Our rich heritage of such rhymes needs passing on and this book will certainly help. Ideal for family or playgroup use. MS

### The Big Concrete Lorry

Shirley Hughes, Walker  
(Sept 91), 0 7445 2033 9,  
£3.99

Shirley Hughes presents the reviewer with an insuperable problem – what can one say that hasn't been said countless times before about the real and yet special world she creates through her language and illustrative style which has become so integral a part of childhood today? Suffice it to say, if Shirley Hughes' name is on the cover and you're looking for a book for the under-6s at the moment – buy it! JS

### Can You Keep a Secret?

Emma Guénier, ill.  
Jonathan Satchell,  
Picture Lions (Aug 91),  
0 00 663820 1, £2.99

Clever use of language coupled with a dry, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, approach by the illustrator lifts this book into more than just an enjoyable interlude. Sophie has a secret which she shares with her best friend. The secret spreads like a game of Chinese Whispers altering slightly with each retelling until it finally comes back to Sophie changed out of all recognition! Sophie, however, is equal to the situation and neatly turns the table on them all. JS



# Infant/Junior

## Peter and the Bogeyman

Michael Ratnett, ill.  
June Goulding, Red Fox  
(Oct 91), 0 09 963200 4,  
£3.99

When Peter misbehaves his grandparents warn, 'The Bogeyman will get you', but his parents tell him it's nonsense. Peter isn't so sure and sets about making plans to catch the monster. He has great fun being progressively naughtier through the week and sure enough, on Friday night, the Bogeyman is lured up to Peter's bedroom where there are some surprises in store.

Peter's ideas of naughtiness are amusingly depicted in bright, detailed illustrations and the story could well inspire more outlandish versions from young readers and listeners! JB

## Zot's Treasures

Ivan Jones, Young Puffin (Aug 91),  
0 14 03.4142 0, £2.50

The second collection of stories featuring Zot the Dog and his best friend, Clive (a boy). The ingredients – the gentle humour of a 'Zot's-eye view' of things, direct lively language (much of it in dialogue form), a good structure to give confidence to new solo readers, and an inviting layout – should appeal both to readers who enjoyed the previous book and those who make Zot's acquaintance here as he discovers a treasure, visits a rubbish tip, attempts to sample some highly unusual blackcurrant jelly, pits his wits against wily Rat, and encounters a monster. JB

## Bye Bye Baby

Janet and Allan Ahlberg, Little Mammoth (Aug 91),  
0 7497 0624 4, £3.50

A motherless infant has to do everything for himself – even change his nappy – till one night he decides he needs a mummy. Next day he determinedly sets out to find one, meeting on his journey a cat, a teddy, a clockwork hen and an old uncle, all of whom join in the search and share in the happy ending, for baby finds not only a mummy but a daddy, too.

Although some adults may be concerned at the idea of an old man offering to be the baby's uncle and a woman pushing an empty pram picking up a baby and taking it home, the post-war setting distances the story from present-day fears of child snatching and abuse. There's much domestic detail to savour in Janet Ahlberg's water-colours: the clothes horse beside the grate and old

uncle's orange and white-covered Penguin book which appears in more than one scene offer nostalgic glimpses of the recent past and are, of course, a history lesson for young readers and listeners who share this unlikely and highly enjoyable story. JB

## The Vanishing Pumpkin

Tony Johnston, ill.  
Tomie de Paola, Oxford  
(Sept 91), 0 19 272241 7,  
£2.95



Strong overtones of traditional tales such as 'The Johnny Cake' give this cumulative story a predictable text and a lively sense of rhythm. There are other rewards, too, for the newish reader or listener. You can find out what a 700-year-old woman, or a rapscallion, or a varmint look like and you can enjoy a variety of astounding magic tricks performed by an 800-year-old man in the search for his vanished pumpkin. He does get pumpkin pie in the end and my class much enjoyed finding out how! JB

## Mr Bear's Plane

Colin and Jacqui Hawkins, Picture Lions  
(Aug 91), 0 00 663449 4,  
£2.99

When Mr Bear decides to become a pilot and offers his friends a ride, they really don't want to go. How they finally finish up in the plane and then, eventually, in a tree, is told with the Hawkins' usual exuberance and jollity. The boldly printed narrative is in clear prose, while the speech bubbles are all in rhyming couplets which adds an extra interest for very new readers as, of course, do the comical illustrations. Great fun and highly recommended. LW

## Freckly Feet and Itchy Knees

Michael Rosen, ill.  
Sami Sweeten, Picture Lions (Sept 91),  
0 00 663579 2, £3.50

Noses, hands, feet, eyes, knees and bellies are all featured in this romp of a book, full of funny pictures and words. Definitely for older children in the infant school and above who can discuss with an adult the details in the pictures and the variety in the language. MS

## One Snowy Night

Nick Butterworth,  
Picture Lions (Sept 91),  
0 00 664040 0, £2.99



Percy the Park Keeper thinks he's all set for a nice warm sleep in his warm bed while the snow falls outside. However, the animals are cold and he has a soft heart. This cheery, lively story tells how Percy gets himself into a problem and out of it again in an unexpected way. With bright illustrations and clear, fluid text, it's just right for reading aloud on a cold day. LW

## James the Jumble

Gill Davies, ill. George Buchanan, 0 340 54732 4

## Henry's Hallowe'en

Jean Baylis,  
0 340 54733 2

## The Umbrella Tree

Anne Mangan, ill.  
Thelma Lambert,  
0 340 54730 8

## One of our Marrows is Missing

Diana Webb, ill. Alicia Garcia de Lynam,  
0 340 54731 6

Young Knight (Sept 91),  
£2.50 each

The Young Knight format – a single story with text broken up by full-colour illustrations on every page – is designed to bridge the gap between picture books and first novels. Of the four titles here, the two favourites with my new solo readers both feature horticultural activities. In *The Umbrella Tree* a brother and sister are given their own garden plots, but when young Elly tries to grow a new kind of tree her next door neighbour is far from amused.

Fund-raising for the school swimming pool is the starting point for *One of our Marrows is Missing* in which Class 8's sponsored marrow growing efforts are inadvertently sabotaged by the caretaker's wife's sponsored slim. These inviting-looking books are a useful rather than memorable read for that crucial in-between stage. JB

## Whiskers and Paws

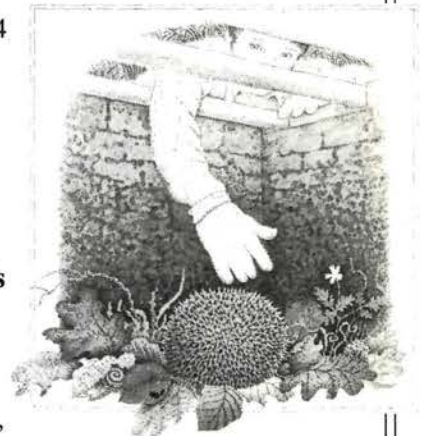
Ed. Fiona Waters, ill.  
Vanessa Julian-Ottie,  
Picture Knight (Oct 91),  
0 340 56071 1, £2.99

A lovely book of animal poems for young children to read for themselves because the poems are all very short, richly rhythmic and printed boldly and clearly beside some beautifully coloured illustrations. The range of poets is wide, from Trad. Anon. to modern writers by way of Beatrix Potter. One complaint: the author is named only on the contents page and not with the poem itself which seems a pity. Otherwise, an excellent addition to an infant book collection. LW

## Operation Hedgehog

Margaret Lane, ill.  
Patricia Casey, Walker  
(Jul 91), 0 7445 1413 4,  
£3.50

Nobby eventually solves the problem of hedgehogs and cattle grids in such an entirely convincing way that one really wonders if this is a true story ... it's a pity we aren't told!



The pictures are excellent and, like the text, very true to the animals' nature. This is not at all anthropomorphic or sentimental, but puts across the message of care for wildlife clearly and honestly. The book comes with a recommendation from the British Hedgehog Preservation Society. LW



**Spiky the Hedgehog**

Mirabel Cecil, ill.  
Christina Gascoigne,  
Walker (Aug 91),  
0 7445 2023 1, £2.99

This story reminded me of one of my childhood favourites, Alison Uttley's *Fuzzypeg Goes to School*, though I found it less enticing. Somehow the combination of fantasy and realism didn't convince me. The hedgehog, Spiky, talks and thinks like a little boy but behaves like a hedgehog and I found this an uneasy combination. However, it's a strong story, nicely illustrated and well-produced, and I think children would enjoy the way Spiky finally gets his wish to go to school with his older brother and sister to help in the nature hunt. **LW**

**The Best Train Set Ever**

Pat Hutchins, Red Fox (Oct 91), 0 09 993210 5, £2.99

Three brilliant stories by Pat Hutchins in a satisfying, chunky format, nicely printed on good paper and with coloured illustrations.

Clever, short and with some of the most cunningly introduced repetition I've read for a long time, they're exactly right for children just moving on to independent reading. The only possible criticism is the last story. How can anyone have measles *without any spots*? **LW**

**Paddington Meets the Queen**

0 00 192459 1

**Paddington Rides On!**

0 00 192460 5

Michael Bond, ill. John Lobban, Carnival (Aug 91), £2.99 each

These books are fantastic! The cartoon story format lends itself to Paddington's very visual antics and although the language is challenging they've been a great boon not only for fledgling readers but also for struggling readers in a supported situation. **JS**

**That Spells Magic**

Tony Bradman, Young Puffin (Oct 91), 0 14 03.4330 X, £2.50

The range of authors here is impressive and many of the poems are mind-expanding and full of rich language. Humour is a major emphasis with just a seasoning of the shivers but it is noticeable that the poems about bad magic are far more interesting than those about fairies and elves. It seems impossible for the two to be eliminated from the latter – a pity because the potential for the unearthly and mysterious in fairies is just as great ('How beautiful they are, the lordly ones'). Still, generally, this is an enriching collection. **LW**

**Rats!**

Pat Hutchins, Red Fox (Oct 91), 0 09 993190 7, £2.50

Sam develops a passion for rats which converts him from a struggling non-reader to an expert well-versed in the literature of *Rattus rattus*, family Rodentia. But this learning spurt fails to persuade his parents to allow him to own a pet rat, so he has to resort to other tactics, especially as he's already secretly bought one of the creatures . . .

A delightful book, packed with good jokes. The relentless emotional attrition Sam inflicts on his parents is particularly hilarious. Lucidity and humour make this a particularly valuable addition to the range of stories offered to readers approaching independence. **GH**

**The Old Man of Lochnagar**

HRH The Prince of Wales, ill. Sir Hugh Casson, Picture Puffin (Aug 91), 0 14 054.414 3, £4.99

We meet the eponymous hermit in his cosy lochside cave, and travel with him through a series of surreal adventures featuring the

natural and supernatural fauna of the Highlands. He endures a Sinbad-like flight in the claws of a pig-eagle, an underwater Loch-haggis hunt, and a sojourn in a cairn as a miniaturised guest of the Gorms.

If you appreciated the pun lurking in that last phrase, then you'll probably enjoy this chestnut-seasoned gallimaufry. I found it underdone. Had the story spent a little longer simmering in the slush-pile and the author been given the opportunity to hone his wit on the cold steel of a rejection slip or two, then the imaginative flavour of these amusing episodes might have been more fully realised.

As for Sir Hugh's watercolours – well, they could do with less water and more colour. **GH**

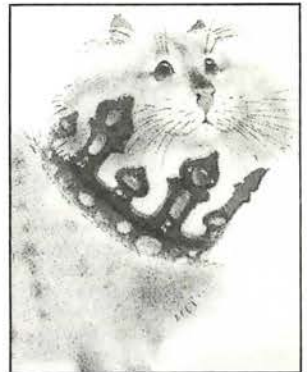
**UFO Diary**

Satoshi Kitamura, Red Fox (Sept 91), 0 09 974210 1, £3.99

Seen through the eyes of a lost alien, Earth emerges from the vastness of space. Its landscapes appear and, standing amongst them, a small child who befriends the visitor and shows him around. At the end of the day the two friends enjoy a space ride together, before the visitor heads off across the universe.

