

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

March 1992 No. 73
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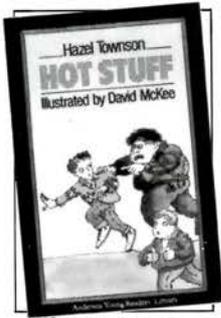
the children's book magazine



SHIRLEY HUGHES
HAZEL TOWNSON
MARGERY FISHER
AND OTHERS . . .

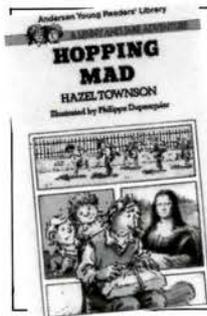
HAZEL TOWNSON at ANDERSEN PRESS

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Guardian
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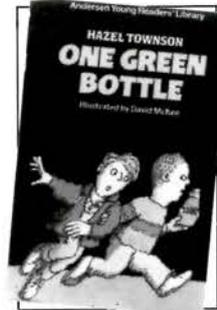


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THREE CHEERS FOR HAZEL TOWNSON!

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Cover story

Our cover illustration this month is by Shirley Hughes from **The Big Alfie Out of Doors Storybook** (see her article on page 4), published by Bodley Head (0 370 31516 2) at £8.99. We thank them for their help in reproducing an illustration from the book.



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the children's book magazine

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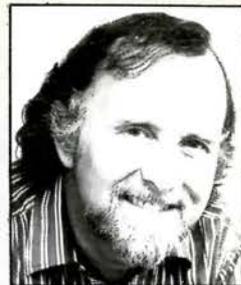
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EDITOR'S PAGE



One of the most remarked-upon articles we've ever carried was Michael Foreman's 'Birth of a Book' in our May 1990 issue (BfK 62). It described the roundabout route by which he reached **One World**, the 'green' picture book he both wrote and illustrated. 'Can't we have more insider-stuff like that?' readers asked. 'It's fascinating!'

So it is. Not all insiders are as clear-eyed about their own creative processes as Michael Foreman, though. And some shrink from examining them too closely for fear of being stopped in their tracks. That's why we were delighted when Shirley Hughes accepted BfK's invitation to ruminate on the origins of her much loved characters Alfie



and Annie Rose (see our front cover). Were they *thought-up* or *drawn-up*? What goes through an illustrator's head as the pictures – and in this case the words as well – take shape on the page? Overleaf is Shirley's report, called 'A Little Character Building', accompanied by some early artwork 'roughs' of a kind most of us would want to frame and hang on a wall instantly.

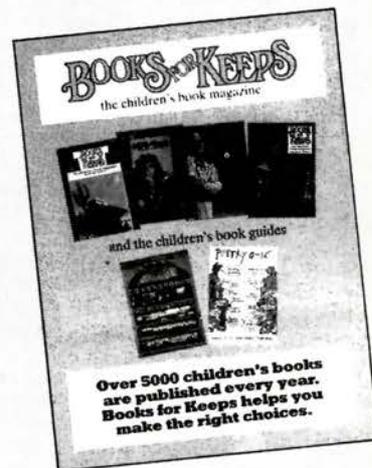
On page 19, Stan Cullimore's 'Writer Reply' also tackles the question of origins – namely, of Henrietta the Hippo who was responsible for converting her creator from a popstar into a children's author. A smart career-move? Well, Stan seems to think so. See 'From Housemartins to Henrietta' for his explanation. Who knows, Henrietta may soon be as well-known as Lenny and Jake, that daffily delinquent duo made popular by the subject of this issue's Authorgraph, Hazel Townson. When we checked with some schools and libraries recently about the authors and illustrators they most wanted us to cover, Hazel was near the top of the list. No surprise, perhaps, given her tireless, nationwide programme of author visits where she promotes the interests of reluctant readers in particular. Especially when they're illustrated by Philippe Dupasquier, Hazel's droll, accessible stories are a major lure for youngsters who normally seek their fun outside reading. See page 8 for our review of her latest paperback **The Deathwood Letters**.

And see pages 20-21 for evidence of classrooms keen to promote books – the results of the competition we judged jointly with our sponsors **Books For Children** in which children were challenged to produce their own double-spread of BfK. The colour and flair of the entries made us wonder if we aren't a little unambitious in settling for an adult readership! Let's hope Books For Keeps For Children becomes an annual event. Warmest congratulations to our overall winner, Year 9 of Villiers High School, Southall, and to Year 2 of Tangmere County Primary School, Tangmere, Sussex, and Year 6 of Delaval Primary School, Newcastle upon Tyne, who were close runners-up.

An accolade, too, for Margery Fisher whose journal **Growing Point** has been a crucial influence on the development of children's books since 1962. How anyone, working

almost entirely alone, can produce a publication of such quality for three successive decades is a mystery . . . till Margery's enthusiasm and energy are experienced at first-hand. On our News Pages, 22-23, Stephanie Nettell reports on the close of an era when the final edition of **Growing Point** is published later this month. As the author of **Matters of Fact** as well as **Intent Upon Reading**, Margery is keenly aware that the writing of non-fiction has imperatives of its own and will recognise at once the sort of problems indentified by Richard Tames in his article 'The Truth, Nothing But the Truth – But Not the Whole Truth?' on pages 16-17. Some things, as Richard observes, don't get any easier with experience.

That's our March issue, then . . . along with ten pages of reviews, of course, which continue to be the bulk and the backbone of our magazine. In the end, what matters most to BfK is the promotion of children's reading 'for pleasure and profit' using 'profit' in a sense that goes beyond the merely economic, I hasten to add. Mind you, profit in its narrower sense does bring an advantage or two. Enabling us to expand, for instance. So take a look at our promotion leaflet at the foot of this page which you may already have seen as part of a nationwide mailing by Puffin (bless 'em!). We've got our fingers crossed that it won't just sustain the renewal of subscriptions but actually *increase* them. Why, if our present readers could each add just one more subscription to their own, we'd DOUBLE our resources and coverage – not just through the magazine but through 'special' enterprises like out Poetry and Green Guides, too. An impossible dream? Probably. But feel free to surprise us . . .



If you would like a few copies of this leaflet to give out to friends, colleagues, students or customers, just phone or write to us at BfK and we'll send some on by return. Speaking of special BfK enterprises, I'll be taking a break from the Editor's chair for a couple of issues in order to concentrate on our latest one. More of this in September when I return. In the meantime, you'll be in the capable hands of Richard Hill. Best wishes,

Chris

A Little Character Building

Shirley Hughes reflects on the growth of Alfie and Annie Rose
– in her head and at the end of her brush.

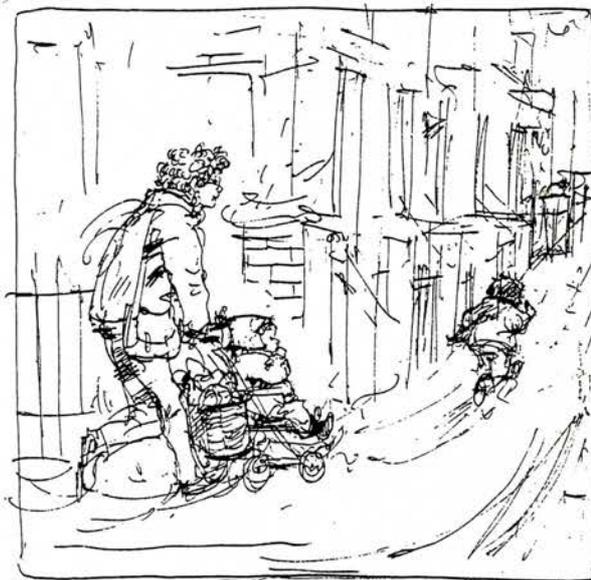
Alfie first made his appearance as a felt pen drawing, done very rapidly. He was running up the street ahead of his mum who came trundling behind with the shopping and the baby in the buggy. A lot had happened, mostly in my head, before I got him to this stage, but it was something of a turning point to see him there on the page. The story *Alfie Gets In First* was already thought out and written. The idea was to tell a simple tale turning on an event which is a common enough experience in family life but is nevertheless of dramatic and memorable importance to a four-year-old – like slamming the door and getting shut in. When I was making that first drawing I was concentrating hard on his concentration – that mighty, breathless, pink-faced, all-out effort with which children of this age give all of themselves to the matter in hand. And the utter dismay which sometimes ensues when things go wrong. Alfie's character crystallised at that moment of my drawing him and developed from there.

The rough dummy is the essence of the book. The pattern, which is made up by disposing the blocks of text and pictures so that they work in conjunction, emerges slowly. I use very smooth thin drawing paper which I can just see through, so that I can place one idea for a spread over another and compare them. At this stage I draw in pencil and go over it with felt pen which gives a good clear photocopy. Unfettered by the tensions which are imposed when you are doing the finished artwork – an altogether slower and more meticulous process – you are drawing very unself-consciously, concentrating entirely on the storyline and the characters. The resulting sketches, not surprisingly, have a vitality and economy of gesture and expression which it is quite hard to reproduce again when it comes to the finished work.

That stage comes later, sometime after six months or a year. Now colour is one of the main considerations. With *The Big Alfie Out of Doors Storybook* I was aiming to expand the frontiers of Alfie's life, starting with the minutiae of his urban back garden – leaves, bits of grass, seedpods and stones – and working outwards to the wide horizons, the countryside around Grandma's house, the moon, the sea and the sky. This required many shifts of perspective. I wanted the colour range to express sunny autumn days, or spring or high summer. There had to be a high degree of freedom in the brushwork.

With colour I work tonally – that is to try to achieve a three-dimensional quality of depth, to open up the page so that the reader can enter the scene, perhaps fantasise about what is not shown. The colour washes – I use gouache colour which is similar to water colour but with a bit more body – go on in layers, solidifying towards the foreground. The underlying pencil drawing which holds the story and the identification of character, disappears under these layers but is brought back again at the finishing stage with very fine brushes. It is all too easy to overwork this process at any stage and so lose the freshness and spontaneity.

Most years when I go on holiday I make a sort of picture diary. I am an absolute sucker for a romantic prospect. One of my favourite things in the world is to sit under a tree in an Italian garden with a sketchbook on my lap and perhaps a glass of chianti at hand and attempt to record dappled shade, geraniums rioting in pots, olive trees and glimpse of an ochre-coloured shuttered house beyond. I had just returned from such a trip when, with all the fine-tuning and editorial discussion which happens at the rough dummy stage



(4)

MUM, ANNIE ROSE and Alfie from the rough dummy of 'ALFIE GETS IN FIRST' The first sketcher I made of the trio.



FIRST ROUGH OF ALFIE [DONE FOR THE DUMMY OF 'ALFIE GETS IN FIRST']

behind me, I plunged into the *Alfie Out of Doors* artwork. Of course, the English light is quite different, full of subtle nuances, hazier, more diffused. But just as lyrically beautiful, if not more so. I think that the freedom I gained from wallowing and splashing about with colour in my sketchbook fed through into the narrative. I certainly felt a great sense of release.

When I am working on a book I am running on two tracks – controlling the technique (or trying to) and at the same time inhabiting my characters. Even very small readers can develop a strong loyalty to fictional characters once they have taken them to heart. I learned that through reading to my own children. I suppose I knew it already from old favourites like Milly Molly Mandy, Josephine and her Dolls and later the William books. I vastly preferred these homely stories to unnerving and sometimes terrifying fairy tales and legends. I wanted to live in their world, one which was close enough to my own to feel that it might be just around the corner. The illustrations were particularly fascinating and still give me pleasure.

It is up to us authors/illustrators to invent characters who inspire this kind of loyalty . . . not quite as easy as it might seem. To rely on merely repeating a formula



Shop



In Alfie's back garden there was a big bush which sometimes had orange berries on it. You could lift up a curtain of leaves and walk inside. It was a nice private place to play.

One afternoon Mum gave Alfie a long cardboard carton to do what he liked with. So he took it into the bush and put it upside down on the inside. It made a good counter for a shop.



is the kiss of death. It's important to build on detail, to beguile the reader with reassuring familiarity but at the same time tell him or her something new with each story, to reveal just a little bit more about this imaginary, but, we hope, very 'real' world. I hold a picture of Alfie's life in my head, his house, his street, his friends and relations, a whole visual jigsaw of data which I draw from. I may not have put it all in yet. But I go on adding to it because I know I will use it one day. I wander about with a sketchbook observing real places. But in the end, of course, you go home and make it all up.

One of the nicest things that happened to me recently was when a young Dad told me how strongly he had been affected by the picture of a little back garden in *Alfie Gives a Hand*. I took him right back, he said. He wanted to know where the setting was. Surely Bedford in the old days? South London perhaps? Similar observations from adults give me great joy and encouragement because I sense that they are reviving pleasurable memories of their own early life while reading to their children.

Will Alfie and his little sister Annie Rose ever grow up, become older children, teenagers even? I doubt it. Like all fictional children they will remain perennially fixed in time, give or take a year or so. It is a sobering thought that Lucy and Tom, had they marched with real time, would now be in their mid-thirties. This makes me very much a grandmother in fictional terms as well as in real life – both roles I am enjoying enormously. Alfie and Annie Rose flesh out and develop every time I draw them. Certainly I had no idea that Annie Rose would emerge as quite such a forceful and single-minded character in her own right. No doubt, as one of the rising generation, she will pester me for a book in which she has the starring role. But that, as they say, is another story. ■

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



Jessica

Kevin Henkes, Picture Puffin (Nov 91), 0 14 054453 4, £3.50

Ruthie doesn't have a pet, or a brother or a sister but she does have an imaginary friend called Jessica. Kevin Henkes has created a delightful heroine and combines an excellent, highly pertinent storyline with expressive illustrations and clever use of lettering, all set in a tight yet highly appropriate and stylish design. When one of my children reviewed it as being a really 'neat' book, it seemed a very accurate description. JS

How's School, Lizzie?

Anne Rooke, ill. Rachel Stevens, Young Puffin (Nov 91), 0 14 034496 9, £2.99

A super collection of stories to use with children starting or just about to go to school. The ups and downs, confusions and fun of the first year are chronicled sensitively and with no patronising overtones. JS

Hairy Maclary's Rumpus at the Vet

Lynley Dodd, Picture Puffin (Nov 91), 0 14 054240 X, £3.50

As an adult I cringe at the thought of yet more of the chaos and mess that somehow dogs (!) Hairy Maclary, but the child in me falls upon it with just as much excitement as everyone in the class. Here Lynley Dodd's irresistible scruffy dog has to visit the vet and as usual he never intends to create difficulties and is always the innocent victim of circumstance, but... JS

Eddie and Teddy

Gus Clarke, Little Mammoth (Nov 91), 0 7497 0491 8, £2.99

Some books work with every child and every group you try

them out on - this is one of them. Eddie and Teddy are inseparable. They meet all the pre-school milestones together, but then Eddie goes to Big School. He copes reasonably well with the parting, but Teddy is impossibly badly behaved at home. This is a really good read-aloud and the added twist at the end is guaranteed to result in grins all round. JS

Are You Asleep, Rabbit?

