

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

January 1993 No. 78 UK Price £2.00

the children's book magazine

I'll cry instead
- when I get home

Extracts from the Album
D DAY'S NIGHT

THE BEATLES

MERMAID THEATRE
at 7.30 p.m.
31 July '66
Stalls 10/-
G 11
TO BE RETAINED

MERMAID THEATRE
at 7.30 p.m.
31 July '66
Stalls 10/-
G 13
TO BE RETAINED



Judge's daughter in 'no hanging' play

TEENAGED Westcott
killers to doubt, has
won a role in a play
which is against
hanging. Adele 19,
of the High Court in
New Street, medi-
cal night. Adele
has been
the new judge.

Adel's daughter
is the daughter
of Mr. Justice Westcott
in the High Court in
New Street, medi-
cal night. Adele
has been
the new judge.

Against
the play, "Hanging"
is staged at Oxford
University's Exeter
Theatre Club.

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the play, "Hanging"
is staged at Oxford
University's Exeter
Theatre Club.

Against
the play, "Hanging"
is staged at Oxford
University's Exeter
Theatre Club.

MYTHS AND
TEENAGERS

THE TIMES

Leichner
OWN WHITE
Leichner
STAGE MAKE-UP
CONTAINS
LANOLIN

FORG
THE AS
LIVES

ST. JOHN'S
HOLYWELL

ST. JOHN'S
HOLYWELL

ST. JOHN'S
HOLYWELL

New Children's titles from A&C Black

JETS

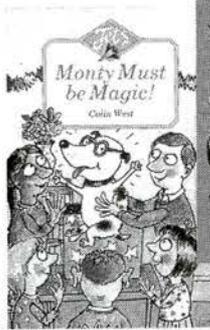
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Colin West
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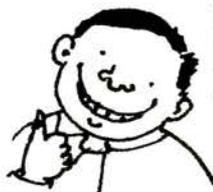
Stone the Crows, it's a Vacuum-cleaner

Bob Wilson
0-7136-3616-5



Sir Quinton Quest Hunts the Yeti

Kaye Umansky
0-7136-3659-9



Forecast of Fear

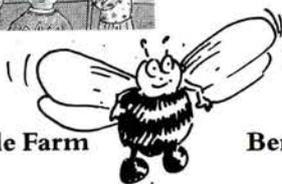
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Margaret Ryan
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Bernie Works a Miracle

Leon Rosselson
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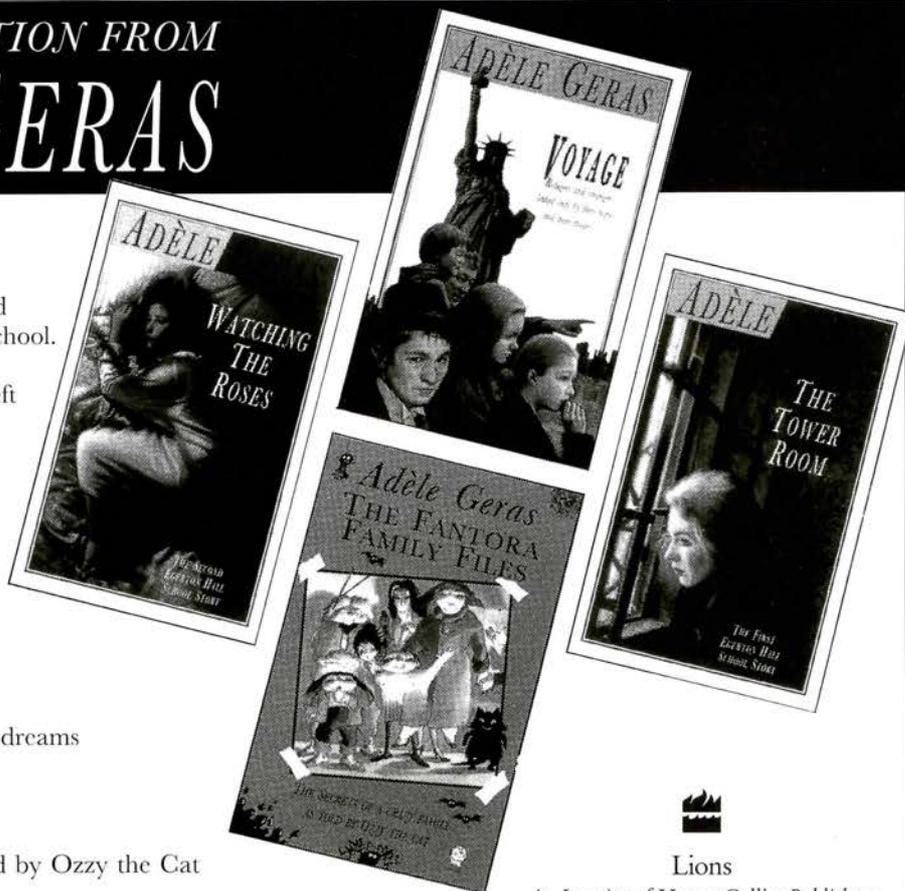
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Lions