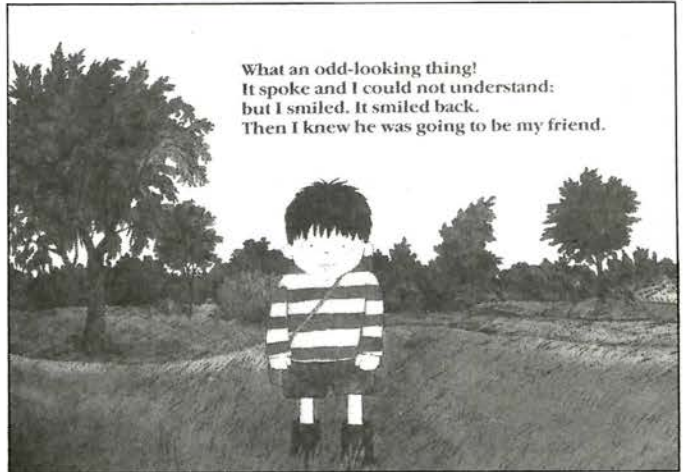
A score of simple sentences tell the story, embedded in images of interstellar immensity and earthly diver-

sity. The book provides a concise adventure to share with younger children, while the illustrations and unusual narrative perspective should excite the curiosity of readers of all ages. **GH**

**Foggy's Crown**

Meg Rutherford, Picture Corgi (Sept 91), 0 552 52619 3, £2.99

A delicious anti-hero in the shape of a fat, lazy and rather boastful cat finds himself trapped by one of his fabrications into searching for a crown in order to prove he really is a 'royal' cat. It takes a certain degree of maturity to cope with the concept of an anti-hero and, what's more, one who doesn't change his spots even at the end of the story. The book fell rather flat with younger children, but was a great success with top infants. **JS**



# Junior/Middle

**The School Spirit**

Terrance Dicks, ill.  
Adriano Gon, Red Fox (Oct 91), 0 09 974620 4, £2.50

This is the third story in the 'Jonathan's Ghost' series. Jonathan and his school friends are on a residential visit to a desolate manor when Dave, a doodle-bug victim and Jonathan's ghostly friend, joins them. Dave warns of dangerous spirits from which there is no protection. To make things worse, one of these spirits is a murderer who's ready to murder again.

It's a finger-tingling tale of the children's vulnerability faced with awesome power. A superb piece of fiction as back-up to Second World War studies and an excellent spine-chiller to be read alone and preferably in the dark (with a torch, of course)! **PH**

**The Big Kick**

Rob Childs, ill. Tim Marwood, Young Corgi (Sept 91), 0 552 52663 0, £2.50

A pacy football story – fifth in the series. Chris is surprised to find himself chosen school

team captain. His elder brother's brilliance as the previous year's captain lingers on, and this, coupled with poor early season results and the relentless jibing of the team bully, makes his self-confidence falter. A match with the Old Boys and some family rivalries subject him to a crucial test of his leadership. A thrilling story of peer-group relationships and family loyalties make this a superb vehicle for footballers reluctant to read. **PH**

**The Snow Queen**

Hans Andersen, trans.  
Naomi Lewis, ill.  
Angela Barrett, Walker (Oct 91), 0 7445 2038 X, £4.99

Breathtakingly beautiful. Angela Barrett's pictures are so cold and frosty the paper positively crackles. The text is wonderful for reading aloud and the story begs to be talked about. This book will thrill and delight reader and listener every time it's read and re-read. All schools should buy several copies. **PH**



**Monty Bites Back**Colin West,  
0 00 673885 0**Harry With Spots On**Chris Powling, ill.  
Scoular Anderson,  
0 00 673884 2Young Lions (Jul 91),  
£2.25 each

Two more excellent books in the 'Jets' series. Superb stories that are sequels-in-demand to characters already introduced – remember **Hiccup Harry** and **Monty, the Dog Who Wore Glasses**?

Monty, up to his usual disastrous tricks, takes an unexpected ride on the car roof and is disgusted to find the cat next door getting more human attention than him.

Harry's measles mean he can't join the class visit to Adventure Universe. Mum and Dad rescue him with a surprise package that's so exciting everyone joins in. Highly motivating for the fledgling reader and ideal material for those children who up until now might have found reading a bit of a chore.

PH

**The Human Zoo**Virginia Ironside,  
Walker (Sept 91),  
0 7445 2068 1, £2.99

Paul's trip to the zoo on his birthday is ruined when the imprisoned animals tell him of their misery. Their revelations are reinforced during a nightmarish adventure in which Paul's entire family are captured by animals, bundled from their beds and transported to a Human Zoo where they're humiliated by animal visitors.

The tension abates as the story develops into an escape yarn, but the message remains powerful and uncompromising. This is an entertaining book for independent readers and a useful resource for discussion.

**The War and Freddy**Dennis Hamley, ill.  
George Buchanan,  
Deutsch (Sept 91),  
0 233 98756 8, £4.99

Freddy is three when the war begins, and nine when it ends. In the intervening time he observes the world, goes to school, struggles into reading and endures the delights and disappointments attendant upon friendship and family. At the end of the book, Freddy is glad the war is over, but an awareness of atrocity and holocaust have changed his world forever.

The story is vividly told with a great deal of warmth and humour, and no sentimentality. Its social history value is enhanced by excellent illustrations. A book to provide thought-provoking shared reading for groups of older children.

GH

**World of Fairy Tales**Ed. and ill. Michael  
Foreman, Red Fox  
(Oct 91), 0 09 995980 1,  
£6.99

This magnificent book is dedicated to the children of the world. Its sources are almost as diverse as its dedicatees. Creation myths

from the Arctic and Australia are interleaved with tales from Grimm, Andersen and Terry Jones. Finn McCool and the Sleeping Beauty appear alongside less familiar characters from Japan, Sikkim, New Zealand and Mexico. The retellings are direct and deeply engaging.

Michael Foreman's illustrations provide a matching degree of beauty and fascination. Many of the pages blaze resplendently, while others provide the muted illumination of dreamtime. Each story is headed by a reminiscence of its country of origin, and by a haunting miniature landscape.

Highly recommended for readers, listeners and book lovers of all ages.

GH

**The Market Square Dog**James Herriot, ill. Ruth  
Brown, Picture Piper  
(Oct 91), 0 330 31929 9,  
£3.50

Take the quiet wisdom of a James Herriot story and add the purity of line and light of Ruth Brown's illustration and you end up with a book suitable for young and old alike. The story and

illustrations complement each other so perfectly it's difficult to conjure up any other image – one is left with a gentle glow of satisfaction that exactly matches the children's smiling sighs of 'ahh!'. JS

**The Nativity**Ill. Juan Wijngaard,  
0 7445 2039 8**Hanukkah**Jenny Koralek, ill. Juan  
Wijngaard,  
0 7445 2041 X  
Walker (Sept 91),  
£4.50 each

These two large format books are beautifully presented with evocative illustrations that remind me of the stamps we used to receive for Sunday School attendance.

The former tells the famous story by combining various sections of the King James version, which might mean unfamiliar language, but ensures a poetic tone enhanced fittingly by flowing, yet clear, calligraphy.

The story of the Jewish Festival of Light is related more simply and straightforwardly in contrast to the lavishly bordered illustrations, which tend to be the more memorable.

Both books deserve to be placed in the hands of children.

DB

**Not Just a Witch**Eva Ibbotson, Piper  
(Oct 91), 0 330 31630 3,  
£2.99

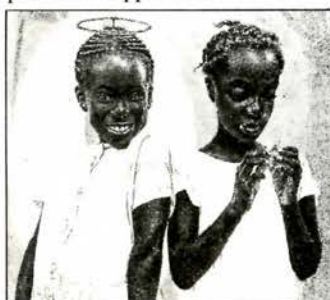
Belief is elasticated as usual with improbable magic, ace villains, dotty old dears, a mad-cap dash through the plot and sensible children. Here, however, the author has brewed a little infusion of animal rights, anti-intensive farming, the proper treatment of OAPs and anti-racism. The result isn't heavily ladled but a fast, funny tale with a stinging bite!

DB

# Middle/Secondary

**I Want to be an Angel and other stories**Jamila Gavin,  
Mammoth (Oct 91),  
0 7497 0987 1, £2.50

Four stories featuring children from 'minority' backgrounds and the problems they face in pursuit of happiness.



Effie dreams of being an angel in the Christmas play, while her family begins to disintegrate; Rajiv strives to summon back the spirit of his banished sister; Dawlish, a traveller, tries to fight rejection by being helpful to everyone; Jasmine struggles to adapt to her new family and the fragility of a first friendship.

I felt uneasy that it should be family pathology providing the unifying theme, but the book does attempt to confront issues of prejudice in an imaginative way.

GH

**Wings**Terry Pratchett, Corgi  
(Sept 91), 0 552 52649 5,  
£2.99

There are lots of readers who've been waiting for this

final book in the trilogy. Since **Truckers** they've been following the journey of the nemes out of the store, through the quarry and now to Florida and space. The novels have a wonderful blend of wit and inventiveness. I particularly love the playing with language and though this, like all the invention, is at its height in the first book, there's enough here and in **Diggers** to keep readers entertained and wanting to read bits aloud. More please, like this.

AJ

**Faces in a Crowd – poems about people**Ed. Anne Harvey,  
Puffin (Aug 91),  
0 14 03.2685 5, £3.50

Anne Harvey's anthology juxtaposes the quirky with the

serious, the traditional with the contemporary, the well-known with the less familiar. The resulting mixture will appeal to a wide age-range; it's a fruitful teaching resource, but also a book for children or adults to enjoy browsing in. There's a refreshing absence of the saccharin doggerel which often fills space in children's anthologies, and most readers will find new delights alongside old favourites.

LN

**The Deadman Tapes**Michael Rosen, Tracks  
(Aug 91), 0 00 673822 2,  
£2.99

Forget the jokey Rosen you know and love. This collection of monologues, supposedly taped by teenagers, are bitter

POETRY





in tone and content, and hard to get the mind around in one reading. A puzzling tension builds as stories of grief, infatuation, desertion, prejudice, etc. unfold in the 'memorable speech' style for which this author is regarded. It deserves to be stocked for its sheer, intriguing otherness. One of my unkeen readers pronounced it 'ace'. DB

### Bully

Yvonne Coppard, Red Fox (Oct 91), 0 09 983860 5, £2.99

Kerry, a promising young gymnast badly injured in a car crash, becomes the target of bullies at her new school. At first friendless, she gives way to threats from Billy and Wayne, the school thugs.

She finds a means of retaliation which, through the eyes of her new-found friend, is as much a facet of bullying as the behaviour she has endured.

This convincing narrative provides no easy answers to Kerry's problem, but offers insights, new perspectives and reassurance to all who've suffered in similar situations.

Offer this to lower secondary readers to accompany, perhaps, Aidan Chambers' *The Present Takers*. VR

### A Begonia for Miss Applebaum

Paul Zindel, Red Fox (Sept 91), 0 09 987210 2, £2.99

Alternate chapters by teenagers Henry and Zelda tell the story of the last few months in the life of an eccentric science teacher. The gift of a begonia leads to a closer acquaintance, as a result of which the two friends decide that Miss Applebaum should be treated in hospital – a decision they later regret. The lasting impression of Miss Applebaum is of her energy, enthusiasm and enormous general knowledge, but Paul Zindel's larger-than-life characterisation eclipses his two narrators and distances the reader from the events he portrays. LN

### Knights of the Sacred Blade

Julian Atterton, Walker (Sept 91), 0 7445 2042 8, £3.50

Set in twelfth-century Northumbria, the first part of Julian Atterton's trilogy gives a vivid picture of life in feudal times, and of communities trapped between warring factions. Simon de Falaise devotes himself to the ways of knighthood and to the quest for the Sacred Blade which he believes will save Northumbria. The book's 281 pages are packed with hasty journeys and a bewildering number of characters, but the uncluttered, evocative prose brings the settings to life. A historical novel which is also likely to appeal to lovers of the fantasy genre. LN

## Older Readers

### The Hillingdon Fox

Jan Mark, Turton and Chambers (Oct 91), 1 872148 3, £5.95

Two teenage brothers keep diaries, entries from which are alternated; Gerald's is written in 1982 for a Time Capsule to be buried for a hundred years, while Hugh writes eight years later. The looming of armed conflict in the background to each diary (Falklands and Gulf respectively) enables Jan Mark to explore attitudes to war and violence, paralleled by events closer at hand. The ending is tantalisingly open-ended, with the Time Capsule about to be opened sooner than expected, and likely to turn out as a Time Bomb. An innovative structure, and an intriguing read for discerning teenagers. LN

### A Kindness

Cynthia Rylant, Lions (Jul 91), 0 00 673457 X, £2.99

Fifteen-year-old Chip and his artist mother Anne have been alone since Chip was born. Each supports the other, each compensates for the other's weaknesses – Anne's impracticality, Chip's desire to label and own people, unable to let go.

When Anne becomes pregnant by Ben, whom she's known and loved for a long time, their lives are irrevocably changed. Chip has to learn to accept and let go, Anne to give up her friendship with Ben – since boundaries have been redrawn.

A moving and eloquently written story, likely to appeal to Year 9 upwards and a strong contender for a book box place. VR

### Double Vision

Diana Hendry, Walker (Sept 91), 0 7445 2044 4, £2.99

Quite simply, the best book I've read in ages. The double vision of the title refers to reason and imagination – seeing things two ways. Eliza and Lily, sisters living in a North-West coastal town, have opposite views of their surroundings. Eliza feels confined; Lily's eccentric imagination is given free rein. Characters and events are paraded in front of the reader in an irresistible display, brought to life by Hendry's wonderful use of language.

