



# BOOKS FOR KEEPS

November 1992 No. 77 UK Price £1.90

the children's book magazine

## Christmas



# WHY THE RIGHT BOOKS MATTER...

## WHY YOU CAN RECOMMEND BFC

**M**ore than a dozen years ago, BOOKS FOR CHILDREN realised that caring parents with limited time, money and expertise, were looking for ways to help their children prepare for, and do well at school.

Teachers, educationalists and government committees all agreed: a love of reading and an aptitude for learning go hand in hand. For reading is a key factor in developing the language potential which still remains the best predictor of educational success.

This is where homes that own books have such an advantage. They provide the perfect context not just for reading, but for re-reading – the enjoyment, over and over again, of some encounter with print so happy it leads to more and more encounters.

### So, where does BFC come in?

BFC is a children's book club. But it's a book club with a difference. Our trademark is quality, and we never offer a book just because it is a money-spinner. We aim to screen all the new hardback children's books before they are published, and offer our members only the very best of them.

We offer information books – offering knowledge at its most accurate, up-to-date and attractively presented. We look for picture books – nowadays not just an aid to literacy but a whole Art Curriculum in miniature. We look for fiction – the form in which humanity has always cast its wisest attempts to understand itself and communicate that understanding.

### And who selects these books?

The BFC selection panel is:

ANNE WOOD, editor of the magazine *Books for Your Children*, a producer of children's television programmes, and holder of two literary awards;

CHRIS POWLING, who is a tutor in English, a former head teacher, a writer and broadcaster;

MARGARET CARTER, who is an expert in child development, former editor of *'Mother'* magazine and a writer and children's book reviewer;

SALLY GRINDLEY, who is editorial director of BFC and a writer of children's books.

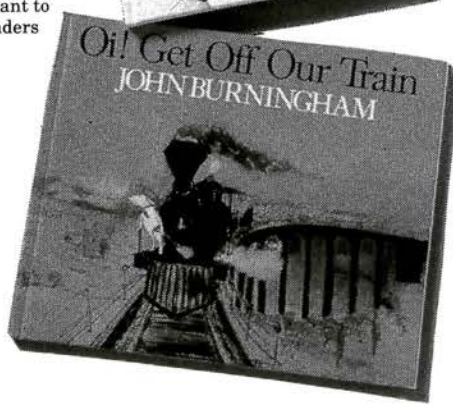
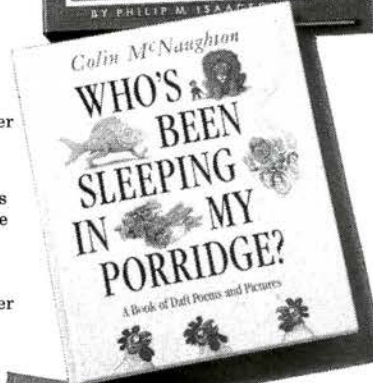
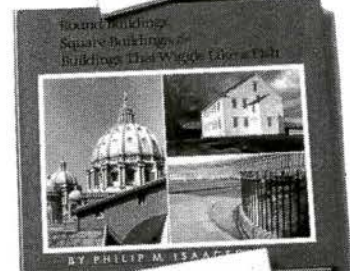
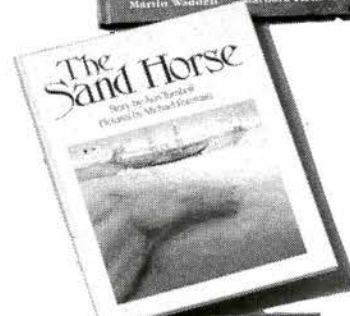
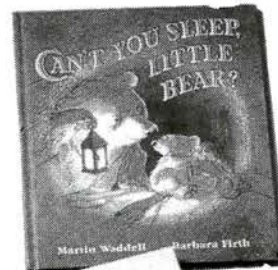
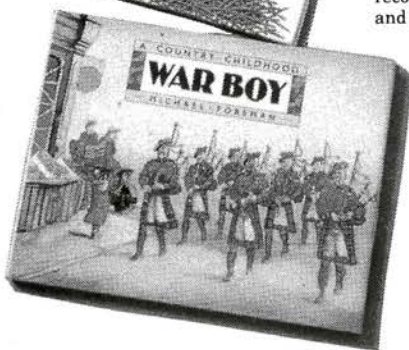
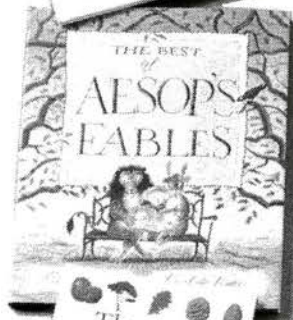
You only have to look at this page to see the calibre of books they have recommended over the past few months. And they are all offered at savings which range from between 20% to 50% off the publishers' prices.

So the benefits of Club membership are very real, very tangible and very valuable. Anyone wishing to become a member of Books for Children should simply write to us at the address below and we will send full details and our introductory offer.

We hope, too, that after reading this page you will want to recommend us to other parents, teachers, playgroup leaders and PTAs.



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## Cover story

On the front of *BfK* this month is the cover of *On Christmas Eve* by Peter Collington - see his accompanying piece on page 12. The book was published by Heinemann (the paperback version is now available) and the animated film will be shown on TV at Christmas - all details are given at the foot of Peter Collington's delightful double-page spread. We thank Heinemann for their help in using this illustration.

## BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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# EDITOR'S PAGE



Ebenezer Scrooge, insists a friend of mine, was no hater of Christmas; his tolerance threshold for cliché was just abnormally low. This is a savage diagnosis, admittedly, but tempting all the same as we re-enter the season of chestnuts roasting on an open fire, sleighbells tinkling in the snow. Prolonged exposure to the full range of Xcessmass, especially in these drear days, is enough to make anyone chime in with Tom Lehrer's famous lament 'Brother, here we go again'. Sister, too.

And yet ... deep in the tat and trivia of it all, doesn't something still stir? Can't the old magic work yet again if only we make way for it? That's what this issue of *BfK* proposes, anyway. It's Christmassy through-and-through and if we could make it more so, we would.

The Christmas Story itself is where we begin with Jan Pieńkowski and Jane Ray, one a Catholic and the other an atheist, describing very different approaches to the text of the King James Bible (see pages 4-5). They're different, that is, in style and orientation rather than purpose. The end product, in both cases, is a wonderful book for adults to share with children, which also demonstrates how the clutter of cliché can be cleared at a touch - provided it's a genuinely personal touch.

See Edward Blishen's article (pages 6-7) for a reminder of something else so well-known we commonly overlook it: the joy of reading aloud. Only at Christmas, do I hear you say? Certainly not - but what better way to pass the time while roasting those chestnuts? Or waiting for Christmas Dinner, Mary Hoffman might add. On pages 28-29 she offers a mouth-watering menu of titles as an appetiser for all ages so there's a risk, if you take up her suggestions, you may never get to the meal.

Christmas being the season of goodwill to all men, even He of the Quiff, pages 36-37 offer a Present for Mr Patten - Leon Garfield's account of his own scriptwriting for *The Animated Tales*, a book and video package of six abbreviated plays by Shakespeare which Peter Thomas reviews enthusiastically on the facing page. Alas, Peter suffers from the supreme disadvantage of being a talented and experienced teacher so no doubt his endorsement of this enterprise and the support it offers the best classroom practices will fall on DFE ears as usual. Still, who knows? It is Christmas.

And strange things happen at Christmas. Ask Peter Collington. Our front cover is decorated by a page from his book *On Christmas Eve*, now issued in paperback - though, just as easily, it might have been a still from the movie version which will be shown on BBC TV during the holiday break. This book changed Peter's life and on pages 12-13 he reveals how it came about. It all began, you see, on Christmas Eve a couple of years ago with a little help from a certain red-garbed, white-bearded travelling-type who broke into Peter's house in the dead of night.

What's that? You can't credit such a fellow? Neither could we, at first. He seemed to us about as likely as, say, a 40-page issue of



Christopher Robin and friends as a Shepard Christmas card, from *The Brilliant Career of Winnie-the-Pooh* (see page 8).

*BfK* with 12 of those pages in colour. After all, this would mean we had resources for a special Authorgraph (centre pages), for an extra feature (page 11), for a double-spread of News (pages 38-39), for a Letters Page (page 32) and additional review space (page 8) - for an issue, in sum, both bigger and brighter than ever before. Who'd be mad enough to believe that could be possible in the middle of a recession? No one, surely ... except you're holding just such an issue in your hand.

So thanks, Santa.

Mind you, he had plenty of helpers. We've never been so well-supported by advertisers, by publishers willing to assist with the costs of colour reproduction, by companies who keep our postage-costs low through funding inserts (see the innovative flyer from Viking, for instance, which arrives with this issue). We're also grateful to our contributors and regular reviewing team - workers for love rather than money, Heaven knows. Most of all, though, we must thank our subscribers, single or in bulk, for a loyalty that's been quite splendid in these troubled times. Against all the odds, we've actually had a small increase in our readership, recently.

What keeps us all going, of course, is a love of books and children in close proximity. Now there's a cause worth a wassail or two. In the words of Tiny Tim, then, 'God bless us, every one!' Sometimes, only a cliché will do.

Enjoy the issue.

*Chris*

## Subscription price increase to Books for Keeps

Here at *BfK*, as Chris says, we do our best to contain costs and keep the annual subscription as low as possible. We last put up the price in September 1991 and promised to hold it until August 1992. We are pleased that we managed to maintain the existing subscription rate for an additional four months. Now we have to announce a price increase as follows:

* UK and Ireland	£12.00
* Overseas surface	£17.50
* Airmail	£20.00 (a single rate now applies)

In addition, we are able to offer LEAs, libraries, colleges, booksellers and others interested in multiple subscriptions a range of bulk discounts from 10% to 55%. The new prices are effective from 1 January 1993.

Richard Hill (Managing Director)



## ILLUSTRATING

Jan Pieńkowski, a Catholic, and Jane Ray, an atheist,

## 'THE STORY OF CHRISTMAS'

Jane Ray, Orchard, 1 85213 280 9, £8.99 (published 1991).

I've no Christian faith, indeed I have many arguments with the established Christian Church, and would describe myself as an atheist. In rejecting that religion I'd turned my back on much of its imagery, poetry and history. I have been amazed, awed and excited, by the richness of other cultural traditions (Indian, Chinese, African, Islamic – perhaps because I have no personal involvement with them) and until recently rather embarrassed by my own.

Now I'm sufficiently far away from the painful point at which I realised that I simply did not believe in a god, I can take a more dispassionate view of the faith of my culture and acknowledge its influence on my artistic development. I became aware that there was something hypocritical in revering the customs of other cultures whilst pouring scorn on my own.

Researching the story of Christmas caused many pleasant childhood memories to surface. I have always found Christmas both moving and comforting which was deeply confusing at a time when I was turning away from religion and developing a political awareness that rejected the rampant consumerism so prevalent at that season. Now I have children it makes perfect sense to have times of celebration – be they Diwali, Hannukah or Christmas – as essential focal points in the year. Human beings the world over need to acknowledge birth, death and marriage and this need, in my view, is what actually gives rise to religion, to mythology and legend in the first place. All cultures have their own creation stories, their visions of the apocalypse and their yearning for redemption. I find this universality both comforting and encouraging.

My *Story of Christmas* sketchbook began to fill up with memories of ancient churches visited on childhood holidays, of stone effigies, stained glass, carved misericords, brasses and gargoyles. I realised I'd long been using these images in my work without understanding where they were coming from. Brought up in a musical household I had a wealth of musical influences to draw upon, both religious and secular – Benjamin Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols*, wassails and mumming songs, medieval carols and, of course, Handel's *Messiah*. I looked up the Mystery Plays, and tracked down half-forgotten legends of Christmas, of the hay blossoming as the Christ child was laid in it, and of the cattle kneeling at the stroke of midnight on Christmas Eve. I remembered, too, that however angry religion makes me, the school nativity play always reduces me to tears!

I was pregnant with my second daughter all the time I was working on the book and wanted to show the intensity, anxiety and pleasure of that state. I didn't want to portray Mary simply as a necessary vessel for the production of the saviour but as a character in her own right – bewildered, excited and joyful. In my portrayal of the Annunciation, she is on an equal level with Gabriel, not prostrate with awe. She directs the packing of the mule and leads the way home again. She is vulnerable on the long journey and clearly in labour on their arrival. She is shown suckling her newborn child, slightly awkward maybe, but intent on him and his needs. I based that picture on drawings of a friend and her new baby, as well as using memories of my own first experience.

I make extensive use of symbolism in the book, a device that fascinates me. I love to be able to look again and again at a picture and each time to find a new clue. In my picture of the three wise men approaching Herod, I tried to indicate their wisdom and knowledge by constructing their flowing robes from a collage of old maps, scraps of text in different languages, and astrological signs. Herod, his face a mask, sits enthroned in a barred room with cracking walls, spying eyes; his animals, a dog and a hawk, chained and captive.

Throughout the book I used bright watercolours, inks and collage, a lacquer to burnish, age and intensify the paintings, and a wonderful gold ink to give richness and texture. So, although I was slightly ambivalent when I first started to work on this project, I became totally involved. I handed it to Orchard Books two days before Ellie was born and dedicated it to her.

I hope people will enjoy the book, the beauty of the language on which it's based and my illustrations. It would give me great pleasure to think they might return to it again and again, and find something afresh, whatever their beliefs.



Jane Ray's *Noah's Ark* is also published by Orchard, 1 85213 206 X at £7.95. Her latest book for them is *The Story of the Creation*, 1 85213 281 7 at £8.99.



# CHRISTMAS

each describe their approach to the Christmas story.

## 'CHRISTMAS'

Jan Pieńkowski, Heinemann, 0 434 95649 X, £7.95; mini version, 0 434 95693 7, £3.99; Puffin, 0 14 050646 2, £4.99 pbk (published 1984).

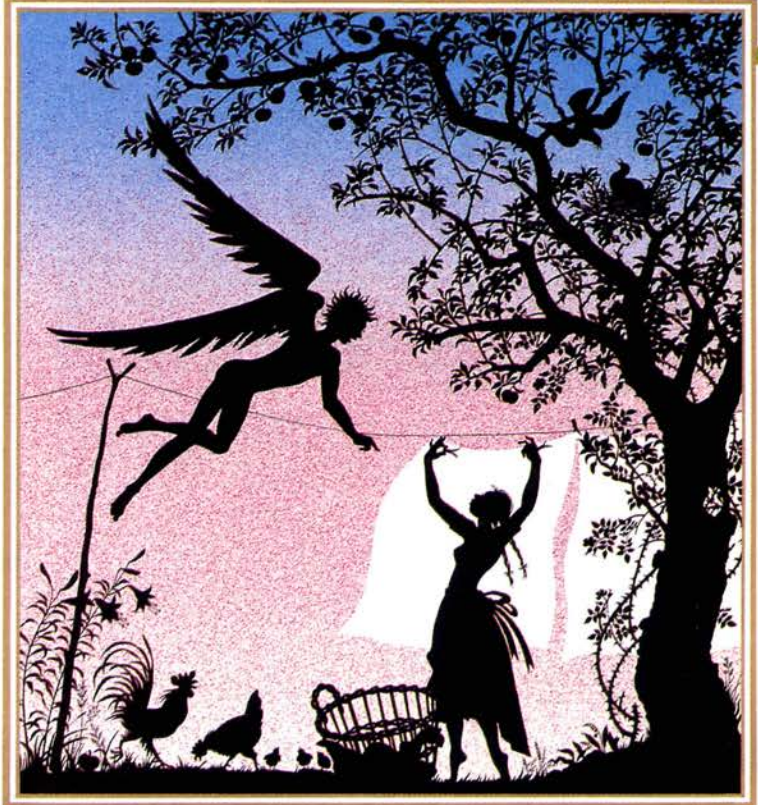
The King James version is unarguably the greatest translation of the Bible into English and I felt that no retelling could equal it for the beauty of its language and narrative force. So when I started to plan a book of the Christmas story, there was never any doubt which text it would be, even though I am a Catholic. The only difficulty was in convincing my publishers that a book like this could be a commercial success.

From first to last, it took three years, a long time for a 32-page picture book. The Christmas story is told in the New Testament by Matthew and by Luke and each account reflects the character of the writer. It took a degree of nerve to plunder these sacred texts and weave them together into what I hoped would emerge as one seamless narrative, with a beginning, a middle and an end. But I decided this had to be the way to do it because, although the two storytellers are very different, the familiar words which are the essence of Christmas for the English-speaking world, come almost equally from both. There were times when a choice had to be made and, because I wanted the book to be accessible to young readers, brevity was vital. So the text itself took a lot of thought and it had to be first, before I could begin to weld the pictures into it.

Just as the original scholars used language familiar to ordinary people, so I felt the pictures needed familiar settings. What could match the archaic words, known to children from so many well-loved carols and nativity plays?

I set the pictures in the country which is every child's heritage – the land of legend.

King Herod's castle is fit for a villain. Fully of gloomy dungeons and bristling with armed men, it looms menacingly over the little town where we discover Mary in her back garden, doing her washing and hanging it up as the Archangel Gabriel appears with the great news. Maybe this picture was based on an old Polish country saying that the sun shines when the Virgin hangs up her washing: maybe the apple tree is an echo of the garden of Eden.



The silhouettes in the pictures allow children's imaginations free rein to identify with the characters, whatever their ethnic background. They can dress the three kings in the richest colours and paint the houses of the crowded street to match the town they know.

The pictures are married to the text by illuminated capital letters and gold foliage, a traditional embellishment for the Gospel words. The plants are chosen to help tell the story: the holly and the ivy form a rustic bridge to carry the running deer to the lowly cattle shed, standing among the trees of a winter forest. This is not the Palestine of 1AD but the northern landscape of so many Christmas carols.

The wise men are portrayed as the three kings of fable, forming an innocent link between the scheming King Herod and the child in the manger. They visit both in turn and deliver their precious gifts of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh as Joseph and Mary are working to make a shelter for the baby. In tropical moonlight, we see them embark on their voyage home, together with their menagerie of pack animals.

**Christmas** was printed in an appropriately exotic location. Only Singapore could provide a book decorated with gold 'bronzing' and I enjoyed going out there and working with the printers to get it right.

The drama of the story was challenging as well as rewarding: the most difficult scene was perhaps Herod's cruel horsemen galloping through autumnal brambles in pursuit of the innocent babies of Bethlehem, while the Holy Family make their escape under cover of darkness, lit by forked lightning. Perhaps this too was an echo of a childhood memory, when my own family departed from my native Warsaw with Nazi bombs and shells falling all around.

As the rainbow follows the storm, we find the child in his father's workshop surrounded by the carpenter's tools we can recognise and holding the nails which we can also relate to coming events.

When the book was finished, anxieties surfaced. Dreading to be thought heretical, I sent a copy to the Pope, with an accompanying letter, in Polish, drawing His Holiness' attention, for good measure, to the reference to his home city in the picture showing 'no room at the inn'. After a nerve-wracking wait, I had back a letter, also in Polish, signed by an Italian Cardinal, conveying the papal blessing on my future creative work. Heartened by this, I tackled **Easter**. ■



Jan Pieńkowski's **Easter** is also published by Heinemann, 0 434 95659 7, at £8.95; mini version, 0 434 96053 5, £3.99.



# Two Joys for Christmas

The old lady was eager to show me something. Since I appeared to be mixed up with that radio programme, **A Good Read**, I could have no decent reason for not consenting to see it.

'There!' she said. 'It reads to me! I have it because I can't see! But what I want to know is why I didn't have one when I *could* see.' And she frowned at me, spectacularly, clearly of the opinion that the fault was mine. Whereupon she had an old lady's instant change of heart, and reached out for my hand. 'You couldn't help it,' she said.

And, truly, I couldn't help it that my friend didn't have a Talking Book machine long ago. Also I bit back a response which would hardly have been kind. 'Didn't you have a husband?' I wanted to ask, knowing in fact that she did, but he was less a husband than a golfer. A not unreasonable man: but I would have hesitated at laying before him my notion that he ought occasionally to give the links a miss in favour of reading aloud to his missus.

Two things have long been clear to me: that it's a sadness so many people discover the delights of being read aloud to only when they are old and poor-sighted: and that everyone ought to be encouraged to be a Talking Book machine. That encouragement, of course, is best rooted in childhood. I don't want to suggest that ours was an amazingly virtuous family, but for an important step in my own education I look back to a moment when a small (but significant) son of mine said one bedtime: 'Tonight I'm going to read to you.' 'Good gracious, are you?' I said. It took me a moment or two to realise that he'd understood, but I hadn't, an essential point about reading aloud to one's children at bedtime or at any other moment of the day – that there are *two* joys involved, being read aloud to and reading aloud. My audience had properly decided to make an audience of me. I am now so ancient that that original audience has bred audiences of its own and I am glad to say that all these additional audiences now treat me as an audience . . . of a remarkably captive kind. Grandfathers, having made the effort to be seated, tend to stay put. I am now read into the ground by grandchildren, and cheerfully admit I deserve it.

I've never forgotten my first great experience of being read aloud to, by Mrs Brown of Byng Road Council School, Barnet. I guess it was the winter term of 1928 or 1929. The book was **Black Beauty**: and we were appalled to find that it caused us to be in two minds about the impending Christmas. We longed for it, but grew increasingly alarmed that it would come before Mrs B got to the end of the book. She was too splendid a reader to hurry, except where the text demanded pace. If the horse was trotting, her voice trotted; if it ambled, which it seemed to do more of, her voice ambled. What I remember is seeing, because of that warm and splendidly clear reading, how you could harness words, as **Black Beauty** was harnessed: how they slowed and speeded, how they fitted together. If there were quotation marks, Mrs Brown was suddenly all quotation marks. I loved the conversation, each speech (I could see as she read) having its own space, flying flags of punctuation fore and aft:

"Well, my dear," she said, "how do you like him?"

"He is exactly what John said," he replied; "a pleasanter creature I never wished to mount. What shall we call him?"

[Mrs Brown beautifully pausing, making room for the creasing of the lady's brow.]

"Would you like Ebony," said she, "he is as black as ebony."

"No, not Ebony."

[Room made now for creasing of brows all round.]

"Will you call him Blackbird, like your uncle's old horse?"

"No, he is far handsomer than old Blackbird ever was."

[Mrs Brown taking her time. There was a sensation as if she'd got up and walked round the playground before resuming.]

"Yes," she said, "he is really quite a beauty, and he has such a sweet-tempered face and such a fine intelligent eye – what do you say to calling him **Black Beauty**?"

[Mrs Brown's reading here was so fine there came a sharp drawing in of breath from the whole class. **Black Beauty**! Of course! Surely the gentleman would agree! And Mrs Brown's voice made the most of the quite flat firmness with which he did so.]

"**Black Beauty** – why, yes, I think that is a very good name. If you like it shall be his name," and so it was.



**Edward Blighen**  
on the  
pleasures  
of being  
read to  
aloud . . .  
equalled  
only by  
those of  
the  
reader.

I wish I'd been read aloud to when I was smaller (I'm thinking perhaps of 1924). But there was no habit of it – and my mother, who'd have been most willing, was barely literate, and famously would be reading about Chile when she thought she was reading about China. What it does from the beginning, where the reader is halfways sensitive to the job, and relishes the words on the tongue and the changes of pace and the rest of it, is to give children a sense of the weight and colour of words, of the great variety of rhythms in language: and they'll understand that words are to get your tongue round and not merely to run your eye along. They'll have the beginnings of what you must have if you're to make effective use of language: an idea (not the less strong for being perfectly subliminal) of how harmony and pleasure and fittingness of sound may be present according to the choice of words and the fashion in which they've been fitted together. It's the ear that's your true judge of all that (or the tongue, when children have been encouraged to do their own reading aloud). The eye, relatively, is a lousy critic.

I'm a judge of the W H Smith Young Writers' Competition and there's always a moment at the final judging when one of us reads aloud a poem we've all missed, and we see that it's marvellous. Eyes have failed to pick it up: a voice has gathered it in.

So – the best, early training in language is the training of the ear:

*'The gentleman raised his eyes above his newspaper and looked curiously at Jemima –*

*"Madam, have you lost your way?" said he. He had a long bushy tail which he was sitting upon, as the stump was somewhat damp.'*

[The reader's voice perfectly bland – nothing to worry about, nothing at all! – except for that slightly disturbing, oh most faint, emphasis on 'the long bushy tail'. The child feels pleasantly supported, carried along, by this nobly equable tone the story has.]



*'Jemima thought him mighty civil and handsome. She explained that she had not lost her way, but that she was trying to find a convenient dry nesting-place.*

*"Ah!, is that so? indeed!" said the gentleman with sandy whiskers, looking curiously at Jemima.'*



[The existence of the exclamation marks and the question mark distinctly hinted at by the reader, who is being brilliantly briefed by Beatrix Potter. Her very punctuation amounts to stage-directions.]