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Cover story

On the front of **BfK** this month is the cover of *Yesterday* by Adèle Geras. The artwork is by Carolyn Piggford. This book is one from the 'Teenage Memoirs' series published by Walker (for a review of the series, see page 15) and Adèle, of course, is the subject of our Authorgraph – see centre-spread.

Our thanks to Walker Books for their help in using this illustration.

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EDITOR'S PAGE



Every so often I'll receive a note or phone-call from one of our regular contributors. 'Have you thought of running a piece on . . . ?' comes the tentative question. Straightaway, I'm grinning. Experience has taught me that

- The person concerned is likely to be undergoing an acute case of writer's itch.
- Good copy is in the offing.

Of course, sometimes a little persuasion is involved. **BfK** contributors are a modest lot on the whole and, even when transparently right for a particular article, may need convincing that there's none who could do it better. Almost certainly there won't be since the best person to scratch an itch tends to be the person suffering from it.

There are two such articles in this New Year issue of **BfK**. The first is by Nick Tucker who, in his joint role of psychologist and literary critic, was intrigued by a television discussion of Berlie Doherty's Carnegie Medal winning novel *Dear Nobody*. Does the book give a rounded picture of teenage pregnancy and what it entails? *Should it?* For Nick's deliberation on both issues see pages 4 and 5. His answer, surely the only possible response for all but the closed-minded, is that any shortcomings *Dear Nobody* may display in its coverage of the available options – it is, after all, a novel not a Compendium of Moral Hygiene – are best taken care of by other books written from a different viewpoint. No doubt Berlie Doherty herself came to the same conclusion.



Our second unsolicited piece comes from a member of the reviewing team, David Bennett. What about myths and legends in the secondary classroom, he asked? Would we be interested in an account of some work currently going on at his school linked with the books that initiated it? Readers who are familiar with David's occasional chalk-face commentaries, not to mention his reviewing and authorgraphs (see **BfK** 77, Nov '92) will know what to expect from pages 20-21.

As a postscript to his piece, David asked if I'd seen the newly-issued 'Books at Key Stage 3 For Use In The Test Of Prior Reading At Level 3 and 4'. I had to admit I hadn't, **BfK** not being on J Patten's mailing list – or his Christmas card list come to that. Straightaway David sent me a copy along with some quick impressions of his own written so close to the end of terms, he says, 'I'm too shattered to have deep thoughts.' Fragmentary or not, his observations and queries no doubt represent the stuff of much English Department discussion throughout the land – or would, if the Christmas break hadn't intervened. Am I alone in being uneasy about the timing here? And about the routinisation of these restricted reading-lists generally at earlier key stages? Now there's an itch worth scratching . . .

A remark of David's that struck a particular chord concerns an absence of non-fiction from the KS3 lists. Why not a diary, he asks, or autobiography? Why not, indeed. Look no further than page 15 for a special review of a new series of autobiographies for teenagers – a review, I may say, which led to a major confrontation in the Powling household where the Adèle Geras Fan Club has long had a lobbyist-in-residence tirelessly pushing the case for an AG Autobiograph. Naturally, the disinterested responsibilities of high office being what they are, The Editorial line was 'in due course'. Well, the course became due . . . a splendid opportunity being provided by *Yesterday*, Adèle's contribution to the aforementioned series (see our front cover) along with the bright idea that four actual teenagers should look at the individual titles. 'Wonderful!' said the L-in-R. 'Can I review Adèle's?' The word Nepotism was much mentioned, believe me. So was the word Divorce ('Kids can do that now, Dad'). Eventually I was forced to summon all my steely resolve. Much good did it do me. Still, as the committed party was not slow to point out, it's nice to be able to offer some home-grown evidence of passionate readership. So thanks a bunch, Ellie – also Helen, Jon and Tim who covered the rest of the series with such no-holds-barred freshness.