Alison Campbell and Julia Barton, ill. Gill Scriven, Picture Lions (Oct 91), 0 00 664156 3, £2.99

It's snowing and Donald decides it's too cold for Rabbit to stay outside in her hutch for the night. Careful preparations still leave him worried about her and as the night progresses his visits to the kitchen become more and more frequent until both end up snuggled together in a makeshift bed under the kitchen table. This is a simple, comfortably predictable story, charmingly illustrated, which leaves everyone feeling really satisfied. JS

Doodle Dog

Frank Rodgers, Little Mammoth (Nov 91), 0 7497 0724 0, £2.99

Living in a flat Sam couldn't have a dog of his own, but the picture his mother drew for him was very special. He took it to bed with him and in his imagination Sam and the Doodle Dog visit his toy farm. An enchanting story with gentle illustrations that invite the audience to suspend disbelief and carry on with the illusion. JS

If I had a pig
0 333 54461 7

If I had a sheep
0 333 54460 9

Mick Inkpen, Picturemac (Nov 91), £3.50 each

Two funny books for small children about a boy and a girl



who imagine they've been sent a pig and a sheep. The little girl suggests she and her sheep could chase leaves, be a pop group, have an ice cream or dress up as pirates and princesses, while the boy decides that he and his pig might bake a cake, paint pictures, have fights and read a story, etc. Truly delightful. MS

Under Sammy's Bed

Odette Elliott, ill. Amanda Welch, Picture Puffin (Nov 91), 0 14 054186 1, £3.50

Sammy is the resourceful youngest child in his family. When he's not included in outings or activities with everyone else, he imagines his own entertainment under his bed! But when the pet hamster is lost, Sammy really finds it under his bed. A story which will help children see each other's point of view, and ideal for the youngest member of any household. MS

Witch, Witch, Come to My Party

Arden Druce, ill. Pat Ludlow, Child's Play (Nov 91), 0 85953 1, £2.95



'Come to my party' is a theme always running through young children so this book is going to be topical. However, the pictures of the witch and the goblin are really rather frightening, as is the baboon, the ghost and the snake. In the light of recent alarm over child abuse and black magic, I think we adults must be especially careful in our choice of material for children and so I would hesitate to recommend this book. MS

Goodnight, Jessie!

0 7500 0849 0

Hurry Up, Jessie!

0 7500 0849 0

Harriet Ziefert and Mavis Smith, Simon & Schuster (Oct 91), £3.50 each

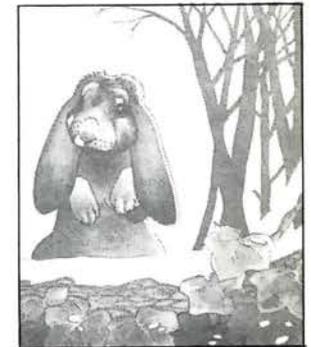
Two excellent books for 3-5 year-olds about times when children delay things their parents would like them to do. The 'going to bed' scenario is cheerfully portrayed as Jessie gathers all she needs before succumbing to her mother's wishes - it's a story we all recognise. Similarly in the second title, Jessie takes a long time to gather things for the beach as her mother grows impatient in the car.

In both books anticipating becomes fun as the hole-in-the-page gives a clue about what is coming next. Enjoyable for both adults and children. MS

Loppylugs

Abigail Pizer, Picturemac (Dec 91), 0 333 54165 0, £3.50

A picture book which tells the tale of a pet rabbit who escapes from his hutch and goes to find out what wild rabbits are like.



He meets with adventure in the outside world but his long ears don't make life easy for him, so he decides to return home. The wintry illustrations are quite lovely and there's much to enjoy in this simple story. MS

The Trouble with Babies

Angie Sage and Chris Sage, Picture Puffin (Dec 91), 0 14 050909 7, £3.50

It is hard for a big sister or brother to have a new baby in the house and this book may very well help. Each page describes a different 'trouble' and then, almost at the end, we're told, 'But sometimes

babies can be *great* . . . they giggle when you play with them and when you tickle their toes.' Nothing like a positive note to help with a difficult problem – the pictures will help, too! MS

Meg and Jack Are Moving

0 00 664044 3

Meg and Jack Make Friends

0 00 664001 X

Paul Dowling, Picture Lions (Nov 91), £2.99 each

Grown-ups, caught in the flurry of moving house, may not always remember that

children get anxious about what is going to happen next. Such a time can be very worrying if you're small – but, with these two story picture books, help is at hand. The whole scenario from the sale of the house right through to making new friends, and all the business of packing and unpacking in between, is told in a bright, breezy and humorous form for the enjoyment of both adults and children. Ideal for 3-5s who find themselves in this situation. MS

Chicken Soup with Rice

0 00 664104 0

One Was Johnny

0 00 664105 9

Alligators All Round

0 00 664106 7

Pierre: A Cautionary Tale

0 00 664103 2

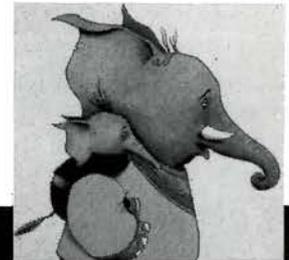
Maurice Sendak, Picture Lions (Nov 91), £1.50 each

A modest but deceptively spacious quartet, consisting of a book of months, a forward and backward counting rhyme, an alligator alphabet and a cautionary tale in verse, all presented in a quaint miniature format. Sendak's drawings and text are admirably economical, conveying narrative richness in a few deft lines. The books are attractive, robustly constructed and would fit snugly into a toddler's pocket. GH

A Piece of Cake

Jill Murphy, Walker (Oct 91), 0 7445 2016 9, £3.99

Another excellent book from Jill Murphy. Mummy elephant decides she's too fat and puts her whole family through a diet and fitness regime. None of them likes it much and when a cake arrives from Grandma that does it . . . Definitely fun, up-to-date and recommended for all slimming Mums and their little ones. MS



Infant/Junior

Earl's Too Cool for Me

Leah Komaiko, ill. Laura Cornell, Picture Puffin (Dec 91), 0 14 054211 6, £3.50

This is an interesting book that examines the developing relationship between two boys through the eyes of the less confident child. It's one of those American publications that doesn't cross the Atlantic easily – the style and changes of pace which worked so well for the same team in *Annie Banannie* are not as accessible in this title. The zany Earl wasn't totally acceptable to my children, but they did enjoy the contrast between the two characters and the book more than earned its place on our shelves because of the discussion it provoked. JS

But you promised!

Bel Mooney, ill. Margaret Chamberlain, Mammoth (Nov 91), 0 7497 0636 8, £2.50



Bel Mooney's formula triumphs again. Kitty is a heroine every child will identify with and over whom every parent must surely chuckle. She personifies all that is most maddening about an infant, but also all that is most lovable. It's a shame the book has such a cheap feel about it. Mammoth must know how popular it's going to be and it certainly won't survive long in my class judging by the waiting list! JS

The Puffin Book of Fabulous Fables

Ed. Mark Cohen, Puffin (Dec 91), 0 14 034696 1, £2.50

A useful book containing 42 pithy little tales, with not a wasted word in any of them. Just over a third come from Aesop; the rest are drawn from a variety of traditions and a handful of individuals. Most of the major vices are admonished in these enjoyable retellings, which come in helpings small enough to dish out at a moment's notice: the moment a crime is committed, for example.

Handy to have at your elbow for a quick, reliable story and a good way of introducing children to an area of oral tradition. GH

Sophie's Tom

Dick King-Smith, ill. David Parkins, Walker (Oct 91), 0 7445 2096 7, £2.99



The weeks following Sophie's fifth birthday are very eventful. She starts school, pursues her ambition to be a lady farmer and contrives to adopt the stray cat who showed up at her unwelcoming house on Christmas Day. She also catches chicken pox and has her first taste of playground strife. These are mundane

events, but they're related with such warmth, clarity and enforced humour that the book wraps the happy reader in a glow of quiet enjoyment.

The doughty little heroine is a wonderful creation, and David Parkins' illustrations capture her, and the rest of her family, beautifully. GH

Condensed Animals

Spike Milligan, ill. Kathryn Lamb, Puffin (Dec 91), 0 14 034822 0, £2.99

Spike Milligan wrote this book for all readers who do not like rambling poems – though if you want a long rambling poem he says you can read the whole book in one go. It consists of 109 meditations on animals, each of which, in a few lines of minimalist spareness, expresses a thoroughly silly sentiment on the creature in question:

*Bluebottle bluebottle
You're a fly I'd like to
throttle* **POETRY**
*Always landing on my food
Goodness gracious you're
so rude!*

Highly enjoyable, and if only it were given the big book treatment it would provide splendid first reading experience for beginners. GH

Ruby and the Dragon

Gareth Owen, ill. Bob Wilson, Picture Lions (Dec 91), 0 00 664002 8, £2.99

Ruby didn't want to be the dragon in the school play but, as the costume fitted perfectly and she had the loudest voice, Miss Williams thought she should. Once inside the costume, Ruby warms to her role and puts on a star performance for the opening night, even though she gets lost and doesn't keep to the script.

A school story told in strip cartoon style, although there are several spreads where captions are also provided. These tend to disrupt the pace and continuity of the story as the reader is unsure whether the captions or the pictures should be read first. Nevertheless, many juniors will be suitably entertained. JB

You're in the Juniors Now

Margaret Joy, Faber (Jan 92), 0 571 16461 7, £2.99

Twelve short stories, one for each month, chronicle the events of a class of Year 3 children, Foxy and his friends. At first they long to be back in the safe security of their last infant class, but it isn't long before they begin to take delight in the things their new teacher has to offer.

The author accurately and sensitively recounts the feelings most children have when moving from infant to junior school; however, the class is obviously a multi-ethnic one – indeed Foxy's best friend is Imran – yet none of the events described seems to take account of this. A pity, it would stop me using it with my seven-year-olds. JB

The Dog with the Awful Laugh

Toni Goffe, Walker (Nov 91), 0 7445 2088 6, £3.99

The characters from four nursery rhymes, 'Old King Cole', 'Ride a Cock Horse', 'Ding Dong Bell' and 'Hey Diddle Diddle', get together in this romp of a book.

Old King Cole loses his fiddlers three to the fine lady on a white horse and is anything but merry with the antics of the cat and his fiddle or the little dog. It's this pair, though, who unscramble

things and restore the king's good humour. Children will need to be familiar with the traditional rhymes to get full enjoyment from this large format paperback. JB

Clever Cakes and other stories

Michael Rosen, Walker (Oct 91), 0 7445 2097 5, £2.99

Seven stories with appropriately amusing line drawings by Caroline Holden. Each story features a child character who has to use his or her wits to get out of trouble with such adversaries as the Devil-dog and Gobbleguts the giant. As well as being perfect for reading aloud, Rosen's lively, direct style is highly accessible to confident solo readers who will no doubt want to relish these gems for themselves. JB

Tiger and Me

Kaye Umansky, ill. Susie Jenkin-Pearce, Red Fox (Nov 91), 0 09 972210 0, £3.99

Unsentimental, highly moral (and none the worse for it) story of a little girl who decides to do something about the keeping of tigers in captivity. It's given additional punch by being written in lively verse which manages to be simple in style and complex in content. The message is put over clearly enough for very young children, but with plenty for older ones to discuss. Is it true for instance, that:

*Wrongs can be righted
If you are determined.*

If not, why not? And what evidence, one way or the other, can you provide? Lots to think about, high quality writing and charming artwork. LW

The Puppy Who Wanted a Boy

Jane Thayer, ill. Lisa McCue, Hippo (Oct 91), 0 590 76552 3, £2.25

Well, you'd have to be a very mean and horrid person indeed not to fall for this happy tale. Despite the dangers, the author has stayed firmly on the right side of sentimentality and sickliness in the story of Petey the puppy who wanted a boy to look after and whose search ends in an orphanage at Christmas. That it works so well is due to the straightforward and simple storytelling, with a nice seasoning of humour, and the delightful depiction of Petey in the illustrations. He's a very realistic and lively puppy with a great deal of strength of character. We'd like some more stories about him, please! LW

The Collins Book of Stories for Four-Year-Olds

0 00 673228 3

Stories for Five-Year-Olds

0 00 673229 1

Stories for Six-Year-Olds

0 00 673230 5

Comp. Julia Eccleshare, Young Lions (Dec 91), £2.50 each

Three excellent anthologies to add to any collection. Despite the rather arbitrary divisions by age, they offer any child within the Infant age range a selection of stories which will last throughout their early years of literacy. The stories are chosen from a wide range of cultures and styles, very few are familiar and all have

something intelligent to offer both reader and listener. Because of this depth of ideas, those from the **Five-Year-Old** collection will still be worthwhile for children to read for themselves at an older age, and many of the **Six-Year-Old** stories could well be listened to by a younger child. It's a pity the age label will inhibit flexibility... it takes a brave six-year-old to be seen reading a book labelled so obviously for four-year-olds. Parents, too, might miss the opportunity provided for young fluent readers to read these themselves, because of the silly 'Read Aloud' label imposed by the publisher. Why risk circumscribing books, especially ones as good as these? LW

The Winter Hedgehog

Ann and Reg Cartwright, Red Fox (Nov 91), 0 09 980940 0, £3.99

The format, large with high quality colour and paper, and



the excellent illustrations make this a very attractive book. The story I'm less sure about. It appears to be a nature story – the pictures depict wild animals in natural habitats and the smallest hedgehog is plainly a hedgehog, not an imitation child, doing hedgehog things. Because of this air of realism a young reader may be led to believe that a baby hedgehog could survive winter out of hibernation in snow and ice with only one carrot to eat. There's an uneasy mix of fact and fiction which worries me rather. It would, however, be worth discussing this with children and thereby preventing misunderstanding. LW

Octavia Warms Up

0 85953 786 2

Walter Worm's Good Turn

0 85953 785 4

Barbara Beak, ill. Lynne Farmer, Child's Play (Nov 91), £1.25 each

These two books have a beguiling air of battiness about them. Walter the Worm goes camping with the Worm Scouts and Octavia the Octopus goes to ballet classes. The joke is that both characters are knitted – the instructions for knitting them are included. So are instructions for knitting Walter the Worm a Scout neckerchief, woggle and sleeping bag and for making Octavia the Octopus a scarf, legwarmers and headband (I can't believe I'm writing this!).