*'He folded up the newspaper, and put it in his coat-tail pocket.'*

['Bushy tail' . . . 'coat-tail', thinks the young audience, liking this neatness of echo: they're similar terms, yet – given now a certain wariness in the reader's voice – they are perhaps not similar enough. The civilised coat-tail is at odds with the potentially barbarous bushy one, and 'sandy' sounds the wrong colour for trustworthy whiskers.]

*"As to a nest – there is no difficulty: I have a sackful of feathers in my wood-shed."*

[Here the audience intervenes. A valuable feeling for what characterisation might amount to, induced by earlier readings and now by the combined skills of Miss Potter and the reader – a notion of something in *Jemima Puddle-duck* that might be seen as unsuspicious to the point of silliness – and Lord, that reference to *feathers*! – causes the audience to shout warnings: repressed at once, since they know a story is inexorable.]

*"No, my dear madam, you will be in nobody's way. You may sit there as long as you like," said the bushy long-tailed gentleman.'*

[That tail again!]

*'And he led the way to a very retired, dismal-looking house amongst the fox-gloves.'*

[And there, good grief, is *description*! 'A very retired, dismal-looking house'! Would the reader mind uttering those words again, to double the pleasure of them! I remember Mrs Brown would spend much of the morning dealing not at all effectually with the adjective, called a describing word because it . . . described. In the late afternoon she read aloud to us and we saw with no recourse at all to the blackboard what an adjective was.]

Should it ever stop, this reading aloud and being reading aloud to? I see no decent reason for saying it should. Any teacher knows the child who's been read to – there's that confidence with language, willingness to experiment with it: that understanding of tones, speeds, densities, deftnesses. But there's also what reading aloud and together has done for a family, giving them a whole rich shared range of references, drawn from worlds beyond themselves, the words of the imagination. Why ever bring this to a halt? I've often said, and greatly believe, that the writing of my friend Leon Garfield, writing that is young and old at one, is made for a universe of readers of mixed ages who share their reading. You may turn up at a bedside or in the early evening living-room with *The Apprentices*, perhaps. If you're doing the reading aloud, you can't stop doing the reading

aloud: if you're doing the listening, you can't stop doing the listening. The author (I'd make a law against his ever being read silently) won't release you.

*'There they go, Moss and Blister, hurrying up Blackfriars Stairs and on through the dark streets, under a sky fairly peppered with stars as cold as frozen sparks. Up Colman's Alley, across Bristol Street . . .*

*"'Appy Christmas, marm – and a nappy Christmas to you, miss!" bellowed a bellman, coming out of an alehouse and wagging his bell like a swollen brass finger.'*

[The faintest of pauses, for the image has to be dwelt upon – just long enough.]

*"'For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given!" He hiccupped, and drew out a little Christmas poem of his own composing, while Moss and Blister stood stock-still and listened. Then he held out his hand, and Moss put a sixpence in it, for it was Christmas Eve, and Moss, who was a midwife, felt holy and important.'*

Note that the bellman is a Talking Book – or a Talking Poem, anyway. And ask yourself how such stuff should be read otherwise than aloud: by child or adult, it doesn't matter. And further, consider the question: Who wouldn't want to add Moss and Blister to the family's stock of reference? I have a sudden fantastic vision: of Leon's story being read aloud to my old dim-sighted friend by her husband, that penitent sportsman. ('See, I snap my clubs over my knee,' said the bushy-tailed golfer.) As ever he might concede – memorable as enjoyed by the eye, like so much in books Moss and Blister are doubly memorable on the tongue and in the ear. ■

Edward Blishen, formerly a teacher, is a well-known writer and broadcaster. His work includes both autobiography and several anthologies of prose and poetry. Recently two books he wrote with Leon Garfield have been reissued by Gollancz in paperback at £7.99 each: *The God Beneath the Sea* (0 575 05256 2) and *The Golden Shadow* (0 575 05255 4). Both are illustrated by the late Charles Keeping.

Books quoted from are:

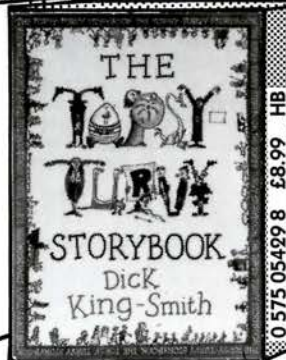
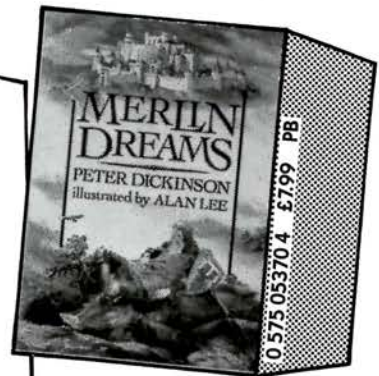
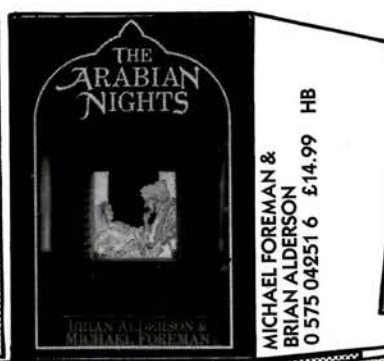
*Black Beauty*, Anna Sewell, various editions

*The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck*, Beatrix Potter, Warne, 0 7232 3468 X, £3.99

*The Apprentices*, Leon Garfield, Puffin, 0 14 031595 0, £3.50 pbk

# Christmas Delights

full of festive promise!



GOLLANCZ





# CHRISTMAS BOOK FAIR



**R**eviewers of Christmas books for children had better beware: their longing for something different may be at odds with the very sameness that attracts youngsters. After all, the whole kerfuffle won't have gone sour for them – not while they're still constructing the sort of idealised set-up that for us is Just Like the One We Used to Know, ho-ho. The cleverness of **Sammy's Christmas Workshop** (André Deutsch, 0 590 54077 7, £7.99) is that it manages to exploit this gap between child and adult perception without violating it on either side. Behind Sammy's frantic attempts to pass the time before Santa's arrival, we see grown-ups struggling to fit everything in – captured with special wit by Amanda Welch in her pictures at the market and outside the local corner shop. When Sammy finally gets lucky and wins unanimous approval in Odette Elliott's warmhearted and completely credible addition to her tales about this mixed-race family, it's both appropriate and satisfying that Christmas seems to have arrived early.

In Philippe Dupasquier's **Paul's Present** (Andersen, 0 86264 374 0, £6.99) it's already gone. This is a post-mortem story, set on the first day of the Spring term, when children engage in the time-honoured activity of comparing-the-spoils. Paul's present, a hamster, is up against Jenny's rollerskates, Mark's skateboard, Kevin's transformer, Stanislas's telescope, the twins' walkie-talkies, Arthur's Dracula costume, Dimitri's drums and even the 'giant train set with thirty carriages, four engines, 40 metres of track, bridges, tunnels and a modern station which lit up in the dark' that's been given, naturally, to Christopher Smart. Oh yeah, do I hear you sniff? Well, Philippe Dupasquier gets there first and in a neat bit of narrative table-turning restores our faith in his wonderful ability to explore, in word and image, the sheer anarchy of children's values.

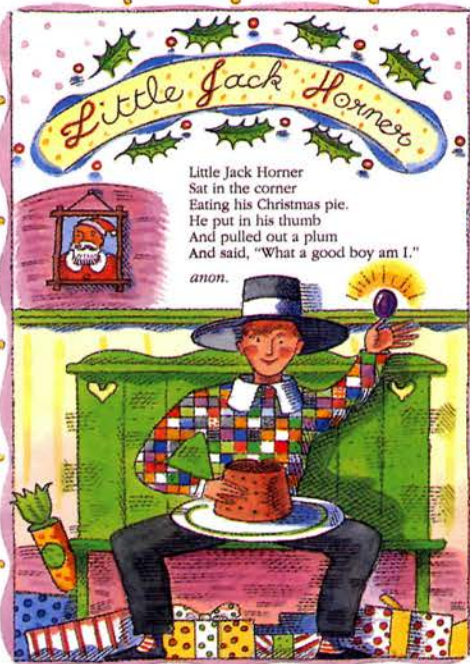


From **Gumdrop's Merry Christmas** (Hodder & Stoughton).

Of course, the gift Christopher Smart should really have gone for is an Austin Clifton Healey 12/4, circa 1926... yes, Gumdrop himself. **Gumdrop's Merry Christmas** (Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 56714 7, £7.99) is the thirty-fifth in the series, but you'd never believe it. Val Biro's vibrant drawing and droll, mannerly storyline about the year

**CHRIS POWLING**  
looks at new hardbacks  
with a Christmas theme.

Gumdrop took over from Santa's sleigh seem as fresh as ever. Clearly this is a narrative vehicle which, handled so expertly, will run and run... vintage, you might say.



From **Poems for Christmas** (André Deutsch).

The verse in Jill Bennett's anthology, **Poems for Christmas** (André Deutsch, 0 590 54062 9, £8.99), is also built to last. Younger readers are the book's target and, backed up by Ian Beck's bright and deceptively simple illustrations, its appeal to infants is guaranteed, ranging as it does from 'Little Jack Horner' to Adrian Mitchell's mysterious manikin, or womanikin, who

*'... liked to swoop around the hall  
With a silver paper soccer ball  
And I think I was four but maybe some  
more  
When I named her Mrs Christmas.'*

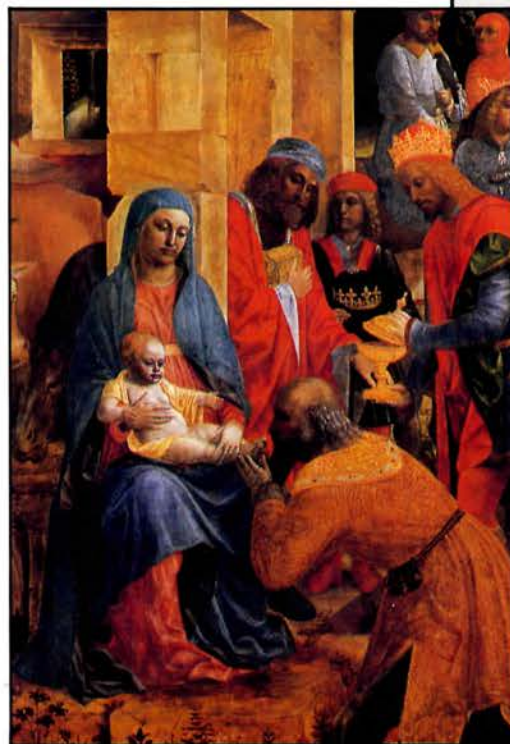
As always, whether for four-year-olds or maybe some more-year-olds, Jill Bennett's choice is unerring in quality and variety. The best poem of the lot, though, is Charles Causley's 'High in the Heaven', which augurs well for the poet's own collection **Bring in the Holly** (Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 0668 6, £8.99). This offers six old favourites such as 'The Animal's Carol' and 'Ballad of the Bread Man' mixed with half-a-dozen new poems I can only describe as about-to-be-favourites. All are illustrated by Lisa Kopper at the top of her form... and she needs to be when her skills must match verse like this:

*'Angels, under elm and lotus  
On St Vincent Square  
Adjust a drifted wing, a halo.  
Fix their gold hair.'*

Could a pageant, in a particular place, be 'fixed' more succinctly? What makes Charles Causley so impressive a writer for children lies partly in the sense he always gives of 'language on tiptoe', Edith Sitwell's

definition of poetry, and partly in his uncanny ability to surpass other first-rate talents on their terms rather than his. 'Parson's Lea' out-Mitchell's Adrian Mitchell, for instance, and 'Driving Home' out-Nicholls Judith Nicholls. This, truly, is a wonderful book.

So, quite literally, is **The First Christmas** (Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 0784 4, £9.99) which in spread after spread lays out for us just what Jan Pieńkowski and Jane Ray were trying to surpass (see pages 3-4 of this issue). Here, the King James Version of the Nativity is illustrated by paintings from the National Gallery, London – not so much a picture book as a book of pictures, in fact. Sensibly, whether full plates on the right-hand page or exquisite vignettes on the left, these are interleaved, unidentified, with the text. We must turn to the key at the back of the book to discover we've been looking at a roll-call of the world's greatest painters between the mid-fifteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries from Fra Angelico to Pierre Patel.



'The Adoration of the Kings' by Vincenzo Foppa, from **The First Christmas** (Frances Lincoln).

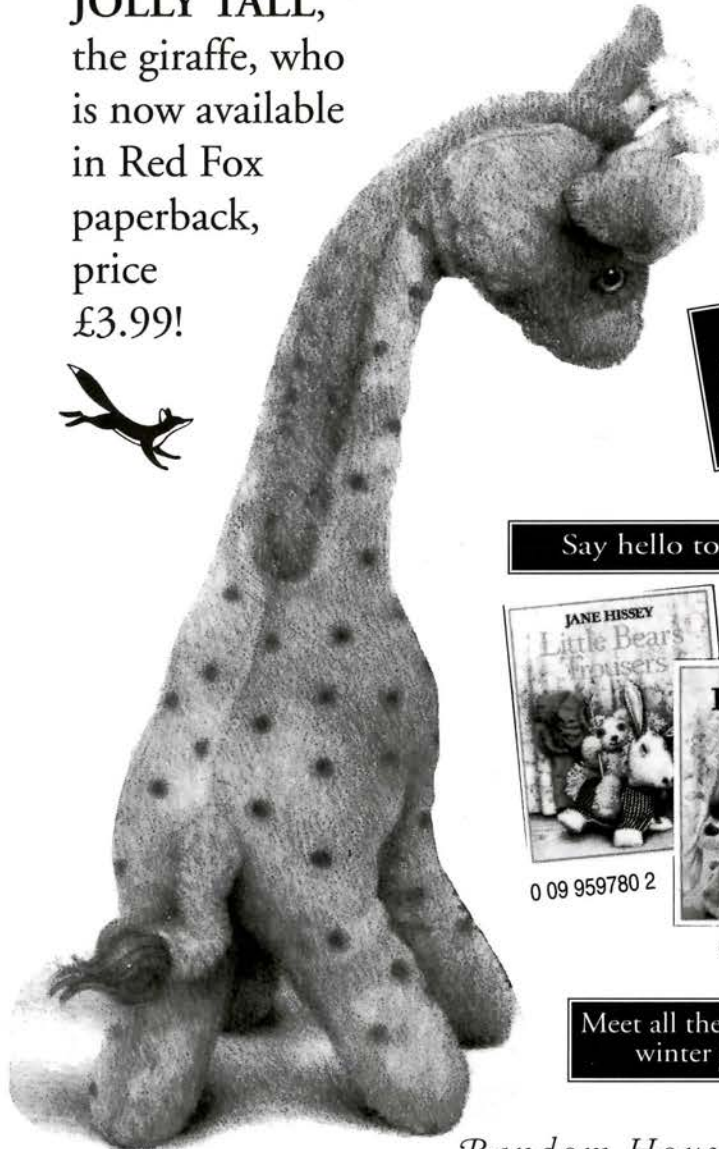
Could there be better confirmation of the proposition that picture-books are for all ages and are about Art as much as Literacy?

Finally, Ann Thwaite's **The Brilliant Career of Winnie-the-Pooh** (Methuen, 0 413 66710 3, £14.99), an account of A A Milne and his writing for children, is a spin-off from her much praised biography published two years ago. It's a glorious scrapbook of photographs, theatre programmes, newspaper cuttings, certificates, menus, cigarette cards and miscellaneous other material linked by a sharp, scholarly text which never attempts to compete with the full-length version. What's that? How can I justify mentioning it here? Well, for a start, there's the Shepard Christmas card, reproduced on page 6, which was sold at Christie's for £5,380 in 1990... and, for a finish, it's the book that, if I hadn't got it already, I'd most want to unwrap on December 25th. So there. ■



# IT'S TEDDY BEAR TIME!

**E**nter the world of Jane Hissey and make new friends with Bramwell Brown, Zebra, Little Bear, Rabbit, Old Bear and Duck! And welcome the newest member of the gang **JOLLY TALL**, the giraffe, who is now available in Red Fox paperback, price **£3.99!**



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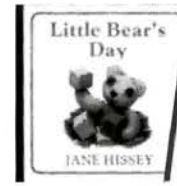


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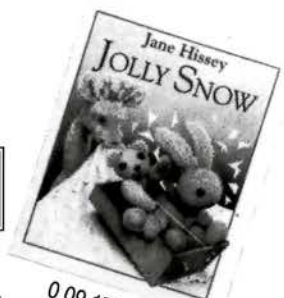
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Meet all the characters in this beautiful winter storybook, price £7.99



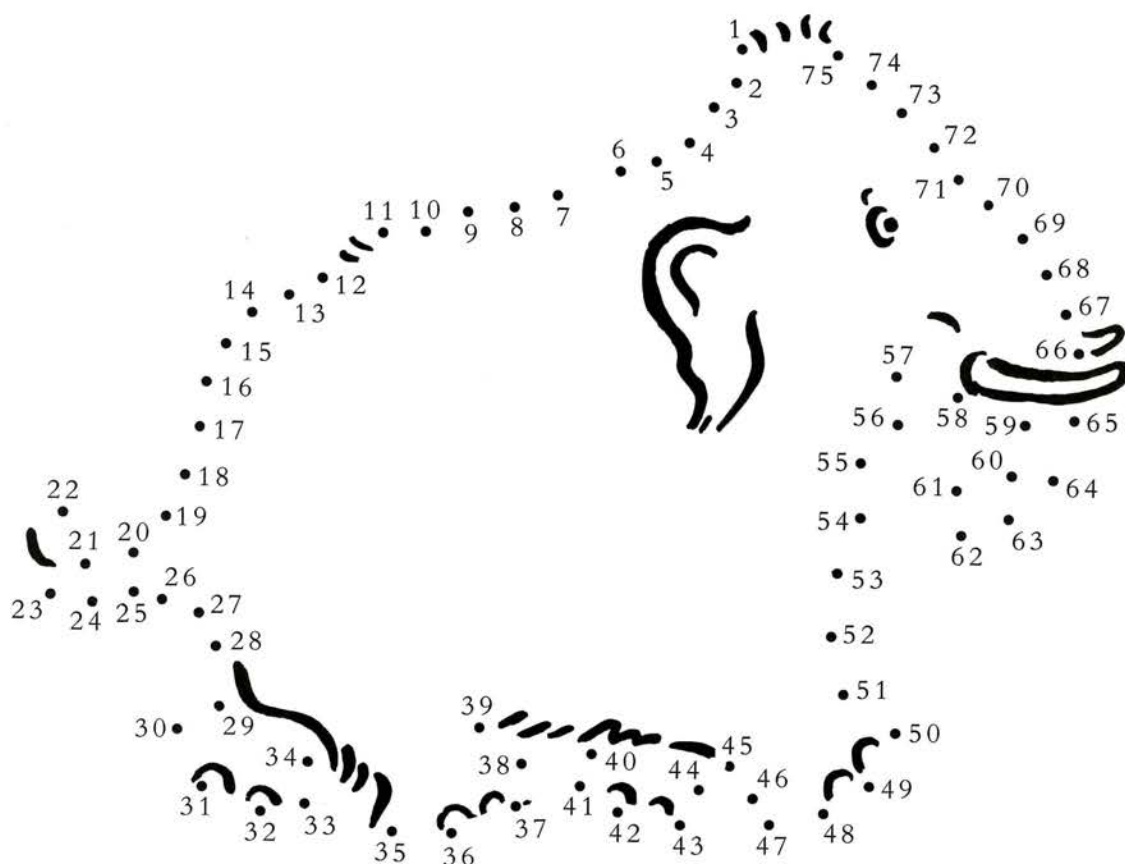
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Random House Children's Books

**RED FOX**



# WHAT'S HAIRY, HUGE & READ ALL OVER?



Which paperback list produces innovative picture books by Dick Bruna, Janet and Allan Ahlberg, Babette Cole, Emma Chichester Clark and Peter Collington?

Which paperback list publishes Winnie-the-Pooh, Babar, Tintin and Thomas the Tank Engine?

Which paperback list has a significant number of titles recommended for the National Curriculum?

Which paperback list publishes classics like The Railway Children, 101 Dalmatians,

Lorna Doone, Little Women, The Secret Garden and Little House on the Prairie?

Which paperback list promotes fiction from prizewinning authors such as Anne Fine, Michael Morpurgo, Jenny Nimmo, Jean Ure, Penelope Lively, Diana Wynne Jones, Elizabeth Laird, Berlie Doherty and Robert Westall?

Which paperback list has adventure stories by Enid Blyton and adventure game books from Nintendo?

Which paperback list has over 800 titles in print?



# Alison Leonard declares ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS IS . . .



All I want for Christmas is a pile of high-quality books for my children and your children. High quality not just in the paper, the artistic and literary quality of the illustrations – but in the values that adults pass on to children via books, the excitement of story and culture and history, the challenge of opening minds and developing awareness. Everyone in the world wants that.

Everyone in the world – except the people of Great Britain.

What? Britain produces the most wonderful of all the world's books for children! Yes – but they produce them on an island, disconnected from the rest of the world. They're not interested in IBBY.

The International Board on Books for the Young met in Berlin in September, and the whole world came: from Argentina, Albania, China, Indonesia, Switzerland, Sri Lanka. Teachers and librarians, publishers and academics, illustrators and writers met to share experiences, question assumptions, reflect on the philosophy underlying their work, and even make deals. Just two Brits were there: the last of a tiny group of IBBY enthusiasts, Chris Kloet of Gollancz, and myself as a lone interested writer.

It was a week of questions, questions, questions. Like: what proportion of children's books in your country are translated, what proportion locally written? In Britain, the answer is 3-4%; in Scandinavia 50%; in Japan 70%. Such facts opened up a deeper question: what effect does a near-100% translation rate have on your culture, and its transmission to the next generation? Why should a Nigerian girl soak up the atmosphere of Haworth, Yorkshire? A chasm grows between the inner and the outer: the inarticulate sense of self and daily surroundings, and a mirror which constantly (as in the old Eastern Europe) throws back a distorted or bizarrely contrasting image.

But conversely, what effect does it have on our children, here in Britain, to experience almost none of the folk tales, classics and vibrant modern stories from other countries?

There's a whole world out there, and we're missing it. To quote Robert Leeson, another despairing old IBBY hand: 'People here think the world needs them, rather than the other way round.'

Just look what we're turning our backs on. The children of Albania, thrown from communism into market chaos, and hungry for books; IBBY there has an office, but no phone. In Germany, IBBY groups have started 'Bibliotherapy': libraries for children in hospital, with volunteers on hand to read books aloud or, better still,

encourage parents to read to their own children. In South Africa, the organisation called READ (Read, Educate And Develop) is bridging the gulf not only between black and white but between urban and rural children.

Lots of people spoke of the success of a 'books with germs' scheme: a story-book has a 'Go and Read This Book to Someone Else' germ, and sends them maybe to a neighbouring but ethnically different school, maybe to a faraway village that takes days to reach. How about that for Northern Ireland?

In Croatia, the library in Vinkovci has been entirely destroyed by bombing. Their representative appealed movingly for books and donations towards a Children's Library of Peace, to help children grow up with tolerance and understanding both of their own and other people's cultures. (Donations and enquiries, please, to: Children's Library of Peace, Marulicev trg 21, Zagreb, Croatia.)

I had breakfast with Kyoko Matsuoka, Japanese writer, librarian and translator of 'Paddington Bear'. I heard about children in Israel – and her own traumatic childhood – from an Israeli children's TV presenter as we pounded along Berlin pavements. I learnt from the Iranian delegation over lunch that they're eager for books which open children's minds and help them to think for themselves.

## IBBY ? BRITISH SECTION

Why has the British launch of IBBY died a slow and painful death? 'To be fair,' says Chris Kloet, 'there are practical difficulties. For instance, the IBBY subscription is calculated on the basis of the number of children's books



published in that country. So the British have to pay over the odds. And lots of countries have governments that support their IBBY branch through the Ministry of Education. That doesn't happen in Britain, does it?'

Nor are children's book publishers interested to give support. They go to the Book Fairs and make their deals there. And Britain has lots of other organisations for children's book people: The Federation of Children's Book Groups, the Children's Book Foundation, the School Libraries Association, and more. They're wonderful – but they belong to these islands. They are insular.

There in Berlin, between hard covers, stood all our famous authors and illustrators: John Burningham, David McKee, Geraldine McCaughrean, Raymond Briggs with his Snowman, Martin Waddell and Barbara Firth's *Kannst Du Nicht Schlafen, Kleine Bar?*. No doubt those deals, those co-productions, were worked out at Frankfurt and Bologna or in the publishers' offices.

But there's more to the international children's book world than trade. Everyone who offers a book to a child – offers food for children's minds – needs to stand back and look at the overall diet. We in Britain need to stop resting on past laurels, and end our intellectual isolation. Let's try a bit of humility for a change, and learn from the minds, hearts, words and pictures which communicate through IBBY, and get together every two years for nourishment, like they did in Berlin.