The same could be said of all our reviewers, I hope – from guest critics like Naomi Lewis on the back page to our regular team throughout, including on page 11, a new column assessing the latest series-titles which we intend to run in alternate issues from now on. The combination of freshness and experience is difficult to sustain, Heaven knows, but crucial if we're to offer the best possible service to our readers and the youngsters who depend on them. Teachers have the same problem. How can even the most dedicated communicate their enthusiasm for books and their belief in the value of reading in these days of diminishing resources and the ringbinder revolution? On page 22 Henrietta Branford's Writer Reply spells out why she, both as writer and parent, considers their contribution to be vital. The future of literacy, and a lot more besides, depends on it.

Enjoy the issue!

Chris

CHILDREN'S BOOKS AND UNWANTED PREGNANCIES

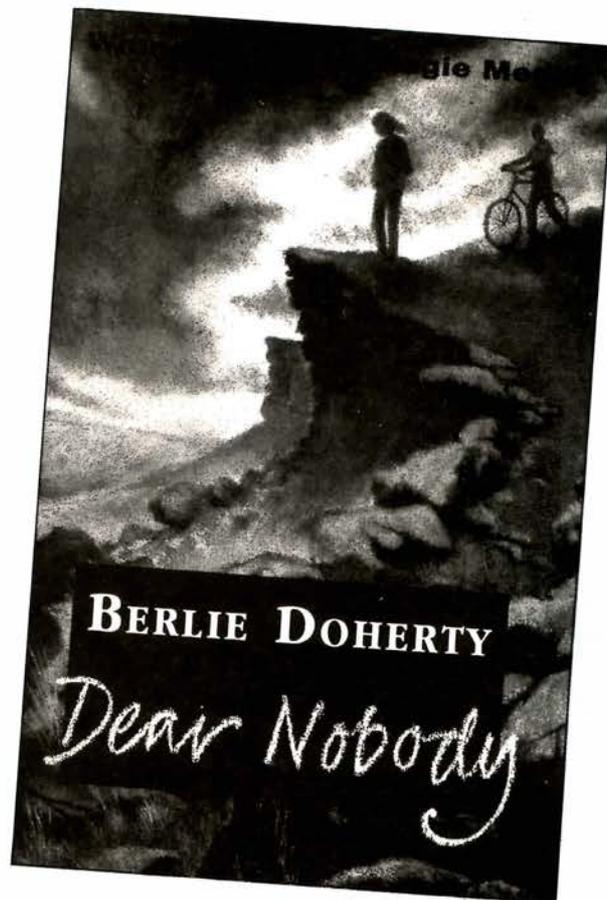
Nicholas Tucker

It's not often children's literature lends itself to strongly-held controversy these days, and true to form the public disagreement about Berlie Doherty's novel *Dear Nobody* has been conducted very discreetly. But the issues it gives rise to are important. Briefly, in an interview on Channel 4 news, the well-known critic Naomi Lewis rather regretted that this book had won the Library Association's Carnegie Medal for 1991. In her opinion, it is disturbing that young schoolgirls should regard it as acceptable to become parents at their age. For Lewis, it is a sad fact that one in three children are now born into one-parent families, given that such children always figure more prominently in crime statistics later on in life than do those starting with two parents to their name. Impressionable teenagers reading *Dear Nobody* may get the idea that love is always enough when considering whether to have a baby, regardless of the age or preparedness of the mother. But real life problems caused by unplanned pregnancies out of wedlock can be considerable, and no teenage novel should encourage immature readers to believe otherwise.