Both books would appeal to any new knitter longing for something simple and jolly to make and I think they're wonderful... LW

Junior/Middle

The Enchanter's Daughter

Antonia Barber, ill. Errol Le Cain, Red Fox (Sept 91), 0 09 975230 1, £3.99

While the Enchanter searches for the secret of eternal life, his daughter searches for her past and her identity. She magically re-enacts the tales of her origin, told by her father, and in so doing attempts a final escape from the fictions which imprison her.

Here is a story whose simple telling invites the unfolding of complexities. The illustrations evoke a crepuscular world haunted by bright visions. Highly recommended as a straightforward read-aloud and as a beautiful book for children to explore more deeply on their own. GH

The Man Who Wanted to Live Forever

Retold by Selina Hastings, ill. Reg Cartwright, Walker (Aug 91), 0 7445 2077 0, £3.99

Reg Cartwright's illustrative style has a timelessness and other world quality which is admirably well-suited to this retelling of the classic folk legend of a young man's search for immortality. There are powerful ideas here and a chilling climax. A thought-provoking book which offers much to readers of seven and over. JB

The Deathwood Letters

Hazel Townson, Red Fox (Nov 91), 0 09 983500 2, £2.50

A very cleverly constructed

thriller about a flirtation between the son of a wealthy parliamentarian and a schoolgirl from a villainous background. Frances writes Damien an admiring letter after he rescues a dog from a well. When he replies their friendship begins to flourish, but soon Frances' thuggish brother begins to take an interest. The tale is told entirely through the interchange of letters. This is a very effective device, which should fascinate older children and encourage lively speculation about the implicit events evolving in parallel. GH

Thumbelina

James Riordan, ill. Wayne Anderson, Red Fox (Nov 91), 0 09 968840 9, £3.99

Author and artist pull no punches in this exquisite book.



Riordan gives another classic retelling of the Andersen tale. There are no concessions made in the storyline, language or the vivid, sometimes shocking, illustrations. It's a powerful and haunting book which challenges us. JS

Dr Jekyll and Mr Hollins

Willis Hall, Young Lions (Oct 91), 0 00 674060 X, £2.75

The Hollins family's weekend break takes a peculiar turn when Mr Hollins presents his bad back to a doctor descended from Stevenson's famous physician. He even has the prescription for the potion to hand, which of course gets mixed up with the one for Mr Hollins' embrocation...

A very promising idea, somewhat stalled by a shuffling pace and some cardboard characters. GH

Henry Hobbs, Alien

Kathryn Cave, Puffin (Dec 91), 0 14 034317 2, £2.50

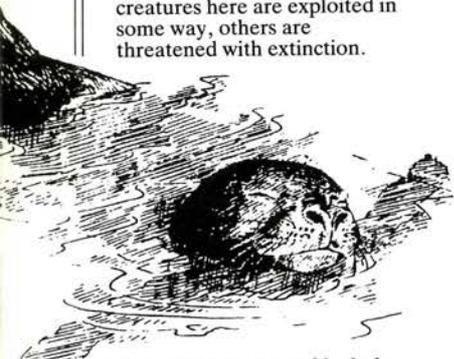
A book about boredom in outer space. Henry lives on Omicron, the dulllest planet in the cosmos. He's forced to flee when his brother comes on the warpath, but the only place to hide is on a visiting spaceship as a stowaway. He then discovers that the three-man crew have eluded the stunning tedium of interplanetary travel by going insane in sundry ways...

An entertaining comedy, told in a sadsacky deadpan style, which should go down well with fluent readers of sci-fi in search of an unusual angle. GH

Headlines from the Jungle

Ed. Anne Harvey and Virginia McKenna, Puffin (Nov 91), 0 14 034214 1, £2.99

A fine and thought-provoking collection of poems featuring wild animals, though not all are in the wild. Many of the creatures here are exploited in some way, others are threatened with extinction.



The poets represented include Wordsworth, Ted Hughes, Elizabeth Jennings, Eleanor Farjeon, Maya Angelou, Grace Nichols and Carl Sandburg, thus ranging over a variety of cultures and a wide timespan.

This excellent book deserves a very large readership. JB

The Dream Thing

Judy Allen, Walker (Nov 91), 0 7445 2058 4, £2.99

Jen, half-gypsy, is the butt of jokes and taunts by other

pupils at school. When gypsies arrive and set up camp in neighbouring wasteland, she is troubled by a disturbing vision of a malevolent spiky creature. At first she's convinced the gypsies have conjured up the 'dream thing', but eventually realises the creature is a manifestation of her own fear and hatred of the gypsies. It's somewhat over-schematised, the fantasy elements more strongly drawn than the real-life happenings, but is an imaginative portrayal of insecurity and prejudice. LN

Hook, Line and Stinker/A Fishy Tale

Robin Kingsland, 0 330 31993 0

The Magic Boomerang/The Magic Present

Scoular Anderson, 0 330 31980 9

Young Piper (Nov 91), £2.99 each

Two new titles in the 'Flipper' series (two stories back to back in one book, each pair being linked).

From Robin Kingsland we get a human and a fish-eye view of a fishing contest. Below the water Brian challenges Carlos, a piranha, to see who can eat most bait without getting caught, while on the bank tricky Cecil tries to beat his cup-winning Aunty.

The Magic Boomerang is created by apprentice Max when he tricks TV addict Wizard Bungli into handing over his book of spells. Its power to fetch and carry are more than Max bargains for, though it does cure Bungli of his telly watching before becoming **The Magic Present** which Aunt Ethel gives to the MacWilliam family in England when she visits.

Certainly not the best in the series by any means but, with their appealing format of text and integrated pictures, they could find fans among those less enthusiastic about reading. JB

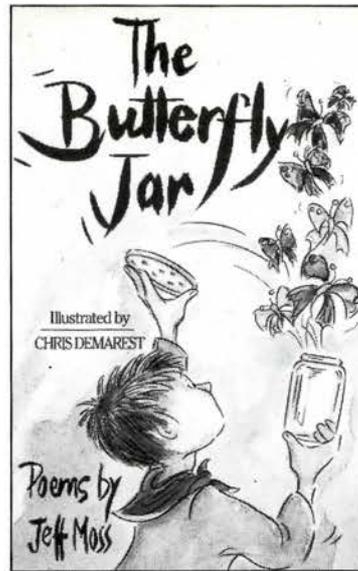
The Butterfly Jar

Jeff Moss, ill. Chris Demarest, Piper (Dec 91), 0 330 31475 0, £4.99

Hilarious poems that play with everyday spoken words and events. Far from humdrum, each poem manipulates the familiar through gentle amusement to the gloriously funny.

'The Ice-cream Pain' would be a smile-producing diagnosis from any Ear, Nose and Throat clinic. 'Things I'm not Good at' provided an exciting stimulus for poetry writing with my Y6s - I hadn't realised their excuses could be so varied or original.

Hidden, lurking, is the poem with the longest title ever: 'What happened the night Grandma said "I'm so happy being here with you that I'm



afraid a train is going to run right through the middle of the house and ruin everything'. It also has the shortest of last verses! PH

Rough and Tumble

Ed. Anne Wood and George English, Puffin (Nov 91), 0 14 032890 4, £2.50

The ten stories in this collection all feature very naughty children, five boys and five girls. There's Emil - who gets his head stuck in a soup tureen, Little Alpesh - who manages to destroy a multi-storey car park with his amazing conker, and Marmalade Atkins - who takes her donkey to the Ritz Hotel, to name just three. A number of the 'stories' are in fact episodes from novels, such as **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory** and Chris Powling's **The Conker as Hard as a Diamond** - a great favourite with young juniors.

With authors such as Dick King-Smith, Gene Kemp, Astrid Lindgren and Andrew Davies included, this is great fun in its own right. Ideal for both reading aloud and solo reading, as well as being the possible starting point for further exploration of work by the chosen writers. A number of poems, in keeping with the theme (some by George English himself), are interspersed among the stories. JB

The Lost City of Belfast

Shaun Traynor, Poolbeg (Nov 91), 1 85371 164 0, £3.50

Inspired to be an archeologist by Mr Redman, her teacher, Kate Price digs in her garden and so begins her 'time-climbing' adventure up and down the steps of Irish history. In a contrived and simplified way, it all begins to make a bit of sense and throws light on the present difficulties in Ulster. As such it's worth putting a copy in the hands of interested pupils. DB

The Other Side of the Island

Marjorie Quarton, Poolbeg (Nov 91), 1 85371 161 6, £3.50

Tina Brown leaves Dublin with her mother and a group of craftswomen to spend the summer on a remote island in the west of Ireland. Left to her own devices, she meets an elderly woman, Mrs Flynn, who relates tales of island life through the century. The potential interest and charm of the setting fail to compensate for flat characterisation and a shapeless main plot, to which the old lady's disconnected and inconsequential stories add little but padding. LN

Hugo and the Sunshine Girl

Eilís Ní Dhuibhne, Poolbeg (Nov 91), 1 85371 160 8, £3.50

Prince Hugo's up and down adventures when he leaves home to seek his fortune and then to complete a task, which incidentally brings him a bride, are chock-a-block with the strange and mysterious. The traditional imprint of the power and magic of the number '3' provides a sense of the oral tradition in this good-humoured, compelling look at Irish folklore. I imagine it would serialise well and be eagerly received in the junior classroom. DB

Stories for Children

Oscar Wilde, ill. P J Lynch, Simon & Schuster (Oct 91), 0 7500 0999 3, £6.99

The six tales here present a vivid spectrum of Wilde's storytelling powers: the lachrymose heartstring strumming of 'The Selfish Giant' and 'The Happy Prince'; the caustic vanity savaging of 'The Devoted Friend' and 'The Remarkable Rocket'; the grim romantic agonies of 'The Young King' and 'The Nightingale and the Rose'. All are truly powerful and the latter two, in particular, express a variety of anguish more appropriate for older readers.



P J Lynch's pictures fuse striking realism with enchanting strangeness; beautiful illuminations of a very haunting book. GH

Middle/Secondary

Dear Clare my ex best friend

Ursula Jones, Knight
(Aug 91), 0 340 54390 6,
£2.99

Anna Pitts (age 13) frequently feels so moved by the destruction of the planet that she pens her thoughts to world leaders and suggests a reversal of their thinking. Then, as if she doesn't have enough to worry about, there's adolescence and boys!

Shrewdly written with a deftly ironic sub-text, this series of letters to a friend in Australia should prove a great success amongst all youngsters. **DB**

You're Late Dad

Ed. Tony Bradman,
Mammoth (Sept 91),
0 7497 0146 3, £2.50

Ten short stories by an impressive collection of writers – Mark, Magorian, Gower, Nimmo et al – about the relationships between parents and children.

Particularly effective are contributions from Hazel Townson – a boy's attempts to change his mother so she doesn't mind him looking a mess – and a surreal tree story from Jenny Nimmo.

There's a wide range of approaches and storylines here and it's certainly a useful investment for lower school book stocks. **VR**

Castle in the Air

Diana Wynne Jones,
Mammoth (Oct 91),
0 7497 0475 6, £2.99

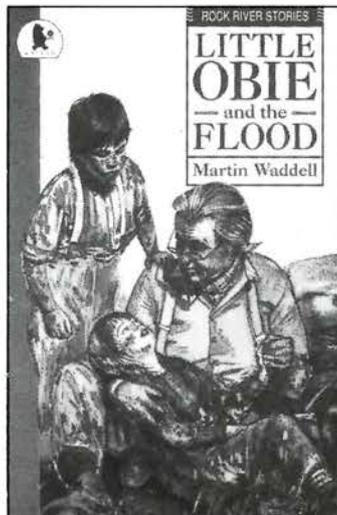
Carpet seller Abdulla's dreams are ordinary enough – a castle, a princess and a lovely garden with bluebells. To realise them he's drawn into an unfamiliar realm of djinns, genies, sorcerers and bandits, each past masters at duplicity. A plot which begins with a slow smoulder soon fizzles and cracks into life as the reader is whizzed on a magic carpet into the stimulating, frantic sequence of events that characterises this author's work. My tester and I loved it. **DB**

Little Obie and the Flood

Martin Waddell, ill.
Elsie Lennox, Walker
(Oct 91), 0 7445 1768 0,
£2.99

Four stories, set in the American West, which deal very sensitively with the crises and disasters in harsh pioneering lives.

Each well-written, self-contained story gives a moving account of Little Obie's perception of the world around him, his friends, family and neighbours. Warmth and



mutual support within the community come over strongly. The plot makes this a possible for older readers who are still finding the technical skills of reading a struggle. **PH**

The Surprising Adventures of Baron Munchausen

Terence Blacker, ill.
William Rushton,
Knight (Nov 91),
0 340 52693 0, £3.99

Strong in the tradition of 'When I was a boy . . .' and 'Did you hear the story about . . .' this is a very funny account of the Baron who from his own 'humble' account has 'driven a wolf carriage through St Petersburg, been scalped by American Indians, visited the Moon (twice), been hauled through the centre of the Earth by a god, romped with a polar bear' and so on and so on.

One of the world's most spectacular adventurers, the Baron's human exploits are retold in his own zany style. Every tall story left me gasping with incredulity and giggling insanely at the irrepressible fun of it all. **PH**

To Hell with Dying

Alice Walker, ill.
Catherine Deeter,
Hodder & Stoughton
(Nov 91), 0 340 53232 7,
£4.99

'He was like a piece of rare and delicate china which was always being saved from breaking and which finally fell.'

This unusual picture book for older readers presents a criss-cross of themes like love, death, old-age and fond memory, told with great gentleness, well reflected in the illustrations which focus largely on expressive faces and tender gestures.