Christmas present, anybody? ■

Alison Leonard's most recent book is *Kiss the Kremlin Goodbye* published by Walker, 0 7445 2134 3, £8.99; 0 7445 2360 5, £2.99 pbk

**For more information about IBBY, contact Wendy Cooling of the Children's Book Foundation (Book House, 45 East Hill, Wandsworth, London SW18 2QZ, tel. 081 870 9055). The Foundation acts as mail-box for remaining British IBBY correspondence and contacts. Wendy is eager for an IBBY revival, because she gets lots of visitors from IBBY branches abroad, who are dismayed at the lack of IBBY's presence on the British scene.**



# On Christmas Eve...

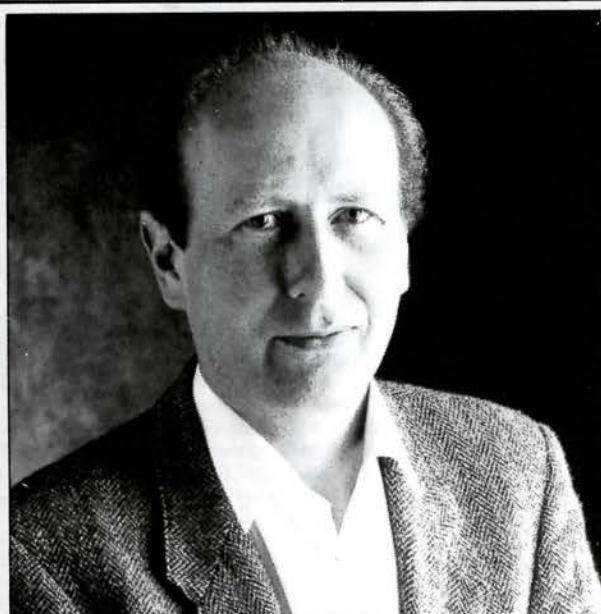


Photo of Peter Collington by David Russell.

*Peter Collington tells the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth about his wordless picture book which this year becomes a TV film.*

One Christmas Eve when I was young, my brother and I were given silver guns in leather holsters. It was the best present I had ever had. The fawn-coloured leather smelt so good I kept bringing the holster up to my nose to repeat the sensation. The guns slipped perfectly into the holsters and my brother and I spent hours, days and weeks practising fast draws and blowing each other away to the sound of exploding caps with a drifting thread of smoke.

I vowed never to forget the man who gave us those wonderful presents. He was Father Christmas. At that stage I didn't know exactly how he knew what present I wanted and how he found the Dutch cottages at the end of the quay in Mudeford where we lived. I just knew he would.

But when I grew up and had a child of my own, I began to get more concerned about the practicalities of how Father Christmas found each child's house and how he knew what presents they wanted. When my daughter was six, we were living on a new housing estate in Creekmoor, near Poole in Dorset. The house did not have a chimney. My daughter and I were worried about how Father Christmas would gain entry.

I remember strolling around the estate trying to think of ideas for a new book. I needed money fast. Bills and rent were mounting up. I was so broke I hadn't been able to get all the presents my daughter wanted. Everything seemed hopeless and I prayed for a miracle of some sort. As I tucked my daughter into bed, she said, 'Are you sure Father Christmas will be able to get in, Dad?'

'Sure,' I lied, 'He probably has duplicate keys to every house.'

This seemed to satisfy her and she quickly dropped off to sleep.

But sleep didn't come for me quite so easily. I lay in bed and tossed and turned. I went downstairs and unlocked the door and was then kept awake thinking how easy it would be for a burglar to come in and rip off our rented TV so I went down and locked the door again. What would my daughter's state of mind be, in the morning, when she looked down at the end of her bed and found that the stocking was empty?

I stared out of the bedroom window. Up there, somewhere, was Father Christmas. There had to be some way of getting him down to the right house in the hope he had on board the presents my house so desperately needed. My confidence in his navigational abilities was fast fading. It was getting close to morning...

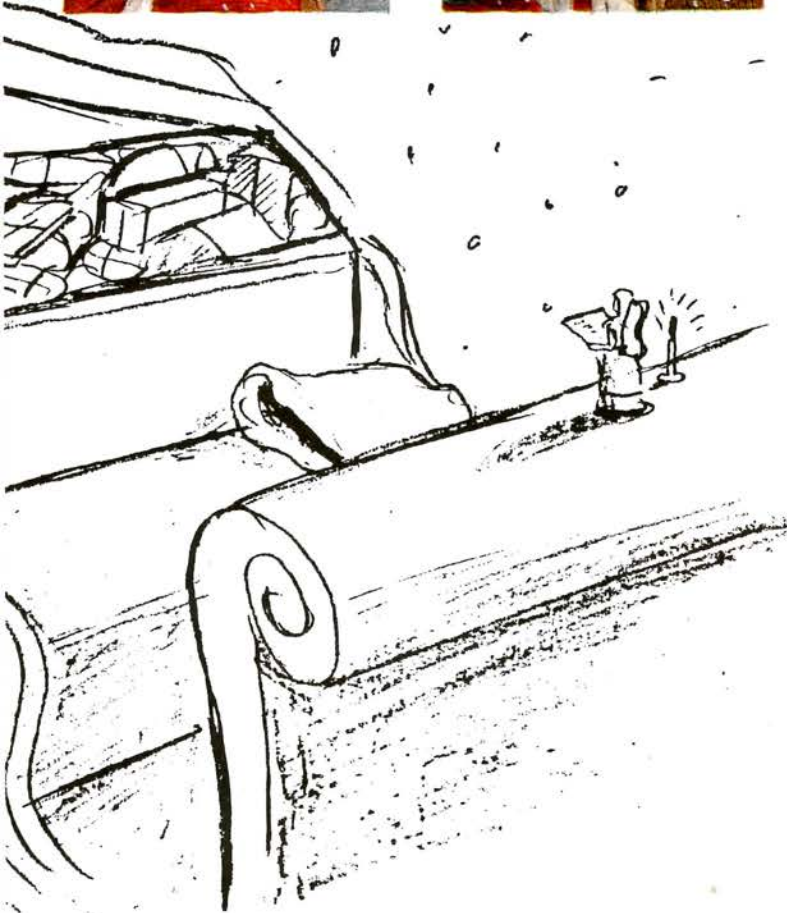
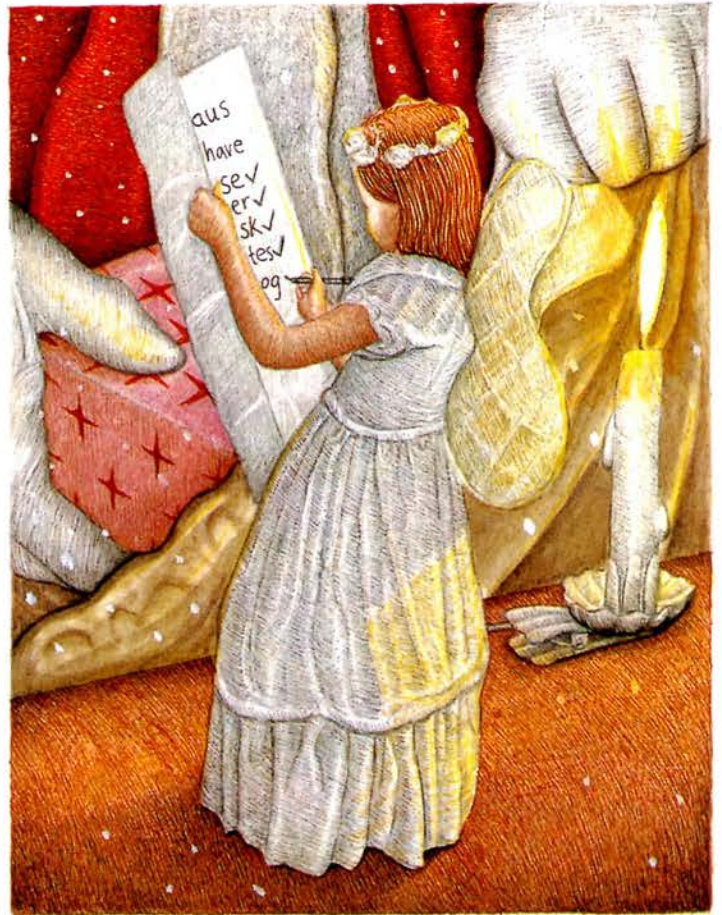
I heard a noise in the next room. I peeped in. There, at the end of my daughter's bed, scrutinizing her note to Santa, was a 7-inch high fairy! She flew downstairs and I heard the key turning in the front door. I crept down myself and sneaked a look round the corner. A host of fairies had flown into the room and were collecting the now lighted candles from the Christmas tree. Each fairy took a candle and flew back outside into the snowy night.

This was incredible!



I rushed upstairs and looked out of the bedroom window. The fairies had formed a flare path with their candles on the street. Were they going to guide Father Christmas's sleigh into land? I grabbed my camera but found I was out of film so I did the next best thing. I seized a 3H pencil and a stack of drawing paper. I began to sketch like crazy.





The fairies' candles looked so beautiful shining out on that Christmas Eve. I just *had* to record it as accurately as I could. When Father Christmas came down majestically to land, the point of my 3H pencil snapped in the excitement. Quickly I found a replacement, an HB (not so good for details, but perfect for hazy first impressions).

The fairy was now showing Father Christmas my daughter's note. He drew back the tarpaulin and there were all the presents. Boy,

was I drawing fast now! Father Christmas put the selected presents into his sack. The little fairy drew out her own pencil (I don't know if it was a 3H or an HB like mine, it was too far away) and proceeded to tick off all the presents as you would on a check list.

Father Christmas's boots crunched on the snow, then hit the carpet and I heard him wheezing up the stairs. I stayed in the shadows and kept drawing. He came to the top of the hallway and I caught a fleeting glimpse of that wonderful flushed face. This was the same man who'd brought my brother and me the guns all those years ago. I wanted to rush over and say 'thanks', but managed to stop myself. This would have been inappropriate behaviour in the circumstances. Father Christmas was working. He wouldn't want any interruptions.

It seemed only a matter of moments before he was gone. At first I felt an empty feeling because I'd had a chance to shake hands with one of the most important people in the world and I'd blown it. A feeling of great regret hung over me. And then it dawned on me. I looked over all the sketches I'd done. Father Christmas had given me something special, too: an idea for a book. Now I would be able to pay the rent, keep up the HP payments and stock the fridge.

When my daughter woke up the next morning, she was in a state of high excitement. She ripped off all the wrapping paper to get to her gifts. Every present on her list was there. She called out to me. I went into her room and just the look on her face was the best Christmas present I could have ever had.

One year and four months later, I finished the book (the sketches had been invaluable). When it came out, it was reviewed everywhere and was a great success. It's even been turned into a film to be shown this Christmas on BBC1. The thing we don't realise about fairy tales is that sometimes in life they actually happen . . . ■

The cover of Peter Collington's *On Christmas Eve* (0 434 93324 4, £7.95), is featured on the front of *BK* this month. The book was published by Heinemann in 1990 and the paperback (Mammoth, 0 7497 0967 7, £3.99) has just become available. BBC1 are transmitting the animated film at Christmas.

His latest book, again wordless, is *The Midnight Circus*, 0 434 93225 2, at £8.99.



# New from HAMISH HAMILTON

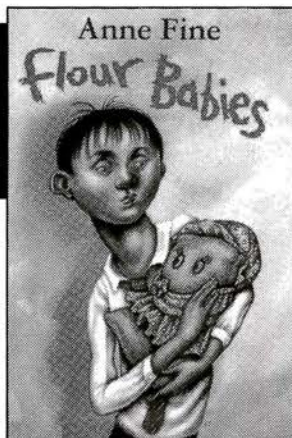
## Flour Babies

Anne Fine

0241 132525 £8.99

November 1992

Instead of the Exploding Custard Tins or the Maggot Farm for the science fair, Mr Cartwright's class have to look after Flour Babies - sweet little bags of flour that must be treated gently and cared for. In this highly original and amusing story, Simon Martin finds that his initial disgust is gradually replaced with an understanding of the stresses of young parenthood and of his own life.



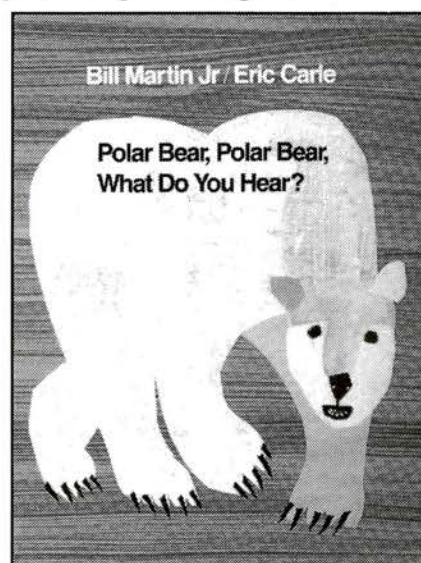
## Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What Do You Hear?

Bill Martin Jnr/Eric Carle

0241 132460 £8.50

November 1992

Children will love roaring, hissing and braying through this magical menagerie



## Hands Off Our School

Joan Lingard

0241 132614 £8.99

October 1992

Katy McCree, a pupil at Glen Findie Primary, tells us of the fight to keep her one teacher school in the Highlands of Scotland open. Nobody really knows what to do and the council officials seem very remote. In this wonderfully evocative book, the way of life in a Highland village is beautifully explored in a lively, amusing and gripping way.



## Pictures of the Night

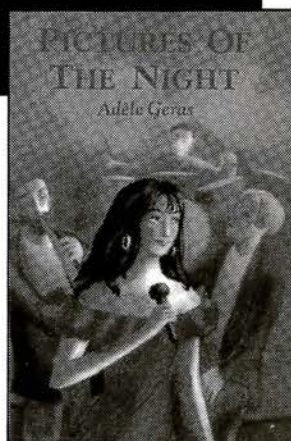
Adèle Geras

0241 132517 £8.99

November 1992

In the final story of the Egerton Hall trilogy, Bella finds herself moving from Land's End on holiday with Pete's seven-man-band to a singing engagement in a Parisian nightclub.

Everywhere Bella goes, the malevolent influence of her stepmother seems to follow her - or is this only her imagination?



For further information, or for a FREE 1993 Hamish Hamilton Catalogue simply contact Michael Addison, Children's Marketing, Hamish Hamilton, 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ



# 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

### When Dad Did the Washing

Ronda and David Armitage, Picture Puffin (Jun 92), 0 14 054422 4, £3.50

A comfortable yarn with Mother out at work and Father in charge. While Father's back is turned a red track suit finds its way into the washing machine alongside the family wash which includes Mother's new white skirt. The inevitable results can't be washed away and mother must come to terms with a new pink skirt. It was interesting to see the reactions of shock and horror at the enormity of the crime as the children listening identified with the tale completely. JS

### Roaring Billy

Dee Shulman, Red Fox (Aug 92), 0 09 987440 7, £3.99



"WAAAH!" cried Billy.

A must as a present for any older brother or sister of a baby. Normally Billy is a delight, but one day he wakes up roaring and no matter what they try nobody in the family can make him feel better. It's only when he smiles on the following morning that the mystery is solved. Dee Shulman's zany style perfectly illustrates the family disintegrating into desperation as the day wears on to the accompaniment of roars from Roaring Billy. JS

### Steel Drums and other Stories and Poems from Around the World

Ann Marie Linden, ill. Valerie McBride, BBC Books (May 92), 0 563 36375 4, £3.99

This book already falls open in favourite places, almost begging to be read in poetry sessions. Ann Marie Linden opens our eyes wide with wonder at the world we live in,

crinkles them up in humour and makes us bounce with delight as we share her sheer joie de vivre. Her special appeal is to younger children. What infant could resist the notion of doing a tango with Miss Mango? JS

### What Am I? Very First Riddles

Stephanie Calmenson, ill. Karen Gundersheimer, Picture Puffin (Jul 92), 0 14 054254 X, £3.50

A super book for young children. It offers a simple verse as a clue and the children have to guess the answer before they turn the page. The only disappointment is that the paper is so thin the answer can be seen through it... having said this, it doesn't appear to have spoiled the book for the children at all. I've read it so often to my own pre-schoolers I know it off by heart and read it on automatic pilot to the Reception Class - there's no escape! JS

### Kids

Catherine and Laurence Anholt, Walker (Jul 92), 0 7445 3011 3, £3.99



From the absurd to the ridiculous, from the real to the imaginary, from the nasty to the charming, this is a book which touches on the important aspects of life as experienced by the young child. Interestingly, school does not feature which is why the children clearly felt it referred to pre-schoolers. Despite this it proved a popular read with the infants, led to a lot of discussion and was a title to which many of the children returned. They all agreed that a book about school ought to be next on the Anholts' agenda. JS

### Togg and Leftover

Mike Ratnett, ill. June Goulding, Picture Lions (Jul 92), 0 00 664005 2, £3.50



Togg, a cavewoman, finds an enormous egg and plans to share it with his friends for supper. When he finds the eggshell is empty he goes hunting for the contents and eventually, after a hilarious chase, discovers it's a leftover dinosaur. He starts off by being frightened but soon realises that Leftover is friendly. The children are convinced there'll be more adventures for this delightful couple - I hope so. JS

### Where Does the Brown Bear Go?

Nicki Weiss, Picture Puffin (Jun 92), 0 14 054181 0, £3.50

Dark, rich, night-time colours and a repetitive rhyme asking 'Where does the bear/monkey/stray dog/seagull go?' is the theme of this book and, as the reader travels through it, he/she wonders where all these animals do go. The answer, of course, is that they go home to bed... and are all tucked up safely when they get there. Picture Puffin at its best. MS

### Going to Playgroup

Catherine and Laurence Anholt, Orchard (Jul 92), 1 85213 435 6, £3.99

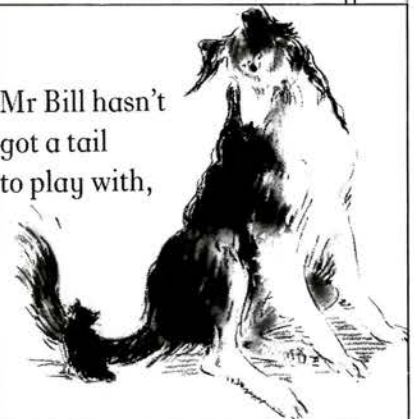
A story about Anna who sets off for her first day at playgroup a little tentatively. After a while she begins to enjoy all the experiences on

offer - sticking, cutting, the rabbits, the slide, the bookshelf, the home corner and more. By the end of her first morning she's made a friend and asks keenly 'Will it be playgroup again tomorrow?'. This book is certain to reassure parents and children facing similar anxieties about a new phase in their lives. MS

### Mr Bill and Clarence

Kay Gallwey, Red Fox (Jun 92), 0 09 997430 4, £3.99

Mr Bill hasn't got a tail to play with,



Dogs and cats are not usually friends, so this story starts with a surprise because it's about a big dog, called Clarence, and a tiny kitten, called Mr Bill, who enjoy each other's company. The beautifully drawn pictures are very true to life and the bold text adds much to the book. Highly recommended. MS

### The Great Zoo Hunt

Pippa Unwin, Picturemac (Jul 92), 0 333 56614 9, £3.99

This picture book is a game of looking, finding and naming the animals who have escaped when a new zoo keeper forgets to lock their cages. Seeing into the town from overhead the child needs time, and a keen eye, to search each spread for

Gill Roberts joins the BfK reviewing team for this and the next two issues while Jill Bennett is on sabbatical in India. Gill was a qualified librarian in Lancashire before moving to teach in Clwyd. She's worked with children of all ages and is currently with Year 2 (6/7 years) at Perth-y-Terfyn Infants School, Holywell. Welcome to the pages of BfK, Gill!





the individual animals who've gone missing. By the last page they're all rounded up and led back to their cages by the zoo keeper. Excellent to keep 3-5s turning and scouring the pages. MS

### Sebastian Explores

Vanessa Julian-Ottie, Little Mammoth (Jun 92), 0 7497 0933 2, £3.99

A new story about Sebastian the kitten who travels through his garden and through the pages of the book exploring and learning about everything he meets. The listening child can be helped to anticipate what might come next by looking through the hole carefully positioned in every picture. Definitely recommended for 3-5s. MS

### Fish is Fish

George Adams, Simon & Schuster (Jul 92), 0 7500 1001 0, £3.99

This is a useful and entertaining book full of information with modern, brightly coloured pictures. The simple sentences convey fish-related vocabulary (like 'gills' and 'scales') and much is made of the shapes and patterns of different kinds of fish. An ideal reference book for pre-schoolers. MS

### What Would Bear Wear?

Jillian Harker, ill. Simone Abel, Hodder & Stoughton (Jul 92), 0 340 55212 3, £4.99

This is really a game 'dressed up' as a book. It's a mix-and-match book with every page divided into three, allowing the child to decide which clothes go with which activity... what would bear wear to go swimming, or to work in the garden and so on? A very good way of learning vocabulary and finding topics for discussion. Excellent value and a lot of fun for 3-5 year-olds. MS

### Rosie's Babies

Martin Waddell, ill. Penny Dale, Walker (Jul 92), 0 7445 2335 4, £3.99

Getting used to Mum being involved with a new baby must be hard for the child who arrived first. In this warm-hearted picture book, Rosie is the big sister who talks all the time the baby is being put to bed and finally manages to get her mother's total attention. A softly-coloured, sensitively written book recommended for children under 5. MS



From *Rosie's Babies*.

### The Wish Factory

Chris Riddell, Walker (Jun 92), 0 7445 2328 1, £3.99

There are faint overtones of Maurice Sendak, echoes of *The Night Kitchen*, and a touch of Max about this book. Oliver flies to the Wish Factory to protect himself against the Bad Dream which he defeats just as 'morning came quite soon'. Less dark and complex than Sendak, however, the world we're in is gentler in both writing and illustration, and small children will find the story straightforward and reassuring, especially if they're afraid of the dark. Good for reading aloud. The clear, large hand-lettering will also help early readers. LW

### Rosie and the Pavement Bears

Susie Jenkin-Pearce, Red Fox (Aug 92), 0 09 972090 6, £3.99

A huge comfort to anyone who's been subjected to bullying or who cares about the bullying problem in schools. Many a child must long for the protection of such bears, which appear to Rosie when she stamps on the pavement cracks en route to school. There's a lot of humour in the action-packed illustrations and storyline. Children loved it. It's a must for any primary classroom. GR

## INFANT/JUNIOR

Monty began to drool.



The ice cream grew bigger...

### Monty – up to his neck in trouble

Colin West, Young Lions 'Jets' (Jun 92), 0 00 674302 1, £2.50

A welcome return for Monty, the dog who wears glasses and just can't seem to help getting into trouble. He's been a favourite character for a long time and I'm sure this book will not disappoint his fans. The 'Jets' format of text, illustration and speech bubbles is a real winner, providing support and tremendous stimulus for newly independent readers – that's if they can get a look in as the demand for 'Jets' is so great! JS

### Charlie's House

Reviva Schermbrucker, ill. Niki Daly, Walker (Jul 92), 0 7445 2394 X, £3.99

This book will haunt the

reader. The children found it hard going, but returned to it again and again. It is tough for it's based on the experiences of a real Charlie, who lived for six years in a leaky iron shelter in a South African township. Niki Daly's illustrations are a brilliant representation of the writer's concept – the child is not devalued in any way and his efforts and creation are treated as seriously as they should be, with no patronising humour or sentimentality. The special house he creates in his backyard, made out of mud and bits and pieces of rubbish, is almost unbearably poignant to adult eyes but much examined and admired by the children. The infants who shared this book mostly took it at face value – as a story about a boy who lived a very different kind of life from themselves – but there were some who started to question...

JS

### Last Stories of Polly and the Wolf

Catherine Storr, Young Puffin (Jul 92), 0 14 036050 6, £2.99

The Wolf has some really cunning ideas in this collection of new stories. It seems such a pity that they all go wrong... except the last one which finally gets him what he wants, but by then what he wants isn't Polly after all! Entertaining

and witty, these stories are recommended for experienced readers and for reading aloud. Despite the finality of the title, Polly's fans will be pleased to hear there's scope for the Return of the Wolf at some later date. LW

### The Happy Rag

Tony Ross, Red Fox (Jul 92), 0 09 978080 1, £3.99

This one is a real mind-bender with huge scope for discussion and thought. Two little children both have comfort blankets and both make up magic about them. The two different stories begin from opposite ends of the book, meet in the middle and cross over so that each one finishes the other. It's very clever, not least because it operates at several levels of sophistication.