Buy a set of this remarkable book and give GCSE students a linguistic and literary treat. VR

### Scars

Anne Bailey, Faber (Oct 91), 0 571 16322 X, £2.99

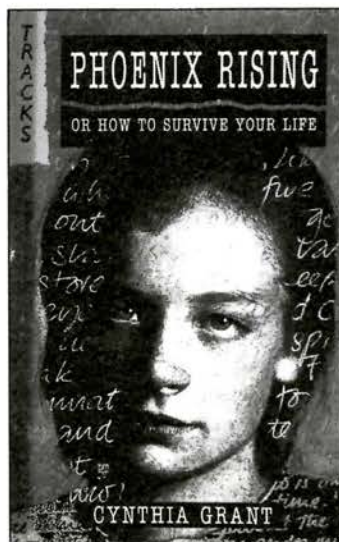
Tanya's inability to speak, her bouts of guilt-ridden self-loathing and destruction, make for a gruelling start. Her mother's re-marriage piles on the tension but the new father, unlike the old, is cruel to be kind, and slowly the psychological and spiritual wounds start to heal... Then Anne Bailey sets the reader back with new revelations!

Complex, fractured human emotion and behaviour is straightforwardly explored and simplified in this novel that will do nothing if not unsettle. DB

### Phoenix Rising or How to Survive Your Life

Cynthia Grant, Tracks (Jun 91), 0 00 673732 3, £2.99

Jessie's elder sister, Helen, has died of leukemia and all



that Jessie has left of her is her diary. Through it she discovers that Helen came to terms with her suffering and that she, too, must come to terms with hers.

There's a family to heal; relationships which have been fractured must be re-forged. In parallel with this is the story of Helen's deterioration in her own words, providing a second voice to Jessie's interpretation.

This is, ultimately, a novel of hope – written in Grant's charismatic style and accessible to readers in Year 9 and above. VR

### Give Me Shelter

Comp. Michael Rosen, Bodley Head (Oct 91), 0 370 31613 4, £6.99

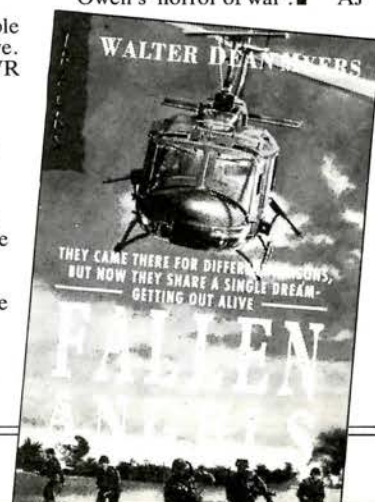
What can any book do about young homelessness? This one battles against apathy with striking visual layout and a strong mix of print and picture that includes song lyrics and journalism, poetry, stories, cartoons, interviews and paintings. The quality of the

material is in part a reflection of the range of people who have contributed (amongst others John Agard, Roger Woddis, James Watson, Michele Roberts and Posy Simmonds) and their continual attempt to find a form, a means of catching our attention. It's expensive in school terms but there's powerful material here for individuals and groups to get to grips with. AJ

### Fallen Angels

Walter Dean Myers, Tracks (Sept 91), 0 00 673596 7, £3.50

A powerful piece of writing which seems to lack any kind of literary artifice, it tells the story of one soldier from his arrival in Vietnam by plane to his departure, wounded and accompanied by the caskets of other soldiers. In between he becomes part of a squad, tightly bound by experience, especially the shared experience of fear and horrors. There are ironies, the bureaucratic errors that allow him to be sent to Vietnam, the repeated assertions of peace on the way although we know, in hindsight, how long the war drags on for. This is the modern realisation of Wilfred Owen's 'horror of war'. AJ





# Audio Tapes

Rachel Redford reviews a selection of recent tapes, focusing particularly on poetry titles and those for older readers.

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

## Pudding and Pie Oranges and Lemons Ride-a-Cock Horse Round and Round the Garden

Oxford, each cassette approx. 35 mins, £2.99 each

Books available separately.

These four tapes make a delightful library of very young children's rhymes and songs. Their content is varied: **Oranges and Lemons** concentrates on imaginative musical party games, **Ride-a-Cock Horse** on knee-jogging rhymes and **Pudding and Pie** on a kaleidoscope of no less than 40 nursery rhymes. Presentation is varied and vibrant, including different musical backings with solo and group, adult and children's voices. The books, all beautifully illustrated by Ian Beck, add an extra dimension. Now available is a Nursery Pack – it's good value at £13.75 – which contains the last three cassettes with the paperback books. An ideal gift for a new baby.

## You Can't Catch Me Quick Let's Get Out of Here

Michael Rosen, Scholastic, one cassette each title, 90 mins, £3.99 each

Michael Rosen tunes in accurately to young children's minds and lives. His London voice is friendly and his language colloquial and rhythmical. Everyday subjects are treated with zest and humour: he finds onomatopoeia in the splodge, splodge of the sauce bottle and makes everyday complaints of lost shoes, scratchy jumpers and tidying bedrooms very funny. All the poems are linked by Rosen's chatty childhood reminiscences and snippets about his own children. The books are available separately.

## Jelly Pie

Brian Patten and Roger McGough, Cover to Cover, one cassette, 35 mins, £3.99

This is how poetry should be introduced to children – with lively music, jokes and vivacious presenters. The funny, rhythmical poems, like the 'stuff left undigested' in Cousin Lesley's stomach or the 'truly awful' sister who shot the hamster, have immediate and irresistible appeal. But there's depth, too, with the serious undercurrent of the little boy guiltily tidying his room, vainly hoping for the

return of his Dad who's walked out. McGough and Patten's chat and accents increase the accessibility and friendliness.

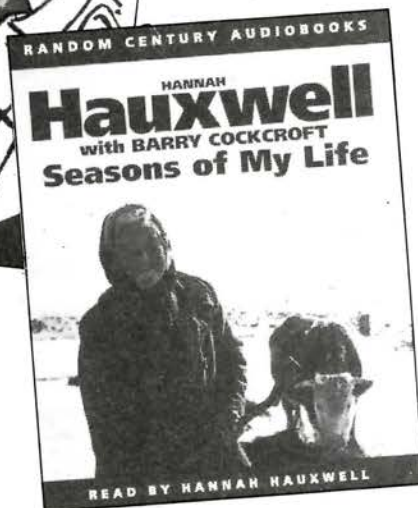
## Look Lively Rest Easy

Comp. Helen East, A & C Black, one cassette with 32-page paperback, 80 mins, £9.99

Performed by multi-ethnic cast of adults and children. There's an enormous amount crammed into these 80 minutes: stories, tricks and rhymes to waken and quicken on the 'Look Lively' side, and much to relax and soothe on the 'Rest Easy' side. The attractive book has all the words and music with copious illustrations. The stories are *told*, not read, and the multi-cultural content is varied including a Gambian waking song, an Australian aboriginal sitting-down dance and Scottish and Mexican lullabies. The musical instruments used are just as diverse – tin-can percussion, maracas, guitar and even a nightingale! There are notes and project guidance for teachers.

## The Machine Gunners

Robert Westall, read by James Bolam, Cover to Cover, four cassettes, 5 hrs 10 mins, £14.00  
1975 Carnegie Medal Winner,



**The Machine Gunners** is typical Westall – a vigorous story which gets more and more tense and frightening. Set in war-time Tyneside, it starts innocently enough with Chas collecting war souvenirs, but when he steals the potentially lethal machine gun and ammunition and with his friends involves the escaped German prisoner, danger creeps insidiously closer. James Bolam is just the right reader for this unabridged, taut and economical tale. His Tyneside accent makes the boys totally credible as ordinary lads caught up in the hardships and reality of war.

## The Outsiders

S E Hinton, read by Jim Fyfe. Chivers, four cassettes, 4 hrs 20 mins, £20.95 + VAT

The language and content of this story of Playboy of the Greasers – the Outsiders from the 'other' side of an American town – is so immediate it's hard to remember it was written in 1967. It's salutary for adolescent listeners to learn that S E Hinton was only 16 when she wrote it. The 'socials' (the haves) bait the Greasers (the have-nots) until frustration erupts into violence and Pony's best friend is driven to manslaughter. This is a deep and powerful story and Jim Fyfe's unabridged American narration adds a lively authenticity.

## Seasons of My Life

Hannah Hauxwell with Barry Cockcroft, read by Hannah Hauxwell, Random Century Audio, two cassettes, 3 hrs, £7.99

Hannah Hauxwell is sweet and gentle, tough and resilient, and these qualities are evident in her country voice and in the idioms, humour and poetry of her speech. Hannah survived 60 years on an isolated Yorkshire farm without electricity or water, struggling on after her parents died, taking water and food in ice and snow to her cows, whose flanks were her only warmth. Hannah's memories of vanishing farm villages and hardship are unimaginable to today's adolescents, and her impassioned appreciation of beauty makes this entertaining and valuable social history for older listeners.

## Cider With Rosie

Laurie Lee, ISIS, six boxed cassettes, 8 hrs, £19.99

Laurie Lee reads with a lyricism and tenderness which makes the evocation of his childhood in Slad valley extremely moving. His gentle Gloucestershire vowels make particularly touching the portrait of his vital, admirable mother battling alone against rural poverty, fired by the hope that one day the husband who'd abandoned her would return. Lee's voice somehow conveys a tinge of sadness behind the brightness of village life. Excellent for classroom use, as this is a very popular GCSE text, as well as for general enjoyment. An abridged version is available from LFP Argo.

## Under Milk Wood

Dylan Thomas, read by Richard Burton with an all-Welsh cast, LFP Argo, two cassettes, 3 hrs, £7.99

'It is spring, moonless night in the small town, starless and bible-black, the cobblestones silent and hunched...' From this beginning the spell of Dylan Thomas' play for voices is cast. The characters are unforgettable – from Mr Pugh spitting out his wife-hating asides ('here's your arsenic, dear, and your weed-killer biscuit') and Polly Garter whose garden grows nothing but milky babies, to melancholy Captain Cat with 'a nose like strawberries', crying as he remembers dead Rosie Probert whose sensual voice we hear in his head. Audio is the rightful medium for **Under Milk Wood** and this version with Welsh cast and Richard Burton as narrator is certainly the best. ■



# Authorgraph No. 72

Although James Berry has lived in Britain for more than forty years, much of his writing is dominated by his Jamaican roots. And it's so rich:

*Put me in bright eye of sunlight  
in shadows under broad hats,  
on hillside pulling beans,  
or chopping or planting,  
I am restful with my mother.*

He grew up in a coastal village, the fourth child in a family of six. James describes his father who farmed a smallholding as a man with no personal ambition and very little interest in his children's education. His mother was another matter. She kept the family safe and steady, working on her old Singer sewing machine making clothes for all the kids till late into the night. 'She knew every button in the house'. He describes her in a poem:

*My mother is a magician.  
My mother knows how to ignore my  
father.  
My mother puts food and clothes  
together out of air. Bush and bark  
and grasses  
work for my mother.*

She was the creative force behind the family. She also had a good singing voice and was a devoted member of the local church and its choir, so James's early exposure to musicality in language was through hymns and the Bible.

Another woman with a strong influence on his early life was his grandmother who, on seeing him as a new-born baby, exclaimed 'my Jimbo has come back to me'. (Her husband had recently died.) Thus the infant was called James and his grandmother treated him as a great favourite which had its drawbacks: grandmothers crop up a lot in his work. A poem like 'Seeing Granny' may not be directly autobiographical, but gives a strong flavour of a powerful matriarch and the effect she has on a small boy – affection mixed with dread!

*She bruises your face  
almost, with  
loving tree-root hands.*

James was a precocious child, reading early, memorising with ease great chunks of the Bible. He adored literature at school, making the best of a rather thin diet of Nelson readers and the like. Fortunately, they contained plenty of poetry and he was soon immersed in everything from Felicia

Hermans' 'The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck' to Eliza Cook's popular poem about Robert the Bruce. And you can see why it might mean so much to a boy desperate for education and burning with ambition:

*The spider up there  
defied despair.  
He conquered, and why shouldn't I?  
And Bruce of Scotland braced his  
mind.  
And gossips tell the tale,  
That he tried once more as he tried  
before,  
And that time did not fail.*

The content of the curriculum was English culture. 'There was no Jamaican history – no black heroes.'

In the Jamaica of his childhood, free elementary education ended at fourteen and with it James's chances of further schooling. Other parents scrimped and saved to keep their children on at school. Unfortunately his father had no such aspirations for his children and sent James into the shoe-making trade. In some respects his father can't be blamed: 'he was the product of plantation', but it is clearly still a painful memory.

*You scare me man,  
but I must go over you again and  
again.  
I must plunge my raging eyes  
in all your steady enduring.  
I must assemble material,  
of my own  
for a new history.*

From making shoes James moved on to tailoring, then life as a travelling salesman for patent medicines on an old bike. He was singularly unsuccessful at all trades. As he recounts these tales he laughs frequently and it's impossible not to respond. Although James has many serious convictions and passionate beliefs, one of his most appealing qualities is that humour is never far away. I spent a lot of the interview laughing, too.

His opportunity arrived towards the end of the war, when he and many of his friends formed part of the newly recruited American work force. For James it was the answer to his prayers: 'I would have died if I'd stayed in Jamaica', and he set forth on a troop ship taking him first of all to New Orleans – with all the dreams of idealism and youth. Although some features of life in the USA were sweet, there was plenty to shock a well-

behaved Sunday school boy with a natural respect for authority. Most of all, James was appalled by the humiliation and indignity suffered by 'people who looked like me'.