In the text there's a strong



Tiger's Railway

William Mayne, Walker
(Nov 91), 0 7445 2099 1,
£2.99

A joy to read and saunter through – a series of episodes in the life of Tiger Malik, a superintendent of railways in an east European country. Tiger must make his trains run on time, even on a non-existent line, and continually fights his urge to steal trains left unattended in his area. It's part idyll – the romance of the trains, with a wonderful group of characters playing out lovingly detailed eccentricities. Great fun and a pleasure to read aloud. **AJ**

The Alchemist's Cat

Robin Jarvis, Sprint
(Oct 91), 0 7500 0890 3,
£4.50

Robin Jarvis is enjoying mining this area of fiction with powerful hocus-pocus wizardry set here in roughly believable seventeenth-century London, with Plague and Great Fire as plot extras. There are key parts for the cats and some fire and brimstone scenes of magic warfare. Stirring stuff, sustained admirably with yet more to come. **AJ**

The Flight of the Earls

Michael Mullen,
Children's Poolbeg
(Nov 91), 1 85371 146 2,
£3.99

This recreates Ireland in the early part of the seventeenth century. We begin with the old Earl of Tyrone dying in Rome and then follow the events which have led to his exile. There's a mist of sadness hanging over it all, where grand honourable men are defeated by mean-spirited lawyers, and a rich past and culture are lost. It has scenes of drama, but in the main this is an elegy. It's well-written and though it probably won't be widely read those who persevere will be fascinated by its story. **AJ**

High Wizardry

Diane Duane, Corgi
(Nov 91), 0 552 52651 7,
£2.99

High tech fantasy. The computer game is exploited with chapter headings making word play from computer jargon and computers themselves occupying a large part in the plot. Here, asking the computer to 'copy' creates a second computer, one planet is a large silicon chip . . . The book runs as part of a sequence and has the feel of television adventures in some of the setting up but, once in the midst of the fantasy, the writer creates very intense scenes of wit-battling. **AJ**

sense of a perceptive adult reflecting on the past with considerable, acceptable insight and wisdom and no condescension. Well worth putting in the hands of young people and demanding a reaction. **DB**

Tom's Amazing Machine Takes a Trip

Gordon Snell, Red Fox
(Nov 91), 0 09 974260 8,
£2.50

Life leans towards the unpredictable when your lap computer acquires a mind of its own! Fortunately Zenda is very user-friendly and helps Tom solve his problems: a bossy Aunt Gertrude, sister Marion's boyfriend and even the thefts from Dad's factory. When Tom and his friends raise money for the school visit to France, Zenda's a marvel, but what about the sinister turn of events on the cross-channel ferry. Can Zenda help again?

Not just for the computer nut. This story bounces along with infectious excitement and enough teacher weaknesses to make it a smash-hit. **PH**

Death Knell

Nicholas Wilde, Lions
(Nov 91), 0 00 674005 7,
£2.99

Tim and Jamie turn detective in this ingenious murder mystery. A sense of eeriness is created through the winter village setting and the local superstition focusing on the church. The book's strengths are plot and atmosphere; unfortunately, characterisation and dialogue are less engaging. The boys' indeterminate age, the faltering exchanges – particularly wooden in the opening chapter – undermine the credibility of events. Nevertheless many readers of 11+ will enjoy this winter's tale. **LN**

Older Readers

This Is Me Speaking

Josephine Poole,
Red Fox (Nov 91),
0 09 974030 3, £2.99

There are many books which take teenage girls trapped in the net of pregnancy as their central theme. This offering is worthy of far more than being added to that considerable list, however. The mainstay of its success is the central character, Elizabeth.

Proud and self-assured, she refuses to accept either firstly that she might be pregnant or, later, that she should have an abortion. The thoughtless rape which led to her pregnancy is allied with the carelessly manipulative way she's treated by her first employers and is contrasted with the peace and harmony she finds in the house of her friend, Archie. His unexpected death is shocking, but rather too obviously an authorial device by which Elizabeth is persuaded to return home.

A must for library or book box – analytical, moving and empathetic. VR

Culture Shock **POETRY**

Ed. Michael Rosen,
Plus (Dec 91),
0 14 034007 6, £2.99

A superb collection; witty, iconoclastic, intelligent and determined not to be dull. The alphabetic arrangement is refreshing after so many theme collections. Attila the stockbroker rubs shoulders with Auden, Fiona Pitt-Kethley with Pope. There's graffiti and quotations, lines to laugh at, lines to ponder over. What a range of writers, ages and styles is woven together – and at this price! It's a pleasure to be able to teach with this, to have it in the classroom or just to have it in your pocket.

There are gems throughout. AJ

The Language of Love

Ed. Anne Harvey, Plus
(Nov 91), 0 14 034626 0,
£3.99



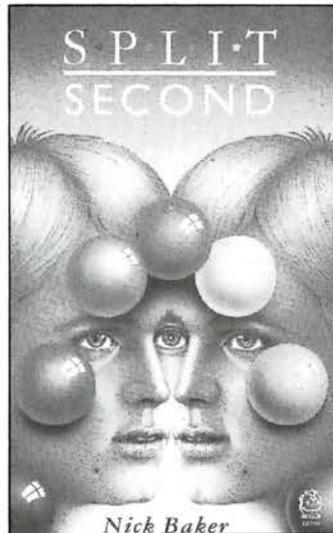
In eight sections spanning first love, in love, out of love, love and marriage, etc., Anne Harvey has amassed an intelligently arranged, wide-reaching collection of verse that takes into its scope other ages and cultures. She's carefully avoided too many of the obvious entries and included some delights that I can't wait to share with my classes. Well recommended for secondary readers and likely to appeal to both sexes. DB

The Friendship and other stories

Mildred D Taylor, Puffin
(Nov 91), 0 14 034615 5,
£2.50

Three short stories that are thought-provoking and conscience-disturbing in their portrayal of black oppression and vulnerability in 1930s Mississippi. Episodes from the author's childhood have been skilfully woven together and show how the everyday innocent events of a loving, warm family life become life threatening if you're black.

Vibrantly written, commonplace events are viewed from rigidly opposing perspectives, that of Southern whites, Northern blacks and the reader. This must be one of the better ways of approaching American social history, racism and Civil Rights – all that and three stories that stand tall as a good read. PH



Split Second

Nick Baker, Lions
(Dec 91), 0 00 674013 8,
£2.99

Gordon Watts discovers that he can clone himself; his late father's experiments with the 'extra dimension effects' of DNA were transferred to his then unborn son. The phenomenon has advantages for Gordon, especially when he and his twin self can successfully juggle the complications of their double life, which encompasses a sensational busking act. Inevitably shadowy strangers lurk in the background with unhealthy interest in Gordon/George's skills.

Nick Baker manages to make the incredible convincing in this fascinating piece of fantasy which I had to read in one sitting. DB

Echoes of War

Robert Westall, Plus
(Nov 91), 0 14 034208 7,
£2.99

The dramatic cover and the publisher's racy comment are misleading. These stories are much more subtle. Westall has very special gifts for reflecting war at a distance – sometimes through memory or the ghostly recreation of past events, sometimes the contemporary is filtered through distance or the child's eyes. There's a hard-edged realism to his writing which anchors the dramatic in the everyday, making his stories compulsive but often uncomfortable reading. There's at least a couple I'd want to share ('Adolf' and 'Zakky'), but the whole collection is worth reading. AJ

A Handful of Stars

Rafik Schami, Plus
(Nov 91), 0 14 034586 8,
£3.50

Adrian Mole with political overtones? Damascus is the setting for this 14-year-old boy's journal; friendship and political unrest the themes. The style is necessarily anecdotal and perhaps it's the translation which gives the prose a stiffness not normally found in writing of this sort.

Both these factors combine to give the book a slow-burning fuse, but one which eventually takes hold. There are insights and observations here which will reward and delight the more able reader in Year 9 and above. VR

On the Edge

Ed. Aidan Chambers,
Pan (Dec 91),
0 330 31983 3, £2.99

So often books which promise chills and thrills turn out to contain two or three good stories surrounded by limp fillers. Not this one. Jan Mark's semi-humorous portrayal of the girl who convinces herself that she's smuggled a terrorist bomb on to a trans-Atlantic flight, Robert Westall's macabre story of revenge, Margaret Mahy's tale of a blind woman whose sharpened senses enable her to outwit a murderer, are excellent. But there isn't one weak story in the book; all are well-crafted and suspenseful, and really will keep teenage (or adult) readers on the edge of their seats. LN

The Year Without Michael

Susan Beth Pfeffer,
Bantam (Nov 91),
0 553 40327 3, £2.99

Jody's 13-year-old brother, Michael, sets off to visit a

friend and is never seen again. The impact of his disappearance on his family is nakedly communicated – the more powerfully for an unsensational approach.

The well-meaning but painful questioning from friends and relatives is a constant re-opening of the wound of grief, and Jody, her sister and their parents react to the stresses and uncertainties in a variety of ways, all self-destructive.

There are no easy answers, no miracle reappearance, yet the book sustains interest in a character who appears for two pages at the very beginning. It gives a bleak and honest picture of the breakdown of a family under extreme stress. It will, sadly, strike many chords in adolescent hearts but will provide the comfort of a trauma re-enacted in print. VR

Dreaming of Larry

Jean Ure, Doubleday
(Nov 91), 0 385 40011 X,
£6.99

15-year-old Judith falls for an older boy, and from then on the plot hinges on will-they-or-won't-they have sex while Judith is Under Age (they don't, but it's a near thing), and on Judith's discovery of a link between her ancestors and Larry's. The relationship isn't brought to life as successfully as Abe's and Marianne's in Jean Ure's 'Thursday' series, but the realistic portrayal of teenage concerns and conversations will appeal to adolescent girls. LN

The Revolutionary's Daughter

Gwen Grant, Mammoth
(Nov 91), 0 7497 0422 5,
£2.99

Set against the miners' strike of 1984, this deals with family upheaval when Violette's mother leaves home to support the strikers, although her 'revolutionary' fervour is little more than a device to create domestic conflict; the issues involved in the industrial dispute are left unexamined. 16-year-old Violette finds it hard to accept her mother's desire to escape from her maternal role and find independence. There's a lot of potential here, but it's marred by the lack of variation in pace, and by the simplistic, often clumsy, style. LN

Reviewers in this issue:

David Bennett, Jill Bennett,
Pam Harwood, George Hunt,
Adrian Jackson,
Linda Newbery, Val Randall,
Judith Sharman, Moira Small
and Liz Waterland.

Authorgraph No. 73

Hazel Townson

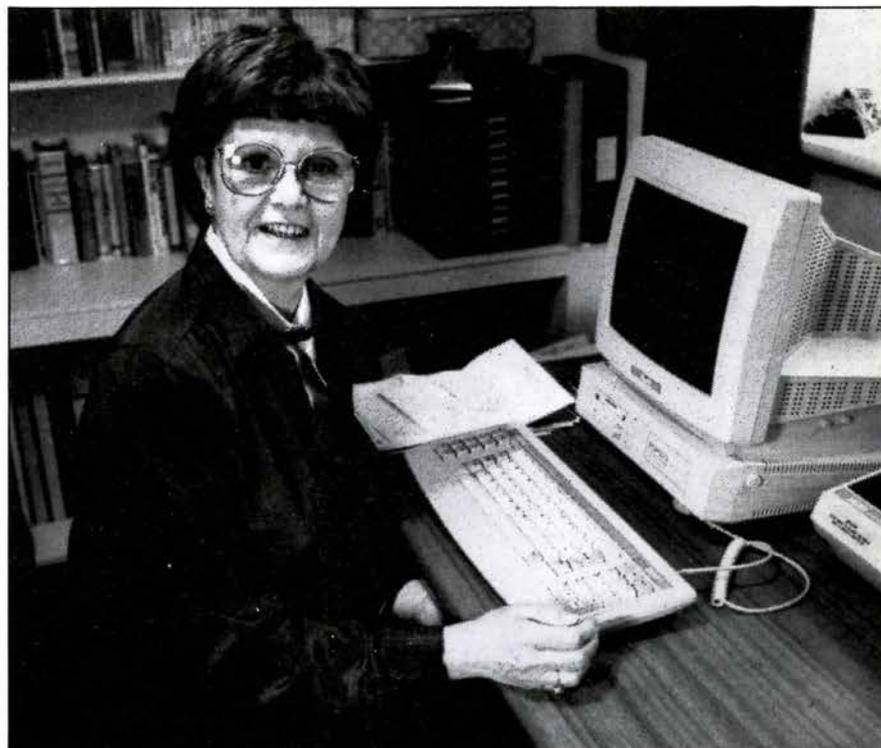
'I simply can't write a serious book. I have tried to write a tear-jerker but gave up – I always end up making it funny.' True, her books are rollicking rough-and-tumble fun, but Hazel Townson herself is quietly spoken and neat to the point of demure, tapping on her word-processor in a wondrously tidy study in a wondrously spick and span bungalow on a new estate in Prestwich.

Even her press-cuttings collection, going back almost 40 years with all her contributions to **Punch**, is a model of efficiency. She looks what I suspect she remains at heart: an organised, well-informed librarian, totally committed to children reading. And although she is hospitably unfazed by interviewers who kick over cups of coffee on her pastel-patterned carpet, being photographed the previous afternoon had been a trauma. Beneath that quick smile and those bright, long-lashed eyes there surely lurks a worrier.

No surprise, then, to learn that the discipline of honing down a book *after* it is written is what occupies her. She cares almost as much about soothing kids' problems and fears as making them laugh. 'It takes six months to produce one very thin book! It may be only 7,500 words, but it's taken *months* to cut that down from three times as long when I wrote it. It's one of the many lessons I learnt from **Punch**, especially the cartoons: one word can tell so much. Rumer Godden once said, "It's what you take away that shapes the book," and having been a librarian and watched children plough through a lot of verbiage that isn't necessary to the enjoyment of a story, I am so afraid of leaving in that sort of thing I work to the point of obsession to reach the absolute skeleton.

'Each word is important for a seven-year-old struggling to read. You need only a few hints for children to work things out for themselves, and hopefully if they've enjoyed the book they'll read it again for another layer of meaning – the satirical layer, perhaps, like the send-up of the art world in **The Shrieking Face**, or the consolation of laughing at someone else being nagged (**One Green Bottle**), or confused (**Gary Who?**), or neurotic over their health (**Pilkie's Progress**).

'You think I'm hard on parents? Well, parents are hard on children! As I go round schools I do come across these "ferocious women" [I'd commented on some of her adult characters], 'kids not allowed to do homework, say, and the



sort of home life that breeds school vandals. Children can have a terrible time, quite honestly, but if you get them to identify with a problem in a book, make it funny, then they're laughing at themselves and may feel better.

'There are two reasons for reading: to escape your own problems – the Lenny and Jake stories are pure escapism – and to find out how others tackle their problems. But I always want characters children can identify with, down to earth, realistic, with reasonable dialogue, which is why I go round schools and listen to them talking.'

Unlike most children's authors, she is positively stimulated by reading other people's books ('I'd much rather read a good children's book than an adult one'), and, even more unusually, has an expert background knowledge of the field 'because I came to it all from the other end.'



An only child – 'I used to sit and write when other people would have been quarrelling or playing' – she was born in Nelson, moving within two years to the small industrial village of Hapton which had grown around the cotton mill where her father was manager (today her husband, too, is a director of a textiles firm). When she was seven she had permission to go into school early to copy poems from an anthology into a special book she had saved up for. 'I loved that, and I still remember things like "Drake's Drum". I won a penny prize for writing another verse to "Wee Willie Winkie"! I think I was going to be a writer from that moment, but I never thought of it as a viable career.'