Young children will enjoy the fun of weaving together the two plots, while older readers can explore how it's been made to work (and could well enjoy trying it for themselves). Funny and original, as Tony Ross always is, this is highly recommended, both for the writing and the splendid pictures. LW

### Nightfeathers

Sundaira Morninghouse, ill. Jody Kim, Open Hand – Seattle, Washington (Jul 92), 0 940880 27 X, £3.50

A book of poetry and pictures celebrating the magic, comforts and dreams of childhood. The poems are rhythmic explorations of song, speech and wordplay. Many echo the cadences of nursery rhymes and playground games, and they have a great potential for performance. The black and white drawings adorn the lean text with bold imagery, illustrating the multicultural roots of the book (Morninghouse is African-American, Kim is Korean). GH

### Rosa's Singing Grandfather

Leon Rosselson, Young Puffin (Jul 92), 0 14 034587 6, £2.99

Four simple sketches from the

**POETRY**





life of a young girl, her overworked mum and her marvellously realised singing grandfather. We visit grandma's grave with this family, hear stories from grandad's childhood, including one that teaches Rosa how to defy the darkness, then follow them to the hospital when grandad falls ill. The relationships between the characters are depicted with warmth and accuracy. The clarity and optimism of this book should make it very welcoming to new independent readers. GH

**Solomon's Secret**  
Saviour Pirotta and Helen Cooper, Little Mammoth (Jun 92), 0 7497 0934 0, £3.50

An unusual story – very short, beautifully illustrated and magical – about a little boy, his strange neighbours and their even stranger back garden, the path of which leads to the rest of the world. Plenty for young children to think about here, both in the plot and in the details. Ideal for the multi-ethnic classroom. LW

**Go Noah Go!** **POETRY**  
John Agard, ill. Judy Brown, Picture Knight (Aug 92), 0 340 57713 4, £3.50

There's life and humour in the stance and expression of every animal and member of Noah's family in this version of the renowned Old Testament story. Judy Brown's ability alone makes this a highly successful visual account. John Agard's poetic style re-doubles the humorous impact of the pictures, especially if the demand it makes to be read aloud can be met appropriately. GR

**Slinky Malinki**  
Lynley Dodd, Picture Puffin (Jul 92), 0 14 054439 9, £3.50

'Cheeky and cheerful, friendly and fun' by day, perfectly named Slinky Malinki turns 'wicked and fiendish and sly' by night. Lynley Dodd creates a rare opportunity to witness cat movements on a moonlit night and Slinky Malinki is a particularly 'rapscallion' cat with superlative characteristics. The full power and aura of feline independence, real humour and night-time magic are evoked by vivid illustrations, simple rhyme and splendid language. This really captivated children of 6 and 7. GR

**One World**  
Michael Foreman, Red Fox (Aug 92), 0 09 983480 4, £3.99

Two children explore a rock pool and empty it of its organic riches, leaving only pollution. Then they clean up the pollution, repopulate the pool and walk away as the tide comes in to reunite it with the ocean. The link between the tiny and the vast is the core of this simple story. The minute denizens of the pool generate images of great whales; the smear of oil on its surface is a reminder of a poisoned world; the children's decision to restore the ransacked habitat promises hope for the earth. This book is a sermon, but one

so economical with words and profuse with beautiful illustrations that its message is conveyed as lucidly as birdsong. GH

**The Adventures of Peter Cottontail**  
0 486 26929 9

**The Adventures of Reddy Fox**  
0 486 26930 2

Thornton W Burgess, Dover (Jun 92), 95p each

Reprints of the popular children's classics, the first in which Peter Rabbit consistently outwits Reddy Fox and the second in which Reddy Fox has many narrow escapes from Farmer Brown's boy. The constant scheming and action make them gripping tales of intrigue with a funny and mildly moralistic tone. Chapters are short with an occasional illustration and the print is clear, if a little small. Children from 6 upwards will enjoy listening to these tales and accomplished readers of 8/9 upwards will be able to enjoy them for themselves. GR

**The Birthday Phone**  
Toby Forward, Simon & Schuster (Jul 92), 0 7500 1079 7, £3.50

We all know about the Tooth Fairy, but the Birthday Fairy is a different thing altogether. You might get hold of her if you dial your birthdate... on the other hand you might not! Here the idea makes an entertaining and original story with a charming and unsentimental ending. Children will enjoy this book, either to read for themselves or to hear. However, it really should be emphasised that younger children must have an adult involved to explain that dialling unknown people and giving them your address is

not a good idea. There is a serious need for some safety warning here and I hope the publishers will consider providing one promptly. Meanwhile, enjoy the story but make sure the children realise the dangers of speaking to strangers... even over the phone! LW

**Stop, Look and Listen Mr Toad!**

Kate Petty, ill. Alan Baker, Hodder & Stoughton (Jul 92), 0 340 57220 4, £3.99

Endorsed by RoSPA, this is actually a very Educational book intended to teach small children about road safety. The illustrations are bold and attractive and Mr Toad's attempt to cross the main road is cheerfully written and stands up quite well as a story in its own right.



I'm never sure how much the adventures of small creatures mean to a child poised on the kerb of a busy street, though, and I do wish that advice to find a place to cross 'away from parked cars' was more realistic – you'd be halfway to Northampton before you could do that near our school! LW

## JUNIOR / MIDDLE

**The City Cats**  
Colin Dann, Red Fox (Jun 92), 0 09 993890 1, £2.99

A sequel to *King of the Vagabonds*, this is hugely enjoyable in its own right. Sammy has become leader of the cats and feels secure in his position, but while scavenging for food he and Pinkie, his mate, are foolishly curious. Their well-ordered world is totally upset and Sammy is forced to depend upon his own resources in a very hostile environment. The terrors of London traffic are all the greater from Sammy's 20cm viewpoint and the life-threatening rivalries between city cats struggling to protect their own territories seems only to raise questions about our own behaviour as humans.

P.S. How is it Sammy drank the milk even though it tasted strange? Mine won't eat anything that hasn't come from Fortnums! PH

**Mum's Winning Streak**

David Wiseman, Puffin (Jun 92), 0 14 034899 9, £2.99

A cautionary tale about a compulsive competitor whose dreams of victory inflict a nightmare on her family. Angie's mum's obsession fills the house with tin cans stripped of their labels and mountains of useless prizes, but these irritations are as nothing compared to the catastrophe which hits the family when she wins an evening out with her favourite

film star. This repulsively decrepit parasite infests their home like a disease, teaching Angie the attractions of ruthlessness.

Much of the charm of this book derives from the cruelty which spikes its humour, though justice and compassion are nicely balanced at the conclusion. GH

**Dracula in Sunlight**  
Chris Powling, Young Lions, 0 00 674297 1, £2.99

Nine stories set in south-east London vividly recount episodes from the home and school lives of the mixed race Satchwell children. Kath is the family storyteller, and her love of story is the theme underlying their adventures.

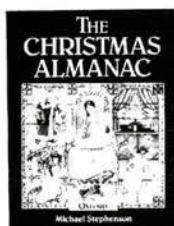


Though the twin brother and younger sister who form her bedtime audience are sometimes resentful of her gift, a shared passion for make-believe involves them in the games, dreams and fantasies which surround a poignantly real family mystery at the heart of the book.

The children's exploits are related through Kath in a voice which makes friendly



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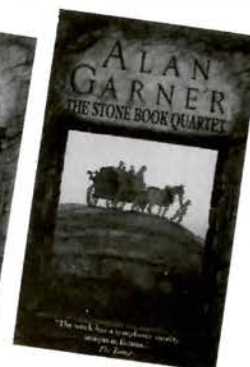
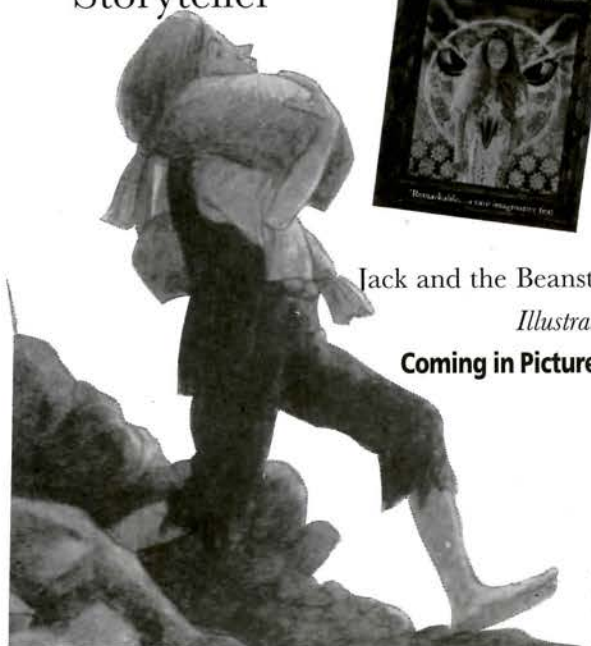
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and entertaining prose. The overall tone is lighthearted, but moments of anguish, pathos and insecurity are honestly conveyed. Highly recommended for independent readers of all ages. GH

### If Cats Could Fly

Robert Westall,  
Mammoth (Jun 92),  
0 7497 0936 7, £2.99

This story begins very whimsically with a couple of extra-terrestrials gate-crashing Earth's ecology and granting two cats the gift of flight. The ramifications of this episode, however, make much tougher reading. As the cats discover that the race to which their kindly owners belong is guilty of such casual atrocities as factory farming, vivisection and wholesale environmental thuggery, it becomes apparent that the only moral response to such evil is violent retaliation.

The book is not the lighthearted fancy that the cover suggests, though Westall does manage to maintain a humorous aspect to this anguished tale. It invites the reader to view human behaviour from an oblique angle and provides a thought-provoking adventure story which older children should enjoy reading on their own. GH

### Niffs and Whiffs **POETRY**

Compiled by Jennifer Curry, Red Fox (Jun 92), 0 09 984610 1, £2.99

Over 70 poems by no less than 50 different contributors who include Jenny Craig, Judith Nicholls, John Betjeman and Michael Rosen . . . together with poets as young as 7 and 9 years old. This is another highly successful Jennifer Curry anthology which cleverly invokes every smell from



Safari Smells

The rhino is house trained  
The lion's quite clean  
And most of the penguins . . . they'll live in the stream.  
So if by some offchance there is a bouquet  
Let's all hope the wind isn't blowing our way.

cowpats and cabbage to fish and chips and talc. Hours of absorbing reading for anyone who has some memory and a sense of smell. GR

### Tales of the Seal People

Duncan Williamson,  
Canongate (Jun 92),  
0 86241 373 7, £5.95

Duncan Williamson, a Scottish traveller, has spent a lifetime collecting stories about seal people, or silkies. They are recorded here in a conversational, colloquial style which reflects the oral tradition of storytelling. Tales of people who help injured or abandoned seals, and are in turn helped by them, accord with today's environmental concerns, while the fisherman who persecutes the seals for stealing fish is invariably punished or reformed. There are attractive cameo illustrations to head each story, but it's a pity the cover design is unlikely to attract young readers. LN

# BIGGLES IS BACK!

. . . if, that is, he's ever been away. George Hunt assesses the re-packaging of a publishing phenomenon.

### Biggles Learns to Fly

0 09 993820 0

### Biggles Flies East

0 09 993780 8

### Biggles and Co.

0 09 993800 6

### Biggles in Spain

0 09 993810 3

### Biggles in the Orient

0 09 993830 8

### Biggles Defies the Swastika

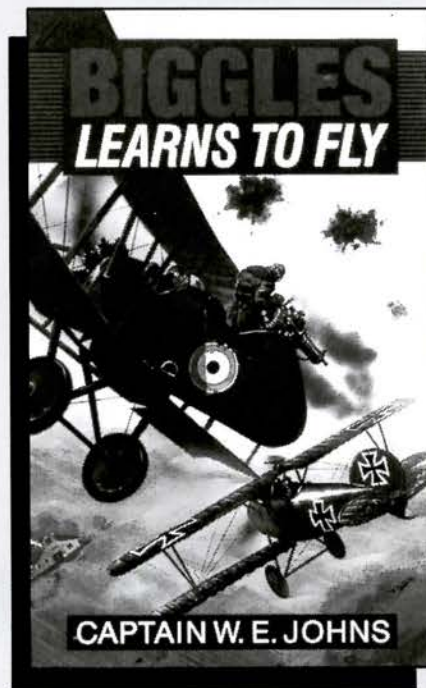
0 09 993790 5

W E Johns, Red Fox (Jul 92),  
£3.50 each

*'In keeping with the post-Maastricht spirit, Red Fox have resurrected from the cultural memory bank a figure who will show the foreigners just what we Britishers are capable of when we're pushed too far: yes, along with phonics, skinheads and compulsory formal grammar, Biggles is back!'*

Thus began my first attempt at a review of these books before I decided that I'd better collect some children's impressions of them before foaming at the pen. Johns declared that he intended to 'give boys what they want to read rather than what their elders and betters think they should read' and my assessors, consisting of Year 6 and 7 boys and girls, seemed to agree. Only one boy refused to go beyond the front cover; the others, sometimes nudged by parents eager to read the books themselves, raced through these tales and enjoyed them. The adventures span two world wars with a couple of international escapades between them, and the pattern of battle, capture, escape and just revenge is constant across them all.

'You know he's going to win in the end because he's so good,' said one girl, 'but the books keep you guessing about how he's going to do it.' Johns' ability to maintain this narrative tension, despite his improbable



plots and rusty language, was impressive enough to carry me through the six titles, but the 'goodness' of Biggles and his pals is more problematic.

The author's camouflaged intention was to 'teach the boy to become a man' in keeping with 'the traditions of British sportsmanship'. (Only *Biggles and Co.* features a significant female character.) Accordingly, our heroes go out of their way to avoid unnecessary violence, never using a weapon when a right hook will suffice, and Biggles frequently alludes to the horrors of war (quite convincingly in *Biggles Learns to Fly*). However, Captain Johns strives to loop the moral loop of reconciling these sentiments with a celebration of the exhilaration of combat, and in spite of Red

Fox's 'sensitive editing', the books are riddled with an unreflected chauvinism that many readers may consider pernicious.

In *Biggles in Spain*, Johns is politically correct enough to have Ginger shooting down fascists for the International Brigade, but his Spanish comrades are castigated for their idleness and garlicky breath. In *Biggles in the Orient*, Biggles departs from minimum force by executing two Japanese 'scum' who mock the corpse of a British pilot. Germans are referred to as Huns throughout, though an author's note explains that this should not be regarded as a derogatory term.

I found that the children, when prompted, were able to relate expressions of hatred to their historical context. 'He was writing about the war when people did do horrible things to each other,' one boy said. 'Perhaps he should have written that things are different now,' another added, displaying a naivety that demonstrates the need to approach these texts cautiously. Ellis and Williams, the biographers from whom I have taken my quotations\*, state that 'it is fatal to approach Johns without a sense of humour' and indeed, Biggles' remark at the end of a death-defying adventure, that 'it's because any Britisher would do what we've just done that the old Empire keeps on going,' was greeted with some healthy laughter. Personally, I think the humour should be complemented with hard-edged questioning. I wouldn't spend precious book-fund money on the series unless the intention is to develop critical literacy by exploring the prejudices underlying Johns' work, and comparing his account of warfare with others written from a less sexist and jingoistic stance. I wonder if it's possible to do this without detracting from the readers' enjoyment or belittling the heroism of the models on whom Biggles is based?

The books are bound to be popular, and with a total of 96 titles in the canon, they might well become as ubiquitous as Blyton or Dahl. Have your responses ready.

\* By Jove, *Biggles!*, Ellis and Williams, W H Allen, 1981.



# Authorgraph No. 77

Alan Garner

INTERVIEWED BY  
DAVID BENNETT

In the kitchen of his isolated and rambling fourteenth-century Cheshire home, where he has lived for the last 35 years, Alan Garner is worriedly fossicking for cups and saucers. He abandons the effort and asks his wife where they are kept. She herself is attending to an injured kitten but immediately comes to her husband's aid. Minutes earlier Alan had announced with staggering precision that he had been a writer for 36 years and 31 minutes – about writing he is obsessively precise!

For Alan Garner the process of writing appears to be a fraught one; what others might call their muse he calls 'The Bitch Goddess'.

'After 36 years I cannot come to terms with the act of writing. I dislike it; it is like an agony which is not pleasurable.'

'I don't know why I am a writer; I have to write.'

It's a wonder he's lived to tell his tales. He was the only child of a working-class rural family, 'that knew its place in the best sense'. By the age of eight he'd died three times. He'd had diphtheria, meningitis, double pneumonia with pleurisy, and a bout of whooping cough and measles simultaneously. During the second illness he actually heard himself pronounced dead. As he ruefully says, 'That makes every day seem like a benison'.

His formal primary education was obviously scant (he sees that as another benison!), but there was enough of it for a perceptive local school teacher to recognise his undoubted intellectual ability and suggest sitting the entrance exams for Manchester Grammar School. He duly passed and, through the process of studying Greek, Latin and French, came more and more to favour academia, finally becoming a classicist at Oxford after an enforced spell in National Service.

One of the results was an estrangement from his family. He had become a 'creature that they could not relate to' and, in his own eyes, a failure within their close clan of rural craftsmen, whose motto was that 'every man must get aback of the man in front'. Such a deep and narrow family had no concept of academia. They could not cope with what had happened to their son. Grandfather Joseph however said nothing, for which Alan is still grateful. Their relationship is recorded through *The Stone Book Quartet*, more especially in *Tom Fobble's Day*, the most autobiographical of all Garner's works. The Quartet is an attempt 'to come to terms with the price of Manchester Grammar School, in that it enabled me with great precision to articulate the cost, but did not equip me to salve it until with *The Stone Book Quartet*. Only someone who had had a thorough grounding in Literature and intellectual gymnastics could cope when necessary with what the text had given. But the subject of the text I could only get from one place and that was grandfather.'

Grandfather was both a whitesmith and a

blacksmith, a highly gifted craftsman who allowed his grandson to sit in the forge hour after hour, listening to the local gossip, watching the comings and goings and drinking his share of the ale from a tin mug, becoming part of forge life . . .

*'The fire receded. Grandad flicked the swage block clean with the end of his leather brat, and wiped his face. He sat with William by the forge and drew two cups of beer from the barrel he kept under his bench.'* (Tom Fobble's Day)

The tools of Old Joseph on his workbench are in an orderly display in the Garner home along with the swage block, and Alan proudly draws attention to the letter punches used to stamp his clogs.

*"Hold still," he said, and he reached over to where his metal punches stood in their rack in order of the alphabet, and very deftly he took each as he needed it, placed the letter against the sole of William's clog and tapped it. The punch left a clean print in the wood. And he dropped the punch back in the rack and took another.'* (Tom Fobble's Day)

Grandfather showed the Manchester Grammar boy that he was really no different from the rest of the family, 'merely ploughing another field', and passed on to his grandson the two precepts that seem to guide the older Alan Garner:

'Always take as long as the job takes you because it'll always be there when you're not and you don't want folk saying, "What fool made that codge?"'

Alan Garner's latest project has taken ten years so far. He describes the work as a pregnancy.

The earlier process of *Red Shift* he can chart with the precision of a total perfectionist.

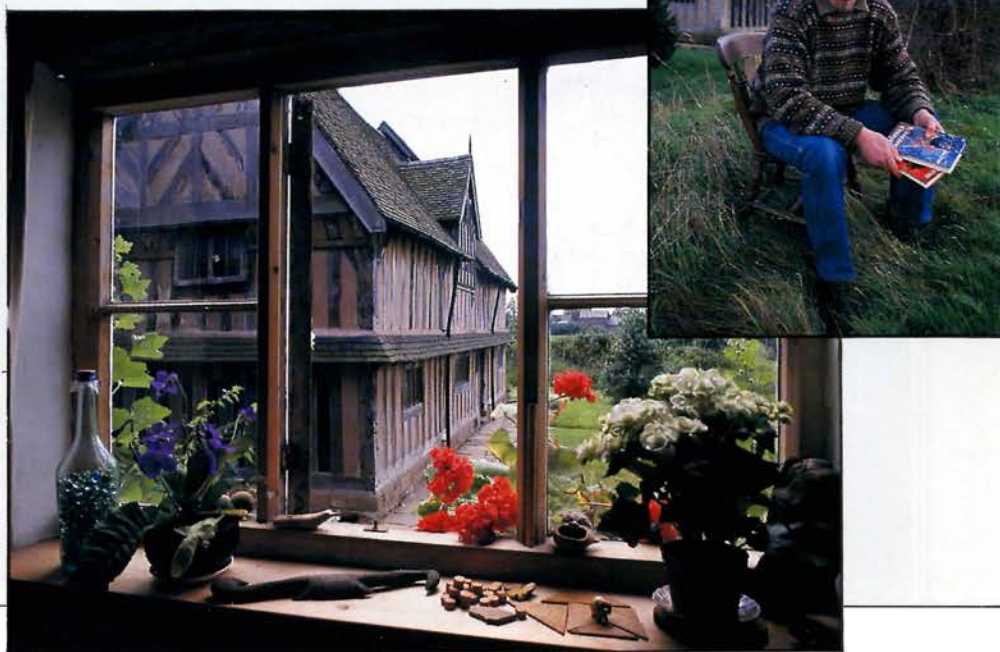
In December 1965 a friend mentioned that her grandma, who lived on Mow Cop, said the folk roundabouts were swarthy because they were descended from Spanish slaves, who deserted and set up a colony there whilst being marched north by the Romans – the Ninth Spanish. Garner filed it away in his mind. He is always using the image of filing cabinets. In April 1966 he was waiting for a train at Alderley Edge when he spotted some lipstick graffiti on the waiting room wall:

Alan Fisk = Janet Heathcote

NOT REALLY NOW NOT ANYMORE

Suddenly everything came into place. Garner rushed home, grabbed a camera, caught the next train back and photographed the wall. The next day the waiting room was re-painted!

During the next two years came the research phase. All possible areas of research were explored, in this instance beginning with the Romans. Because he enjoys this bit the most, he makes it last as long as possible. It takes him into all kinds of fields allowing him the academic luxury of analytical thought and analysis. He meticulously pored over Ordnance Survey maps for scrupulous accuracy. Historical accounts were acquired and studied, from which he learnt that there was a massacre on Mow Cop in the seventeenth century, hence the third strand in *Red Shift*; there were resonances with the Romans at Mow Cop. At this stage too began reflection into why he felt emotionally involved with these shreds of information and then later the thought occurred, 'In a way it's better to have it over and done with with one sword thrust . . . or is it? And in trying to answer that question the book emerges.'







But finally he could research no more and entered what he calls, with despair in his voice, 'The Oh My God! Bit' which is summed up by the anguished fact that 'Oh my God, there isn't a story. Oh my God I can't write.'

This lasted from roughly 1968 until 1971 and during those three years, as with his other work, Garner repaired to his book-lined, low-ceilinged study, always at 6pm, and sat before the log fire, his mind empty, waiting. Nowadays he sometimes plays bad B-movie films (black and white only and preferably with the young Ronald Reagan in them), with the sound turned off. At other times he plays music.

In 1971 the Bitch Goddess came one night and in a jumble of words he wrote, as always, the last paragraph of the book. *Red Shift* had begun. In fact during the many seemingly empty nights of the 'Oh My God! Bit' the story was created sub-consciously so that, as with the others, it could be written intuitively in long-hand ('the elbow is a great editor') and barely needed any revision or redrafting. It can be akin to automatic writing; 'Sometimes I look to the ceiling and say "hey, hold on I can't get all this down".' He frequently refers to this stage as *Purdah*. The family of two teenagers and any form of distraction is kept away from him by his wife, upon whom he relies totally, and for whom he has the highest praise as a critic of his work; 'She doesn't tell me what to do, but where I've gone wrong.'

In 1973, eight years after the granny's Mow Cop story, William Collins first published *Red Shift*, now in its twelfth impression. Alan Garner had taken as long as the job took him.

Grandfather Joseph's second precept was: 'If the other fellow can do it, let him.' In other words find out what is uniquely yours.

In his very early twenties Alan Garner decided to be an artist. Really he was ambitious to be 'a professional bum'. He couldn't draw and had no formal training in music, so it had to be writing. He felt that he didn't have enough experience to tell people twice his age how to run the world. 'Therefore I wondered, if I wrote flat out to the fullest extent of my ability and experience and thought, whether people not twice my age but half my age might get something from it.'

After two days this felt too much like writing to order and inhibitive so he wrote then, as now, purely for himself with no specific audience in mind. On Tuesday, 4th September at three minutes past four, 1956, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* was started and took two years to complete, with another two before it was published. He left Oxford without completing his degree and supported himself with a job teaching in a private school and then tried a spell of labouring. The other fantasies followed. He actually explored the caves himself as research for *The Moon of Gomerath*. The cottage in *Elidor* is the one where he lay in a whitewashed room with cheesecloth muslin at the windows as a sickly, once paralysed child. There were out-of-the-body experiences, brought on partly by sensory deprivation, where he drifted into the ceiling and here was the world he later re-created in characteristically vividly realised detail as *Elidor*.

*'Roland could never remember whether he saw it, or whether it was a picture in his mind, but as he strained to pierce the haze, his vision seemed to narrow and to draw the castle towards him. It shone as if the stones had soaked in light, as if the stone could be amber. People were moving on the walls: metal glinted. Then clouds drifted over.'* (*Elidor*)

In the pursuit of what is uniquely his, Alan Garner does not read novels or children's books and seldom meets with other writers for fear that he might take an idea and submerge it. He will talk to no one about anything he is currently working on. He constantly subjects himself to analysis and exploration of his craft and expounds his thoughts with a vigour and passion reserved only for talking about writing:

*'... Words will not go where they are most needed. You cannot say what you deeply feel in words. The only thing that words will do to get you there will be to construct the images that will present you with the truth. Words won't tell the truth; they prevaricate, they fudge and they blur and they're not precise enough. But it is possible to construct images in conjunction with each other in such a way that they've never been presented before, so that the readers says "Wow!" ... if it works!'*

Research finally leads to 'a narrowing down to the point where all the poles of the tepee

cross. That is the moment of creativity and, where they cross, the creativity exists concretely as the book, film or whatever. That for me is worth anything.