My own feelings are that this deeply felt novel has as much right to win the Carnegie Medal as any other. It is also a fine piece of writing, and I suspect that teenagers will find it as gripping a story as I did myself. But as an overall picture of this particular situation, some qualifications are still in order. This is inevitable; no one novel could cover every aspect of so fraught a topic. The author could also retort that anything like a complete guide to thinking about unplanned pregnancies should come not from a novelist but from a public body like the British Pregnancy Advisory Service. But impressionable young readers do sometimes use fiction as a chart for their own lives. *Dear Nobody* describes sympathetically the feelings of an unmarried teenager who decides to go through with her pregnancy. Young readers should not be protected from any book written from this point of view. But they also have a right to read other authors who see this sort of situation differently.

Not that *Dear Nobody* takes a sentimental view of unplanned teenage pregnancies. Its young heroine Helen initially feels negatively about her forthcoming baby. In the letters she writes to it as a way of sorting out her conflicting feelings, she tells the baby early on to 'Leave me alone . . . I don't want you. Go away.' Elsewhere she calls it 'An alien growth . . . a disease.' When out riding she lets her horse gallop wildly in an effort to abort her child. But when the baby still sticks with her, Helen's feelings turn more positive. 'I can't wait to meet you,' she writes. And when little Amy is born, Helen concludes on the last page, 'I think I'm exactly where I want to be, at this moment of my life.'

Children, including teenagers, cannot usually think ahead with the same knowledge of everyday reality available to adults. Accordingly, and not unconvincingly, Helen is shown refusing to plan for her future. Instead, she is above all concerned with making sense of her current emotions. The fact that she has nowhere to live an independent life and no means of supporting herself does not really intrude. Giggling happily with her friend at the relaxation classes held at the local ante-natal clinic, she does not worry that living at home with an anxious father and a smouldering, resentful mother could lead to grave tensions for all three. Her vision of a future university place supported by a crèche



takes no account of the strains of being a single mother when everyone else is free to do their own thing.

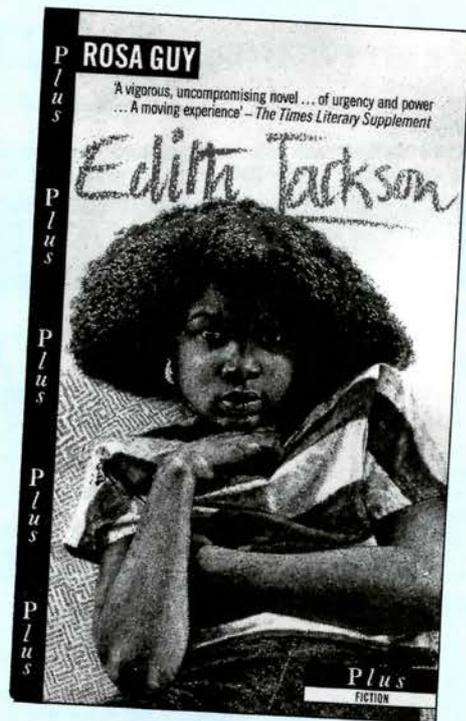
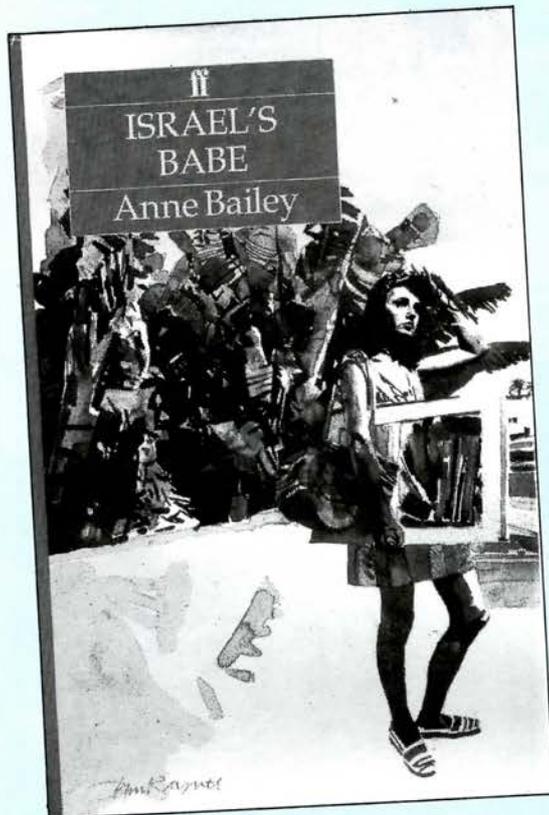
Yet because the novel ends with the birth of Amy, any such uncomfortable realities about the future remain unarticulated. Helen says at one point that 'A baby isn't the end of everything. It's the beginning of something else.' But because this 'something else' is never spelled out, readers are left with a story where the birth of the baby comes over as the culmination of the whole action. The loved and trusted 'dear nobody' – confidante to Helen's deepest thoughts – never stands as a person in her own right. The baby as ideal companion is therefore never replaced by the baby as a demanding and occasionally disruptive presence, whose needs will often be opposed to those of her young mother.