Accrington High School, then English ('I was hopeless at everything else') at Leeds University ('quite a struggle then, especially for girls'), where she was 'an absolute washout, clever but lazy. I concentrated all my energies on

the theatre group and being assistant editor of the *Union News*. One day an advertiser let us down, and the editor said to me, "Write us a poem three-and-a-half inches long," so I got out my ruler and wrote a bit of comic verse. The advertiser kept on letting us down, and I kept on getting a verse in, until it was a regular feature.

"Someone said, "Why don't you send one of those to *Punch*, I do believe they pay for them?" They took it, and I was paid five guineas – a fortune! So began a freelance relationship that was to last many years. 'I learnt such a lot from *Punch*, particularly from Peter Dickinson who was assistant editor then and used to write comments on everything. It was an adult audience, but the same sort of satirical humour.' It was Peter who pointed her to prose. "But what shall I write about?" "What are you doing at the moment?" "Bringing up two babies." "Write about that." "It isn't funny." "Anything is funny if it happens to somebody else – stand outside yourself and look at it and you may see the funny side!"

So the next week a horrendous journey to visit her mother – babies and baggage, big pram put out at the wrong station, teddy overboard to be decapitated by train – at first produced tears but was followed by a pioneer prose piece, 'The Pram Now Standing'. Later, when her son and daughter were at primary school and she was chafing at home, *Punch* sent her some children's novels to review which she so relished that she decided not only to write one herself but to be a librarian.

With the cheek of the innocent, she simply rang her library and said if you've got any jobs, consider me; a week later she was solving a crisis for them as part-time assistant on the counter. She was hooked. A day-release and evening course at Manchester Poly (including a history of children's literature) qualified her – and, juggling work, study and two young children, she was certainly no longer bored. She rose from children's librarian to Chief Assistant Librarian for Bury, in charge of and buying books for 110 school libraries and 11 public service children's libraries. She gave up to write full-time, but is appalled at the suffering inflicted on libraries today.

'Manchester itself has never had a school library service – but now even the good outlying areas like Bury are at crunch point. It's dreadful. Schools have to "buy in", pay to belong to the service, and there is no longer a library allowance that has to be sent on books. People don't know what they're losing. Seven of us used to spend every Monday morning going through huge boxes on approval, reading them and picking out those for schools' booklists – without that service teachers won't know what has come in and will be swamped by it all. Most teachers know so little about children's literature; they don't keep up to date and have no idea about modern writers. And if we don't catch a child between seven and 11 we've probably lost a reader for life.

'Klaus (Flugge, of Andersen Press) has

agreed to put a note on the back of the title page of all my future books: "Your library is precious – use it or lose it."



As well as visiting schools she chairs (opinion-less) the Lancashire Children's Book of the Year Award with a panel of 14-year-olds – 'plot and speedy action come first, then characters, while style comes nowhere!' She herself is not drawn to writing for teens; the closest is her new *The Secrets of Celia*, school essays 'written' by a lass of engaging energy and charm – 13, Hazel thinks, except that 'I never mention ages, just in case, so anyone can identify as they like.' No question of literary style, either, for *Celia's* punctuation is erratic, to say the least, as was the spelling in *The Deathwood Letters*. Hazel Townson defends herself against the charge of enshrining mistakes or 'bad English' in print by claiming that authenticity is essential. 'And how can children recognise the right thing unless they see the wrong as well? In school a teacher would explain, or use the book as a sort of testing game.'

Grabbing a reader is what matters. It was this conviction that prompted her to write when, as a librarian, she conducted her own surveys and found two-thirds of her borrowers never reached the end of a novel. She drew up a formula for the ideal book (the 'Manageable Book' for reluctant readers, described by her in detail in *BfK 61*, March 1990) which tackled covers, titles, type-size, display, length, cliff-hangers, characters, humour – everything.

'When I started the surveys the only books for reluctant readers were the old drab Antelopes, and many of those were historical which these kids won't pick up.' She herself was later to move to Antelope from Brockhampton ('few publishers did short books in the 70s') until they rejected her sixth title, *The Great Ice-Cream Crime*, with the immortal words, 'This is not the sort of thing young children want to read. They want quiet, domestic kinds of drama.' Which was enough to make her decamp to the fledgling Andersen Press, where *Ice-Cream* was an instant (and continuing) success. She and Klaus Flugge, with editor Audrey Adams (and Tony Ross, David McKee and Philippe Dupasquier), have lived happily ever after.

Like all the others in his stable, she is devoted to Flugge, paying tribute to his eye (and heart) for an artist, and his willingness to give writers a say on illustrations. 'But why are paperback covers changed from the hardbacks – they always seem older – while the inside illustrations aren't changed? Crazy – and children do notice. When editors tell me it's due to market research, I answer, "I do market research every day: I go into schools and I see children, and they say they don't like the covers!"

'Let's face it, publishers don't often meet the children, don't get out and stand in front of a class and hear what they say.'

Hazel Townson began by listening to children; she gave up her library work because she was driven 'to reach these children that no one was reaching'; and she will go on listening for as long as children will go on talking. And we know how long that is. ■

Hazel Townson was interviewed by Stephanie Nettel.

Photographs by Lucy Rogers.

Hazel Townson's books are published by Andersen in hardback and Red Fox in paperback. Given here are details of those mentioned in the Authorgraph:

The Shrieking Face, ill. Tony Ross, 0 86264 065 2, £5.95; 0 09 941310 8, £2.25 pbk

One Green Bottle, ill. David McKee, 0 86264 164 0, £5.99; 0 09 956810 1, £2.25 pbk

Gary Who?, ill. David McKee, 0 86264 191 8, £5.99; 0 09 965530 6, £1.99 pbk

Pilkie's Progress, ill. Tony Ross, 0 86264 149 7, £5.99; 0 09 956360 6, £2.25 pbk

The Deathwood Letters, 0 86264 305 8, £6.99; 0 09 983500 2, £2.50 pbk

The Great Ice-Cream Crime, 0 86264 005 9, £4.95; 0 09 948640 7, £2.25 pbk

Her new hardback *The Secrets of Celia* (0 86264 382 1) will be published in April this year, priced £6.99.

REVIEWS – Non Fiction



24 Hours in a Desert

0 7496 0540 5

24 Hours in a Game Reserve

0 7496 0696 7

Barrie Watts, Franklin Watts
(24 Hours series), £8.95 each
JUNIOR/SECONDARY

The '24 hours' formula worked excellently for Barrie Watts' homely **Forest** and **Seashore**; now he has been to the Sonoran desert and an African reserve to see if it does as well in exotic locations.

It does. Again Watts shows us the rhythm of each day and the influence of light and weather on animal activity. On a May mid-morning, with the desert temperature hitting 66 degrees Celsius anything that moves holes up in the shade, the shimmering stillness broken only by photographers snapping vegetation. African animals graze and prowl through the day but in Spring everything stops – morning and evening – for rain.

All this is, of course, the stuff of all those 'day in the life' TV programmes, but these two books do several things that television can't. The photographic definition is far finer than that on any screen, and there is plenty of space for bit parts (scorpions and spur fowl) as well as predictable stars (gila monsters and giraffes); and, being books, they go at the reader's own speed and replay forever. Also, **Desert** wins my 'endpaper of the year' award. TP

Birdwatching for the Under Tens

Bill Oddie, George Philip,
0 540 01244 0, £6.99

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Oddie starts with a message to parents about the importance of supporting young birdwatchers in their enthusiasm. This is absolutely right, for birdwatching is all about special times and places as well as expensive binoculars, and adults need to understand this if they are not to risk frustrating the development of children's interest.



Dunnock and cuckoo, **Birdwatching for the Under Tens**.

Birds are our most observable warm-blooded wild creatures, so an interest soon brings rewards. Oddie counsels a modest back garden start, making sound recommendations about field guides before showing us some of the commoner bird families. Binoculars only appear half way through the book and here again advice is reliable and straightforward, leading to a demonstration of how systematic analysis of bird features aids the certainty of recognition. Oddie's sketches provide excellent samples of record keeping and he explains very well the different approaches to the study of different habitats. As well as this, the reader gets a strong intimation of what it feels like to be a bird enthusiast.

The publishers have got it wrong though with their 'under tens' label. It would be a very able and dedicated eight or nine year old who could tackle this, moreover all the advice is applicable to aspirants of any age. So, please, for 'under tens' read 'beginners' and then we can all enjoy this genuine Goodie. TP

Alcohol

Iris Webb, Wayland (Points of View series), 1 85210 648 4, £8.95
SECONDARY

Presenting contrasting opinions on a contentious subject, the 'Points of View' series has been generally successful. This latest volume on alcohol is no exception and arguments have been well marshalled by the author.

It is unfortunate that some of the photographs look a little dated, and the index leaves a lot to be desired (16 entries under drinking and 20 under alcohol – and anomalies and omissions); but the main thrust of the book, i.e. the presenting of the arguments, is well executed.

With the pro-alcohol views expressed by the drinks industry and the anti-views by, in the main, the medical profession, it is perhaps unsurprising that the latter case is better argued, particularly as it is more geared to avoiding excess than advocating prohibition.

Wider issues are also included such as the power and influence of the drink industry (argued by both pro and anti lobbies), and the continual search for new markets – as Brian Baldock of Guinness Brewing Worldwide put it in 1989, 'Africa remains an important growth region . . .'

A useful lucid book for secondary children. GB

Rich World, Poor World

Nance Fyson, Oxford University Press, 0 19 913321 2, £9.95

UPPER SECONDARY

Ambitious but effective, **Rich World, Poor World** is a revealing study of contrasts and links between North and South. Fact after fact hits the reader in a powerful way – too many for reading the book through, but valuable for examining a topic.

At a time when good presentation can sometimes mask thin content, this volume is different being exceptionally thorough but occasionally resembling a text book in appearance. There are some mis-matches between the body of text and exercises set for the reader such as 'What advantages did areas have from being colonised?' – a difficult question since in this instance there is minimal coverage in the text.

These points should not deter purchasers – **Rich World, Poor World**'s strength lies in the breadth and depth of information covered, e.g. Agriculture (62% production North, 38% South), Life Expectancy (richest countries' average 74 years, poorest 49), Medical Provision (a doctor per 520 people richest, per 17,000 poorest), or GNP per person (US \$17,480, Ghana \$390).

This is a useful book on an important subject. GB



Wayan lives in Indonesia. GNP per person (1986): \$490
Does he live in the richer North or the poorer South?



Mirtha lives in Peru. GNP per person (1986): \$1090
Does she live in the richer North or the poorer South?

From **Rich World, Poor World**.

Paperback Non-Fiction – Soft on the Inside?

Ted Percy looks at the paperbacks received for review in 1991.

As more and more children's non-fiction comes out in paperback and book prices continue to rise, schools and school library services have to consider whether the 'hardback only' policy will still serve them effectively. It's time to look at paperbacks within the context of the whole non-fiction scene and consider what advantages they offer anyone who thinks they provide a chance to get more for their money.

Among the traditional and influential virtues of the hardback information book are the ways in which it:

1. Comes out first
2. May never appear in paperback
3. Lasts longer and looks nicer while doing it
4. Has a broad spine that displays its title well and holds a classification number nicely.

But with simultaneous paperback editions becoming more common and physical production standards improving, the advantages of a half-price paperback may be more influential. So I've been looking at the output of some major non-fiction publishers with a view to reaching some sort of conclusion.

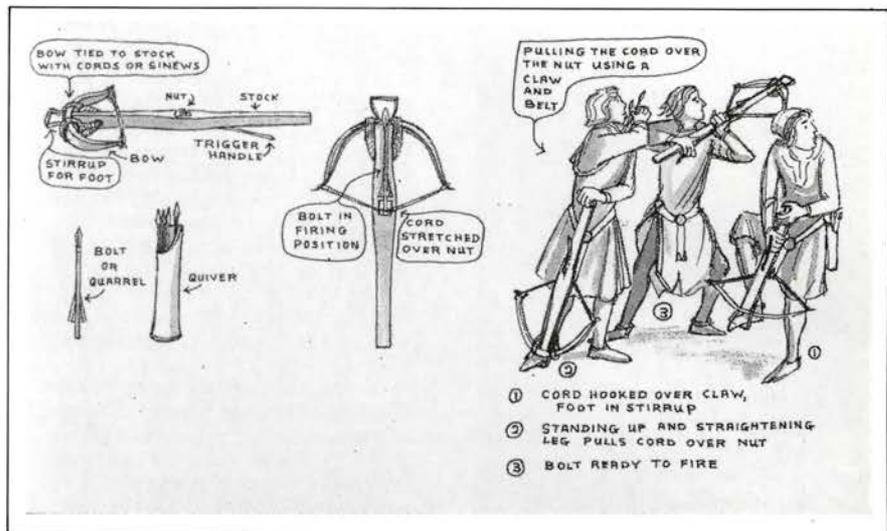
A & C Black have an enviable record in the information field and their decision to rescue, by paperback, twelve of their best titles from the threat of out-of-print oblivion is most laudable. Among their 'Threads' series, **Paper** (0 7136 3502 9), **Plastics** (0 7136 3503 7) and **Wood** (0 7136 3505 3) are especially welcome. They go right through primary school as do Black's equally excellent 'Stopwatch' series – Barrie Watts' **Broad Bean** (0 7136 3495 2) is the infant 'growth' book and his **Bird's Nest** (0 7136 3494 4) and **Spider's Web** (0 7136 3499 5) have long been essential fare. Too good to die, if paperbacks can keep them alive let's hope that Black's list lengthens. At £2.99 each they're a bargain.



From **Broad Bean**.

Franklin Watts have stuck mainly to reprinting out-of-print hardbacks. Exceptions are their 'Rainy Days' at £2.99 each. Most useful are **Shadow Theatre** (0 7496 0667 3) and **Puppets** (0 7496 0668 1) whose templates will be much easier to copy without an expensive spine to crack on the primary school table. The revised edition of their valuable middle/secondary **Channel Tunnel** (0 7496 0675 4) exemplifies the preferability of paperback for rapidly changing facts. Cheaper production should allow frequent updating and at £3.99 we could afford a whole set of revisions.

Thirteen years ago, Sheila Sancha's wonderful **Castle Story** nearly won the Carnegie Medal; now Collins have provided a handsome paperback revival



Crossbows, from **Castle Story**.



Sword, from **Vikings**.