'The book is a time capsule and every reader's interpretation is different ... The creative act involves the reader. It is a great privilege for the writer to take the reader to somewhere they could not otherwise have gone.'

His widely acclaimed success for doing so well what the other fellow can't do might be measured by noting the novels' continued publication years after they were first written. Better evidence is in the letters he receives saying, 'I didn't know that there was anybody else who had that experience'; 'Thank you for making clear what was driving me out of my mind. Now I can understand it and deal with it'; or those who affirm that *Red Shift* helped them to come to terms with their own thoughts of suicide or those of their friends and relatives.

His works have also found an audience in TV film versions, notably *The Owl Service*, for which he won the Carnegie Medal and *Red Shift*. He wrote the scripts for both of these but has left stage versions of his books to others, since he does not wish to cover again old ground.

He does however feel the need to bring the skills of his craft to the reworking of traditional tales. His recently re-published collection *A Bag of Moonshine* and the latest picture book, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, are his own response to the watering down of the tales over the years. He fears a prettifying of them so that they have lost the special, unique qualities of the storytellers down through the ages. Men like Grandfather Joseph. History fascinates him. Stones and fossils lie on his study windowsill, vicious-looking flint or stone weapons and tools are stored on shelves and skulls gaze hollow-eyed from a dresser. If he has any relaxation at all, it is when he's researching the archaeology of the site on which he lives. Despite their landlessness he has traced the Garners back to 1592. He sometimes feels like an emigre in this place, which is only seven miles from where he was born. He has the need to return often to The Edge, where he 'learnt his primary sensory alphabet', where the majority of his books are set, including a recent original film script and the next book. From here this solitary, intense writer draws repeatedly as he ploughs his very own, very special kind of field, taking as long as it takes, and letting the other fella do it if he can do it better ... There have been imitators but few have done it better. ■

Photographs by John Cocks.

### Alan Garner's books are published by Collins in hardback and by Lions in paperback:

*The Stone Book Quartet*, 0 00 184289 7, £6.99

*Tom Fobble's Day*, 0 00 184832 1, £4.95

*Red Shift*, 0 00 184202 1, £4.95;

0 00 671000 X, £2.50 pbk

*The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*,

0 00 183104 6, £8.99; 0 00 671672 5, £3.50 pbk

*The Moon of Gomerath*, 0 00 184503 9, £5.95;

0 00 671673 3, £3.50 pbk

*Elidor*, 0 00 184202 1, £4.95; 0 00 671674 1, £3.50 pbk

*The Owl Service*, 0 00 184603 5, £5.95;

0 00 674294 7, £3.50 pbk

*A Bag of Moonshine*, ill. P J Lynch,

0 00 184403 2, £8.95; 0 00 674290 4,

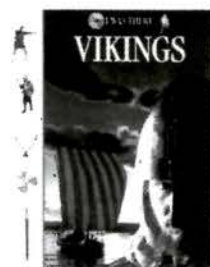
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*Jack and the Beanstalk*, ill. Julek Heller,

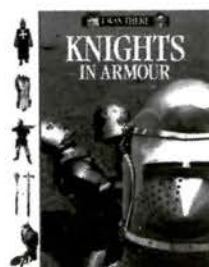
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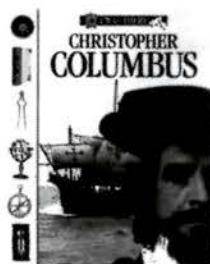
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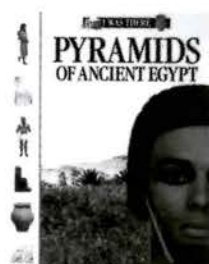
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## JUNIOR/MIDDLE REVIEWS continued . . .

**Where the Quaggy Bends**

Chris Powling, Lions  
(Jul 92), 0 00 674087 1,  
£2.99

The Quaggy river, 'no more than a gap in the city's city-ness . . . a wild streak people had forgotten to tame', is involved in almost every aspect of Chris Powling's tale. Narrator Skip finds himself ranked with his new friend Nimi against the local bullies, in an attempt to protect a vulnerable old man; ultimately, it's the girls – sister Ren, a crack shot with a catapult, and quiet, intelligent Nimi, with whom Skip finds a deepening friendship – who outwit the aggressors. The ever-relevant theme, expertly controlled pace and concise, effective scene-setting make this ideal to read aloud to juniors, or to recommend for solo reading by lower secondary pupils. LN

**Shark and Chips and Other Stories**

From **Puffin Post**, Puffin  
(Jun 92), 0 14 034654 6,  
£2.99

A glittering collection of short stories, all very individual and reflecting the style of each author. With such an array of talent (Aiken, Ashley, Cresswell, Cross, Fine and Fisk to name six of the thirteen authors) my expectations were great and I was not disappointed. Yes, of course, like the children, I went straight to my personal favourite! Now that I've read them all, alone and with groups of youngsters, they've each proved to be thoroughly enjoyable. One of the additional benefits was a heated and informed discussion about authors and the children's personal preferences. Wonderful material both to read in sequence or to dip into. PH

**The 100th Thing about Caroline**

Lois Lowry, Lions  
(Jun 92), 0 00 674195 9,  
£2.99

This is the first of a series about Caroline and her brother JP which promises to enchant young readers. Although the plot is predictable, the author has created a range of well-drawn characters and amusing situations. When Caroline convinces herself that a man living above her family in New York apartments is plotting murder, she enlists JP and a would-be journalist friend to foil him, in a story which has all the warmth, humour and charm expected from Lois Lowry. LN

Wyvern Copse, which sounds suspiciously like everyone's local comprehensive, is the expected hotbed of gossip, manipulation and intrigue. Firstly there's the roaring and lucrative trade in sandwiches a la carte and then the amazingly talented chameleon of a new girl who simultaneously delights and ridicules her teachers with effortless ease.

**The Great Sandwich Racket and Other Stories**

Andrew Matthews,  
Puffin (Aug 92),  
0 14 034900 6, £2.99

Things take a swift turn towards chaos when a ghost is rumoured to be inhabiting the swimming pool. Time for the teachers to strike back? A hilarious look at flourishing student sub-culture 'unknown' at the D.F.E. PH

## MIDDLE / SECONDARY

**Panther's Moon**

Ruskin Bond, Puffin  
(Aug 92), 0 14 036044 1,  
£3.50

Ten stories linked by India and the struggle between humans and creatures, frequently tigers. My favourites (including the title story) have Indian children and village life at their heart, so we see and feel the patterns of their lives while being absorbed by the dramas of the plots. This is high-quality storytelling, mixing both detail and simplicity. AJ

to cope, Simon works hard at being 'one of the boys'. The class nuisance becomes a welcome friend and together they set out to get Sam into the football team and defeat the school gang. Only when things go dangerously wrong does Sam realise that Cool Simon's name was well earned. Overlooking an uncomfortable change of tense, I found this to be a wonderfully witty book that's an entertaining read in its own right and a welcome addition in any classroom collection. PH

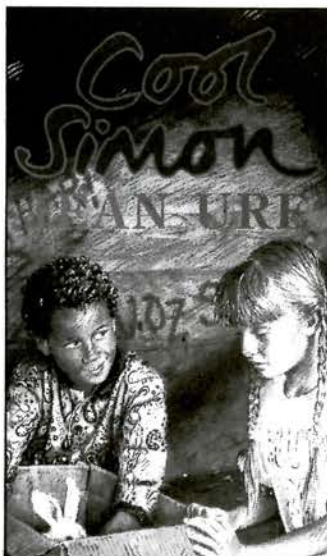


the text to be used for research assignments. PH

**Our Side of the Playground**

Compiled by Tony Bradman, Red Fox  
(Aug 92), 0 09 997770 2,  
£2.99

A book of two halves, two points of view in a flip-over form. 'What do boys think of girls?' starting from one end and the reverse starting from the other. A neat device for a lovely range of poems, poets and perspectives. There's the surprise of older rhymes (Longfellow and Kate Greenaway) exposed to modern contexts, the delight of parody (Wendy Cope's macho Christopher Robin) and a range of lively voices, many of which will be new to the classroom. It's the kind of collection you want to read aloud from, that many children will read and share, and which can also form the basis of a range of lessons – literary and social. AJ

**Grady the Great**

Judith Bernie Strommen, Puffin  
(Jun 92), 0 14 034985 5,  
£2.99

Bereft of his long-term best friend, Grady is lonely. As if that wasn't enough, Grady's new neighbour, Burgess, appears to be a pushy pest too eager to be accepted. To make matters worse, Burgess is a detective and has discovered Grady's super-plan, a big secret that can only be kept by Grady pretending to be friendly. The risks are high and timing is crucial!

A wonderful read that takes us back to the first principles of friendship, the sensitivities, and compromises we make. PH

Scotland and entering adulthood with an appetite for humour, fantasy and travel. She writes about problems, fears and regrets, but also, with great exuberance, about the fascination of the sheer variousness of life. GH

**The Journal of Watkin Stench**

Meredith Hooper, Piper  
(Jul 92), 0 330 32494 2,  
£2.99

Another addition to the growing collection of history information texts that are accurately researched and then empathetically written. This one is based on the early settlers in Australia in the late eighteenth century. Through our highly articulate rat friend, Watkin, we experience the raw hardships and extreme difficulties affecting the horrifyingly interwoven lives of rats and men.

Surely one of the most pleasurable ways of discovering the social aspects of history is to enjoy a good read, and that's what we have here. For the purist the historical facts come at the end and enable

**Two's Company**

Jackie Kay, Blackie Poetry Originals,  
0 216 93317 X, £5.99

A book depicting pitbulls and pumpkins, lost friends and imaginary friends, glimpses of Crete and of Skye. Jackie Kay's poems reflect the experiences of an adopted black child growing up in

**Cool Simon**

Jean Ure, Corgi  
(Jun 92), 0 552 52707 6,  
£2.99

Changing schools is traumatic for anyone, but when you have partial hearing things can get tricky. Aware that he has

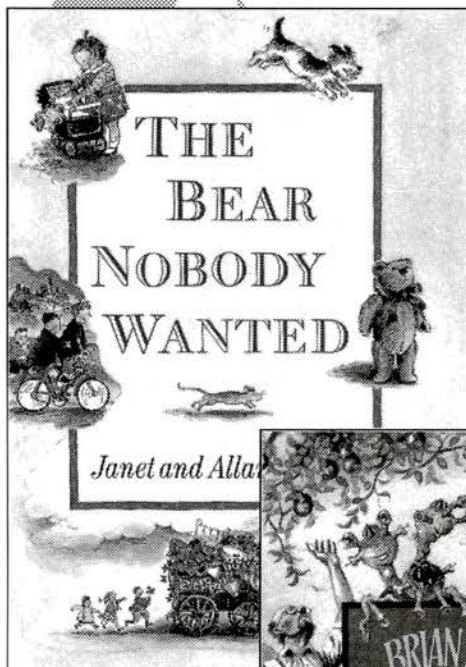
**The Warning**

Sigrun Srivastava, ill.  
Tapas Guha, Puffin  
(Aug 92), 0 14 034819 0,  
£3.50

As part of a positive effort to feature a collection of books reflecting our multicultural society, this story represents some of the more sensitive material that's on the market. Mohini's family prepare to enjoy their holiday in the hills, escaping the heat of Delhi. The holiday turns into a nightmare after the unexpected departure of their father and the danger and tension of the events that



# NEW FICTION THIS AUTUMN



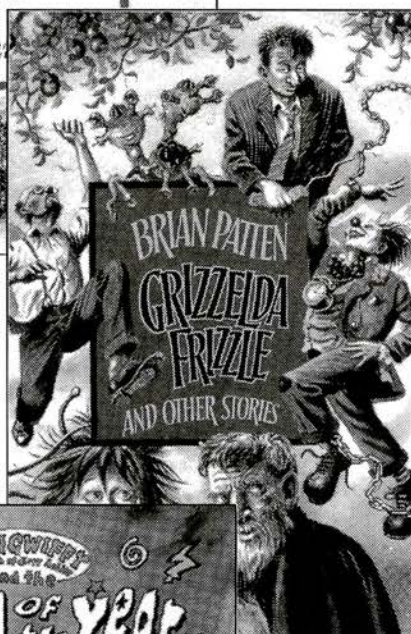
## THE BEAR NOBODY WANTED

Janet and Allan Ahlberg

0670 839825 £9.99

October 1992

What sort of life lies ahead for a bear who comes off the production line in a teddy bear factory only to discover that, while he thinks the world of himself nobody seems to think the world of him? This is an irresistible story for everyone who knows what it is to love a bear, however young or old.



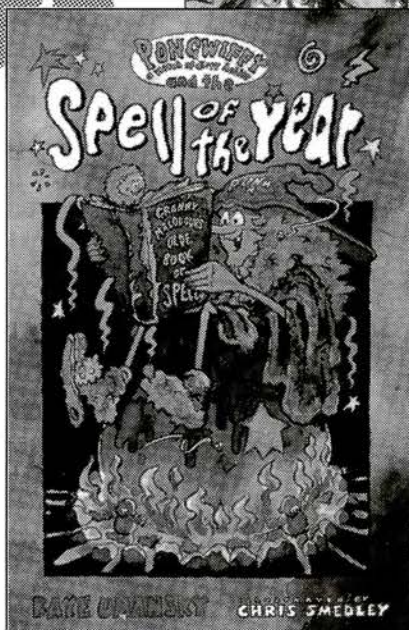
## GRIZZELDA FRIZZLE and OTHER STORIES

Brian Patten

0670 842249 £8.50

November 1992

In this beautifully illustrated book of magic fables, the classic elements of fairy tale meet with Brian Patten's inventive wit, all woven together in a wonderful tapestry with richly detailed illustrations.



## PONGWIFFY and the SPELL OF THE YEAR

Kaye Umansky

0670 846368 £8.99

October 1992

When witch Pongwiffy finds a famous recipe for wishing water, she thinks she has found the Spell of the Year, but first she has to find the ingredients. Her search leads to hilarious consequences and a third magical story about the smelliest and craftiest witch in the world.

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follow. When a motorbike screeches out of control towards Mohini and her cousin, Jack, everything seems lost.

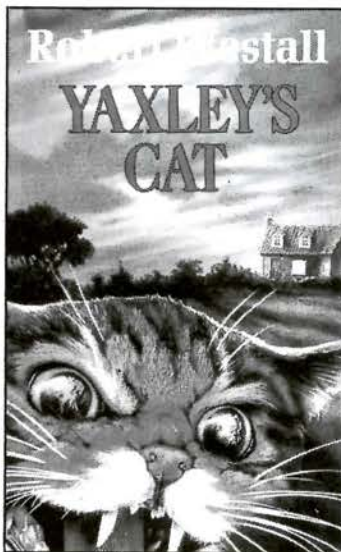
The cultural values of India are integral to a superb story here. This is invaluable for introducing any exploration of comparative societies yet worthy of a place on the bookshelf in its own right. PH

### The Chronicles of Narmo

Caitlin Moran, Corgi (Jul 92), 0 552 52724 6, £2.99

In a series of wonderful comic episodes, we have life with the Narmos: parents, five children and two dogs. Eccentrics all – except perhaps the dogs – so that merely being together is a drama before they ever come up against the outside world. It's very witty, both in plot and dialogue (it ought to be televised), with some lovely running jokes. My favourite is the way Morag's first attempt at a loaf manages to make an appearance through many of the episodes covering about nine months. It's edible for all this time, finally appearing as stuffing for the turkey.

The whole book just bursts with life, and there's so much to spare that many of the normally inanimate objects are dramatised too. The author, by the way, is 15-years-old. AJ



### Yaxley's Cat

Robert Westall, Piper (Aug 92), 0 330 32499 3, £2.99

Unusually, Robert Westall uses the viewpoint of a mature woman for this chilling story of rural prejudice and persecution. Rose, to escape from her yuppie, Richmond life and her smug husband, rents Sepp Yaxley's abandoned Norfolk cottage with her two children. A ferocious cat, and bizarre items found in cupboards, reveal Yaxley's reputation as a 'Cunning Man', and why he disappeared; but the newcomers' presence arouses

local hostility to the point where their own lives are at risk. By the end the threatening violence is controlled, but Rose feels just as dismayed by the methodical ruthlessness of her teenage son. Utterly gripping. LN

### The Skybreaker

Ann Halam, Puffin (Aug 92), 0 14 034857 3, £3.99

In this conclusion to the 'Daymaker' trilogy, magician Zanne has to leave Inland, where technology is a thing of the past and supernatural powers are used for the benefit of all, to act as tutor to the captive child king of Magia, where magic is manipulated by one person and used to evil ends. Each country has its own policies and rituals, requiring some perseverance in the early chapters, especially by readers beginning with this volume; but patience will be rewarded by a gripping and atmospheric story of good versus evil, with an understated topical theme. LN

### Stanley's Aquarium

Barry Faville, Puffin (Aug 92), 0 14 034965 0, £2.99

Barry Faville writes with assurance and humour, vividly evoking his New Zealand setting and creating an intelligent and likeable first-person narrator. Robbie takes a gardening job for elderly Stanley, finding him at first fascinating and later repellant; when she finds out what he keeps in his aquarium and what he plans to do with them, the book takes on a thrillerish twist without losing its sharp insight into character and relationships. Unusual and compelling. LN

### Glad Rags

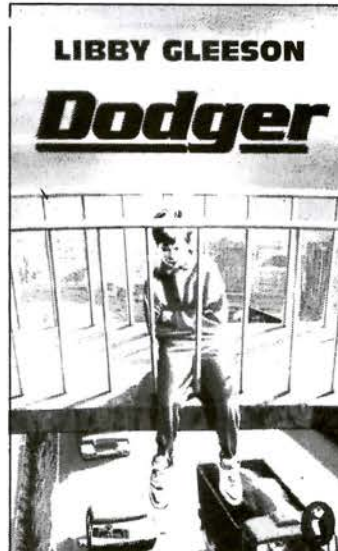
Joan Lingard, Puffin (Jun 92), 0 14 034633 3, £2.99



This is a follow-on from *Rags and Riches* told alternately by Seb and Sam, offspring of a dizzy second-hand clothes dealer mother and an

unreliable aristocratic father. Their varied, incident-filled lives take in an assortment of unusual characters – a battle-axe granny, a mad grandfather with a decaying castle and their own school mates.

Joan Lingard's skill is in making the whole thing sound not just lively but also quite plausible and in inducing the reader to want to keep turning the pages. DB



### Dodger

Libby Gleeson, Puffin (Aug 92), 0 14 036063 8, £2.99

A painful, sad story where the troubled personal and family relationships, plus the stormy school life, of Mick are told through a skilful blend of flashback, a teacher's letters to a friend, the boy's own notes and sympathetic narrative.

Coming to terms with the negative expectations of others and his own poor sense of self-worth is achieved through a role in a school play and by an impressively sensitive first-year teacher. Highly recommended, even though it's truly an agonising read, especially at the end. DB

### Someone's Mother is Missing

Harry Mazer, Teens (Jun 92), 0 7497 0949 9, £2.99

At the poor, shambling, noisy end of the family there's Sam, fat, over-talkative and awed by his super-cool and sophisticated cousin, Lisa, from the apparently rich end of the clan. When Lisa's privileged world crumbles, it's Sam who helps her to find some balance, out of which both gain a better sense of reality and the value of family.

The pace is slightly slow in parts but there's a gentle humour and the developing closeness of the two teenagers is convincingly handled. It could be promoted to both boys and girls, which is a bit of a rarity. DB

### Pigeon Summer

Ann Turnbull, Walker (Jun 92), 0 7445 2413 X, £4.99

Mary Dyer doesn't really fit into her family or male-dominated culture; for one thing, she, a girl, loves her father's racing pigeons and when he must go away to find work, Mary knows enough to carry on managing the loft and winning prizes, despite increasing conflict with her harassed mother. Set believably in 1930, this readable tale might look a bit whimsical from its packaging but has a sound basic message that 'There's different kinds of cleverness', which can't be bad. Thoughtful readers should find satisfaction here. DB



### Other Bells for Us to Ring

Robert Cormier, Lions (Jun 92), 0 00 674049 9, £3.50

Like some kind of other world imp, Kathleen Mary O'Hara leads Darcy Webster through the end of childhood into adolescence. The nature of denominational faith, miracles and a personal creed by which to live get aired in a tale that somehow feels as though it ought to be longer to do justice to the magnitude of the theme. It's set in small-town America during the second world war, although there isn't a particularly strong period feel and as such it's not quite interesting enough to keep you turning the pages willingly. DB

### Mystery Tour – and other stories of detection

Compiled by Mick Gowar, Red Fox (Aug 92), 0 09 997750 8, £2.99

A lively concept – detective stories, or, more correctly, stories in which there's a problem to be solved, each by well-established authors. This is a consistently strong selection, especially appropriate for KS3 pupils. The title story is written by Jan



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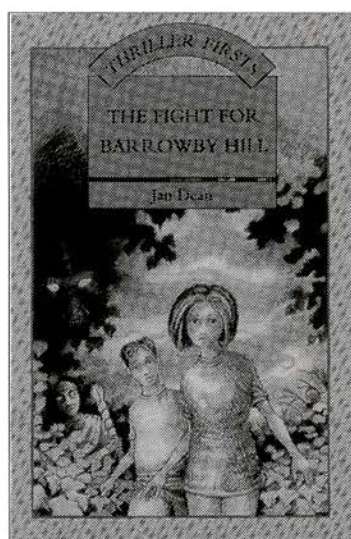
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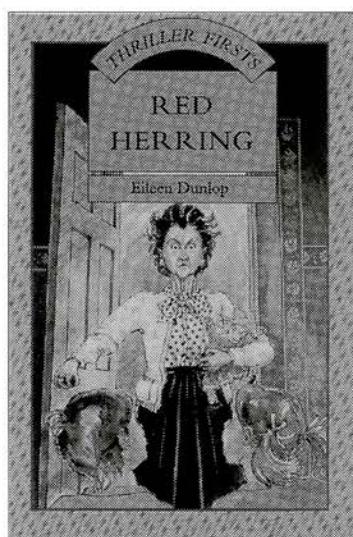
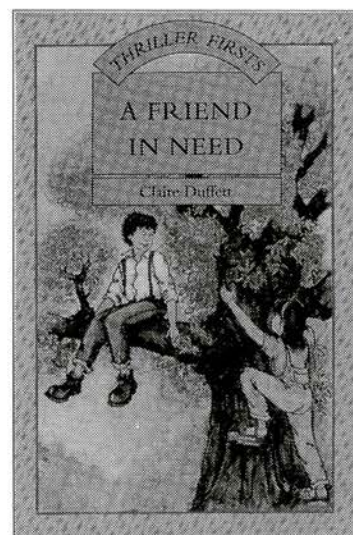
Barrowby Hill is being threatened by developers. Emma and James are determined to fight them – but how? They are in despair, until they find that the ancient guardian of the hill itself is prepared to help them...



### A FRIEND IN NEED *Claire Duffett*

0216 932807 £6.50 November 1992

Katy is fed up. The last thing she wanted to do was to visit her sick great-uncle. And who is the strange boy in the garden? There is something odd about him Katy can't quite work out...



### RED HERRING *Eileen Dunlop*

0216 932815 £6.50 November 1992

Who is Mrs Herring? Is she really just on holiday? If so, why is she poking her nose into every corner? Hazel and Craig are soon to find out...



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Mark and exhibits her love of catastrophic adults rescued by resourceful children. Helen Cresswell's 'Boney Murphy Goes Walkabout' is one of the funniest stories I've ever read, detailing the attempts to lose a skeleton bought as a Christmas present – yes, you *did* read that correctly!