He returned briefly to Jamaica after a few years, then sailed for London in 1948. His first night in a Salvation Army hostel for down and outs was a rude welcome; and there was the difficulty of finding a room in a city full of degrading notices which read 'No blacks, no coloureds, no Irish, no dogs, no children'.

But James is nothing if not resilient. He had youth and hope and ambition and, despite the racism, he grew to love London. It offered libraries and books, Evening School (where he immediately began taking correspondence courses), Trafalgar Square, Big Ben, the buildings and the parks: 'I began educating myself to write. I was in heaven.'

He tried his hand as a dental mechanic fixing false teeth, then trained to become a telegraphist which was his occupation for many years: 'The happiest day of my life was when I was made redundant. I thought to myself "I can write now!"' Back in post-war London after working by day, James took classes to educate himself at night. He also found time to meet with other black people involved in a growing number of cultural activities. The Caribbean Artists Movement had been formed and James got to know writers who were also politically active like John la Rose and Edward Brathwaite. A scribbler for as long as he could remember, James began to publish short stories, took to writing plays and read his work at venues like The Troubadour.

One evening he took up an attractive woman's invitation to a Writers' Workshop on T S Eliot: she later became his wife; James was also hooked for life on poetry and began writing it seriously himself. Later he attended workshops at the City Lit which he found both stimulating and nurturing. He moved on to a Poetry Society workshop run by Geoffrey Adkins where writers took turns in reading their work and having it criticised by others. It was a tough and rigorous apprenticeship, just what this particular young poet needed – 'My way is a fumbling way, full of wanting to express myself.'

In 1976 James published **Bluefoot Traveller**, a book of black British poetry. I remember my own excitement at coming across it: there was nothing else like it on the market. **Bluefoot Traveller**, as well as containing some excellent poetry, was a document of black voices telling their own 'tales' about life in Britain. Since his early days in this country, James has remained an active campaigner on the part of black people and has helped to promote young black writers in particular. He's delighted the African writer, Ben Okri, has just won the Booker Prize – 'There's a thunder roaring in him.'





In 1977 James won a Greater London Arts Association Fellowship and spent part of the next two years working in Vauxhall Manor Comprehensive alongside writers like Michael Rosen. He enjoyed running workshops for pupils and has continued to do so. 'It's wonderful. Children let you in on their way of thinking.' However, he was horrified by the paucity of literature which reflected the lives of black pupils. It's hard to remember now, but in the seventies there were still relatively few books in school either by black writers or representing black people as central characters. 'These black kids knew nothing about the Caribbean, nothing about our history. If you are excluded [from literature] you know you're not wanted. Everything's a put-down. I wanted to do something about it and that's how I got into writing for children. I have surprised myself. I didn't really think I'd write for children. I'm amazed at

how much I enjoy doing it. Adults want to make sense of their own childhoods. By writing for them, we become children again.'

James won the National Poetry Competition in 1981 and hasn't looked back since. Two adult collections were well received in the mid-eighties, as well as **News from Babylon: the Chatto Book of West Indian-British Poetry** which he edited. 1987 saw his first book for children, **A Thief in the Village**, which won the main Smarties Award. **When I Dance**, a superb book of poetry for older readers, followed in 1988 and won the Signal Poetry Award. Mostly in standard English, but with a delicious helping of Creole, it fairly vibrates with life:

*I say I wohn get a complex  
wohn get a complex.  
Then I see the muscles my sista flex.*

But don't imagine it's only the language

and rhythms of dialect poetry at which he excels. He's a delightful humorist: (from 'Letter from your special big puppy dog')

*You know I'm so big  
I'll soon become a person.  
You know I want to know more  
of all that you know.  
Yet,  
you leave the house, so, so often.  
And not one quarrel between us.  
Why don't you come home ten times  
a day?*

He is able to handle sensitive issues like racism head-on without haranguing his reader:

*my eyes packed with hellos behind  
them  
my arrival bring departures,  
it seems I test people.*

In a poem for adults ('On an Afternoon Train from Purley to Victoria, 1955') he treats the unintended prejudice and ignorance of a white person with compassion:

*Where are you from? she said  
Jamaica I said.  
What part of Africa is Jamaica?  
she said.  
Where Ireland is near Lapland I  
said.  
Hard to see why you leave  
such sunny country she said.  
Snow falls elsewhere I said.  
So sincere she was beautiful  
as people sat down around us.*

Now he spends his time between London, where he still loves the bright lights, and his home in Brighton, where he enjoys the contrast of Sussex's rolling countryside. Having been heaped with literary honours, has James any ambitions left? 'The more you move into a new area, the more the horizon recedes - you see the great area you haven't touched. . . . There's other things I want to do. . . . There's so much to say. . . not enough time.'

His latest book for children, **The Future Telling Lady**, may be his best yet. ■

James Berry was interviewed by Morag Styles.

Photograph by Lucy Rogers.

#### James Berry's children's books:

**A Thief in the Village**, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 12011 X, £6.95; Puffin, 0 14 03.2679 0, £2.50 pbk

**When I Dance**, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 12426 3, £6.95; Puffin, 0 14 03.4200 1, £2.99 pbk

**Anancy Spiderman**, Walker, 0 7445 0793 6, £7.95; 0 7445 1311 1, £2.99 pbk

**The Future Telling Lady**, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13127 8, £8.99

For adults:

**News from Babylon**, Chatto (1984), 0 7011 2797 X, £7.99

**Bluefoot Traveller**, Thomas Nelson (1985), 0 17 444104 5, £2.45 pbk



# REVIEWS – Non Fiction

## Tools

0 7496 0661 4

## Machines

0 7496 0660 6

Henry Pluckrose, Franklin Watts (Readabout series), £6.50 each  
INFANT

'Readabouts' adopt a similar approach and style of presentation to the familiar 'Knowabouts', 'Talkabouts' and 'Thinkabouts', allowing their subjects maximum impact on the page with a minimum of text. However, though brief, the text is effective, making useful points that can be applied beyond the pages of the book.

**Tools** looks at garden tools, garage tools, kitchen tools, and one or two more unusual groups. There are sufficient close-ups for children to examine some tools in detail, and plenty of starting points for groupings of their own. **Machines** moves from familiar domestic machines to fork lift trucks and robots.



By careful grouping, juxtaposition of contrasting items, and pictures of amusing but inappropriate uses, points are made about such things as scale, structure, and purpose. The text can be read by child or adult, and encourages observation and discussion rather than offering snippets of information. FB

## Remembering Mum

0 7136 3381 6, Ginny Perkins and Leon Morris

## Adventure Holiday

0 7136 3382 4, Sue Brearley

A &amp; C Black, £5.95 each

INFANT/JUNIOR

**Remembering Mum** is a literal title: Sam, Eddy and Dad remember Mum who died a year ago – things she liked, things she taught them, things they did together. It is a taut, powerful book about a real family.

**Adventure Holiday** is the report of a week's holiday shared by children in wheelchairs and 'able-bodied' children. Taking the form of diaries compiled by Dean, Rohana and Sarah, the book challenges stereotypes of disability whilst showing practical difficulties (such as using a public telephone). The book also gives an insight into the personalities of the diarists – Dean in particular being a likeable rogue!

Both books use appropriate colour photographs to support the narrative, and could be used with a wide age range, particularly with adult intervention.

Criteria for judging information books usually include assessing index, contents page and glossary. Both these titles would 'fail' on these grounds yet are very valuable additions to library or school stock. GB

## Electricity

0 7136 3355 7

## Gears

0 7136 3354 9

Chris Ollerenshaw and Pat Triggs, A & C Black (Toy Box Science series), £5.99 each  
JUNIOR/MIDDLE



Librarians, teachers and parents have been going scatty trying to scrape together materials to help with the bit of the National Curriculum that deals with mechanics through the study of toys. So it's Ollerenshaw and Triggs to the rescue as we look at different ways of storing and transferring energy through the medium of a collection of toys.

Each book examines its subject from a very basic beginning, the reader gradually accumulating knowledge and being encouraged to apply it and discover more, using the simple tools and models illustrated. Many questions are asked and nearly all are answered, but not until the reader has had a good chance to discover the answer experimentally.

'Things to do' is what these four are all about – each one is a steeplechase of instructions and investigations, incomplete without a collection of bits and pieces to match those shown in the book and a lot of peer/parent/teacher interaction. The clarity of Peter Millard's photographs and the friendly nature of the materials and their demonstrators will encourage unafraid curiosity, which is exactly what's wanted. And just in case the grown-ups miss the point, all is lucidly explained on the last page. TP

## New Bike

0 7136 3482 0

## New Shampoo

0 7136 3481 2

## New Car

0 7136 3484 7

## New Shoes

0 7136 3483 9

Kate Petty, A & C Black (Start and Finish series), £6.50 each  
JUNIOR/MIDDLE

Aimed at supporting National Curriculum technology, this new series looks at a familiar product (such as The Body Shop's banana shampoo) and follows it from first design sketches to finished product. A good clear explanatory text and attractive colour photographs aid the reader's understanding of the process.

The approach adopted – double-page spread per production stage – highlights the need for company planning, timetabling and linking of components, but is rather less

successful in showing the relative complexity of a particular stage (an especial difficulty with **New Car**). Each title stands on its own but useful work could result from comparison of: advertising techniques and approaches; quality control; CAD/CAM; and the origination of the product.

These are useful new books, with the author's mix of description and pertinent questions a particular strength. GB

## Volcanoes

Jacqueline Dineen, Gloucester Press/Franklin Watts (Natural Disasters series), 0 7496 0686 X, £7.99

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

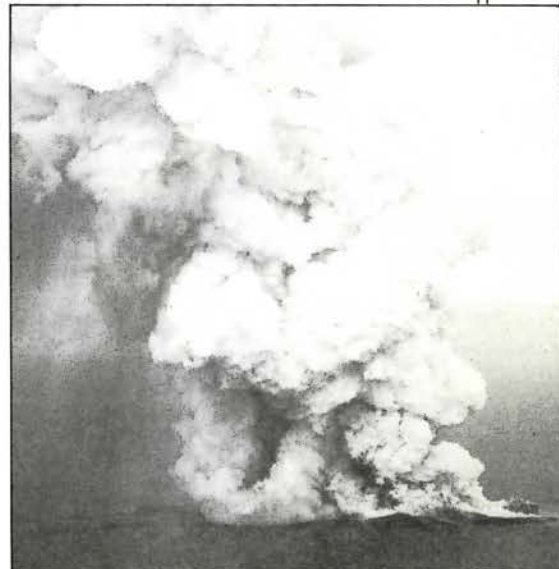
## Volcanoes

Susanna Van Rose and Ian F Mercer, Natural History Museum Publications, 0 674 94307 4, £5.95 pbk

SECONDARY

**Volcanoes** have long been a popular feature of geographical studies but now the National Curriculum requires a study of their global distribution, the nature and effect of volcanic eruptions and the resulting landforms.

**Volcanoes** in the Natural Disasters series provides a useful overview of these topics through a brief text accompanied by colour photographs, diagrams and maps. Double-page spreads examine aspects such as 'What is a Volcano?', 'Active or Extinct?' and 'Volcanoes in History'. The emphasis is on straightforward explanations supported by examples from varied areas and eras. The book works best when describing such things as plate movements and the differences between types of magma. Space prevents it from achieving much depth but it is a useful, readable introduction for older juniors or younger secondary children.



From **Volcanoes** (Natural History Museum).

Slightly older children will find more detail in **Volcanoes** from the Natural History Museum. Clear information on the closely printed pages is accompanied by excellent colour photographs which reward careful attention. Eye-catching techniques have been used for the maps and diagrams although occasional problems result from combinations of shading and labelling. This useful paperback is a reminder of the many excellent publications that are available from museums. FB



**Bird Migration**

1 85429 007 X

**Insect Migration**

1 85429 008 8

**Mammal Migration**

1 85429 006 1

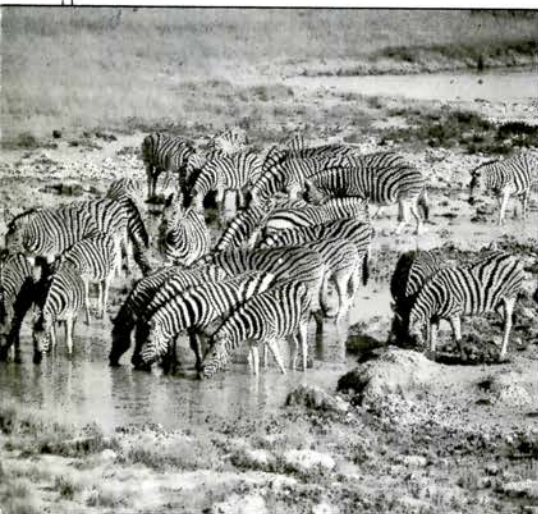
**Migration in the Sea**

1 85429 009 6

Liz Oram and R Robin Baker,  
Young Library, £6.95 each  
JUNIOR/SECONDARY

It's been some time since I read an information book where the end of the right-hand page didn't also mean the end of a sentence and usually the end of a concept. The tyranny of the two-page spread is so nearly absolute that one wonders how much useful material gets left out in one place and how much padding gets put into another so that all the frames shall be equally filled. In presenting this migration quartet, the publishers have wisely decided to buck the trend (rubbing it in by spelling 'Usborne' wrong in their bibliographies) and let the full stops fall where the authors meant them to (even when it's after a preposition).