(0 00 184177 7). Sancha's drawings get the good paper they need in a solid production which, properly jacketed, should do as well on a middle or secondary shelf as the original. It costs £6.99. I liked Rosemary Stones' **Under Manners** (0 00 673413 8). Subtitled 'a teenage guide to etiquette', it is honest, helpful, lively and funny. You would buy it for your teenage self, so it needs only paperback production at £2.99.

Well done Puffin for taking up David Day's **Noah's Choice** (0 14 031906 9). A splendidly

Golden Hamster, from **Noah's Choice**.



written collection of stories of extinction and survival, this is an enduring contribution to green understanding, appealing to middle schools upwards. At £3.50 let's hope it spreads further and wider.

Ian Redmond's **Elephant Book** engages all generations and has a long future, so hardback is still best value for library stock. But if Walker's full size paperback (0 7445 1773 7) puts it into more homes, this must be a good thing at £5.99.

Hardback 'Olympics' books invariably outwear the Olympiad they celebrate, so Wayland's decision to put their 'Olympic Sports' series (£3.95 each) and **The Olympics** (0 7502 0242 2, £4.95) almost straight into paperback seems just right; they're colourful, attractive and accurate but shouldn't last much longer than Barcelona.

Of Two-Can's bright new 'Jumps' I particularly liked their History titles. **Ancient China** (1 85434 014 X), **Ancient Egypt** (1 85434 057 3), **Aztecs** (1 85434 052 2) and **Vikings** (1 85434 024 7) present engaging miscellanea in a friendly way and will be worthy additions to library shelves in junior or middle schools where temporary demand may be heavy. Nice for nurseries are their 'Jump Starts' (it had to come!) **Play with Paint** (1 85434 160 X) and **Play with Paper** (1 85434 165 0). Full of achievable effective creations, to generate confidence among grown-ups as well as children, they're cheap enough to risk glue and paint splashes. Each 'Jump' costs £2.99.

From a school or library point of view it seems that paperback non-fiction offers its best value in subject fields undergoing rapid change and temporary heavy demand, so in tooling-up for the Olympics and Euro-Tunnel, for instance, its advantages are great. Someone else must agree, as the publishers who are relatively new to paperback non-fiction are planning to do more of it in 1992. If this means more affordable quality in the bookshops I'll drink to it, but for the widest range of durable titles, easily handled and promoted, hardbacks must still be the choice. ■

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

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

Non-fiction Reviews Editor: **Eleanor von Schweinitz**.

The Truth, Nothing But the Truth – But Not the Whole Truth?



Richard Tames examines some moral dilemmas in the writing of information books.

Ideally the writer of children's information books hopes to satisfy at least three levels of 'client' – the publisher (who may be plural – i.e. freelance copy editor/ desk editor/ publishing director etc.); the 'gatekeeper' (i.e. the adult – librarian, teacher, parent, auntie) who is usually the one to make the actual decision to purchase; and ultimately, the reader, the 'child' (I tend to conjure a mental picture of my niece who has above-average reading ability, below-average reading tastes and the scepticism of the proverbial Man from Missouri). These three levels overlap in the sense that the publisher peruses the author's manuscript with one eye on each of the other two levels (leaving how many eyes to look at the MS itself? – good job they're often plural) and the gatekeeper likewise appraises the finished book in relation to the desired or anticipated reaction of the child. The author, of course, anticipates all this when preparing the manuscript. Communication between author and reader is therefore governed by a complex process of refraction, however rarely this may actually be articulated or even consciously perceived.

Let me ask rhetorically – what master criterion should govern that effort to communicate?

Let me answer myself with an anecdote – which gets to the point in the end. Trust me. Some years ago UNESCO organised an international project to examine how each of six participating nations taught the history of the last two hundred years in the last two years of compulsory schooling. Confrontation was implicit in the entire venture which

had deliberately been based on the involvement of three eastern bloc states and three western ones. But the overall atmosphere was one of desperate anxiety to produce a report to which all could assent. We hit the rocks with the very first recommendation – proposed by the Soviet representative – 'The teacher of history should be scientific'. Well, we all know what that's a code word for. Marxists may claim history as a science; the rest of us ain't at all sure. Sorry guys, no go. The East German came up with a revised bid – 'The history teacher should be objective'. The western group winced collectively – as a counsel of perfection a bit hard to object to, but as a routine requirement? Stalemate. Silence. Eyes turn to examine the ceiling, the walls, the coffee-trolley in search of inspiration. 'Accurate?' I venture hesitantly. Multi-lingual conferring. Smiles. 'Accurate' is indeed, we all agree, what teachers should be. So I always try to be accurate.

But what does accurate mean? I still aim to practise what I have heard slightly referred to as 'Oxford history' – getting the dates right. (They even tried to teach us that at the other place.) But history, it has been cogently observed, is not about facts but about the relationship between them. I'm still simple-minded enough to believe in the cardinal value of at least the pursuit of truth, even while I hear the constant echo of Oscar Wilde's sardonic observation that the truth is seldom pure and never simple.

Starting from that premise about historical truth never being simple I once developed a series of books which were intended to convey, through their very structure, that very point, to impress upon the reader that momentous events, because they affected people in very different ways, could not be readily reduced to straightforward black and white judgements. The books took the form of multiple biographies, each book taking a major conventional 'topic' and showing how it shaped the lives of a dozen or so people who were caught up in it.

The first title dealt with the Great War. My concern for accuracy focused not on the details of the characters' lives (which were more than adequately documented for the level of treatment I had space for) but on the selection of the characters themselves and the way in which they could be grouped together. First came the élite group who actually conducted the war at policy level. I chose a German general (to show the 'other' side), an admiral (to bring out the strategic importance of the parallel war at sea), Marshal Petain (to point up the fact that a traitor at one point in his career could be a hero at another) and an Australian

general (to underline the significance of the colonial contribution to the nominally British forces). The second group were the actual combatants – British infantryman, of course (stereotype expectations ought to be confirmed when they have a firm basis in fact), a trench poet (but one who never went to public school), a German sailor, a French lieutenant of transport and a Scottish nurse whose unit was so much part of the Serbian army that it would be insulting to describe her as a non-combatant. Finally came the 'Home Front' category – the US Ambassador in London, a 'skivvi' who became a prominent trade unionist, a little boy in the slums of Salford, following the war through adult gossip,

If writing within one's own culture involves problematic areas of moral judgement, how much more is the difficulty compounded when one dares to stray beyond it?

a prominent pacifist, a Scottish strike-leader and an Austrian housewife, desperately trying to feed her family as an empire collapsed around her. On reflection my choices were too much focused on Europe. Half the point is that it was a world war, with campaigns from Africa to China. Perhaps there should have been something about the Ottomans, to show that 'Johnny Turk' was a much better soldier than the Allies had anticipated? But then how 'accurate' would it have been to give the Turks this due and omit the horrors of the Armenian massacres?

A subsequent title, on Nazi Germany, raised even sharper dilemmas. Part of the problem here was to try to explain the positive appeal of the Nazi movement without appearing to glamorize or endorse it. Offsetting this difficulty was a welcome opportunity to redress the imbalance of historical reportage and give long-overdue credit to the German anti-Nazi resistance. Between 1933 and 1939 the regular German courts sentenced 225,000 people to a total of 600,000 years imprisonment for political offences. The number killed without trial or who simply disappeared in 'Nacht und Nabel' (Night and Fog) is, with any accuracy, unknowable. Over the entire period 1933-45 at least 800,000 people – one in every hundred – were condemned to periods of detention for acts of resistance. I therefore devoted

MUHAMMAD* AND ISLAM: THE ROLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Heaven and Hell

Like Christianity, Islam presents its followers with vivid descriptions of Heaven and Hell.

SOURCE 7 Description of Heaven and Hell from the Quran (Sura 88.2)

On the Day of Judgement many faces will be downcast, tolling, weary, scorched by burning fire, drinking from a boiling spring. No food for them save bitter thorn-fruit, which does not feed or satisfy. On that day other faces will be calm, glad for their past effort, in a high garden, where they hear no foolish chatter, where there is a gushing spring, where there are couches to lie on, and glasses (to drink from) set to hand, and cushions piled up, and silk carpets spread out.

1. Use Sources 7, 8 and 9 to describe what Heaven and Hell are like.
2. In what ways do these visions of Heaven and Hell reflect the best and the worst things about life in a desert environment?
3. Compare Sources 7, 8 and 9 with a Christian vision of Heaven and Hell on page 112 (the Chaldon Mural). What similarities and differences are there?
4. Look at Sources 4-9 again. How do you get to Heaven if you are a Muslim?
5. How does this differ from the way people in medieval England thought Christians got to Heaven?



SOURCES 8 and 9 A vision of Heaven and a vision of Hell from the *Miraj Nama*, a book illustrated by an Iranian Muslim in the fifteenth century AD/ninth century AH



HE'S SHOWING HOW POWERFUL HIS GOD IS BY DOING AWAY WITH ALL THE PAGAN IDOLS

I KNOW MUHAMMAD, HE'S A GOOD MAN. HE HELPS THE POOR

Muhammad is right about the Meccans. They are a lot of sense to me.

More people join him every day. I don't want to be on the wrong side.

These teachings are the most beautiful thing I have ever heard. They must come from God. Only God could speak like that.

He's defeated the Meccans. God must be on his side.

I'm afraid of the Hell he talks about. I want to go to Heaven.

MUHAMMAD BELONGS TO MY TRIBE. I OUGHT TO STICK BY HIM.

Why did people follow Muhammad*?

Above are some of the reasons people had for deciding to follow Muhammad* and Islam. Some of these reasons show the importance of Muhammad* as an individual - others show different factors.

Look at the reasons people had for following Muhammad*.

1. Which reasons show the importance of what Muhammad* had to say?
2. Which reasons show the importance of what Muhammad* did?
3. Why do you think many people believed that Muhammad*'s message came from God?

Activity

- a) Imagine you are a Meccan slave in AD630/ Bah. Explain why you have decided to become a Muslim.
- b) Imagine you are a Meccan merchant in 630/8. Explain whether or not you have decided to become a Muslim. Give your reasons.



'The treatment of religious subjects may require a pictorial compromise between the use of authentic pictorial evidence and specially commissioned art work which makes due allowance for the believer's sensitivities.' From *Contrasts and Connections* (John Murray, 1991).

no less than half the book to the stories of 'Resisters and Survivors'.

If writing within one's own culture involves problematic areas of moral judgement, how much more is the difficulty compounded when one dares to stray beyond it?

I try to take pains when writing about Islam, to make it clear as far as I can, that I do so as a non-Muslim primarily addressing other non-Muslims. The collaboration and advice of supportive Muslim friends has therefore been invaluable. A decade ago I worked on a survey of the Islamic world aimed at the middle-school age-range. What one of my friends calls the 'insultant' was anything but that. An Arab, educated in both the classical and western traditions, he was a long-term British resident with an English Muslim wife. Together we went through my MS literally word by word. In some ways it was like the UNESCO experience, looking for the *mot juste* that conveyed accuracy of meaning without leaving either the believer or the sceptic feeling unduly compromised. A crucial passage dealt with the authenticity of the revelations of the Prophet Muhammad, which we finally phrased as follows: 'Muhammad was sitting in a cave on Mt Hira, when he sensed the presence of a strange being. This was perceived by him as the angel Gabriel . . . 'Perceived' seems a bit heavy-handed perhaps, certainly unpoetic; but perception was what the experience seems essentially to have been about.

Was the whole effort an exercise in superfluous scrupulosity? From the point of view of the average eleven-year-old, quite possibly. But there were the views of the gatekeepers and, not least, the sensibilities of concerned Muslim educators to be taken account of as well. The publisher was prudent and patient enough to let us get on with it and as the book has subsequently appeared in American, Dutch, Danish and Japanese editions, this shining example of editorial foresight seems to have been more than adequately rewarded.

Not that I'm claiming we got it all right. The book was profusely illustrated with superb colour photographs; that was really the point of it. But the core of Islam is not its aesthetic heritage (in a sense anything but) but its revelation. An exquisite Mughal miniature is, from the point of view of strict orthodoxy, if not quite a blasphemy certainly an irrelevance. What matters is the power and majesty of a divine message - in Arabic. How to convey that? to a child? on paper? The splendour of a gorgeously-lettered Qur'an perhaps conveys something through the visual dimension, but it is the verbal which is the essence of what one needs to get across. So all our 'accuracy' was, to that extent, off-beam.

And things do not seem to be getting any easier with experience. This time last year I was close to complete despair over the projected Islam section of a multi-author class text for the new National Curriculum in

history. The problem arose essentially from the conflict between an Islamic tradition based on inculcating respect for intellectual authority and a western tradition which seeks to challenge it through critical inquiry. Ideally today's favoured pedagogy seeks a selection (how accurate?!) of documentary and visual materials which can be, in effect, interrogated. The aspects of Islam one can investigate without blundering into blasphemy present one problem. The sheer paucity of surviving data which might be comprehensible and in the least interesting to the average lower secondary pupil was another. In the end we got there. (All hail the editor's unsinkable tenacity.) And we did save our consciences by spelling out what we'd been through in the accompanying teacher's manual, so that they would have a better idea of why the book is as it finally is and not as they might have expected it to be, if you see what I mean. Oh, yes, and this time we even got the publisher to observe good Muslim manners and put an asterisk to stand for 'peace be upon him' every time we mentioned the name of the prophet Muhammad*. ■

Richard Tames worked with schools for fifteen years as Head of the External Services Division at the School of Oriental and African Studies. He has published 60 non-fiction books for children (both history and biography).

ELECTION FEVER



BY ANN PILLING



£8.99

0670 83486 6

Baz quickly learns that it takes more than a scholarship to be accepted at Bryce's, the poshest school in town.

He's soon in trouble for protecting the juniors when they get bullied and for questioning all the petty rules and regulations. When Bryce's lets its pupils have a school election, to coincide with the national one, Baz forms his own party to fight for what he believes in.

Despite opposition from the Cut Above supporters who try to crush him, and the teachers who fear that nothing but 'wildness' and 'unruly behaviour' will come out of his radical Common Man party, Baz does have some support.

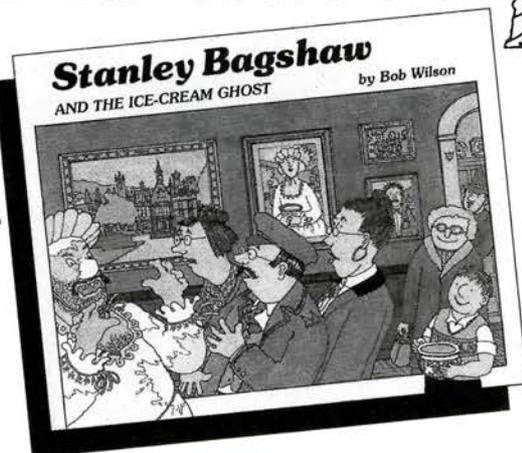
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WRITER
REPLY

FROM HOUSEMARTINS TO HENRIETTA

Why would a popstar turn into a children's author? **Stan Cullimore** explains.