A varied, idiosyncratic and undeniably entertaining collection. Wonderful stuff! VR

**Wilderness Edge**  
John Coombes and Martin Riley, Network Books (May 92),  
0 563 36344 4, £2.99

This is based on the TV series and is set in a Lake District outdoor pursuits centre. A number of teenagers spend a week canoeing, sailing, abseiling, etc., although these

activities take second place to the intrigues, romances and rivalries which develop. The writing is pedestrian, with dialogue of the 'Faffin' 'ell, we've climbed miles!', 'Yer what!!!!?' variety. The numerous characters are so one-dimensional that most can be identified only by name, with no particular viewpoint to focus the reader's attention. In

terms of plot and setting, **Wilderness Edge** has the ingredients of good television drama, and in skilled hands it could have succeeded as fiction. LN

## OLDER READERS



**The Tiger in the Well**  
Philip Pullman, Penguin Plus (Jun 92),  
0 14 034484 5, £4.99

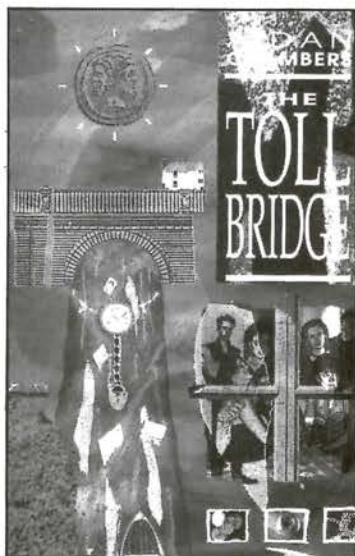
A wonderfully dense plot which makes putting the book down difficult and finishing it a real loss. There's the shock of the opening as Sally Lockhart, an unmarried mother, is sued for divorce, and for custody of her child, by a man she's never heard of. As documents and people begin to confirm this nightmarish impossibility, Sally is forced to run from her comfortable life. Pullman blends the raw excitement of chases, the fascination of penetrating the mystery, with the physical sensations of Victorian London, particularly the East End, and a detailed sub-plot about growing socialism, Jewish persecution and immigration. A Victorian setting which uses all the craft of Victorian writing – Dickens, Mayhew and penny-dreadfuls – in a thoroughly knowing yet apparently effortless way. This is young adult writing of a quite stunning kind. AJ

### Song for a Tattered Flag

Geoffrey Trease, Walker (Jun 92),  
0 7445 2412 1, £4.99

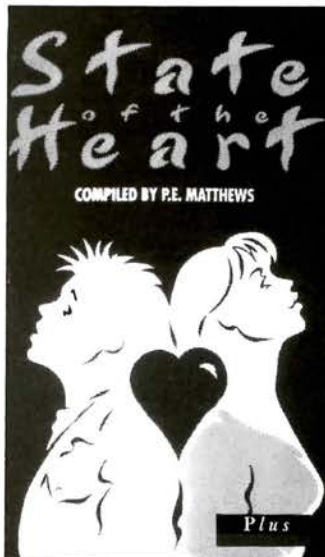
Even such recent history as this may not be part of young readers' memories, but the images of the overthrow of the Ceausescu in Romania are still vivid in my mind and

Trease skilfully shows the way fiction can get inside documentary fact in a way that gives it powerful new life. The brooding sense of fear, the enormous bravery of people resisting that fear and then the bullets, is very well conveyed. There's a marvellous sense of relief and release as the Ceausescu is removed from power. Hindsight makes the happy ending of fiction seem shallow, but it's an excellent book. AJ



**The Toll Bridge**  
Aidan Chambers, Bodley Head (Jun 92),  
0 370 31526 X, £7.99

It's impossible to do justice to this brilliant, complex novel in a few words. The main characters variously seek identity, signified by each using an assumed name. 'Janus' leaves home and girlfriend to work as a tollbridge-keeper, a device which permits the use of thematic as well as literal bridges; a fugitive, 'Adam', proves catalyst to Janus and others. This really is a novel for 'young adults' – it's sexually explicit as well as having a disturbing, ground-shifting denouement. Surely one of the most original and rewarding teenage novels of the year – not to be missed. LN



**State of the Heart**  
Compiled by P E Mathews, Penguin Plus (Jun 92),  
0 14 034351 2, £3.50

This collection has a good deal to offer the rather saturated market of love stories for young adults. What marks it out is the sharpness of humour and strong characterisation. 'The Flea' is particularly affecting – sacrifice and betrayal for a friend's illicit love. 'First Impressions' with its agonies over appearance and appeal will strike many a chord in young women's hearts and 'Jonathon's Story' confronts teenage embarrassment in a totally winning way. Years 9, 10 and 11 will wince and chuckle over this collection – buy it! VR

### Riding the Great White

Gina Wilson, Bodley Head (Aug 92),  
0 370 31692 4, £7.99

An excellent, compelling read. Being a paperback original, its price is entirely justified but may prohibit purchase by many schools. Gin and her friends formed Thakers, their own exclusive 'gang' which met during the school summer holidays. The book follows the dissolution of the group through the traumas experienced by its individual members. Central to the story is the relationship between Gin and Gav, ambivalent in nature, powerfully destructive,

deeply felt. This is a novel about love and its effects on the young, and the balance of tensions within the group is carefully and creatively examined. It raises and answers questions, warns but also advocates risk in order to achieve the ultimate goal.

The Great White is a childhood excitement – a waterslide – it is also the headlong, reckless, exhilarating charge into first love. VR

**Invitation to the Game**  
Monica Hughes, Mammoth (Jul 92),  
0 7497 0953 7, £2.99

A stunning post-Holocaust fantasy in which a group of friends – of whom Lissa is the narrator – attempt to survive in a society which needs neither their skills nor their aspirations. They rally determinedly behind their talents and inventiveness and are rewarded for their efforts with an invitation to what appears to be an escapist, hypnotically-induced Game. They survive the challenges and then comes the ultimate test – transportation to a planet in another galaxy to build a new civilisation. The shock of this discovery is countered by their tenacity and community-based ideals and the result is a new beginning.

A fine piece of writing and, in these days of recession and disillusionment, a beguiling metaphor. VR

## REVIEWERS in this issue

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



# A FEAST OF STORIES

Mary Hoffman ruminates on food in children's books . . . all the year round, not just at Christmas!

Can you remember a passage in a children's book about eating? Back over the years there come to me the illicit pickled limes that Amy March was caned for, the chicken and peaches that the railway children's mother was given by the Kind Old Gentleman and the buns the same children had for tea every time she sold another story. A quick trawl round my family produced Alice's dry biscuit, proffered to quench thirst by the White Queen, the breakfast of buckwheat and muffins given up to the poor by the March girls (Alcott really knew how to make gastronomic impressions) and the archetypal plum pie at the end of **Each Peach Pear Plum**.

It begins further back than that even, with the first songs and stories we tell children out of our, significantly, oral traditions. Goldilocks eats the porridge, the wolf eats the little pigs (and Red Riding Hood's grandmother, for good measure), Snow White eats the apple. Little Miss Muffet has a curious meal of curds and whey, the Knave of Hearts notoriously runs off with the Queen's patisserie and as for pies . . . well, from one that masquerades as the first letter of the alphabet, to the one Jack Horner stuck his sticky thumb in, they are everywhere, containing blackbirds, or being denied to careless kittens and impecunious simpletons like Simon. The pie is so deeply ingrained in the English consciousness as the epitome of delicious nosh, that you must not be surprised to find it still on today's menu.

## Famine, feast and fullness

Probably the best-selling children's book of all time is **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory**. You may say with hindsight that a story giving a poor child control over a sweetie empire was bound to succeed, but it is more than that. Dahl, like other successful writers for the age group, captures a recurring experience which most adults have forgotten. In the affluent West, few people know the horrors of real famine, but the language of childhood does not reflect this. 'I'm starving,' they say, 'I could eat a horse', 'I can't wait till supper'. Young children empty out and fill up much more quickly than adults. Half an hour's wait for a meal can seem an eternity.

And they don't want healthy little appetisers like crudités, either! Offer a child who hasn't eaten for three or four hours the choice between a chocolate bar and a raw carrot, and we know which one proves the more mouth-watering. Charlie Bucket's family were chronically short of food and a chocolate bar was an unprecedented treat. Of course it had to contain the golden ticket too – after such a dearth, glut is the only possible next step.

Charlie never sickens of his luscious inheritance, because all the bad aspects of greed and over-indulgence are split off into other characters like Augustus Gloop and Verruca Salt. But it is characteristic of a certain kind of children's book that the heroes – and the reader – move from appetite, to satisfaction, to surfeit and nausea. **Jam** by Margaret Mahy is a good picture-book example, in which a family bottle and eat a whole tree's worth of plums, getting so fed up with the jam that in the end they are using it as an adhesive for bathroom tiles.

You can experience the same progression reading Posy Simmonds' **The Chocolate Wedding**, in which Lulu pigs herself so heartily on Easter eggs that she's too sick to be a bridesmaid after all and dreams queasily of seas of chocolate and sugar people. Perhaps it's there in **The Very Hungry Caterpillar** too, though Eric Carle takes us through to a final tranquil stage beyond bingeing and tummy-ache, when we are beautifully cured and metamorphosed into something no longer monstrous.

## Nature red in tooth and claw

Carle says that the theme of his most successful book is 'nature's own story' and she is co-author of many another plot involving eat or be eaten. The harsh realities of the food chain are familiar from traditional tales like 'Chicken Licken'. But of course the sub-text of **Rosie's Walk** is all about a fox's supper too, which he fails to get, though not because Rosie is any more yardwise than her predecessor (or is she?).

Foxes and wolves are always hungry in children's books. Young readers, brought up on the three little pigs, immediately spot the dangers in **Mr and Mrs Pig's Evening Out**, when the babysitter is introduced as Mrs Wolf, and the writer Mary Rayner plays with this deliciously. Just as the babysitting wolf is foiled, so the one in Catherine Storr's brilliant series of stories about Clever Polly is always planning new ways to catch and eat the little girl and is always thwarted. This gives rise to the wolf's favourite piece of emotive and useful poetry:

*'Monday's child is good to fry  
Tuesday's child is best in pie  
Wednesday's child is good meat roll  
Thursday's child is casserole  
Friday's child is rather tough  
Saturday's child is tender enough*

*But the child that is cooked on the Sabbath day  
Is delicious when eaten in every way.'*

I'm sure no child has ever been horrified by this blood-curdling philosophy. Like Polly, they accept the *donné*, quite unrealistic though it may be, that a lone wolf will always want to eat a human, and the literary convention in Storr's world is that he will always fail.

## We'll eat you up, we love you so

More disturbing may be the frisson of cannibalism, in **The BFG** for example, where the giants, though hideous, are clearly humanoid and have horrible names like Bonecrusher and Childchewer. Adults assume quite reasonably that children will be terrified by the idea of being eaten alive, particularly by a grown-up human, which is what analysts like Bruno Bettelheim tell us that giants represent. Yet have you never nibbled on the toes and fingers of a dimpled baby or made yum-yum noises while you nuzzled its neck? And what did the delicious baby do? Squealed with delight, almost certainly.

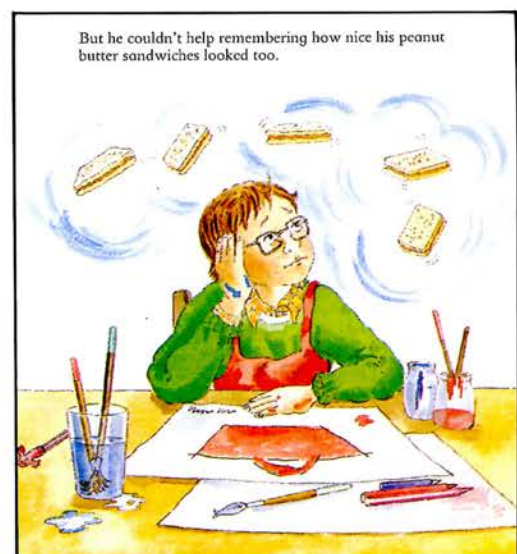
Maurice Sendak says the Wild Things in his most famous book were only slightly exaggerated pictures of his aunts and uncles as seen through a small child's eyes. And they entreat Max to stay with them with the enticement, 'We'll eat you up, we love you so.'

## Food as magic

As every young reader discovers with reassuring pleasure, Max's supper is waiting in his bedroom on his return, and it is still hot! There is a strong element of magic there, but perhaps the arrival of hot food on the table is magic to a small child? They certainly show no perception of the stages by which it gets there. Perhaps this is why food in their favourite stories has hidden and unexpected properties, like Alice's mushroom which makes her grow or shrink. It can make one incredibly strong, like Popeye's spinach or John Burningham's baby's avocadoes. It can renew itself inexhaustibly like the traditional pasta/porridge pot or Norman Lindsay's **Magic Pudding**. It can get out of hand and threaten to take you over, which is what happens in Margaret Mahy's **The Great Chewing-Gum Rescue**.

## Food as consolation

Above all, food can console you. It is a friend and as with some friends, children like to stay with a trusted favourite. Remember how in **Harriet the Spy** she always took tomato sandwiches to school? My own hero, Leon of **Leon's Lucky Lunch Break**, is a peanut-butter freak. Sometimes this gives parents a problem and they want to encourage children to be more adventurous. The classic technique is saturation with the chosen food. In **Mrs Pig's Bulk Buy**, the mother stocks up on nothing but huge bottles of tomato ketchup and the piglets get predictably sick of it. In **Bread and Jam for Frances**, Russell Hoban's badger parents are a bit more subtle but with the same result. 'How do I know what I like if you never let me try it?' wails a Frances loaded to the gunwales with bread and jam, while her loving family tuck into spaghetti and meatballs.



From **Leon's Lucky Lunch Break** (Dent).

## The joy of eating

But some descriptions of food in children's books are so frankly sensuous that they sound positively erotic. Is this the latency equivalent of pornography? Tolkien is riddled with references to food and anticipations of meals described with physical longing. (I found this out while reading **The Hobbit** to my medically 'starved' child who was waiting to go down to the theatre to have her appendix out!) At a not



untypical meal, Gandalf eats 'two whole loaves (with masses of butter and honey and clotted cream) and [drinks] at least a quart of mead'. Even allowing for his being a wizard, there is something definitely Rabelaisian about such gorging.

There are whole books, such as Jill Barklem's first 'Brambly Hedge' quartet, which really only exist for the purposes of describing a good blow-out. In these four, each named after a season, *Autumn Story*, etc., the mediocre text is subservient to the wonderful pictures and the central idea of obtaining or providing the appropriate seasonal feast. That this is so can be confirmed by the existence of Brambly Hedge merchandising, allowing one to buy very expensive china replicas of the bulging larders and groaning boards of Jill Barklem's world.

It's not surprising that books appealing to children will capitalise on the pleasures of oral gratification. Their audience is, after all, still close to the time when demand is necessarily quickly followed by supply. That is why Pooh, with his constant optimistic view that it is always 'time for a little something', will continue to speak the

language that most of us still understand. Peter Rabbit, in his progression from gourmandising on beans and lettuce to indigestion and the need for a little parsley, has something to say to children and adults alike. In his case, of course, there also looms the shadow of Mr and Mrs McGregor and the possibility that he might follow his father's footsteps into a pie.

Perhaps that accounts for the timeless popularity of Peter and his friends? They are near enough to the base of the food pyramid to be both hungry and hungered after. Their appeal to small and helpless readers, whose eyes are bigger than their bellies, will endure, along with all the other pie-eaters, -makers and -avoiders of the children's book world. ■

Mary Hoffman is the author of many children's books. The illustration here taken from her own *Leon's Lucky Lunch Break*, ill. Polly Noakes, published by Dent, 0 460 88021 7, £6.50; 0 460 88122 1, £2.99 pbk.

### Books referred to:

*Little Women*, Louisa M Alcott, various editions

*The Railway Children*, E Nesbit, various editions

*Through the Looking-Glass*, Lewis Carroll, various editions

*Each Peach Pear Plum*, Janet and Allan Ahlberg, Viking, 0 670 28705 9, £8.50; Puffin, 0 14 050919 4, £3.99 pbk

*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, Roald Dahl, Collins, 0 00 185430 5, £4.99; Puffin, 0 14 031824 0, £3.50 pbk

*Jam*, Margaret Mahy, Mammoth, 0 7497 0885 9, £2.99 pbk

*The Chocolate Wedding*, Posy Simmonds, Cape, 0 224 02759 X, £6.95

*The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, Eric Carle, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 01798 X, £8.50; Puffin, 0 14 050087 1, £3.50 pbk

*Rosie's Walk*, Pat Hutchins, Bodley Head, 0 370 00794 8, £7.99; Random Century, 1 85681 074 7, £3.99; Puffin, 0 14 050032 4, £3.50 pbk

*Mr and Mrs Pig's Evening Out*, Mary Rayner, Pan Macmillan, 0 333 19371 7, £5.95; 0 333 46118 5, £3.25 pbk

*Clever Polly and the Stupid Wolf*, Catherine Storr, Puffin, 0 14 030426 6, £2.50 pbk

*The BFG*, Roald Dahl, Cape, 0 224 02040 4, £8.95; Puffin, 0 14 031597 7, £3.50 pbk

*Where the Wild Things Are*, Maurice Sendak, Bodley Head, 0 370 00772 7, £8.95; Lions, 0 00 664086 9, £3.99 pbk; Puffin, 0 14 050031 6, £3.99 pbk

*Avocado Baby*, John Burningham, Cape, 0 224 02004 8, £6.99; Lions, 0 00 662591 6, £2.50 pbk

*The Magic Pudding*, Norman Lindsay, Angus & Robertson, 0 207 16731 1, £4.95 pbk

*The Great Chewing-Gum Rescue*, Margaret Mahy, Mammoth, 0 7497 0250 8, £2.50 pbk

*Harriet the Spy*, Louise Fitzhugh, Lions, 0 00 672175 3, £3.50 pbk

*Mrs Pig's Bulk Buy*, Mary Rayner, Pan Macmillan, 0 333 30978 2, £5.95; 0 333 51039 9, £2.99 pbk

*Bread and Jam for Frances*, Russell and Lillian Hoban, Puffin, 0 14 050176 2, £3.50 pbk

*The Hobbit*, J R R Tolkien, various editions

*Spring Story* (0 00 183922 5), *Summer Story* (0 00 183923 3), *Autumn Story* (0 00 183739 7), *Winter Story* (0 00 183711 7), Jill Barklem, Collins, £4.99 each

*Winnie-the-Pooh*, A A Milne, various editions

*The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, Beatrix Potter, Warne, 0 7232 34604 1, £3.99

## Brilliant Books for Boxing Day and Beyond...

### The Kingfisher Illustrated History of the World

*Foreword by Magnus Magnusson*

A visually stimulating account of world civilization from 40,000 BC to the present day.

0 86272 953 X £25.00 Ages 9-13

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*Selected by Edward & Nancy Blishen*

A bumper-sized collection of new and traditional stories.

0 86272 923 8 £12.99 Ages 4-8

### Mother Goose Rhymes

*Colin & Moira Maclean*

Over 50 favourite nursery rhymes in this large beautifully illustrated collection.

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### Where's Mouse

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### How Nature Works

*Steve Parker*

This fascinating and richly illustrated book examines the mechanisms of all living things.

0 86272 919 X £9.99 Ages 9+



Kingfisher Books





# REVIEWS – NON FICTION

## Egyptians

Rachel Wright, Franklin Watts (Craft Topics series), 0 7496 0808 0, £7.99

### JUNIOR

Although published as a craft activity book, the excellent factual back-up means that this title could equally well be promoted on its merits as a good introduction to the Egyptians which also includes some fun-to-make ideas. Either way, what you get is an attractive volume with full colour photos and artwork and a format that gives the conventional well-trodden topic path an alternative route.

Using easily acquired materials and following the step-by-step photos, the end results are well within the capabilities of most **Blue Peter** aficionados, although they need an adult on standby to ensure that cutting tools are used safely.

Items to make include a water clock, scarab stamp seal, Egyptian wig, ornamental neck-collar, fish charm, and even a coffin with a mummy in it. The text, describing how the latter was accomplished in reality, provides any necessary stimulus ('Bandaging bodies was a smelly business').

Having made your own 'artefact', you can then go off to look at the real thing. Listed at the end of the book are just some of the museums in Britain which have Egyptian collections. VH

## Maps and Mapping

Barbara Taylor, Kingfisher (Young Discoverers series), 0 86272 918 1, £4.99

### Mapwork 2

Julie Warne and Mandy Suhr, Wayland (Mapwork series), 0 7502 0302 1, £7.99

### JUNIOR

The lack of suitable books on mapping and mapwork for the junior school library has been highlighted by the demands of the National Curriculum. These two titles should help to fill the gap.

**Maps and Mapping** has clear illustrations, useful D-I-Y blocks which illustrate the theory of the text, some helpful explanations (e.g. how a map is a bird's eye view) and well chosen, unusual examples to exemplify points (the chosen tube map is Tokyo's). The least successful element is the section on map projections – a complex subject not examined in the necessary depth.

Whereas **Maps and Mapping** has an attractive cover **Mapwork 2** has a fairly terrible one – a mixture of 1970s colours and a weak representation of a child's drawing.

Don't be put off – the content is strong and the internal design good. The book concentrates on National Curriculum topics, handles them well and is particularly effective in its use of Ordnance Survey maps to illustrate points made. A good glossary is included but the bibliography is less convincing – a seven-year-old world atlas seems dubious.

Some flaws in both books then but both have a lot to offer and needy teachers can heave a sigh of relief. GB

## Mountains and Volcanoes

Barbara Taylor, Kingfisher (Young Discoverers series), 0 86272 917 3, £4.99

### JUNIOR

## Earthquakes to Volcanoes

John Clark, Franklin Watts (Hands on Geography series), 0 7496 0747 5, £7.99

### Volcano

John Dudman, Wayland (Violent Earth series), 0 7502 0365 X, £7.50

### JUNIOR/MIDDLE

### Volcano

Susanna Van Rose, Dorling Kindersley (Eyewitness series), 0 86318 910 5, £8.99

### JUNIOR/MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Comparing a range of recently published books on volcanoes proved to be an interesting experience. Would the figures quoted be consistent? Would the same library photographs be used? Would the same events be seen as significant? Would they be readable and useful? Answers: No, Yes often, Not always, and Yes generally.

My favourite of the selection has to be **Earthquakes to Volcanoes** – here explanations are given rather than implied and the 'things to do' sections explain further. The book is extravagantly over ambitious, not just earthquakes and volcanoes but the effects of wind, rain and frost too – and all in 32 pages. For clarity and as an introduction though, it's ideal.

At the other extreme is the Eyewitness guide, **Volcano** – full of a mass of information and illustrations, not just the expected artefacts (Pompeian bread) but also dramatic photographs and models. This book also gives more information about the infrequently mentioned St. Pierre volcanic disaster of 1902 in which nearly 30,000 died.

Below: Maps as a bird's eye view, from **Maps and Mapping**.

It is a volume that will prove popular both for curricular support and general interest browsing.

A more straightforward but still useful volume is **Mountains and Volcanoes**. This works well in relating the earth-shattering to the mundane (a volcanic eruption can be compared to a fizzy drink.) It also includes a number of good experiments which would be useful for teachers too.

Also likely to appeal to children is **Volcano** in the appropriately named 'Violent Earth' series. Here the emphasis of both text and excellent colour photography is on the drama and devastation, but the inclusion of informative cutaways provides another dimension. This book is also strongest on the creative power of volcanoes – the section on Surtsey is exciting but informative too.

There is no shortage of items for primary or secondary children on volcanoes. As well as the books included here **BfK** has recommended two other titles on the subject in the last year. GB

## Electricity

Steve Parker, 0 86318 904 0

## Force and Motion

Peter Lafferty, 0 86318 906 7

## Light

David Burnie, 0 86318 905 9

## Matter

Christopher Cooper, 0 86318 907 5

Dorling Kindersley in association with the Science Museum, London (Eyewitness Science series), £9.99 each

### JUNIOR/MIDDLE/SECONDARY

When Eyewitness first came out I found them to be excellent samplers – the book equivalent of sporting highlights. Now the publishers have teamed up with the Science Museum to produce this silver-wrapped series, the effect is much the same – not much of an end-to-end read but fascinating browsing.

Flip captions and superficial descriptions don't always endear the texts to me but the photographs are what always made Eyewitnesses special and here they are a triumph. For with the Science Museum on hand to supply the examples we can see all manner of scientific firsts – Geiger's original counter (like a bean-tin on a stick), Swan's original light bulb (and you thought he only invented matches), the whistling mail-rocket which posed a serious threat to carrier pigeons in World War I, and my old mentor James Chadwick's original neutron detector and fag-packet toolkit, grimy with use.

All this demonstrates that science is, first and foremost, a human activity and not just a set of laws and principles; and while I can't agree with the publisher's claim that the series is 'indispensable' (sic) it's a grand introduction to the museum – which is. TP

## Ancient Rome

Simon James, 0 600 57284 6

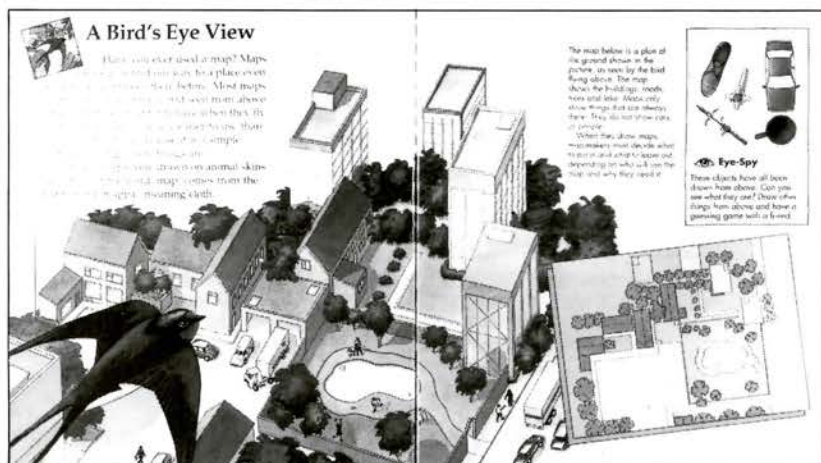
## The Aztecs

Tim Wood, 0 600 57285 4

Hamlyn (See Through History series), £7.99 each

### MIDDLE

Striking jacket designs give these titles immediate visual impact. Inside, generous double-page spreads feature not only the usual blend of artist's impressions and photos, but equally colourful acetate cutaway pictures which enable us to 'see'





both the exteriors and interiors of a range of buildings from temples to town houses.