Thinking ahead about unwelcome realities is never a popular thing to do, least of all when writing for younger readers. But in life, what happens after is very important. In Margaret Drabble's adult novel about an illegitimate birth, *The Millstone*, the baby is born half way through the action, leaving the narrator plenty of time to conclude that 'It was a bad investment . . . this affection, and one that would leave me in the dark and cold in the years to come.' Concluding a book written for the young with main characters still on the brink of discovering some painful truths is not uncommon; think of the fairy stories that end with a wedding and the bland hope of living happily ever after. But while there are some indications in *Dear Nobody* that major difficulties are bound to come, the overwhelming feeling is that because Helen has made the right decision for herself, all future problems will always ultimately count for less.

Most young readers will be more than happy to go along with this view. When they read about a sympathetic young character, not much more than a child herself, who conceives a baby she wants to keep whatever the opposition, they will generally want to side with both young mother and her child. Many older readers, however, will bring a different perspective to this situation, sometimes won from bitter experience. They know that while every baby wants to be born, there are good, not so good and frankly disastrous times for a parent to have a baby. The clash of interests that can result is often very painful; sometimes the child is sacrificed, sometimes the adult . . . and the teenager, soon to become an adult, may sacrifice her own expectations from life. It is harder, when writing for younger readers, to win as much understanding for the adult's needs here as it is for those of the unborn child when both are in conflict. But even so, both types of need must be taken into account, if young readers are ever going to try to make sense of and take control of their own lives, both as they exist at present and how they might develop in the future.

Deciding whether to go ahead with a pregnancy is now an option open to British teenagers. But in the adult literature and films surrounding them, images of abortion are still regularly outweighed by images of birth itself. The decision to abort is usually depicted as selfish in origin and hideous in execution. Now that terminations are medically available, there is less stress on the physical pain or danger involved, but still a great deal about mental scarring. This is not a balanced picture. While some women are deeply disturbed by the whole process of abortion, others come through it unscathed. This lack of concern or guilt would not come over as sensitive or heroic if transposed into fiction, and most writers would want to avoid any suggestion that abortion is a trivial matter that can simply be used as a belated form of contraception. Yet some literary recognition that abortion may not always be a terrible thing for those requesting it is surely in order so as to provide all readers, especially young ones, with a more balanced view.

Yet while there are plenty of novels for young readers describing first sexual experiences, the number that deal with unwanted pregnancies up to now are few. With the exception of Lynne Reid Banks' *The L-Shaped Room*, the only children's story I can think of that has addressed this problem recently is Anne Bailey's *Israel's Babe*. Here again, the unplanned child is kept by its mother. But for the most part, children's literature in Britain and elsewhere prefers to ignore this whole problem altogether. There may be particular reason for this cowardly response in America, where, as Dan Quayle might have it, abortion is now a hot political potatoe (sic). But opting for silence on this issue is to let down young readers. Children do after all sometimes conceive their own children. They should be told about the consequences of going ahead or not with their pregnancies. As the principal of a British school for teenage mothers put it recently, 'Thirty-six hours in labour, which is common, changed them dramatically.' Literature could also play a role here. More writers could and should tackle this difficult subject, so enabling young readers to experience some of these situations for themselves at least in the imagination.