The authors have a fascinating brief and real subject knowledge backed up by good pictures and maps, so the result is four riveting end-to-end reads unfettered by gimmicks. They define migration as 'any planned journey from one place to another' which allows them to tell us not only about the spectacular arctic tern and monarch butterfly but about the lowly ambitions of the limpet. We end up understanding a lot about why animals move from place to place (just like ourselves, it's mainly sex, food and comfort) and how they do it.

Zebras, from **Mammal Migration**.

The examples chosen are wonderful in their variety. We learn that American leaf-hoppers, after wintering in Texas, hitch a thousand kilometre ride on a southerly wind in time to crunch the springtime beet crop in South Dakota, and we share the slow, single-file trudge of the spiny lobster along sixty miles of Atlantic seabed.

But as well as reasons and achievements the authors remember the question 'how do they find the way?' and offer good explanations – moths navigate by the moon, salmon by sense of smell and lemmings by continuous reconnaissance. And when they don't know they own up, so we don't find out about where mature eels disappear to, or how baby turtles spend the first eighteen months of their oceanic life.

This quartet is a splendid addition to any collection of information books in a primary or secondary school that seeks to promote what books do best – enable a meeting of minds between reader and author. TP

**The American Frontier**

0 7502 0235 1, Nigel Smith

**The Roman Empire**

0 7502 0199 1, Peter Crisp

Wayland (Themes in History series), £8.50 each  
MIDDLE/SECONDARY

This new series confines itself to providing a concise and readable introduction to a topic – sketching in the geographical and historical background and giving a clear account of the significant events and chief protagonists.

Not a main course then, but a starter. Nevertheless there's enough here to whet the appetite, served up in an attractive format with illustrations on almost every page, whilst 'evidence boxes' containing extracts from original source material provide tempting fare. The only things likely to cause mild indigestion are the irritating and superfluous questions directed at the reader.

Just as the Romans felt they brought peace and civilization to the lands they conquered, many Americans felt the same about the 'taming' of the West. Those who saw their homeland and way of life irrevocably changed, however, whether defeated Briton or Native American, expressed a different point of view.

Changing attitudes to the treatment of the Native Americans (especially by the media) and the fact that many heroic reputations, such as Wild Bill Hickok's, do not stand up to close scrutiny, provide young readers with one of their most valuable insights into the past – it is constantly being reinterpreted. VH

**Christopher Columbus**

Ken Hills, Kingfisher (Landmarks series), 0 86272 767 7, £6.95

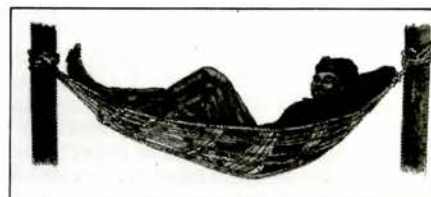
**The Voyages of Columbus**Richard Humble, Franklin Watts  
(Exploration through the Ages series), 0 7496 0524 3, £7.95  
JUNIOR/MIDDLE**Westward with Columbus**John Dyson, Hodder & Stoughton  
(Timequest series), 0 340 55564 5, £6.95**MIDDLE/SECONDARY**

Well, the Columbus bandwagon grows apace; not only quincennial celebrations in 1992, but the master-mariner also features in Key Stage Two History Core Unit: Exploration and Encounters.

Pupils should be able to 'show an understanding that deficiencies in evidence may lead to different interpretations of the past' says the oracle. They need look no further than these three accounts to observe the nuances of emphasis that lead not only to some unravelling of threads, but some ravelling too!

John Dyson makes no bones about one proposed version of events. In 1990 he sailed in an authentic replica of the 'Nina' to test the theory of a Spanish academic that Columbus followed a secret map obtained from someone who had actually been to the New World before him! Although following a more southerly route, the essence of the explorer's first voyage is all there, fascinatingly portrayed in a blend of fact (photographs of the modern-day adventure) and 'faction' (the past as 'seen' through the eyes of a young ship's boy).

Ken Hills recounts a more conventional version of events in his very readable narrative covering all four voyages. The illustrations rely mainly on artist's impressions; although a number of different illustrators have been used, the overall effect is not too jarring.

From **The American Frontier**.

▲ The Arawaks rested and slept in nets woven from cotton threads, called 'hamacas'. In English, 'hamaca' has become 'hammock'. Sailors adopted them for sleeping on ship.

From **The Voyages of Columbus**.

A very matter-of-fact approach is provided by Richard Humble; the illustrations (also artist's drawings) are given almost as much space as the text. He ends his book with the following: 'the saddest legacy of the discoveries of Columbus was the slave trade, which lasted nearly 350 years before it was finally banned'.

A salutary note, perhaps, on which to approach the forthcoming celebrations. ■ VH

**Frances Ball** has been an infant teacher and currently works with pre-school children.

**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**.



# HOW SAFE IS YOUR SCH

## Margaret Smith outlines national changes . . .

Schools should, and do, buy books. However large their budget, though, they could never afford sufficient stock to meet every possible learning and recreational demand. Even resources required by the National Curriculum are not needed in every school every day . . . not to mention the questions of updating, of changing requirements and of the unpredictability of private, individual taste. Here's where the Schools Library Service (SLS) comes in. At its best, it should offer the following:

**Topic collections** – all types of learning resources for teachers and pupils in all subject areas.

**Permanent loan collections** – books, tapes, etc. for recreational reading.

**Exchanges of reading materials** – to keep reading *fresh* whether in school or at home.

**Book purchase schemes** – to provide subsidised purchase of books by schools.

**Professional support and advice** – to teachers and school librarians about the quality and range of stock in school, its display and promotion, and the development of pupils' information handling skills.

Up till now such services were provided centrally and, as far as individual schools were concerned, were 'free'. In many areas that has now changed. The development of Local Management of Schools (LMS), pioneered in Cambridgeshire, is at the heart of a wish to see schools more accountable for their own success. The notion is of Headteachers being responsible, with Governors, for the quality of teaching and learning in their school. Hence many local authorities are beginning to devolve more and more of Education funding into schools' own budgets. The expectation is that schools will buy back into the central support system they require . . . including Schools Library Services.

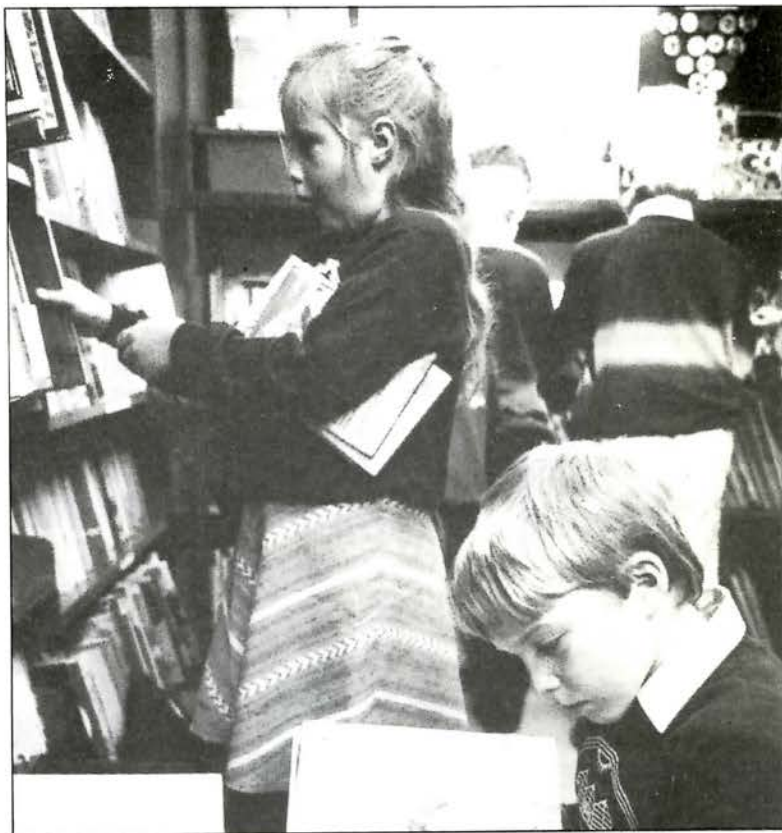
A survey of all SLSs in England and Wales carried out for this article indicates enormous differences in provision. SLSs across the country either have, or will have, their funds devolved to at least secondary schools during 1992. In fewer cases are funds to be devolved to primary schools. Where primary Headteachers have been consulted, the majority have stated their preference for centrally funded SLSs. Those same primary school Headteachers often raise a concern about the effect on their schools of the devolution of the SLS funds to secondary schools. If secondary schools do not buy back in, there will be less money to provide services for primary school needs.

Secondary schools have traditionally, until GCSE courses began, not used SLSs as much as primary schools. However, the demands of GCSE for wider ranges of learning resources, and for pupils to be more effective at finding information, has led to a shift in the perceived needs of secondary schools, too.

The only reason for secondary and primary schools not to buy back into SLSs should be if they, as potential customers, do not perceive sufficient benefits and savings to justify the costs. What's worrying, though, is the possibility that schools' funds for the purchase of SLSs may have competing pressures on them, including the need for teaching staff and repairs to buildings.

Many SLSs have become much more aware of how vital it is to provide what their customers want. Questionnaires and surveys have asked schools to say which of the present services they value and what new or different services they would buy.

SLSs are now 'marketing' their expertise to schools – providing publicity material indicating types of provision, and negotiating service level agreements.



One way of describing the worth of the book support schools receive is a value statement such as that devised by Cambridgeshire SLS – this provides individual schools with 'personalised' information about

- the cost of the actual services recently received from their SLS if the school had had to buy these resources for themselves.
- the value of the school's entitlement to SLS support within a service level agreement.
- the cost of not subscribing to all SLS services from devolved funds but rather using an alternative of payment for individual elements, as and when required.

These statements have proved their worth in discussion with Governing Bodies and senior management in schools – there is now clear understanding of the real costs of a number of resources required from SLS by school staffs.

Although several LEAs are devolving SLS budgets to schools, others have considered and rejected this idea, whilst a very small number have not even considered if central education service funds should or could be devolved to funds. There's no one 'best' solution – consideration and decision depends on local situations. Certainly, it's timely that SLSs are being asked to be more accountable about how and why they provide their resources. They are highly valued and sometimes highly praised support services to schools, and can be rightly proud of their reputation. Let's hope their clients are aware of what they have to offer.

**Margaret Smith** is a Senior Adviser with the Schools Library Service in Cambridgeshire.

If you want further information or need to make any enquiries, she can be contacted on 0733 330870.



# TOOLS LIBRARY SERVICE?

... and Mary Hoffman describes a little local difficulty

It all started with a badger. It was dead; indeed it had died long ago but that didn't stop it becoming a TV star. BBC Schools were making **Badger Girl** in the 'Look and Read' series, and I was, then as now, their Reading Consultant. We consultants don't get much say about live, human actors, but when it comes to casting a stuffed badger the pros relax a bit. We already had Mary, our Star Badger and her understudy and Stunt-badger. But there were a lot of scenes to be shot in studio in Bristol, far from the action on Dartmoor, where a glimpse of static badger was required by the script. 'I know where there's a stuffed badger,' I said helpfully. 'Haringey School Library Service!'

Where else? What was hearsay soon developed into a close personal association. If you are lucky enough to have, as we had in Haringey in 1984, when **Badger Girl** was made, a really first-class SLS, you will find not only a treasure-house of glossy new books but a complete Aladdin's Cave of artefacts from ceremonial masks to oriental cooking-pots. There will be an approval copy of every new children's book worth looking at, fact or fiction, fresh from the distributors.

There will be several professionally qualified librarians, who specialise in children's books, keep up with all the review journals and publishers' catalogues, and run reviewing groups, which you can join – some circulating book information to other teachers. They will advise you on what to buy and if you buy it, pass the full discount on to you. If you are borrowing, they will lend you a self-selected project loan collection. They will come into your school to run In-Service courses and regularly give advice on the spot about setting up and stocking your school or class library.

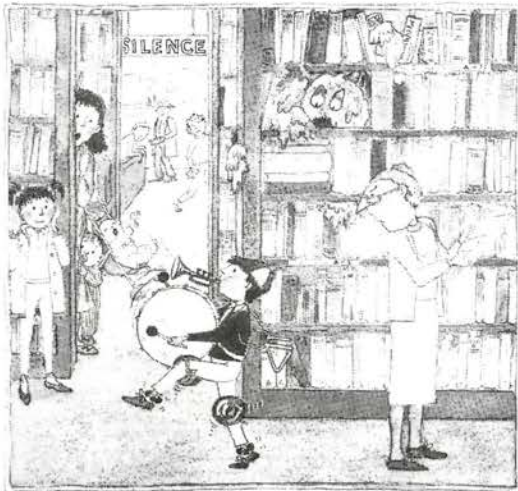


Illustration from **Peter and the Bogeyman**, reviewed on page 7.