Recently, I was sitting in the kitchen eating my breakfast, when the front doorbell rang. One of my daughters answered it and seconds later she walked into the room carrying a large parcel. She read the label and then sighed. 'It's for you, Dad.'

I wiped my mouth and got ready to experience the most exciting moment in any author's life. I was about to hold in my hand, for the first time ever, a copy of my newly (and only!) published book: **Henrietta and the Tooth Fairy**. I opened the padded envelope and drew out not one, but six complimentary copies.

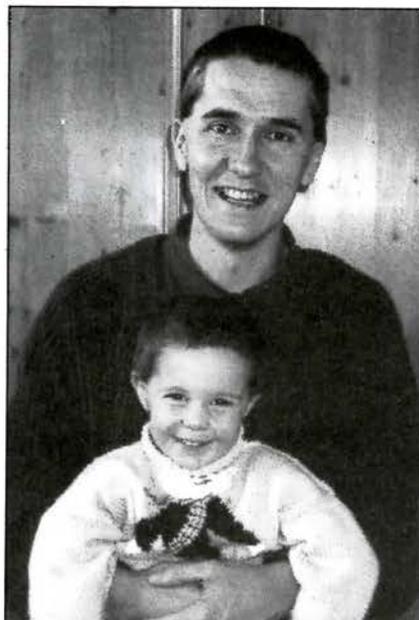
For a moment, even the children were stunned into silence – until, at last, my youngest said (and I quote) 'Daddy, take me to the toilet, NOW!'

'That's the trouble with kids,' I thought as I carried him upstairs. 'They have no sense of occasion.'

When I returned the books had been passed round and duly admired. All I had to do was to explain to my puzzled offspring why I had decided to waste my time writing children's books when I could have been doing more useful things like earning a living. I told them that a kind lady at Piccadilly Press had actually paid me to do it, and therefore it could be looked upon as work. At which point my eldest (they're always difficult at her age) shook her head and announced sadly that; 'You'll do anything to avoid getting a proper job won't you, Dad!'

Since then I have taken to opening my letters in private – but I do have to admit that she has a point. You see, for a short while, a few years ago, I was in a successful pop group called 'The Housemartins'. I was, therefore, a popstar. I didn't look like one and I didn't feel like one, but nevertheless, I was one. And very nice it was too. But it was definitely not, what my mother (or my eldest) would call, a proper job.

In fact, often I would lie in my bath (I was a very clean young man), covered in bubbles and reflect upon how very odd my life was. After all, I had gone to Hull University to get a Maths degree and in the process had somehow managed to acquire a recording contract as well. Not that I was complaining. As jobs go, being a popstar is not that bad. True, I did have to spend a few years teaching myself how to play the guitar, sing and write songs. But, there are worse things in life – and it was well rewarded in the end. Also true, I had to spend most of my time travelling. But, it does broaden the mind (and you get lots of interesting stamps in your passport). In



Stan is the one at the back.



Henrietta also receives a parcel, in **Henrietta's Bubble Trouble**.



fact, the only worrying thing about the whole business was this. Everyone who has been a popstar for more than a couple of years is (to put it mildly) a trifle strange. Peculiar even.

I didn't want this to happen to me. So, when the chance came for me to leave, I did. I retired gracefully to the highlands of Scotland and got married. I also learnt how to twiddle my thumbs and avoid thinking about what I was going to do next! As it turned out, what I did next was to become a father (by various ways and means) to several small children. So I had my work cut out doing the usual domestic stuff. Cleaning teeth, wiping noses, changing nappies and reading bedtime stories. Still not a proper job, according to my daughter. All her friends had Dads that go out to work, in proper offices!

It was at this point that I bought my wife a cuddly hippo, who (whom?) she called Henrietta. For some reason, I told the children that when they were asleep, Henrietta talked to me – and told me stories. (Maybe I *had* gone a bit peculiar by then . . .) Either way, my children now wanted to hear these stories for themselves, so I began to tell them as bedtime treats. The trouble was, when I attempted to repeat them I would forget things that the children remembered. And I would find myself hopelessly bogged down with questions which I could never begin to answer. The only solution was to write down these stories, in secret, and memorise them.

Well, as it does, one thing led to another, and I now find myself the author of a second and third book about Henrietta – the world's favourite hippo (with a sneezy nose). What's more, there's a fourth on the way and possibly a fifth and sixth. In fact, I could possibly describe myself as a writer. With a proper job. The trouble is, my children won't believe me. Only last week my daughter found me lying on my bed with my eyes closed plotting out a story; when I told her I was working, she laughed and said, 'Dad, you don't know what work is!' That's what I can't stand about kids – they're too clever by half. ■

Stan Cullimore's books are illustrated by John Farman. All three are published by Piccadilly:

Henrietta and the Tooth Fairy, 1 85340 170 6, £5.95

Henrietta's Bubble Trouble, 1 85340 136 6, £5.95

Henrietta and the Ghost Chase, 1 85340 171 4, £6.95

BOOKS FOR KEEPS &



COMPETITION

Books for Keeps for Children

The standard of most entries was a delight – living proof that the Rise of the Ringbinder has yet to destroy all teacher and pupil initiative. Whether reviews, authorgraphs, interviews, questionnaires or comment, the children certainly demonstrated that whatever we at BfK can do, *they* can do as well. Or do we mean better? Don't think we didn't reflect on our own offerings when we saw the sharpness, sparkle and originality of their versions.

Our judges, all equally impressed, were Teresa Grainger – Director of the Literacy Unit at Christ Church College, Canterbury; Sally Grindley – Editorial Director of Books For Children; Richard Hill and Chris Powling from Books for Keeps. After much pondering, their decision was as follows:–

- Infant Winner: Tangmere Primary School, Tangmere, Sussex
- Junior Winner: Delaval Primary School, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
- Secondary Winner: Villiers High School, Southall, Middlesex

Each receives an assortment of brand-new hardbacks and paperbacks donated by our sponsor, **Books For Children**, to the value of £500.

In addition, for the overall winner, a further assortment of £2,000 worth of new books goes to:

Villiers High School, Southall, Middlesex.

Congratulations to *all* competitors, though. Take our word for it, it was a close-run contest – as the extracts from winning entries make clear . . .



Infant Winner: Tangmere Primary School.

Junior Winner: Delaval Primary School.

THE WITCH AND OTHER FAVOURITES
By P. Janet Wain
donated by Fiona Kirkland

In this book there are six startling tales about witches, sea-pirates, sailors and other interesting characters. One of the stories is, "Sailor Jack and the 20 Orphans". Jack is a kind sailor who decides he wants to adopt 20 orphans, the only way he can save enough money is to become a pirate, so he does. He is marooned on a very odd island and strange things happen. Another story is about a cross woman who shouts at her poor husband all the time. Her tongue is as sharp as a barber's razor and three times as long. One day she goes to a barber's and ends up in another world. In this world, for once, her tongue does something good and helpful. There are just two of the interesting tales in this book. The Jenny Williams. This book is particularly suitable for reading aloud to young children.

BILL'S NEW FROCK

By Anne Fine
donated by Mrs. E. Bennett, Governor

Bill's New Frock is a bit like "Big", the film. A boy goes to his mother's work and she gives him a new frock so he is able to go to school. She finds out that people treat her in quite a different way. This book is ideal for children over 7. anyone under 7 would not really find it interesting. The author, Anne Fine, won the "Smarties Award" with this book. It's in paper back, and costs £2.50 and I think it is worth it. The illustrations by Phillippe Dupanquier are very good.

HAPPY HATS

By Peter Curry
donated by Alison & Steven Purchase

This book is about all the different hats you can buy from the Happy Hats Shop. There are party hats, warm hats, magic hats. On every two pages is a short piece of writing about hats. There are also pictures of writing about hats. This is written in rhyme. The rhyme is also easy to chant. Details which I think young children would like. I think this book would be enjoyed by children in between 3 and 7 years.

THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS

By Kenneth Grahame
donated by Mr. Scott, caretaker

This is an 80th birthday book. Kenneth Grahame was a secretary of the Bank of England. He wrote two other stories before this one, they were called, "The Golden Age" and "Dream Days". The Wind in the Willows started as "The Adventures of Mr. Toad". The characters were mainly those who remained in the final story, Mole, Rat, Badger and Otter. I haven't yet read all of this book only the first chapters. The illustrations are in black and white and are by Harry Hargrave.

THE HYPRISIES AND OTHER SKYFOOLING POEMS

By Michael Rosen
donated by The Thornley Family

This is a book of humorous poems and rhymes. It would be suitable for children who enjoy funny poems and are aged between 8 and 14 years. The illustrations are by Michael Chatterton and are very entertaining and humorous. I enjoyed reading this book and I enjoyed looking at the illustrations.

INSECT LIFE

By J. Owen
donated by The Whittle Family

I would recommend this book for someone who likes insects or someone who is starting to like insects. They would have to be good readers to enjoy it. This book has some funny True or False questions. I wouldn't recommend it to people over 9 or 10. But I would recommend it. I think the book was great. I really enjoyed it.

THE AGE OF STEAM

By Jonathan Rutland
donated by Matthew Morrall

This book is about steam being used for transport and energy. It tells you a lot about steam trains and boats. It has coloured pictures in the book as well as a poster which tells you how steam is made for energy. I would recommend this book as being good for topic work. I enjoyed reviewing it.

PLEASE MRS. BUTLER

By Allan Ahlberg
donated by Mrs. Clark, Paul & Michael

Mrs. Butler is the title of a poetry book with interesting tongue twisting poems. The verses are by Ahlberg and the illustrations by Fritz Wegner. The poems are mostly about school. Lots of weird things happen in it. Read it and find out! You'll enjoy it.

THE SCHOOL DAY

By Monica Skoppleman
donated by Mr. Hugh Knight, education adviser

This book compares schools in the 19th century with schools now. It is very good for topic work because it tells you about everything and explains things well. It has a lot of photographs and pictures to help you. There is also an index to help you find your way around the book. It is very suitable for children over 10 years.

80th Delaval Primary School Birthday Celebrations Library Books

Staff parents & friends of the school were invited to buy a book for the school library to celebrate the school's 80th birthday. Books were selected from a leading bookseller & parents, children & anyone else who could be persuaded were invited to our parent's room to choose a book to donate. Over 100 books, both hard & soft backed were bought & donated.

Each book has a special label inside with the donor's name. All the books were displayed on the day we celebrated. School children were dressed in Edwardian costumes. There were many other items.

Everyone who came had a great day. The best thing is the books in our library are going to remind us about that very special day each time we choose one of our special birthday books.



Mrs Hill, John and Matthew sign the books



AN INTERVIEW WITH MAIRI HEDDERLEY

Samantha interviewed Mairi at the Northern Children's Book Festival. Laura interviewed her and found the answers very satisfactory. LAURA Did you like making up stories when you were little? MAIRI I don't know that I did because I was not very good at it. I loved drawing pictures. You see in my books I do the illustrations as well as the story so when I'm thinking well, the words come. LAURA What's your favourite book among the books you've written? MAIRI Well I have to tell you it's "Katie Morag and the Tiresome Ted", that's my favourite because it's all about me. I wrote away my teddy bear when I was a big grown-up. The story for younger children that it's not good to be nasty to your teddy bear.



AN INTERVIEW WITH COLIN HCAUNTON AT THE N.C.B.F.

ELLY What inspires you to write your poems and stories? COLIN Well I started off as an artist and I needed words to put to my pictures. I didn't know any poetry so I had to put my own words to my pictures. I wasn't very good at first but practice makes perfect as they say. MAIRI What was your favourite book when you were little? COLIN My favourite books were the annuals that you get for Christmas. You know Beano and Dandy, they were about the ones I had. MAIRI What's your favourite author (apart from yourself)? COLIN Allan Ahlberg I think. MAIRI Do you like a lot of his books? COLIN Yes I do. I also illustrate a lot of his books. I like a lot of his poetry too. MAIRI Did you enjoy writing and drawing when you were little? COLIN Not really. I didn't take writing and drawing seriously. I started when I was about 15. I've been writing quite a long time but I've been drawing a longer time.



AN INTERVIEW WITH BARBARA FIRTH

SIMON Where do you get your ideas for illustrating a book? BARBARA From things I have seen in my life. I take photographs of objects really. If I can draw an animal from life I try to do that. MAIRI Were you good at drawing when you were little? BARBARA People say I was but when I look back on some of the things I have drawn I don't think they're good. MAIRI Why do authors ask you to illustrate their books? BARBARA Because they think the style of the thing I draw are the sorts of things they want to see as pictures in their books.

AN INTERVIEW WITH COLIN HAWKINS

Samantha interviewed Colin in the few minutes when he wasn't signing autographs. SAM. How did you start to write stories? COLIN I started writing stories for my children a long time ago, about ten years ago now. A lot of the time I was reading stories and missing bits out because they were getting boring. I thought it would be a good idea to write our own stories. MAIRI How do you get your ideas for books? COLIN Well there are two of us, Jackie and I. It's like having a very good friend you can talk to in the playground. Really our studio is a bit like a playground and we talk to each other. One may get an idea and the other will say, "yes, we can make it better by doing this." Then the other will say, "things grow very quickly and ideas come faster because there are two of you. It's much easier than if there was only one." MAIRI Not really, except when the books go to Europe. All the grown-ups who read there. Isn't that weird? I don't know why.

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BOOKS FOR KEEPS NEWS



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From Camden Leisure Services in conjunction with Morley Books . . . a full-colour booklet describing ways in which parents can help children learn to read. Lively, beautifully produced and above all *accessible*, it brings much needed flair to a well-tried formula . . . with a Bengali translation also available. For a copy, enclose £1.99 (which includes postage and packing) to Morley Books, Elmfield Road, Morley, Leeds LS27 0X1 or phone 0532 538811.

WHITBREAD CHILDREN'S BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD

The Award for 1991 went to **Harvey Angell** by Diana Hendry, published by Julia MacRae (1 85681 061 5) at £7.99. It's good to see recognition of a title for children in the 8-12 age range, with a strong plot, a read-aloud rhythm and larger than life-size characters (especially Harvey Angell himself). Why it's actually a book for *children!* Congratulations to the Whitbread Committee . . . not to mention Diana Hendry.