Happily, the accompanying texts are equally stimulating and succeed in bringing the history of these two contrasting civilizations vividly to life.

In *The Aztecs*, Tim Wood has provided an absorbing account of the growth, development and eventual destruction of their Empire. He doesn't shirk the importance of human sacrifice in the Aztec religion, but is at pains to balance this aspect of their lives with a description of their many artistic and cultural achievements. This title is especially welcome in view of the dearth of suitable material currently available.

Books about the Romans are not in such short supply, but Simon James more than holds his own with his evocation of daily life in Rome and the provinces. Some of his descriptions have an uncannily familiar ring. We learn that city streets were often 'noisy, dirty and dangerous' and 'crime was common'. Many people lived in poor housing, sometimes in tall blocks of flats, and lacking kitchen facilities had to exist mainly on 'take-away' food!

Both writers are adept at putting flesh on the bones and it is this that makes these books so enjoyable to read. VH

## Comets, Asteroids and Meteorites

0 7451 5137 X

## Planet Earth and the Universe

0 7451 5136 1

## Saturn

0 7451 5138 8

Duncan Brewer, Cherrytree Books (Exploring the Planets series), £7.99 each

### MIDDLE/SECONDARY

*Big Bertha located on Saturn!* Not a headline from the *Sunday Sport* but a revelation from Brewer's book about the planet. We all know Saturn, the one with three rings and a moon or two. That's enough for most of us but for those for whom it isn't, this book is a real treasure.

Starting with the astro/mythological image of a slow and sluggish 'bringer of old age' the author tells us how knowledge of this intriguing planet was built up from Galileo to Voyager 2, providing en route a useful potted history of astronomy and telescopes.

Wonderful facts tumble out of the text like ripe apples from a tree: the rings (seven of them) are made of bits of ice and rock whizzing round in orbit; Saturn is nearly all hydrogen and helium (no wonder it's stayed up so long); and 1000 mph winds consistently blow round its equator.

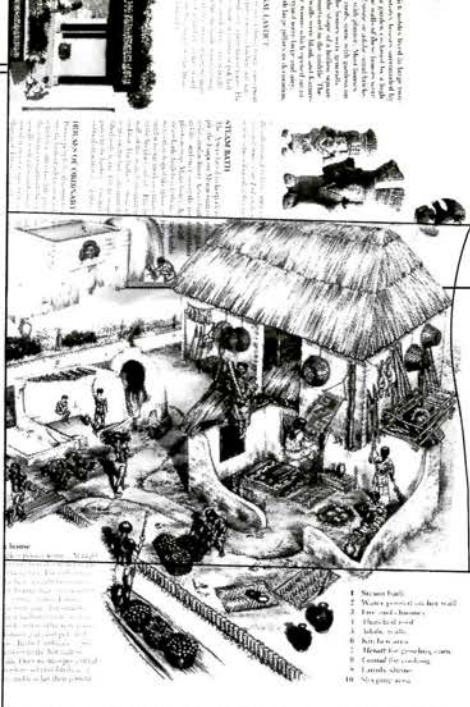
To a non-astronomer like me this is a highly entertaining charivari; to the serious inquirer I suspect it will yield a great deal of knowledge and satisfaction. The reason why it can reach us both is because it is a whole book, written as continuous narrative by one author and more readable than many novels. *Comets, Asteroids and Meteorites* and *Planet Earth and the Universe* are equally entertaining which gives great hopes for the rest of the series – all written by Brewer. TP

## Antonio's Rainforest

Anna Lewington, Wayland in association with WWF UK, 0 7502 0309 9, £8.99

### MIDDLE/SECONDARY

The rubber-tappers of Brazil are the guardians of the rainforest – a fact which the rest of us are beginning to recognise. For many years they were exploited both by their employers and by profit-greedy forest clearers, but now the formation of tappers' co-operatives, with leadership from people



Inside an Aztec house, from *The Aztecs*.

like the late Chico Mendes and some government backing, seems to be promoting a better understanding of the forest and of the protective role of the tappers.

All this – and a huge lot more – is explained very clearly in this exceptional book. Antonio is the 8-year-old son of a forest-dwelling tapper. He and the author show us his forest, his family life and, most of all, his father's tapping round and daily work. Wild rubber is intensely handmade – hand-tapped, hand-collected, hand-smoked, and hand-carried in 90 pound blocks to the warehouse. And all this is done by people whose demands on the outside world are minute, so sufficient is their forest for their needs.



Antonio's dad with a block of rubber moulded in a wooden box with latex and oil sap. From *Antonio's Rainforest*.

This is a book to savour for many reasons – chiefly because it is overwhelmingly real and as such is a welcome change from the preachy sameness which most school library users looking for rainforest information will find. Too much objectivity in this sort of subject area soon gets boring and the device of using Antonio as narrator pleasantly avoids the need for it; and Edward Parker's photographs are marvellous: absolutely illustrative and, again, real. How nice to have a book that is not part of a series, so that it can state and achieve its own purpose in its own way. It does both brilliantly. TP

## Black and British

David Bygott, Oxford University Press, 0 19 913314 X, £9.95 SECONDARY

Over ten years ago I co-researched the Roots in Britain exhibition, an extensive photo-history of black settlers in Britain from Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II. This book usefully covers some of that ground. It also ambitiously spans three continents and four centuries, exploring the roots of contemporary African-Caribbean communities in Britain.

Many sections are familiar – the slave trade, 'the white man's burden', the Empire Windrush, post-war racism, etc. What is different is the way that attention is drawn to the unfamiliar, particularly the fact that black settlement in the UK preceded African enslavement in the Americas. (This will need telling many more times before it is accepted.) The book is packed with visual images, from rarely seen early photographs to maps, sketches and other illustrations, mainly in colour. Also used to great effect are mini biographies which include John Archer who was mayor of Battersea in 1913, Mary Seacole (Crimean medical worker) and the abolitionist, Olaudah Equiano.



The crew of a Liverpool ship in 1893, black and white together.

Inevitably there are some weaknesses, namely the paucity of material on the early twentieth century and the predominant focus on personalities born outside the UK. Yet these faults can be overlooked because of the book's strengths. The way that the past and present are sometimes interwoven to convey powerful messages is as thought-provoking as the general coverage of recent history. A similar treatment for Asian and other settlers would be welcome. ■ ZA

**Ziggi Alexander** is co-editor of the autobiography of Mary Seacole and, more recently, a book on multicultural librarianship.

**Geoff Brown** is Resources Manager for Hertfordshire Schools Library Service.

**Veronica Holliday** is North Regional Schools Librarian for Hampshire.

**Ted Percy**, until he retired recently, was a Divisional Children's Librarian with Buckinghamshire County Library.

NON-FICTION REVIEWS EDITOR:  
**Eleanor von Schweinitz**



## Letters to the Editor

2 APR 1991

8-15 PM

NORFOLK



### Adèle Geras writes:

I have been very interested in the Great Series Books Debate, and I hope it's not too late to join in. I'm speaking here as a writer whose first book ever was a Hamish Hamilton Gazelle, and who has since written another 13 series books, of one length or another.

The reason I enjoy writing such books is this: they are the only place where one can publish pieces of prose of a short-story length. There is a dearth, not to say a complete absence, of outlets for children's short stories. Sometimes a kind editor will invite you to contribute to an anthology, but what if there's a story you wish to write which is not a full-length novel, nor a picture book text? What if your idea will suit a length of 2000, 4000 or 7000 words? The only people who will even read such a story are series editors.

Whenever I teach a Creative Writing class, one of the things I try and emphasise is the importance of recognizing what sort of material you are dealing with. Is what you have in your head best expressed as haiku? A three-volume novel? A sonnet? A novella? It is knowing this which sorts the wheat from the chaff, artistically speaking. What is wrong with some fiction (no names, no pack drill...) is that quite respectable short-story ideas are padded out to novel-length, and occasionally you will meet a short story which is packed full enough for an entire mini-series.

I have to say that restrictions of length, far from being a barrier to creativity, focus the mind in exactly the same way as, say, the 14-line form does, when you are writing a sonnet.

I have also to say that if there is a formula for these books, I haven't found it. They are hard to do well. I've had several turned down. I've never written them because they are money-spinners, nor because they attract critical attention, nor because shops stock them in large numbers... they don't! The 13 I've published have not exactly carried all before them. Only two have reached paperback. One (*The Coronation Picnic*, 1989), which is a particular favourite of mine, got not one single review as far as I'm aware, has not even covered its advance and has, it seems, sunk without trace. Still, I continue obstinately to believe that it, and others (*Tea at Mrs Manderby's*, *Beyond the Cross-stitch Mountains*, *Nina's Magic* and the forthcoming *Toey*) are just as good as anything else I've written.

Because I like writing short stories, I'll continue to write for the series. One of the best books I ever read was a Gazelle by William Mayne called *The Toffee Join* in which some children made toffee with their grandmother - and that's all! It was an inspiration which I still remember.

Thanks to all of you for making people think about these books. All the best,

### Carolyn Tanfield writes:

Following your debate on series books, I was reminded of their usefulness in regard to aiding a child's independent choice of reading material. Their format is readily recognised, and a success with one often spurs on a reluctant reader to choose from that series again.

One caveat, though. When I order from a series I do order individual titles. Quality may vary within the best series.

Good layout and illustrations matter too, as well as physical size and chapter length. The books should handle well (Hazel Townson summed this up perfectly in her article 'The Manageable Book' in *BfK* 61, March 1990).

Knowing the choice is theirs lifts the pressure from children who may still be anxious about going-it-alone with their reading. Series can do much to build their confidence.

### Jean Ure writes:

What a mingy rotten swizz!

I suggested to you ages ago that an article comparing the school stories of yesteryear with the school stories of today might be a good idea, so when I saw that such a one was due to appear in the September *BfK* I thought oh brilliant good egg and jolly japes and all the rest of it - especially as Bob Leeson seemed exactly the right person to choose.

Well! What a measly disappointment! All he did was cover the same old ground as has been covered a dozen times before - almost nothing about any of the modern counterparts to Angela Brazil, Elinor M Brent-Dyer, Enid Blyton et al. Grange Hill was the only one that got a look in. No Trebizond, no Marlowes, no Egerton Hall, no Peter High, no S\*T\*A\*R\*S (for better or for worse) no Pete Johnson... nothing.

I suppose now, sadly, the moment has gone, at any rate as far as *BfK* is concerned.

#### Editor's comment:

Poor Bob! The ground he covered was very much to my specification so blame me, Jean, not him. Anyway, who says the moment has gone for more consideration of current examples of the school story? Watch *BfK* in '93...

### Margaret Al-Sayed writes:

I am a regular reader of *Books for Keeps*, and have usually found that your magazine shows an awareness of the problems of racism in children's books. I was therefore disturbed to find in a review by DB, whom I take to be David Bennett, of *The Year of the Leopard Song*, two references to the 'dark forces' in Africa and 'dark, potent, tribal magics'. I do not find it acceptable to think of Africa as the dark continent, it is time we rid our minds of the stereotype of Africa as 'dark' and tribal. I haven't read the book which was being reviewed, but felt the review itself was not sufficiently sensitive to the possible issues and was certainly written in unsuitable language. Please could you ask your reviewer to be more careful in future?

### ... David Bennett replies:

As I state in the last paragraph of my review, one of the themes of the book is the conflict between the conception of Africa of the past and the reality of the present - the very theme of your complaint.

My use of the phrases to which you object was in accord with the content and language of the text.

Certainly the word 'dark' is in no way intended as suggestive that Africa is a dark continent. The adjective is used in a description of forces and tribal traditions, which might be applied to any civilisation in my opinion! My Thesaurus provides very few alternative adjectives that would be appropriate in this context and these too would no doubt cause you just as much offence. ■



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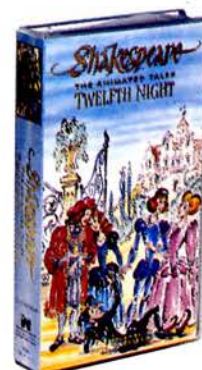
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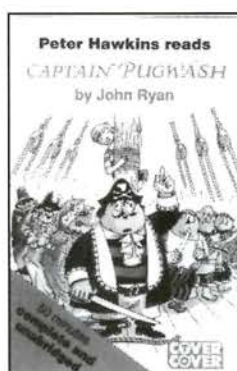
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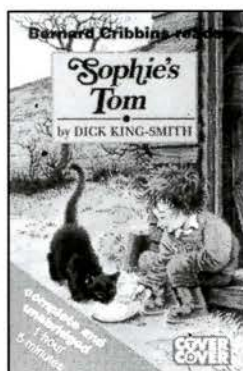
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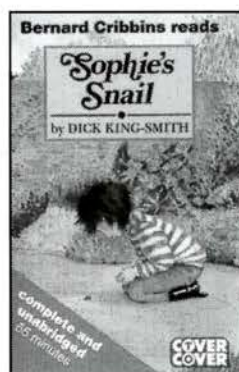
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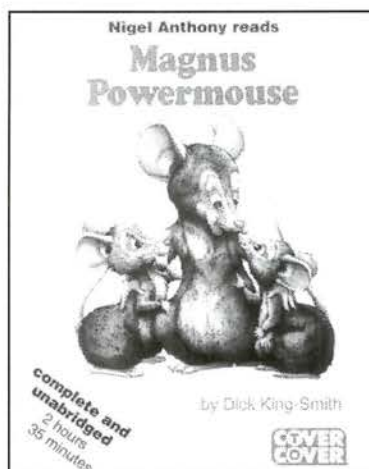
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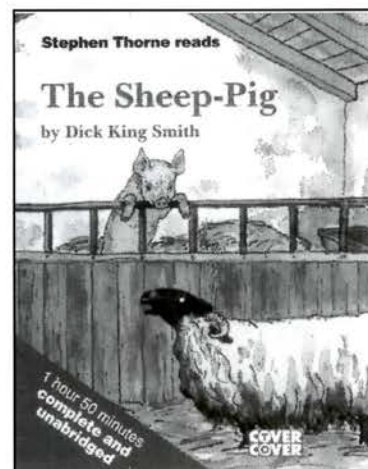


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# AUDIO TAPES

Rachel Redford reviews a selection of recent tapes.

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



## Happy Christmas: Four Christmas Stories

Read by Bernard Cribbins, Maggie McCarthy and Nigel Anthony, Cover to Cover, one cassette, 40 mins, £2.99

Here are four expressively and crisply narrated unabridged stories with a Christmas theme. Ursula Moray Williams' 'The Good Little Christmas Tree' about come-alive fir trees takes up one side whilst on the other are three real-life stories by Tony Bradman, Pamela Oldfield and Elizabeth Laird. Is Father Christmas a grown-up dressed-up or a real Father Christmas? Why does Grandma get a leather jacket with studs on as a present? These are the sort of stories full of domestic detail loved by 4-8 year-olds. A refreshing Christmas cassette to be enjoyed all year round.

**The Story of Rumpelstiltskin**  
Retold by Jonathan Langley, read by Victoria Wood, Collins Audio, one cassette with book, 20 mins, £4.99

Victoria Wood is a good, cosy, but unpatronising, reader, her northern vowels adding to the intimacy of her storytelling. The Jonathan Langley illustrations in the book are full of funny and lively details – the sort children pore over whilst listening. This version of the old tale is different; the messenger who finds out Rumpelstiltskin's name is female and whilst Queen Ruby keeps her baby, the King is punished for his greed and chauvinism, ending up in the Royal Crocodile leaving Queen Ruby to rule!

## Sophie's Tom

Dick King-Smith, read by Bernard Cribbins, Cover to Cover, one cassette, 1 hr 5 mins, £3.99

On her fifth birthday on Christmas Day, Sophie gets a model farm because she's determined to grow up to be a farmer. What she really wants is a real live animal, like Tom the stray cat she befriends and feeds – but Sophie's dad doesn't like cats. The story of how Sophie uses her aunt – and subterfuge – to change her father's mind is full of lively incident centred on home and school. Bernard Cribbins is excellent at creating the character of resourceful Sophie and the convincing and spirited little girl dialogue. This story is a sequel to *Sophie's Snail*.

## Rhyming Russell

Pat Thomson and Caroline Crossland, read by Harry Enfield, Collins Audio, one cassette with paperback, 22 mins, £4.99

This book is one of the 'Jets' series so far offered as book-and-cassette packages: complete books with plenty of illustrations and speech balloons to encourage 6-8 year-olds. Here we have the funny story of Russell Fussell who just can't help speaking in rhyme which leads him into all sorts of trouble, even though his impromptu rhyming saves the school play from disaster. The vivacity of the pictures is translated into inventive sound effects with extra voices enhancing Harry Enfield's lively storytelling.

## The Man

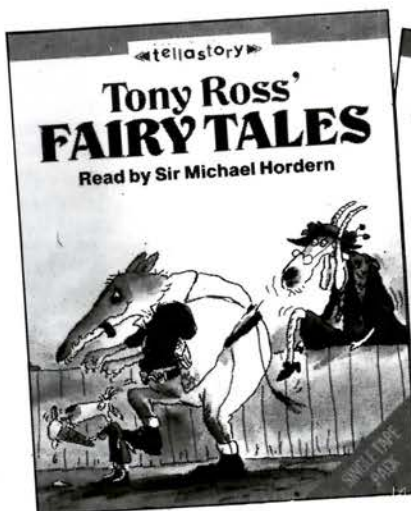
Raymond Briggs, read by Michael Palin and William Puttock, Random Century Tellastory, one cassette, 1 hr 24 mins, £4.99

This powerful script was adapted from the original text by Raymond Briggs himself. Michael Palin is the miniature man who appears on the boy's bed one morning. Real dramatic tension is created with the man's increasing over-bearing selfishness as his three-day visit wears on. Palin conveys a likeable energy coupled with unpleasant wheedling bossiness and 12-year-old William Puttock combines convincing childish excitement with more adult anger, irritation and guilt as the man abuses his hospitality. His tears at the end are moving.

## The Runaways

Ruth Thomas, read by Josie Lawrence, Random Century Tellastory, two cassettes, 2hrs 12 mins, £7.99

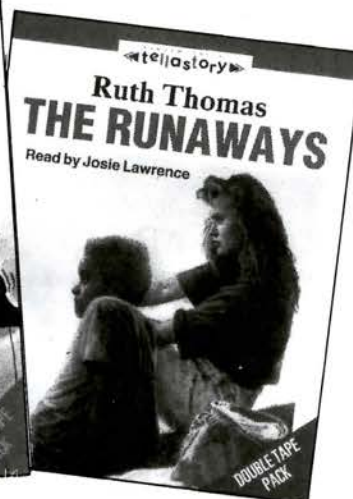
A *Guardian* Children's Fiction Award winner, this is a gripping story of Julia and Nathan's escape from threatening questions after they'd found a cache of money. To begin with it's all an exciting adventure as they stay in a Brighton guesthouse and camp on Exmoor; but the sense of entrapment increases as the police search widens. Josie Lawrence's narration conveys well the isolation of the children which forces them to run away, and the developing tension between them as their escapist dream disintegrates. A convincing performance and a moving end.



## Tony Ross's Fairy Tales

Tony Ross, read by Sir Michael Hordern, Random Century Tellastory, one cassette, 25 mins, £3.99

These four updated fairy tales are lively and witty. Tony Ross is good on details like a contemporary Little Red Riding Hood helping her woodcutter father cut trees with her own little axe! The Big Bad Wolf in each story is traditional, but enlivened with funny details about his stupidity and his inflated ambitions to eat baby goats, slender grannies, hens or little boys. Sir Michael Hordern is brilliant, whether in his oily voice of the Wolf or the squeaky fear of the tormented baby goats. His delivery is a perfect complement to Tony Ross's language.



## The Vampire's Holiday

Willis Hall, read by Victoria Wood, BBC Young Collection, one cassette, 1 hour 25 mins, £4.99

The adventure starts when Henry discovers the coffin of Count Alucard (spell it backwards!) washed up on the beach and finds out what a gentle, good friend the vegetarian vampire inside really is. The delight of this spirited story is Victoria Wood's animated narration and accents – the Sea Captain who opens the story is a dramatic Scot while Henry Hollinsson and his family at the seaside resort are from Yorkshire. Sound effects add to the vivacity of the presentation and the whole is fast-paced, zappy listening.

## Stormsearch

Robert Westall, read by Martin Jarvis, Chivers, three cassettes, 3hrs 10 mins unabridged, £13.50 + VAT

This is a typical Robert Westall story where the past entwines dramatically and enticingly with the present. Tim's Uncle Geoff is one of those passionate enthusiasts and together they discover a model galleon. Martin Jarvis communicates the overwhelming excitement of their research as they piece together clues from the past and finally solve an intriguing mystery of danger and romance that had long been buried in the sand. The intensity of the narration and the insights into family relationships combine to make this gripping listening. ■



# A Present for Mr Patten . . .



A little more than two years ago, I was invited to prepare six of Shakespeare's plays for a series of animated films, each to last half an hour.

I agreed with the utmost trepidation. So far as I could see, I was but slenderly qualified for such work. I had no experience of animation; I had only written one television script, and a few pieces for radio. Although I'd written a book of Shakespeare stories, which had been kindly received, I was no Shakespeare scholar. All that stood in my favour was a deep love and admiration for the plays, and an ability, acquired over many arduous years, to tell a story. So I set to work.

Before embarking on each play, I made it my business to become familiar with the work of most of the great critics and commentators from Dryden onwards. It seemed to me that the plays were so vast and various that it would be the height of folly to tamper with them without guidance. I became a most devious conversationalist, who was capable of turning even an innocent discussion of holidays into Shakespeare. If someone had been to Venice, then *Othello* stalked into the talk; if to Greece, then it was Athens and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Nothing was safe. I would listen in silence, hawk-eared, waiting my chance to pounce. Fielding once said that he did not mind any man riding his hobby-horse, providing he did not demand all and sundry to mount up behind him. Alas! my hobby-horse became more populated than Tom Pearce's grey mare!

The choice of the six plays was not difficult. After all, with such an embarrassment of riches to choose from, any six would have done. Nonetheless, there were certain considerations that had to be borne in mind. Firstly, they should be plays with an international appeal . . . which rather ruled out the Histories. Secondly, a selection ought to be made that gave some hint of the enormous variety of Shakespeare's work. And thirdly, from my own point of view as script-writer, they should be plays that lent themselves most readily to drastic abbreviation. For instance, *Antony and Cleopatra*, though possibly the most wonderful of all, would be more grievously injured by reduction than, say, *Romeo and Juliet*.

As a rule, the Tragedies presented fewer problems, for their stories tend to be monolithic: even a cut-down version of *Macbeth* retains a great deal of power. But the Comedies are another matter. The construction is much more intricate, so that the removal of scenes and sub-plots, frequently results in total nonsense. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* requires all its parts, as they interact with one another in a manner that makes it impossible to dispense with any. So also with *The Tempest*; while *Twelfth Night* presented problems of quite another kind. As with *The Merchant of Venice* and *As You Like It* there is a great outsider, Malvolio, who, although not vital to the progress of the love plot, towers over the play and has embedded himself in the world's memory.

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*Leon Garfield describes his approach to writing the scripts.*

Of the many difficulties that I faced, one of the most arduous was the preservation of Shakespeare's miraculous sense of dramatic time. Often, this had to be suggested by discreet passages of narrative; but even then, much, much had to be abandoned. In fact, every cut was to the play's detriment; all I could possibly hope to do was staunch the flow of blood from the wounds, and leave a little life in the lacerated remains.

But all this is on the negative side. There have been advantages. The work of the Russian animators is unfailingly brilliant. Each one has proved to be an artist of astonishing sensitivity, judgement and taste. Their knowledge of Shakespeare is profound and their love for him is no less than my own. Although I suggested imagery that might supply huge, missing fragments, as often as not they devised images of their own that were wonderfully potent and revealed dimensions in the plays out of all proportion to the all-too-short time allowed.



I remember, in a discussion about my script for *Macbeth* with the director – a Russian of Dostoyevskyan proportions – he thumped on the table so violently as to make the bottles of vodka jump in terror, and demanded more Shakespeare and less narration . . . in fact, he wanted more Shakespeare than could possibly have been uttered in the time available, even had it been done at the speed of a Rossini finale. I also recall talking about *Hamlet* to its director – a most radiant lady! – and hearing how she wished to incorporate images that would turn and turn in upon themselves; and the director of *Twelfth Night* – with a distracting smile that would have done justice to Viola herself – explained how much she could achieve by body language, and so had no need of narrative to labour the point.

And so I learned and learned from these talented people; and my scripts underwent more changes than the moon. I know that many may disagree, and even be shocked by what has been done; but these films are not to be looked at as versions of the plays, but rather as fragments, reassembled into something new.