That is what a good SLS can be and most teachers long for it. That we no longer have such a service in Haringey is no fault of librarians. We do still have SLS, just, by virtue of strenuous campaigning earlier in the year; but it is much reduced, operating on a term-time basis only, with one librarian, and two part-time library assistants. The technician who kept the Primary Arts Loan Collection in spanking order has been axed; there is no wall of new books for teachers to inspect, no work in schools. Worst of all, the hard-pressed Librarian has had to conduct a marketing exercise, to see if the SLS can become self-financing by next Spring.

**Mary Hoffman** is a children's writer and journalist, and is Chair of the Hornsey Library Campaign. Her latest hardback, with illustrations by Caroline Binch, is **Amazing Grace** published by Frances Lincoln (0 7112 0670 8, £7.95).

This noble spectre of the SLS costs something like £45,000 a year to run at its present level of service. There are 77 Primary schools in the Borough and nine Secondary schools. You don't need to be a mathematical genius like Ruth Lawrence to see that schools would have to be asked to buy in at rates of £500 to £600 or more each, and that for less of a service than they had before. It is supposed to come out of their LMS funds, but no extra money has been earmarked for this purpose. In fact Education budgets in Haringey have been cut, because of several years of overspend across the Council budget as a whole.

One Secondary Librarian, who has already received the questionnaire about the buying-in scheme, said 'My entire book budget for one year is £900. If I gave over £600 to SLS, I'd have only a third of it to buy books with.' And this was from a warm supporter of SLS.

This kind of exercise is going on all over the country. The present government is in favour of devolving provision of services to schools, through LMS, and the School Library Service is not a statutory one. We *might* have a different government in six months' time; the Labour Party is committed to making SLS a statutory service, centrally funded. By then Haringey's SLS might be as dead as my badger. Or we might still have the same government, talking about the marketplace and its forces. Either way, we can't just sit back and let it happen.

Haringey is rich in children's writers and illustrators. I managed to contact thirteen of them – a Baker's dozen? – and we wrote a letter in support of SLS, which we sent to Councillors involved on the committees and to the Directors of the relevant Council departments. Signatories included Leon Garfield, Vivien Alcock, Douglas Hill, Mike Rosen and Jane Ray. It was such a starry list that the letter fairly shone, though I don't suppose many Councillors had heard of any of us.

Four weeks later, we have had one short note from the Director of Education, and a longer letter from the Chair of Education Committee, very appreciative of our concern. I don't know if what we did will have any effect when the budgets for 1992 are set, but if it raises the profile of the service a bit and alerts decision-makers to the presence of an active lobby, it will be better than just wailing and gnashing our teeth, though I do a lot of that too.

The Library Association fights the SLS corner admirably, but I think it's time for a national campaign of interested parties, like writers, to save School Library Services for the Nation before it is too late. I do not write books so that they can only be read by those who can afford to go into shops and buy a hardback at £7 or £8; I doubt if any children's writer does. If you would like to join me, please send an SAE to me at 28 Crouch Hall Road, London N8 8HJ. ■



From **Amazing Grace** by Mary Hoffman.

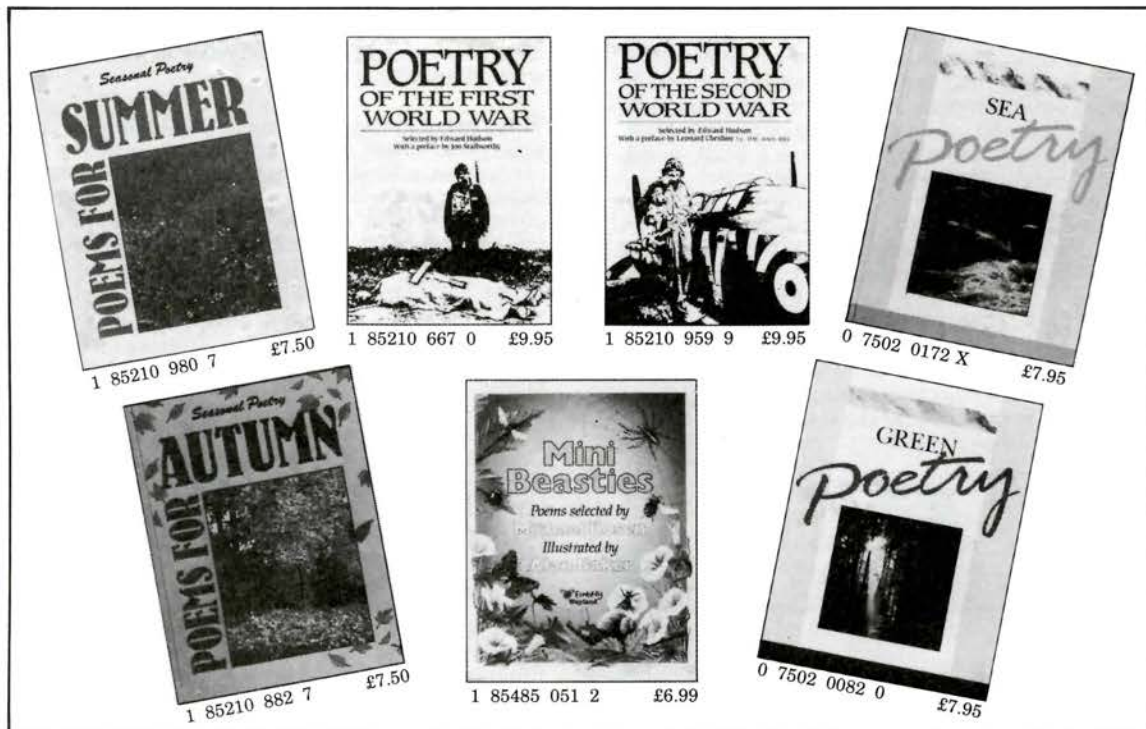




# Wayland

## Poetry selection for 1992

Wayland, one of the leading publishers of children's information books, now publishes a range of poetry books that caters for all ages.



**Thematic Poetry and Seasonal Poetry.** These two attractive series of anthologies are edited by Robert Hull and draw upon a wide range of verse by classic and lesser-known poets and some by the children themselves. These books provide invaluable support and inspiration for teachers of creative writing and cross-curricular activities.

**Poetry of the World Wars.** Two moving collections of poetry from a wide range of writers, many of whom were killed in the wars. Each poem is accompanied by a contemporary photograph which captures the mood and provides a powerful picture that is both poignant and horrific.

**Mini Beasties.** Michael Rosen, the well-known author, poet and broadcaster, has compiled this witty anthology of poems from around the world. Alan Baker's super illustrations bring the wonderful mini-beasties to life.

Full details of all these series can be found in the 1992 Wayland Catalogue.

#### POETRY OF THE WORLD WARS

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# Nicholas Tucker reviews a book with a message that's 'simply too uncomfortable in today's world'

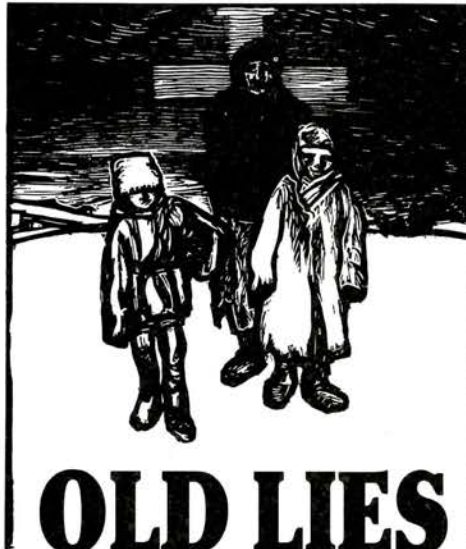
**Old Lies Revisited: Young Readers and the Literature of War and Violence** by Winifred Whitehead is published by Pluto Press (0 7453 0428 1, £17.50; 0 7453 0483 4, £8.95 pbk).

Like her father before her, Winifred Whitehead is a life-long pacifist. As an ex-Senior Lecturer and expert on children's literature, she is also particularly concerned that Thomas Hardy may have been correct when he wrote that 'War makes rattling good history; but peace is poor reading.' If that is so, then the vital task of educating the world's children away from the idealisation of war and violence could turn out to be an impossible one. It is highly relevant therefore to look at the way war-mongers and peace-makers have been portrayed in children's literature this century.

To assess this, the author has read an enormous range of war books dealing with everything from the American Civil War to the troubles in Northern Ireland. Charting so many descriptions of human cruelty and moral short-sightedness must have been a peculiar agony to someone of her beliefs. But she spares neither herself nor her readers in her determination to get to the truth about war as opposed to the many literary fantasies about it. Some of the quotations she includes from autobiography as well as from fiction make painful reading. She also has the courage to ask whether total pacifism is really sustainable, quoting examples from history where fighting back seems like the only logical response.

Many of the books she quotes from are by authors who no longer believe that fighting can still bring out the best in most people. Yet by choosing writers who know war for the dehumanising, degrading thing it is, this study neglects those more popular voices that have also always been around to give warfare a good name. Although there was little British enthusiasm for entering into the Second World War once the horrors of World War One had sunk into general consciousness, it did not take long for contemporary comics and novels to return to the old clichés featuring glorious Allied soldiers regularly putting swinish German troops to rout. In literature

like this, it is not war itself that is the enemy but a particular race of people. William Golding was eventually to write *Lord of the Flies* in order to remind everyone that the potential for evil exists in all of us, not just in those we fight against. Yet morally facile war comics and booklets still exist today despite Wilfred Owen's warning years ago against continuing to peddle the old lies 'to children ardent for some desperate glory'.



## OLD LIES REVISITED

But what exactly are these old lies? That extraordinary heroism and idealism can exist in those who fight there is no doubt. The lie is to trivialise the actual experience of killing and suffering so that defeating an enemy in battle is described as a glorious game where only the bad get hurt, and swift death rather than lingering injury is the rule of the day. In reality, soldiers do not seem to enjoy killing other soldiers very much. Those who go to war expecting it to be fun are almost always quickly disillusioned. One such was Robert Lawrence, hero of *Tumbledown*, a television film by Charles Wood, and co-author with his father of *When the Fighting is Over*. As a badly wounded survivor, he had no place in the Falklands Victory celebrations. Nor was he prepared for the indifference with which he was treated, having been reared on films and novels where crippled soldiers are no problem to anyone simply because they barely exist. The fact that he went into battle still expecting the glamorised war of so much popular entertainment says a lot for the continuing failure in our culture to insist that a fundamentally ugly activity should in general always be depicted as such.

Will the violent literature sustaining these false images ever lose its hold, particularly where young male readers are concerned? Given the psychological pressure on the young always to behave well and in general come up to our expectations of them, it is not surprising that they sometimes turn to literature where they can be as violent and untamed in the imagination as they like. Bernard Shaw has described such imagined mayhem as the violence that hurts no-one. Yet it still seems important that literature which celebrates violence for violence's sake should not also masquerade as a description of real life at the same time. 'Fighting Fantasy' books are unlikely to mislead young readers into thinking they are about anything other than over-the-top daydreams. War stories that seek to glamorise real events are a different matter, possibly leading young readers into dangerous ignorance either about their own future lives or about other people's right to exist peaceably.

Many more important questions are raised in this study. Numerous books are quoted from, including obscure titles which often look extremely interesting. The author's intention throughout is to warn us that unless we all take a more critical view about violence and war as an ultimate solution to political problems, then in the long or even perhaps the short run, we are all probably doomed. Sadly I think she has failed in this aim... not because she has written a bad book, but because her message is simply too uncomfortable in today's world of International Arms' Fairs and incessant war and rumours of war. *Old Lies Revisited* has received little press attention, even in areas that could reasonably be expected to have been sympathetic. When such a worthwhile study falls largely on deaf ears, it is a bad look-out for all of us. ■

Nicholas Tucker teaches courses in psychology and children's literature at the University of Sussex. He's well-known as a broadcaster and critic, and is the author of *The Child and the Book* (Cambridge, 0 521 39835 5, £5.95 pbk), a standard text on the development of children's reading interests.

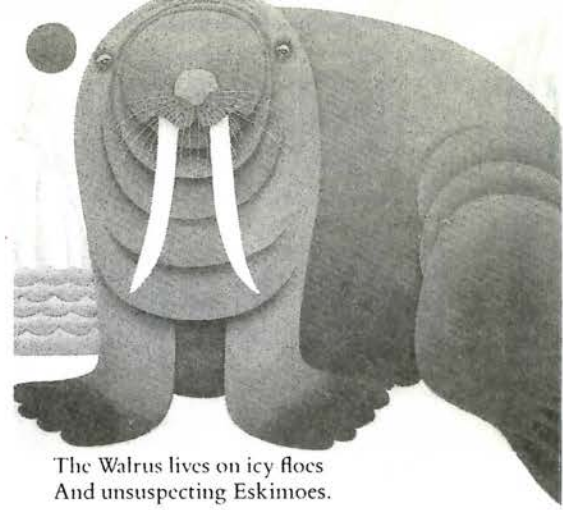






'Portrait'  
by Hannah  
Keever (11)  
from  
Cadbury's  
Ninth Book  
of Children's  
Poetry.