Seven to Nine

From Buckinghamshire County Library Service . . . a list of stories for that crucial stage 'in between picture books and novels'. And well-judged they are, too – with sharp comment and full publication details. Available at £3.50 from Michael Ryan, County Hall, Aylesbury, Bucks HP20 1UU or phone Aylesbury (0296) 383206.

THE PAN MACMILLAN SCHOOL LIBRARY AWARD 1992

The 1992 search is on for the best school library – and it could be yours! Enter NOW and you could win first prize of £5,000 worth of books of your choice from the Pan Macmillan children's list which includes authors such as Jill Murphy, Graham Oakley, Terence Blacker, Mary Wesley, Rumer Godden, Charles Keeping and many more. In addition there are four 'runner-up' prizes of £500 worth of books for each category winner.

There's a full account of the 1990 Award in **BfK 64** (Sept 90) and an entry form for 1992 was enclosed with our last issue including all the information you need to get going on this year's entry.

The closing date is 30th April 1992 and if you have any queries contact Anne Sarrag at The Pan Macmillan School Library Award, Pan Macmillan Children's Books, Cavaye Place, London SW10 9PG (tel: 071 373 6070).

Dick King-Smith

From the School Library Association . . . Keith Barker's affectionate analysis of the books of one of the most popular living writers for children. Aimed at teachers and librarians especially – with suggestions for book-based topic work – the clear and spritely text may also be enjoyed by Dick's older child readers. Price £5.50 (plus 60p postage and packing) from



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Picture Books

Don't Forget Granny

Michael Dugan, Illustrated by Kevin Burgemeestre

Find out what happens when Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Wolf invite everyone to their engagement party except Granny!

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March, Age 3+

Who is Sleeping in Auntie's bed?

Kate Stinson
Illustrated by Robin Baird Lewis

A funny portrait of a family's visit to Auntie's rather too small house.

0 19 540824 1 £6.95 Hb
March, Age 4+

Miranda

Kate Linton

Miranda has to rescue her toys from the rain. The reality of this story is depicted alongside her imaginary mission as a brave lighthouse keeper rescuing her friends at sea.

0 19 553305 4 £6.95 Hb
April, Age 2+



30 Years of Growing Point

This month, after three decades as a team-of-one, **Margery Fisher** will produce the last issue of her famous journal.

Stephanie Nettell reports.

Thirty years ago Margery Fisher, anxious to find more reviewing and in despair over newspapers, decided to publish her own.

Growing Point was born randomly in May 1962 rather than the following January – a timing that has enraged subscription agents ever since – simply to jump ahead of a children's book magazine being planned by Eric Baker of the Kensington Bookshop.



GROWING POINT

Margery Fisher's regular review of books for the growing families of the English reading world, and for parents, teachers, librarians and other guardians

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Special Review: *A Dog So Small*, by Philippa Pearce

Installments or Snippets? Three periodicals of information

Traditional Tales

Other reviews and shorter notices

MAY 1962

Volume 1 No. 1

Published by Margery Fisher, Ashton Manor, Northampton, England; nine issues yearly; post free subscription 21/- or single copies 2/6. Printed by Belmont Press, Northampton

It's less surprising that she should now find it financially impossible to continue than that she has succeeded for so long. 'I managed by doing all the work myself. I have a deal with this firm in Northampton, where the wife of the owner does the typesetting, so I pay a fraction of what I would normally pay, and they send it to a printer where I get a concessionary price – and so I've staggered along!

'It was a workload, but you get used to it. I do have this "puritan work ethic" – she laughs deprecatingly – 'and I like to have a lot of mechanical work, addressing envelopes, writing invoices, so I can think, "Oh, I'm working very hard!" I love doing it. I can honestly say I still get excited when I open the parcels of books, though I'm not so keen on writing – I've got to the stage when I'd like a different language. You use the same word over and over: after 30 years it's difficult to find something new.'

But there is disenchantment. With standards of literacy and spelling (in

adult novels, too – she reports on manuscripts for one daughter-in-law who is an agent, and has to fight her natural prejudice against a sloppily written opening); with publishers who no longer answer, or apparently even read, letters; with the depressing lack of reviewing space ('For a while, in Jack Lambert's time in the early seventies, **The Sunday Times** gave me a column a week – imagine! – with a little picture at the top and anything from six to twelve books'); with the 'tiddly-widdly' diet offered to children at school when they could be getting their teeth into something challenging ('If you don't bring up children to read classics and the great books they never do'); even with writers.

'They assume children all want these short televisual sentences, very brief and get-it-over-with, even without verbs – you no longer get what I call good, complex sentences unless you're reading Philippa Pearce or someone like that. I keep saying things aren't what they were and then something good comes up . . . The teenage novel is getting better. It took me time to recognise it as a form of literature, and I do still think that children over 12 or 13 should be reading adult books, yet there are some very good people who seem to satisfy *something* – Jan Mark particularly, and Adèle Geras, and I like Jean Ure – though I always maintain they're for under-14s, not older!

She is a small, brisk woman, full of zest, living alone now in the book-cluttered rambling house (much of it fifteenth-century) that she and her ornithologist husband James Fisher evolved out of four rural tenements due for demolition. With no sewage, electricity or water, it took ten years to get right; now it is listed and she is not allowed to alter anything. Geese potter around outside – and everywhere inside, on plates, ornaments and pictures.

They had come to the neighbouring Old Rectory in this Northamptonshire village in 1945, but by the late fifties were, with six children, bursting at the seams. During the war James had been working with the Bureau of Animal Population in Oxford (researching rook-roosts meant petrol for house-hunting) and Margery had taught English as a pioneer woman at Oundle where her father-in-law was Headmaster. Teaching straightforward boys, gently leading a football-thickie towards **The Mayor of Casterbridge**, was far more enjoyable than dealing with devious girls as a new graduate before the war.



Margery Fisher with her first grand-daughter.

With her real ambition to write novels – one was published in about 1953 – thwarted by rejections, she reviewed children's books for **Housewife**, partly to afford them for her own children. Olive Jones of the Brockhampton Press took such exception to one review that she came out to see her ('in those days they obviously minded'), and ended by commissioning **Intent Upon Reading** (1961). The ten years of her childhood she spent in New Zealand, 'before Dorothy White had jiggled up the library service', meant she had to fill huge gaps in her own reading – 'great fun and very good for me. It was in print for about 15 years, before John Rowe Townsend and people like that, and I think it helped quite a lot of people at the time.' The emphasis has always been on fiction, but 'I made myself take on non-fiction seriously when I did **Matters of Fact**, hoping people would then think of doing better reviewing.' She is proud of her Eleanor Farjeon Award, remembering how Ardizzone patted her knee because she was nervous.

The time may be past for dashing weekly to London, for committees and IBBY work, for exhibitions in Bratislava and world lecture tours, but this is no retirement. Despite 'the awful feeling that I'm getting to the time when people say, "Oh God, is she still alive?"', she will never give up her joyous, round-the-clock reading.

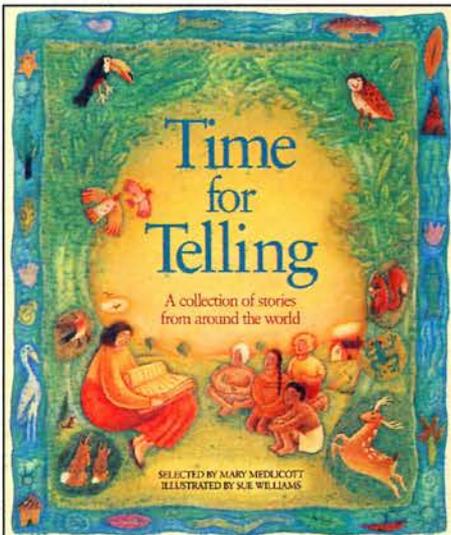
She is, though, seriously considering whether to give up digging her vegetables. ■

TELLING TALES

Chris Powling looks at four new story collections

No printed page can do justice to storytelling as a performance any more than a script gives adequate experience of a play. What it must do, though, is suggest something of the activity's *out-loudness*, of its engagement with an actual audience. Mary Medicott knows this in her bones and it shows in *Time for Telling* (Kingfisher, 0 86272 804 5, £8.95), a collection of stories from . . . well, from just about everywhere. Whatever culture they're drawing on, all her contributors are keenly aware of their place in an essentially *oral* tradition – hence, here and there, the hint of dialect and of direct appeal to an infant and lower junior readership 'listening' in its head. There's an invitation, indeed, to go further:

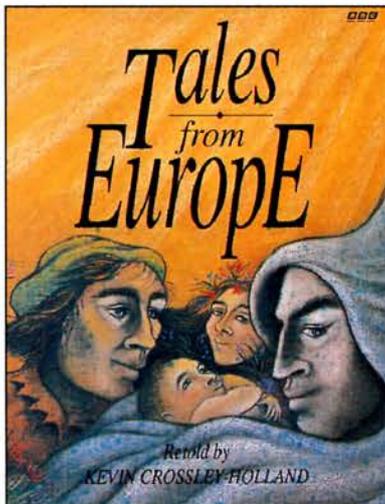
You may . . . prefer to stick to reading the stories aloud. But if you do want to try to tell one, please feel free to make it your own. You might find yourself cutting one bit, embellishing another. You will certainly want to use your own words.



Kingfisher.

Invidious, then, to mention particular tales and tellers, some new and some well-known, since on these terms everything in this generous, open-hearted book, with its warm, bright illustrations by Sue Williams, works a treat.

Cutting, embellishing and making one's own comes entirely naturally to Kevin Crossley-Holland whose *Tales from Europe*



BBC.

(BBC, 0 563 34795 3, £9.99) were first written for the School Television series 'Zig-Zag'. As such, though rooted in that verbal territory which linguists call 'secondary' oracy, they nudge juniors towards full-blown literature with language so fresh and bright few would dare compete with it:

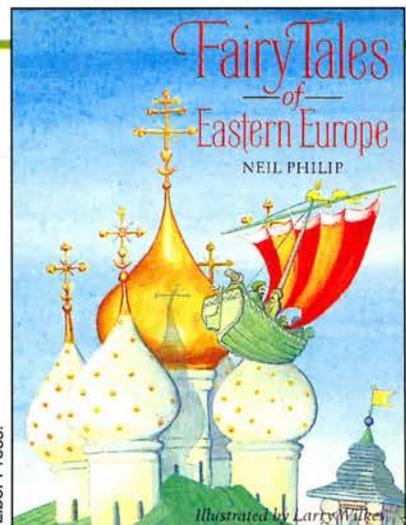
This falling snow is like an old man. It keeps forgetting itself, and wandering sideways. It doesn't really want to touch the ground. And now that the sun is shining, hazy, away in the west, the flakes look so frail you can almost see through them . . .

Thus begins the tale of the sword in the stone but the unexpected angle of approach is typical of retellings so assured that the author can paraphrase Browning, shorten Andersen or distil a Greek myth with equal bravura. My own preference is for the Northern tales since the glint in Kevin Crossley-Holland's prose can become a little dewy the further South he moves but it's clear throughout how shrewdly he's calculating his impact.

I wish I could say the same of Neil Philip's *Fairy Tales of Eastern Europe* (Liber, 1 85734 000 0, £11.99). As a first publication from Liber Press, it's very much a showpiece – beautifully designed and produced, with splendid illustrations from Larry Wilkes in both black-and-white and full colour. The stories themselves are varied and fascinating. What bothers me is the language in which they're told. According to the introduction, the 'earthiness' and 'sense of the realities of peasant life' which runs through them will help 'paint an historical backdrop to the drama of today's news bulletins'. Really? Consider this:

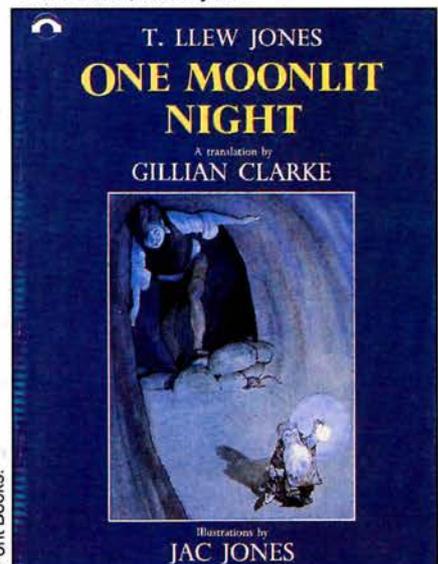
But the King began to grow tired of this behaviour. He called up the Useless Wagoner and gave him a terrible scolding. But it is vain to seat a dog at table, and when the devil gets into a man he stays there; so it was labour lost to drive the Useless Wagoner to work . . .

. . . and so on, describing a world in which it's possible to 'repent bitterly', an old wife can call her husband 'good-for-nothing rogue', a capital city is 'hard by', a fire is something you sit 'before' and a layabout is a person who 'never and never did anything but frolic in the tavern', to take a few examples at random. Here, surely, is a classic case of Folkspeak – that curious malady which so afflicts anthropologists who overdose on the English into which their sources were first translated that 'lo and behold' they end up writing in a style fit for an Edwardian clergyman. A pity . . . because



Liber Press.

in many ways this is an auspicious debut from Liber Press who it's clear will produce books much better than this one. Neil Philip, let it be said, already has.



Pont Books.

At first glance, *One Moonlit Night* (Pont Books, 0 86383 627 5, £12.95) has an odd shape and layout. Half-an-hour into this collection of 26 Welsh folk tales, though, and everything has fallen into place – including the dustjacket which gives equal billing to T Llew Jones who first retold them, Gillian Clarke who wrote this English version and Jac Jones who produced the grey-tinted vignettes beneath each title and the bold full-colour plates throughout. There's not a false note anywhere. For instance, should the originator or the translator take credit for the following:

According to legend, no one since that day has searched for the crock of gold, and it still lies under the stone, waiting to be discovered by a boy with yellow hair and blue eyes. One day, such a youth will come and, as he sets foot on the stone, it will move back easily revealing the treasure that Merlin hid there so long ago.

What colour is your hair? Are your eyes blue?

Opposite, as a pay-off, is a picture so simple and powerful it reminded me of the work of Charles Keeping.

In short, the Welsh Arts Council who commissioned the book ought to be hugging itself with glee. Since the text, arranged in a double column on each page, is already halfway to autocue format I suggest an immediate approach to a Welsh TV company – unless, that is, the BBC's 'Zig Zag' gets there first. ■

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Trevor Dickinson's Spring picture book round-up
Jeff Hynds on wordless picture books
Philippe Dupasquier on illustrating wordlessly
Geoff Fox on the graphic novels of Philip Pullman
Paul Johnson on children making picture books
Victor Ambrus in Authorgraph
... and reviews!