Berlie Doherty must be congratulated for opening up this problematic area so memorably. But I would also like to recommend a novel by another fine author taking a different attitude. In Rosa Guy's *Edith Jackson*, first published in 1979 but still in print, its seventeen-year-old black heroine is struggling to hold her disintegrating family together in a Harlem slum. Her mother is dead and her father has walked out. Befriended by a dynamic lady charity worker, Edith experiences some rare moments of happiness, including a whirlwind affair with a depraved but smooth-talking young man. When she discovers she is pregnant she hopes to marry her lover and keep the baby. But she is cruelly let down, and on a visit to a Welfare Centre packed with unmarried mothers she thinks, 'God, what a shame folks having babies and not knowing how to care for them.' Helping a harassed mother younger than herself with her baby, Edith goes on: 'What are you doing here, I'l girl? Why are so many of you here, hanging around the Welfare, orphan homes, foster homes? The Institutions? What did you do to rate it?' Deciding to have an abortion instead, the novel ends with Edith making the arrangements with her former benefactor by phone.

Like Berlie Doherty, the author puts both sides of the argument. One sympathetic character advises Edith that 'The worse' part's in the tellin'. But by the time the I'l one comes, lovin' it's gonna make that part long forgot.' Yet finally Rosa Guy sides with Edith's ambition to better herself rather than get pulled down into the mire inhabited by all the other poor, unmarried mothers living on welfare arrangements in her neighbourhood. Her friend Ruby, now aged twenty, has also just had an abortion, so that she and her lover can both complete their college studies. Like Edith, she is shown as a survivor, tough enough to make difficult decisions now in order to provide for a better long-term future. Once again, this novel ends with both girls making important decisions, the consequences of which are left to the reader's imagination. Some will still agree with their choice; others may prefer the way an unplanned pregnancy is handled in *Dear Nobody*. The important thing is that both attitudes get more of an airing, so helping all young readers to make up their own minds about which decision they ultimately prefer.

Details of books mentioned:

- Dear Nobody*, Berlie Doherty, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13056 5, £8.99
The Millstone, Margaret Drabble, Penguin, 0 14 002842 0, £5.99 pbk
The L-Shaped Room, Lynne Reid Banks, Penguin, 0 14 001913 8, £4.99 pbk
Israel's Babe, Anne Bailey, Faber, 0 571 16243 6, £8.99
Edith Jackson, Rosa Guy, Puffin, 0 14 032628 6, £2.99 pbk

Nicholas Tucker is a psychologist, critic and broadcaster. He teaches courses in psychology and children's literature at the University of Sussex. He's the author of *The Child and the Book* (CUP), a standard text on the development of children's reading interests.

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

Billy and the Baby

Tony Bradman, ill. Jan Lewis, Picture Lions (Sept 92), 0 00 664235 7, £3.50

This is a tongue-in-cheek tease at enthusiastic parents doing their very best to prepare first child for the arrival of second... and indeed it has some good ideas which those in the situation may well wish to copy. So Billy, the first child, goes along with his parents' preparations and the efforts to include him. When the baby does arrive he's ready with his own carefully prepared box of things to give her. This pleasant book is useful to have on hand for under-5s. MS

Baby Animals

Margaret Wise Brown, ill. Susan Jeffers, Picture Puffin (Aug 92), 0 14 054250 7, £3.50



Softly coloured pictures with delicate pattern and detail lead this first information book off to a flying start. It shows how a little girl and different kinds of animals (birds, horses, dogs, cats, pigs) wake up in the morning, eat their food, sit in the sun, are looked after by their parents and finally fall asleep again at night. Recommended for all small children. MS

Owl at the Vet

Helen Nicoll and Jan Pienkowski, Picture Puffin (Aug 92), 0 14 054549 2, £3.50

Owl breaks his wing and goes to the Vet to be made better. He's then sent to hospital for a rest, but although his friends visit him he doesn't much care for the place. After only a little while he's ready to fly home.

The now familiar, vivid pictures and humorous text will entertain and inform the



listener, and undoubtedly make a difference to fears about going into hospital. MS

Ten Little Crocodiles

Colin West, Walker (Aug 92), 0 7445 2344 3, £2.99



Seven little crocodiles
Doing magic tricks.

One of them went up in smoke.
And then there were...