# A JOSTLE OF POETRIES



The Walrus lives on icy floes  
And unsuspecting Eskimoes.

Don't bring your wife to Arctic Tundra  
A Walrus may bob up from undra.

MICHAEL FLANDERS

From *Birds, Beasts and Fishes*.

## Robert Hull assesses some new anthologies and the thinking behind them

A quite well-known poet once explained to me that poems written by children weren't real poetry. They weren't crafted, you see, didn't have shape and suchlike – not like poets' poems.

Well:

*My brother would put me in a  
SHUT-UP-JOANNE BOX  
because I speak a lot.*

*My mum would put me in a  
TURN-ON-'NEIGHBOURS' BOX  
because she likes it.*

*My dad would put me in a  
GO-TO-BED BOX  
because he wants me out of the way.*

*My teacher would put me in a  
THE WORK BOX  
Because I never do my work.*

*My friend would put me in  
THE SAME BOX AS HER  
because she likes me.*

Joanne Yates was eight when she wrote that (for the poet's NOT-REALLY-A-POEM BOX) and Carl Saville was five when he wrote his equally uncrafted shapeless 'Salty Sea':

*Salty sandcastle  
Salty sea  
Salty footprints  
Salty me.*

Both are from *Cadbury's Ninth Book of Children's Poetry* (Red Fox, 0 09 983450 2, £2.99 pbk), the kind of collection that begs for everyone in the class to have their own copy, to see and share and shout about. At £2.99 a head, or about a day and a half's supply teaching, it would be more than good value. It would also be a reminder to us, from children, of what the poetry we take to and write for them ought to be like.

We can take our teacherly bearings from them. They show us where children's feelings and thoughts are. They make clear what children want to do with words, and what they want words to do. They describe the central features of a poetic world – a world that strikes me as above all serious, not least when it's funny:

*They all say 'God Save  
the Queen': I don't know what  
to save the Queen from.*

Comparing these Cadbury poems by children with too much of what is written and published for them, you notice how few duds there are here; how convincingly young girls and boys arrive at expressive shape and structure; how seldom they write the poem that isn't felt; and how easily they carry an un-self-conscious, lightly worn gravity, on 'serious' and not so serious subjects.

And yet . . . how many poems by children appear in most anthologies offered to them? Not a lot. How many questions on poems by 15 and 16-year-olds at GCSE? Again, not a lot. For all the 'popularity' of poetry now, the poetic world of the young still hasn't, it seems to me, and not just from the evidence of many new books, sufficiently shaped what they are offered in what's compiled for them.

And so, caveat emptor, to the market-place – with a question to orient one's searches. Is this a book of the breadth and depth that children aspire to and need, a poetry book for children that's as rich and serious as the poetry written by children? Or is it one of the adult-centred sort? A topic-the-publisher-and-consultant-think-would-go-down-well poetry book? The outcome of a hurried trawl through nearly all right stuff that fits the subject? Or worse, a mini-tome of heavy jokiness, a miasmic trail of hyper-comic unfunniness left by poets with glue ear?

*Dancing Teepees*, a splendid collection of North American Indian poems, is emphatically an exemplar of the former kind, a through-and-through *children's* book.

*Grandmother,  
I watched an eagle soar  
high in the sky  
until a cloud covered him up.  
Grandmother,  
I still saw the eagles  
behind my eyes.*

I like the Mescalero Apache 'Song for Young Girls':

*You will be running to the four  
corners of the universe;  
To where the land meets the big waters;  
To where the sky meets the land;  
To where the home of winter is;  
To the home of rain.  
Run!  
Be strong.  
For you are the mother of a people.*

A few (30 or so) poems, one a page, with plenty of space for Stephen Gammell's impressive, quiet artwork to fit round the printed words and allow the poem-picture page to be contemplated, stayed with and returned to. The word 'contemplate' isn't often used in the pidgin of curriculum state-speak, but it is a success of certain books that they induce – at least make possible – a willingness to pause, explore the visual image as it in turn explores the poem, re-read. The pages of *Dancing Teepees* do; they will sink in, as we used to say.

So will those of *A Cup of Starshine*; Jill Bennett's choice of poems for young



From *Dancing Teepees* (Oxford).

children is as inclusive and satisfying as could be. She lets nothing trite or frailly whimsical in, and there's no ersatz hilarity, only fun and humour. The lightest poems have an assurance to them, and something to say, like Marchette Chute's 'Reading':

*A story is a special thing,  
The ones that I have read  
They do not stay inside the book,  
They stay inside my head.*

The fine selection becomes a fine book because the pages, like those of *Dancing Teepees*, can be explored through leisured looking and reading done as an integral activity – or inactivity. Graham Percy's illustrations, beautifully understated in terms of colour and emotional tone, are very satisfying, as we see his personages take on postures and expressions that respond perfectly to the particular poem.

*Birds, Beasts and Fishes*, compiled by Anne Carter, also has some irresistible pages. There are gorgeous illustrations – a primitive-naïf Rousseau-an manner – by Reg Cartwright. The text is more a selection of good poems than a good selection of poems, but poem and artwork from time to time create a sumptuous world that children



From *A Cup of Starshine* (Walker).

can investigate at letting-it-sink-in pace. A puzzle for me is 'which children?' in a book that includes Hopkins' 'Windhover' and verses from *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. And one or two of Reg Cartwright's creatures, beautiful though they are, have an elegant dream-like serenity not felt by the creature in the poem, as if anthologist and artist lost each other's phone numbers that week.

If only some equally gifted artist had been given free rein in Anne Harvey's *Shades of Green*. The book outstandingly represents the skilled, scrupulous anthologist at work. There's a felt reason for the collection (a not always satisfied criterion). It's pointedly organised, with sections called 'So They Are Felled', 'Goodbye to Hedges', and so on. The range is splendid. Anne Harvey goes back in time, more than most but not too often, and pokes in odd corners all round the world. She discovers and re-discovers. Here is a fragment of Emily Dickinson:

*In the name of the bee  
And of the butterfly  
And of the breeze  
Amen.*

There are poems one hasn't – I haven't – read, and a number of new ones. There are enervating juxtapositions: Chaucer with Spike Milligan, a limerick with William Barnes (good for her to 'risk' his beautiful 'Vellen o' the Tree'), a Hindustani proverb alongside Norman MacCaig, short moments with longer poems. There is space round the poems on the page, and the type-face is peculiarly agreeable. If only the illustration, sensitive though it is where it appears, hadn't been so meagre, and the cover didn't incline one to turn away from what one ought to buy.

It's interesting to compare this dull-outside but fresh-inside anthology with *The Puffin Book of Twentieth-Century Children's Verse*, which seems to have the careful hand of the poets' union on it. Certainly it lacks the kind of range that Anne Harvey deploys. The title sounds like an official culture-stamp, and such an implicit claim to definitiveness would be hard anyway to justify, even with a collection more ambitious and wide-ranging than this, over a period when so much good verse for children has been written by so many different writers. Here the claim isn't worth risking. Brian Patten's volume is a book of good poems for children written in the twentieth century, and that's about it.

Far away from Establishment Land is Morag Styles and Helen Cook's *The Cambridge Poetry Box*. If the risks intrinsic to picking a poetry curriculum are ever avoidable, they might be here. An essential success is to have produced a number of short-ish books that feel lively and usable. (The device of dividing one hardback – for the teacher presumably – into three 30-page paperbacks

is rather cunning.) The compilers have anthologised with the kind of zeal that turns up new things, and yet they've created local and overall balance – a different balance from Anne Harvey's, with a greater stress on accessible contemporaneity, perhaps, and less on the past and the distant. This version of poetry-for-children conveys the sense of being at the sharp end, of evangelising for the poem in the classroom, in ways that are open-ended and expansive.

The *Teacher's Book* is full of enlightened common-sense, useful short-hand for students, or for anyone who feels their teaching lacks shape, or just doesn't know how to 'do' poetry. For instance, a sentence I particularly liked: 'Each child in a group . . . has an individual copy of the same book from which the teacher reads aloud, while children follow the text.' (Heads and those with the money-bags learn by heart for tomorrow.)

But there are risks, I think, not least for the teachers who want to carve their own trips through poetry and want children to as well. It could mean we have a Poetry Scheme as well as a Reading Scheme (teaching in a POETRY-BOX BOX), with a ready rationale that makes it less necessary to read books about teaching poetry. There's a danger, too, of annexing poetry to language development. Ultimately there's the temptation of Being Responsible, implicating the best liberal-progressive traditions of handling poetry in the coercive pseudo-enlightenments of the National Curriculum. But one can always buy the bits one likes. I'd certainly buy some of this.

From 'Take Me Like I Am' (*Cambridge Poetry Box*).

I'd also buy John Foster's *Twinkle, Twinkle, Chocolate Bar*, a most engaging collection for the 'very young', and Judith Nicholls' *Sing Freedom*, a necessary collection for much older youngsters, on a topic that other publishers seem to be shy of.

And I greatly enjoyed *You Just Can't Win*, a family anthology by Brian Moses, a fine poet and anthologist. I absorbed varied pleasures from *Niffs and Whiffs*, a book of smells compiled by Jennifer Curry, till after



about 40 pages (80 in the book) I needed fresh air.

It's nevertheless true that the more fashionable the poetry, the more likely we are to meet the not-so good poem, the modish bad poem being often better – more saleable – than the unmodish good poem. This is particularly so if a few writers corner an area of the market ('green' issues or multiculturalism, for example) and if some of them are writing and publishing too much. Since I'd like children to meet only good poems, it's worrying if they keep meeting the other sort. We can hardly draw up a league table which relates particular poetries to the likelihood of generating duds, but we can at least, again, and again, go back to the kind of poems written by children to see what their poetry-for-children is.

One feature we see there – as in the first poem above: *My friend would put me in / THE SAME BOX AS HER / because she likes me* – is a frequently 'adult' complexity, of both feeling and poetic organisation. I've wondered, reading a number of anthologies, if one kind of writer-for-children (other than children themselves) isn't consistently under-represented, namely the kind whose poems for children, some of them, can also be read by adults as adults, or some of whose poems for adults are accessible to children.

Writers like Irene Rawnsley, Gerda Mayer, John Mole, Kevin McCann, Vernon Scannell, Barrie Wade, Matt Simpson, and so on, do write 'easy' poems, but they also take up more demanding stances. Children want to be able to read some poems twice or three times and more, and have the books left in their hands. They want to read, in other words, as well as to be read to and performed at. They want books which have been bought for them – in sufficient numbers, need one say. (Yes, one need.) ■

Details of the anthologies are:

- Cadbury's Ninth Book of Children's Poetry**, Red Fox, 0 09 983450 2, £2.99 pbk
- Dancing Teepees – Poems of American Indian Youth**, selected by Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve, with art by Stephen Gammell, Oxford, 0 19 279881 2, £6.95
- A Cup of Starshine**, selected by Jill Bennett, ill. Graham Percy, Walker, 0 7445 1545 9, £10.95
- Birds, Beasts and Fishes**, selected by Anne Carter, ill. Reg Cartwright, Walker, 0 7445 1920 9, £10.95
- Shades of Green**, selected by Anne Harvey, ill. John Lawrence, Julia MacRae, 1 85681 031 3, £14.99
- The Puffin Book of Twentieth-Century Children's Verse**, edited by Brian Patten, ill. Michael Foreman, Viking, 0 670 81475 X, £12.99; Puffin, 0 14 03.2236 1, £4.99 pbk
- The Cambridge Poetry Box**, Morag Styles and Helen Cook, Cambridge (telephone Ros Horton on 0223 325915 for further details or write to Cambridge University Press at The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU)
- Twinkle, Twinkle, Chocolate Bar**, compiled by John Foster, Oxford, 0 19 276092 0, £10.95
- Sing Freedom**, edited by Judith Nicholls, Faber, 0 571 16513 3, £8.99; 0 571 16514 1, £4.99 pbk
- You Just Can't Win**, edited by Brian Moses, Blackie, 0 216 93164 9, £7.95
- Niffs and Whiffs**, compiled by Jennifer Curry, ill. Susie Jenkin-Pearce, Bodley Head, 0 370 31556 1, £6.99

**Robert Hull** taught for 25 years in state schools and is now a freelance writer and lecturer. He's the author of *The Language Gap – How classroom dialogue fails* (0 416 39400 0, £7.95) and *Behind the Poem – A teacher's view of children writing* (0 415 00701 1, £10.95), both published by Routledge. He's also selected poems for several anthologies published by Wayland.