I have, wherever possible, incorporated famous lines; but never at the expense of the narrative. The demands of the story have always come first. Of course, in terms of the totality of the plays, the losses are enormous; but in terms of entertainment, there is nothing but gain. The narrative, I admit, is open to criticism; the dialogue is beyond reproach.



Hamlet and Horatio, with Yorick's skull.

Lady Macbeth.



## Peter Thomas assesses the success of the project and its relevance to current classroom realities . . .

In puppet show and video, in workshop and in class, Shakespeare is alive and well. The active work stimulated by Rex Gibson's 'Shakespeare and Schools' project lets pupils of all abilities and ages enjoy the plays, and appreciate their insights into love, conscience and the shabbiness of politicians. Shakespeare has ceased to be a cultural fossil.

Yet, such is the dismal state of education at the moment, the device which opened up Literature to all is being destroyed. Government policy has, through the Secondary Examinations and Assessment Council, vandalised teachers' efforts and imperilled a great cultural achievement. **All coursework Literature study has been outlawed, and end-of-course timed exams are to return. This is bad news for those who understand children – and for those who care for the teaching of Literature.**

Now Shakespeare has acquired Statutory Order status, and all 14-year-olds must take a written test on one of his plays next June. So what is this? A sign of government support for teachers' enthusiasm? Sadly, no. The enshrining of Shakespeare has nothing to do with bringing plays to life. Statutory Shakespeare erects an icon for worship half in ignorance, half in awe. A compulsory Shakespeare test for all will do nothing for Shakespeare or for children.

The timing of Heinemann/BBC **Animated Tales** could not be better: schools, notified in September that children will be tested on one of three plays in June, will be ordering sets for the year group. No good dishing out the dog-eared jobs in the stockroom: they could kill teenage interest instantly. Teachers who are passionate about Shakespeare know that studying a whole play will not make children enjoy it, nor help the morale of the weakest. We need editions that are pupil-friendly, good to handle and good to look at.

And **The Animated Tales** are certainly all that. The books are large-format, well-illustrated and the print is easy on the eye. Each of the six plays has been skilfully abridged by Leon Garfield, who has written clear narrative links between scenes and speeches. The text is Shakespeare's own, with some purging of obscurities. Those who despise abridgement will carp at cuts (no Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Osric or second Gravedigger in **Hamlet**) and purists will be annoyed that the blank verse is laid out as continuous prose. Carpers and purists can stick to uncut texts, but teachers of real kids will find **The Animated Tales** a blessing: short enough to hold interest and long enough to prepare Key Stage 3 questions which meet Lord Griffiths' taxing criterion that they test knowledge of the story. They make an excellent introduction to the plays, and teachers feeling guilty about using abridgements can add any missing bits through reprographics. In any case, the plays set for KS3 may be re-studied by some classes at KS4, with a fuller text for fuller study.

The videos which accompany the texts (purchased separately) will give all pupils a lively start to study. These half-hour animated versions produced in Russia use a variety of techniques selected to match the tone of each play. **Twelfth Night** and **The Tempest** use puppet animation, **Macbeth** and **Romeo and Juliet** use cel animation, and



Lysander and Hermia ('a virtuous bachelor and a maid') from **A Midsummer Night's Dream**.

**Hamlet** uses oil on glass, a technique which gives a sombre sepia quality to labyrinthine Elsinore. I had feared that the animations would be a vulgar hybrid in the idiom of kids' comics – Tintin of Athens or Midsummer Night's Disney – but they avoid such a pitfall. The **Hamlet**, especially, animates character superbly, with a carnal and shifty Claudius, whose eye movements as Ophelia scatters her flowers, range through fear, guilt, mistrust and cunning. And in **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, no teenage viewer could miss the coy sexiness of Hermia's insistence on separate sleeping knolls, or the frustrated hopes of the expectant Lysander. The facial animation on these, and on the starkly shadowed Macbeth, appealed to me more than the woodenness of the puppet versions, but they have other merits: the repulsiveness of Caliban in **The Tempest** is wonderful, and the toytown quaintness of Illyria is justified by the puppetry of Fate and Love which is so much at the heart of Shakespeare's play. Where I wanted more – like the mechanicals' 'Pyramus and Thisbe' show, I know I can use class performance to prove that active Shakespeare can beat even video wizardry.

All of the voices are done by well-known English actors, and there is pleasing clarity of diction and expression throughout. Texts and videos will be an asset for teachers of KS3 – and beyond. For today's video-blasé pupils, this collaboration is a bridge which takes them to the centre and not the shores of Shakespeare country. All praise to the BBC for screening the plays for a wide audience. Shakespeare lives, as Michael Bogdanov has proved, when he is seen as a popular artist, pleasing a contemporary audience.

**The Animated Tales** are more than a Reader's Digest up-date of Lamb. They are performances with their own artistic integrity, valuable in themselves and for their stimulus to discussion of text and performance. Teachers for whom Shakespeare is a dramatist, not a political totem, will use them to discuss editing and transposition, just as they may use scripts by Croft and Perry, Clement and Le Frenais, and John Sullivan, the inheritors of Shakespeare's irony, pathos and the wit that laughs on pride and smiles at dreams. Comparing **Dad's Army** with **Much Ado About Nothing**, **Blackadder** with **Twelfth Night**, and Smith and Jones to the Gravediggers in **Hamlet**, help to animate Shakespeare's technique and intentions.

But this is outlawed territory: SEAC has

specifically banned the study of such texts in one KS4 Literature syllabus as a 'disgrace'. Living, as we are, in dark times, **The Animated Tales** seem like a ray of light. They could turn out to be the only thing on the English teaching front to gain equal approval from pupils, teachers and the mad dogma of government. ■

Peter Thomas is Head of English at Wheatley Park School, Oxfordshire, and a senior moderator for GCSE Literature.



Juliet and nurse, from **Romeo and Juliet**.

The plays are available in paperback from Heinemann Young Books at £3.99 each:

**Hamlet**, 0 434 96231 7; **Macbeth**, 0 434 96230 9; **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, 0 434 96233 3; **Romeo and Juliet**, 0 434 96234 1; **The Tempest**, 0 434 96229 5; **Twelfth Night**, 0 434 96232 5

A hardback volume containing all six plays also comes from Heinemann: **Shakespeare – The Animated Tales**, 0 434 962228 7, at £15.00

BBC Educational Publishing editions cost £4.99 and contain an educational supplement:

**Hamlet**, 0 563 35188 8; **Macbeth**, 0 563 35186 1; **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, 0 563 35184 5; **Romeo and Juliet**, 0 563 35183 7; **The Tempest**, 0 563 35189 6; **Twelfth Night**, 0 563 35185 3

BBC2 transmissions start weekly from Monday, 9 November at 7.40 pm.

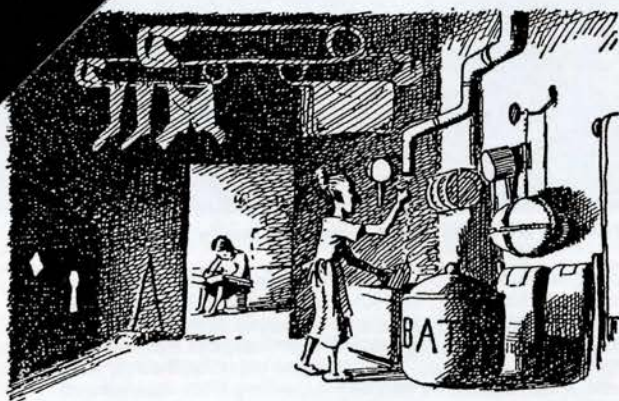
Videos of all six plays are distributed by Island World Communications – see their advertisement on page 33 for details.



# BOOKS FOR KEEPS NEWS

## Mary Norton

10 December 1903 – 29 August 1992



On the one occasion I met Mary Norton, in a studio at Broadcasting House, shortly after the publication of *The Borrowers Avenged*, she was already almost 80. Behind her old-fashioned good manners, though, there was still an actressy twinkle – not to mention a tendency to chainsmoke on a scale that would have warmed Pod, Homily, Arrietty et al for an entire winter. I was completely enchanted. She reminded me of Aunt Sophy in her stories, who drank a decanter of Fine Old Pale Madeira every night and after the first three glasses didn't believe anything she saw . . . so even the diffident Pod felt safe visiting her.

Unlike Aunt Sophy, Mary Norton *did* believe what she saw, at any rate enough to make us believe it, and what she saw was tiny people, six inches high, who live in the nooks and crannies of our lives and 'borrow' the bits and bobs we leave behind us. *The Borrowers* won her the Carnegie Medal in 1952 and was followed by *The Borrowers Afield* (1955), *The Borrowers Afloat* (1959), *The Borrowers Aloft* (1961) and, astonishingly after a 20-year gap, *The Borrowers Avenged* (1982).

Mary Norton's childhood was spent in her family's Georgian manor house in Bedfordshire, the setting for many of her books. After convent school, she joined the Old Vic Company before marriage took her to Portugal, America and back to England, by which time she was supporting herself and her four children with articles, translations, short stories, radio work and books – *The Magic Bedknob* (1943), *Bonfires and Broomsticks* (1947) and *Are All the Giants Dead?* (1975) as well as the tales about the Borrowers which made her famous. For the last two decades of her life she lived in County Cork.

The Borrowers, of course, lived wherever they could, in an endless search for permanence put continually at risk by the fear of being seen by humans. According to Mrs May, who first tells their story to Kate, it was this fear which had reduced them in size so that 'each generation had become smaller and smaller and more and more hidden' till, by the time Kate hears about them, they've vanished altogether.

Not that they ever will from children's bookshelves. The humour, poignancy, inventiveness and sheer storytelling skill of Mary Norton's fantasy surely guarantees their preservation. CP

### The Borrowers on BBC1

Beginning on 8 November, a six-part dramatisation by Richard Carpenter of *The Borrowers* and *The Borrowers Afield* is shown on BBC1 this autumn. Directed by John Henderson and produced by Grainne Marmion, the adaptation stars Ian Holm as Pod, Penelope Wilton as Homily and Rebecca Callard as Arrietty, their young daughter who longs for knowledge of the world and, in particular, friendship with a Human Bean. *The Borrowers* is independently produced for BBC-TV by Working Title Television.

## BOOKS IN SCHOOLS

Did you know that English primary schools currently spend about £9.00 per pupil per annum on books? And that secondary schools spend £13.50?

Compare this with the Book Trust's recent estimate that £15.27 and £24.97, respectively, are needed to meet the minimum requirements of the National Curriculum and a new gloss is put on the Government's continual gripes about the teaching of reading. According to Michael Marland, who chaired the committee which produced *Books in Schools* for the Book Trust, 'the evidence shows that the initial stages of reading are generally well taught', but it's the *later* stages which should be causing concern. 'Our study,' he says 'might irritate the Government by its stress on the shortage of funds for schools to buy books. And it might irritate the profession by its equal stress on the curriculum weakness of secondary schools.'

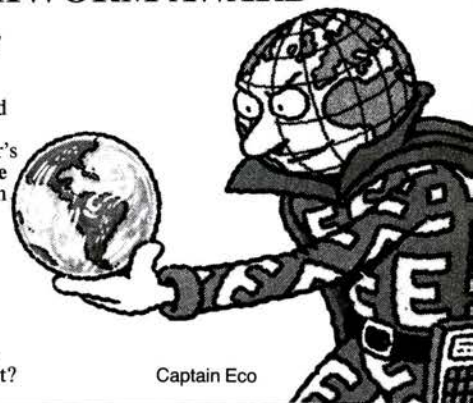
For the full report, write to Books in Schools, Book House, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ, sending £4.95.

## PRIZES

### THE EARTHWORM AWARD

The award was set up in 1987 by Friends of the Earth to promote and reward environmental awareness and sensitivity in literature for children of all ages. This year's winner is *Captain Eco and the Fate of the Earth* by Jonathon Porritt, ill. Ellis Nadler, published by Dorling Kindersley (0 86318 703 X, £6.99).

Who better than Jonathon Porritt to write a powerful story for everyone who cares about the future of our planet?



Captain Eco

### THE NOTTINGHAMSHIRE CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARDS

The 1992 winners are:

Acorn Award: Mick Inkpen for *Kipper* (Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 54053 2, £5.99; 0 340 56564 0, £3.50 pbk)

Oak Tree Award: Jacqueline Wilson for *The Story of Tracy Beaker* (Doubleday, 0 385 40075 6, £7.99; Yearling, 0 440 86279 5, £2.50 pbk)

Both authors were presented with certificates and cheques for £250 from Dillons the

Bookstore in an award ceremony at the Arnold Library.

As usual, the winning books were chosen by children themselves from a shortlist drawn up by Nottinghamshire children's librarians. This year more than 2,000 votes were received in a promotion designed to encourage the reading of books in both schools and local libraries . . . and it seems to have done just that.

### New Zealand Library Association's Children's Book Awards

Tessa Duder has won the prestigious Esther Glen Medal for the third time with her novel *Alessandra: Alex in Rome* (Oxford, 0 19 558230 6, £7.95). The Esther Glen is one of three medals for children's books awarded annually by the New

Zealand Library Association (NZLA).

[\* Apologies, by the way, to Tessa Duder for the mistake in our review of *Alex in Winter* (BfK 74, May 92) where Val Randall wrote 'Alex is 15 – a champion swimmer hoping to be selected to swim for Australia in the 1960 Olympic Games.' She meant, of course, swimming for New Zealand, which is a very different place. Sorry.]



# Once Upon a Time

Children's Book Illustration



Ralph Steadman's 'Long John Silver in the Spyglass Inn'.

In Edinburgh, from 5 November to 27 December, a loan exhibition will be mounted by the National Galleries of Scotland, devoted to 'the most memorable

images in the history of children's books'. Presenting more than 70 watercolours, drawings and prints by British artists, the Exhibition will display a selection of outstanding illustrations published between the early nineteenth century and the present day, including work by Walter Crane, Randolph Caldecott, Harold Jones, Beatrix Potter and Edward Ardizzone. Also on offer will be examples of successful collaboration – between Lewis Carroll and John Tenniel, for instance, and E H Shepard and A A Milne – as well as comparison of differing artistic interpretations such as Mervyn Peake's work for *Treasure Island* alongside Ralph Steadman's.

Sounds irresistible, says *BfK*. Any chance of the Exhibition travelling to the rest of the British Isles?

For further information 'phone Lindsey Callander or Emma Peto on 031 556 8921.



Harold Jones' *Lavender's Blue: A Book of Nursery Rhymes*.

## The Library That Doesn't Exist . . .

As part of her prize for winning this year's Library Association Carnegie Medal, Berlie Doherty is allowed to give £1,000 worth of books, donated by Birmingham-based Peters Library Service, to an organisation of her choice. Appropriately enough, perhaps, since her winning book was called *Dear Nobody* (Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13056 5, £8.99), Berlie donated her gift to 'a library that no longer exists. It used to be at the top of my street until the local council closed it down 18 months ago.' Andrew Milroy, who oversees young people's services in Sheffield, commented 'It's a challenge to the local council to re-open the library in Ecclestone, but whatever their decision the books will provide a valuable resource and will reach a great number of local schools through the schools library service.' ■

## Ms Muffet Fights Back

The third, updated edition of Susan Adler's well-known booklist is now available. Susan Adler's central thesis is that children's books often under-represent and misrepresent girls and women – with the complementary risk that boys, too, can be trapped by the stereotypes of conventional fiction. The booklist, from current Penguin titles, is clearly signposted with four sections (Picture Books; New Readers 5-8; Young Readers 8-12; Books for Teenage Readers) and is available free of charge.

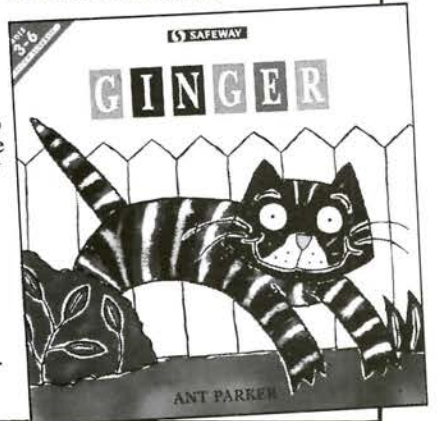
Write to Penguin Children's Marketing, 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ or 'phone

Alison Marshall on 071 486 3000, ext. 433.



## SAFeway SUPERBOOKS

Launched in Children's Book Week, 3-10 October, were Safeway Superbooks, produced exclusively for Safeway by Julia MacRae who writes: 'The chance to produce this list is a dream opportunity for a children's publisher because it means we can present books of quality to a potentially enormous and growing market.' The list includes boardbooks, colouring books and titles for beginning readers as well as storybooks and non-fiction . . . let's hope the trolleys can take the extra weight! ■



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# For Santa's Sack

Margery Fisher takes her pick of new publications.

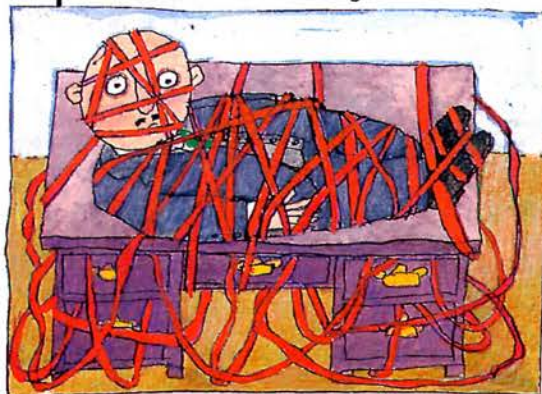
Colour dominates in the latest crop of children's books...

The African legend retold in **A Promise to the Sun**, by Tololwa M Mollel, ill. Beatriz Vidal, Little Brown & Co, 0 216 88908 3, £8.99, offers a naively logical explanation of natural phenomena (sun and rain, light and darkness) as the basis for a picturebook unashamedly lavish in smooth, bright paint and using a faux naïf style of shape and positioning to establish animals in their own mini-drama. When drought hits the savannah the Bat is chosen to negotiate for relief with Moon, Stars, Clouds, Winds and finally Sun. When the birds, happy with the resulting fine harvests, renegotiate on the bargain, the bat hides his disgrace in a cave.



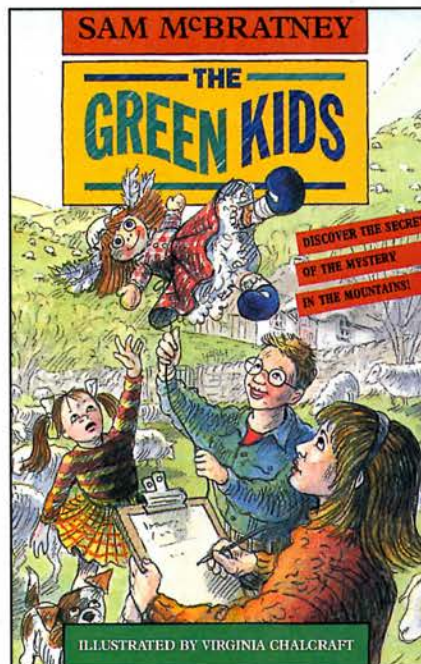
Each colour-spread has its own pattern. In one, the bat appears in a black sky seamed with shooting stars; another is built round geometrical swirls of cloud; in another a god-like sun shakes feathers of fire into a cool, blue sky. The simple, direct text is carefully disposed on backgrounds that link scenes rich in atmosphere.

An exuberant rainbow cover and jazzy endpapers lead into **Out of the Blue** by Hiawyn Oram, ill. David McKee, Andersen Press, 0 86264 384 8, £9.99, a versatile compendium of 'Stories and Poems about Colour', which will make an ideal browsing book for a bad-weather day indoors. Eleven colours provide the basis for two-, three- or four-page spreads, each very skillfully designed. With the advantage of McKee's drollery diverse perspectives and his dexterity in depicting comic action and personality, each spread is chock-full of interest but never crowded. Particularly pleasing are two spreads defining elusive shades of grey. Rain and mist set one single scene, where evocative lines of smoke and wet roof tops are matched with mumbles from the three witches in Macbeth; by contrast humour makes an impact in 'Song of the Grey Suits', whose satirical point is enforced in a dramatic frieze of office gents; with a friar, a wolf, an antique statue and a grandma completing an engaging package. With wayward juxtapositions and an alert vocabulary, this book should catch the attention of the most lethargic child.



RED TAPE

A stickler from down in the Cape  
Liked everything tied in red tape  
But what a to do  
When he found he was too  
And no one would help him escape

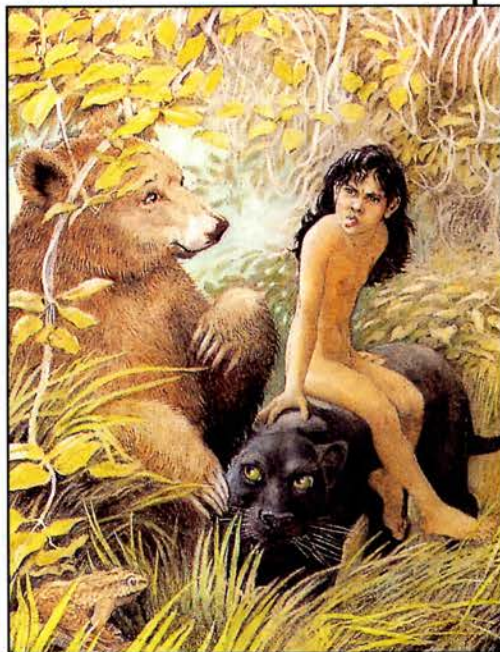


**The Green Kids** by Sam McBratney, ill. Virginia Chalcraft, Walker, 0 7445 2195 5, £6.99, is not an addition to the lengthening list of conservation stories but a neat conjunction of two popular subjects – children sampling country ways and the discovery of a friend in an unexpected place. The squabbling trio upsetting the journey (by white Rolls, no less) to a remote Irish mountainside in the Easter holidays are sharply outlined – Charlie currently obsessed by collecting bones, Shelley daintily affronted by a lack of bathroom facilities and TV, and spoilt little Lottie whose rag doll Luby Lou includes in her many roles the dangerous one of scapegoat (a role sometimes shared by Neptune, the much put-upon family dog). Driven out to perform the unwelcome exercise of walking, the Greens find their first surprise – a supermarket trolley standing idly beside a gorse bush, one feather caught in its meshes. Only mildly interested at first, the Greens are gradually drawn into stranger affairs. Their theory of secret cockfighting in the district is exploded when the uncouth figure in tattered coat and black wellies proves to be harmless, except for the determination to fly, with home-made wings, from the considerable height of the Black Cliff.

Thatcher Collins is eccentric; he is also nature-wise; before this compact layered tale comes to an end, lessons – like moderation, bread making and good manners – have been well learned. There is skill in the way the behaviour of the children is poised just on the edge of improbability, as the unpromising new environment has its slow effect on them. The prose is simple enough for a newly-fledged reader around 8 or 9 but a nice turn of phrase refreshes the ordinary. The Green children 'squabbled and fought rather like starlings round a single crust of toast on a frosty morning'; Shelley, watching a fanatic trying to fly like the birds,

feels the wind is playing with him 'before blasting him away like the seed-head of a dandelion or some other inconsequential thing'; the breakfast porridge which is part of Mr Green's disciplinary scheme seems to Charlie like 'microwaved frogspawn'.

Scrawly drawings punctuate the pages but are hardly needed in such a vigorous, craftsmanlike mixture of pathos, sparkling humour, such an expert moulding of insistent personality and calmly enduring landscape.



Whatever one may think about illustrating Kipling's superlatively pictorial prose, the three carefully selected stories ('Mowgli's Brothers', 'Kaa's Hunting' and 'Tiger, Tiger') have been interpreted superbly by Inga Moore in the handsome new gift book **Favourite Mowgli Stories from The Jungle Book**, published by Simon & Schuster, 0 7500 1007 X, £12.00. Children may think they have 'seen' the Indian jungle on the TV screen but here are scenes to be taken in slowly as rich complement to rich prose. From dimpling infant to tormented adolescent, here is the foster child of wolves, taking innocent liberties with his siblings, facing the dangerous darkness of the great snake's lair, asserting his right to be as human as the hostile villagers. Here are the dissolute bandar-log cavorting round a ruined temple and enticing Mowgli into their futile lives. Here is Shere Khan, the tiger, half-hidden in leaves as gold as his coat. The 23 colour plates, dramatic and wonderfully true to nature, should tempt many children from 8 or 9 to venture for themselves (ideally after listening) into the entrancing world of Kipling's young hero. ■

For 30 years, **Margery Fisher** was the sole producer of **Growing Point** which published its last issue in March this year.

\* Nicholas Tucker discusses Children's Books and Unwanted Pregnancies  
\* David Bennett on myths and legends in the secondary school  
\* Henrietta Branford exercises her Writer-Reply  
\* Naomi Lewis chooses teenage fiction from the autumn lists  
\* A special review of Walker's 'Teenage Memoirs' series  
\* Adele Geras in Authorgraph  
– plus reviews, reviews, reviews  
**AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL OUR READERS...**

In  
January's  
BfK