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# BOOKS FOR KEEPS NEWS AWARDS

## Colin McNaughton Wins 1991 Kurt Maschler Award for

**Have You Seen Who's Just Moved in Next Door to Us?**, Walker Books, 0 7445 1949 7, £7.99

Elaine Moss, one of the judges for the Award comments, "Colin uses narrative verse, bubble talk and Chinese whispers as his text on pages crammed with cartoon-style artwork that pays homage to film, comics and other picture book artists. His book highlights the fear we all feel of strangers, the gossip that gets out of hand when new neighbours appear on the street. Jokes, puns and comic situations abound, but the message is serious: we are all oddballs and we must learn to live together."

## 1991 Smarties Book Prize Winners

Category winners in the three age-groups: 0-5 years, 6-8 years and 9-11 years each received £1,000, and one went on to win a further £7,000. The judges commented: "After three amicable sessions we arrived at a very strong shortlist for each category. The overall decision was the easiest - the winner chose itself."

0-5 Years Winner and Overall Smarties Prize Winner:

**Farmer Duck** by Martin Waddell, illustrated by Helen Oxenbury, Walker, 0 7445 1928 4, £8.99

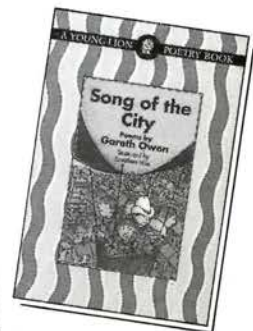
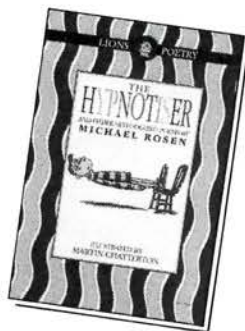
6-8 Years Winner:

**Josie Smith and Eileen** by Magdalen Nabb, illustrated by Pirkko Vainio, HarperCollins, 0 00 191345 X, £5.99

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**Krindlekrax** by Philip Ridley, Jonathan Cape, 0 224 03149 X, £7.95

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# MOSCOW: AUGUST 1991

Judith Elkin

The International Federation of Library Associations' most recent conference was held in Moscow. After a peaceful, sunny weekend, we awoke to a gloomy Monday morning and the news that there had been an overnight coup. There were tanks on the streets outside our hotel, the Kremlin was sealed off and there was a complete news blackout.

During that first day, news was sparse. On television, statements from the Junta were read by wide-eyed television presenters and interspersed with a continuous loop of music from *Bridge on the River Kwai* and *Swan Lake*. The reaction of people to the appearance of tanks and soldiers on the streets was an angry one. There was little open aggression, but groups of people argued with the troops and urged them to go away. Yet we felt and saw in some of the faces the resignation of those who feared that this return to a hardline government could succeed.

How poignant seemed the words of the welcome address, that Monday afternoon, from Mikhail Gorbachev:

'With particular pleasure I would like to greet you, the representatives of the most human profession - librarians, faithful keepers of books . . . and information. Essentially, the library is an international institution ... [which] extends mutual understanding and contacts, provides wide access to information promoting successful cooperation between countries in political, economic and human spheres. I wish the 57th IFLA Conference participants every success, fruitful collaboration for the benefit of lasting peace and a free and prosperous world.'

These words printed in our papers were unable to be presented at our opening ceremony on that historic August 19th, as the President was under house arrest in the Crimea. But the conference proceeded.

That first night we still had no news of the fate of Gorbachev or the whereabouts of Yeltsin. By the following morning, we were aware that Yeltsin had called for full opposition to these enemies of the state and called for an all-out national strike. Support for the strike was small, but support for Yeltsin enormous.

That afternoon, I attended an emotional Russian Orthodox service in the tiny St Basil's Cathedral. A message from the Patriarch of All Russia welcomed the 'intellectual elite' of the world to this international conference and exhorted us to support intellectual and cultural freedom, through provision of libraries and access to information. The heady incense-laden atmosphere, the deep voices of the priests resounding around the frescoed walls was highly moving, with Red Square outside deserted and lines of tanks pointed at the Kremlin.

None of us was brave enough to defy the curfew on that Tuesday evening, as the tanks rumbled away from outside our hotel and moved, we assumed, to attack Yeltsin and his followers in the White House. We had seen the barricades of buses, concrete and iron bars built by his defenders but we did not expect them to survive concerted tank movements.

Little did we know that just 24 hours later, the attempt to storm the White House would have failed, the Junta would have been arrested and the celebrations would begin. For us, the thousand remaining delegates from all parts of the world, our evening's reception in the Kremlin Congress Hall, was overwhelmingly exciting. For the first time, many of our Russian and Soviet colleagues could smile and relax. Never before have so many librarians been united in their bid for international peace, freedom and professional understanding and cooperation; never before have so many librarians been stoned out of their minds, whether through emotional relief, champagne or vodka, I hesitate to suggest.

For us, who live in a society where we have frequent and relatively accurate news reports, living through three days of no



information, partial information, hearsay and rumour, was unnerving. I realise now how easily we take for granted our press, radio and television. As professionals, priding ourselves in supporting free access to information for everyone, we were particularly disturbed and yet realised that this freedom is something that many are unable to take for granted.

We survived on stories: from colleagues, from people on the streets. Stories helped me to make sense of what was one of the most emotional weeks of my life. Stories helped me to reflect on my experiences. Stories helped me to share my understanding with other colleagues, with family and friends.

Many poignant memories remain: the silence of the huge crowd assembled to pay their last respects to the three young men who died; the crowds gathering to celebrate the end of the coup, laying flowers on the tomb of the unknown soldier; fireworks over the Kremlin; the lady who cleaned my hotel room, when I gave her the food, soap and chocolate I had not used. She hugged, kissed and blessed me, leaving me humbled and in tears. I had probably given her the value of a week's wages.

My abiding memories are really of the people, their warmth and anxiety to have a true democracy, where their opinions are heard. They know that life will be hard and nothing can change overnight.

Most of all, I appreciate how vital is our right to information. How crucial it is for all of us to defend in our own democracy, the structures, currently under threat from central government cuts, that give us free access to information and books: the school and public libraries. ■

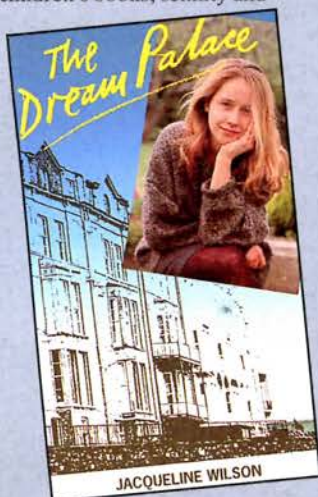
Judith Elkin is Head of the School of Information Studies at Birmingham Polytechnic. She won the Eleanor Farjeon Award in 1986 and is no stranger to *Books for Keeps* as the compiler of our two Guides to *Children's Books for a Multi-cultural Society*.



# DREAMS AND MYSTERIES

## Stephanie Nettel takes her pick of recent Teenage Fiction

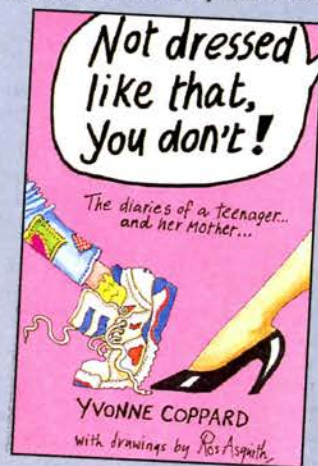
A renewed bleat has arisen that girls are getting a raw deal in subject matter and role models, but surely, if anything, it's boys who are being left out. Three of my titles are uninhibitedly 'girl's reading'; they share age-old 'girl' themes – mother-daughter relationships, first love, and rebellion – but in the toughly honest, physically raw manner of today, and two extend their compassion to a stage in a woman's life rarely explored in earlier children's books, senility and death.



Fiction can help readers cope with their own troubles, or better understand other people's. Rosemary Harris's **Ticket to Freedom** (Faber, 0 571 116313 0, £8.99) is in the latter class – her Lallie, on probation and in therapy for compulsive stealing, loathed by her Dad's new woman and beaten by both, is a dreamer of dreams and as bright as a button, but she is unlikely to read as dense a story, quick-cutting and savagely characterised, as the one she herself tells. Life has been unkind to Lallie, who hungers for love, and she reckons it's time to look out for number one, but the affectionate concern that grows from her duty-visits to an old lady signals her budding awareness that freedom from responsibility might prove a lonely prison. Despite its gritty detail, this larger-than-life book is too bountiful in sub-plots, symbolic characters and events to be entirely believable – but it's wonderfully cockle-warming and alive.

**The Dream Palace** (Oxford, 0 19 271677 8, £8.95) scores in both categories. Curiously enough, Jacqueline Wilson's young narrator is called Lolly: she has a bumbling stepfather she despises; and she too discovers an unexpected tenderness overtaking the revulsion that had engulfed her when the YTS substituted an old people's home for the promised nursery. Again, like Lallie, she yearns to escape from herself, moulding an unexpected hippy boyfriend and the dim memory of her Dad to fit her dreams. Here is an engrossingly convincing view of everyday sordidness, brilliantly conveyed through the naivety and simple reporting (mostly in uncannily accurate dialogue) of an ingenuous school-leaver to whom life is about to give a nasty surprise.

Like most teenage novels, it's about discovering maturity, but more – it's a book about love: how it can be warped, lost, imagined or not recognised, how it can blossom in strange places, how it's the only thing that matters. Love between Lolly's hurt, exasperated mother and her pot-bellied husband; between Lolly and the helpless, fat old woman whose body had once so repelled her; and most of all, that intense love between girls, which, against all odds, endures between Lolly and her best friend.



The young reader sees there's a mutual emotional need between Lolly and her rebel drop-out boyfriend but no love, while, beneath all the rage and rejection, there remains a bond of love with her mother.

Whether describing Lolly's boring little seaside town or a runaways' squat in London's seedy underside, Jacqueline Wilson unerringly hits her target readership with energy, compassion and humour. Self-effacing – we picture only Lolly, never Wilson – her story shocks, entertains, moves and instructs: teenage reading at its most skilful.

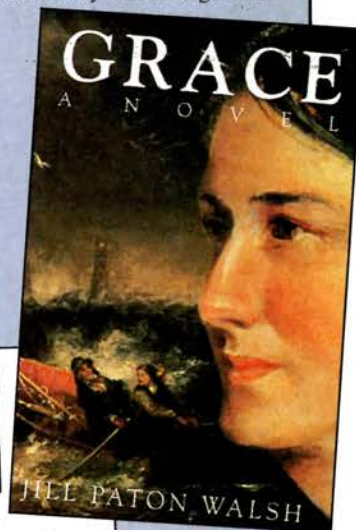
The mother v daughter battle is put under a magnifying glass by Yvonne Coppard, helped by Ros Asquith's sharp but affectionate cartoons, in a book whose title (a speech bubble) says it all: **Not dressed like that, you don't!** (Piccadilly, 1 85340 156 0, £8.95; 1 85340 186 2, £4.95 pbk). Like all the best ideas, it is utterly straightforward – a year from the diaries of a 15-year-old and her mother. Astute and unpretentious, its tongue-in-cheek contrasts make palatable its helpful little message: mums have worries of their own, mums can remember what it's like, and mums do care.

Two challenging novels demand as much as they reward – stimulating and provocative for the right readership, frustratingly off-putting for the wrong. The central characters of **Johnny, My Friend**, a Swedish prizewinner set in the Stockholm of the fifties, by Peter Pohl, translated by Laurie Thompson (Turton & Chambers, 1 872148 70 0, £8.95), are around twelve, but the book is discursively long and tantalising

mysterious – who is young Johnny, adored that summer to the point of idolatry by the now-older narrator, and what has happened to him? At first I felt bogged down, skipping to get on with it, and irritatedly puzzled, but its haunting tragedy propelled me into a second reading that captured my heart and lingered in my mind.

A novel to ponder on is another **Parcel of Patterns** tour-de-force from Jill Paton Walsh – this time, Grace Darling giving her own account of that famous rescue and the bitter aftermath among the community of North Sunderland: **Grace** (Viking, 0 670 83820 9, £8.99). Its calm flow and spiritual gentleness make it hard to resist the temptation to describe it as full of grace; certainly, its total empathy provides a fine piece of social history. But the eerily perfect 1830s style, quiet pace (reining in a turmoil of emotions as great as any storm) and long passages of unbroken narrative may well demand an older, more experienced readership, one willing to stop and savour.

For the youngest teens, two subtly delicate novels that still offer rattling good stories: **Along a Lonely Road**, by Catherine Sefton (Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13136 7, £8.99), is a short thriller, told with beautiful simplicity through the eyes of the eldest girl, about the emotions of a remote rural family held hostage by criminals, while Ann Phillips provides gentle *frisson* in **A Haunted Year** (Oxford, 0 19 271650 6, £8.95), exploring themes of friendship and family life in a 1910 story about a maliciously tenacious ghost. ■



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Controversies in Non-Fiction  
The Art of Shirley Hughes  
Geoff Fox on the graphic novels of Philip Pullman

Thirty Years of **Growing Point** – Stephanie Nettel talks to Margery Fisher  
BfK/BFC Competition  
Hazel Townson in Authorgraph  
Plus reviews, reviews, reviews . . .