Learning to count will surely be fun using this rhyming book... *Ten Little Crocodiles sitting down to dine, one of them ate too much pud and then there were nine!*... and so it goes on 'til a single crocodile is left. He's only lonely for one page as the others come back to join him for a happy ending. A lot of fun for 4-6 year-olds. MS

Oscar Cat-about-town

James Herriot, ill. Ruth Brown, Picture Piper (Sept 92), 0 330 32066 1, £3.50

A true story, taken from James Herriot's adult writing, about a most surprising and sociable cat who's taken in starving by the Vet's family, but who, several weeks later, leaves again. He's found in unlikely places - at a jumble sale, at a football match - and is finally claimed by a farmer's family who take him home. Beautifully illustrated by Ruth Brown using wonderful countryside colours, this

strong story is ideal to use with infants. MS

The Babies' Hotel

Mary Hoffman, ill. Willow, Dent (Sept 92), 0 460 88091 8, £3.50

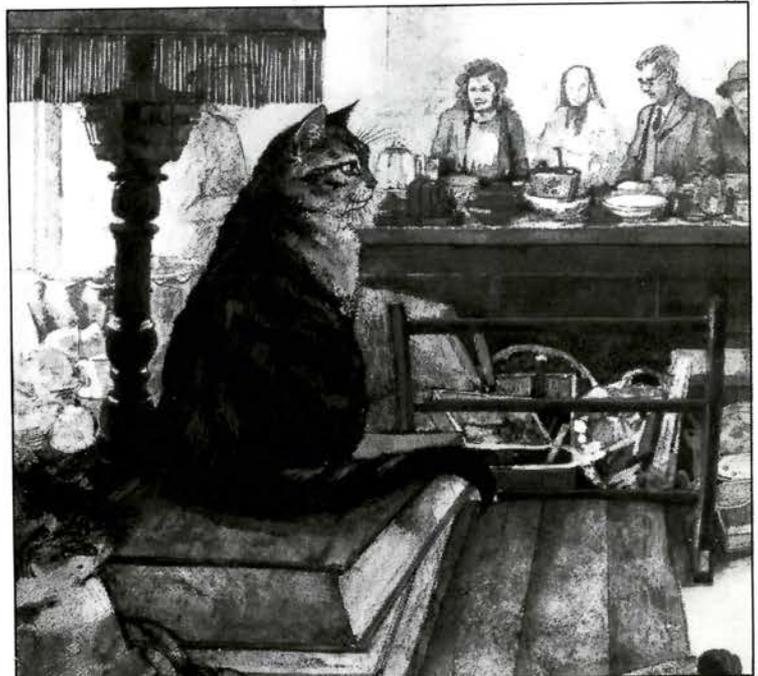
This has become a firm favourite with the children, though it took quite a while to get it off the ground. Most children close to the appropriate age of those depicted couldn't immediately grasp the concepts involved. The book is, as it were, an advertisement brochure for an hotel, Rompers, which caters only for toddlers - allowing them the freedom to do all they ever wanted and providing facilities which are their idea of heaven.

A lot of children have had little experience of hotels or indeed of language put to this kind of use. *The Babies' Hotel* is a very useful teaching aid for the National Curriculum and is, in its own right, great fun. It will certainly appeal to adults sharing the book. The illustrations match Mary Hoffman's wry 'hard sell' with gentle humour and fascinating detail and encourage children to return to the book again and again. JS

Septimus Honeydew

Susan Hill, ill. Carol Thompson, Walker (Aug 92), 0 7445 2346 X, £3.99

Walker have done it again! Story and illustration are perfectly matched to create a book that's equally appealing to adults and children. The storyline of Septimus's regular three o'clock nocturnal prowls to his parents' room and the uncomfortably precise depiction of his ability to oust his parents from their bed and eventually wake the entire household is devastatingly accurate. A must for any family suffering the long-term effects of their own Septimus and is a joy to share with any child - except perhaps a Septimus! JS



Oscar at the jumble sale.

INFANT / JUNIOR

William and the Wolves

Kathryn Cave, ill.
Stephen Player, Puffin
(Sept 92), 0 14 034516 7,
£2.99

William has had enough of being Mary's older brother, and when her imaginary friend Lamb delights their parents and grandparents with his coy and manipulative ways, William grits his teeth and invents, not one, but six, wolves to fight back. All goes well until the wolves get out of hand and Mary begins to cry.

A very cleverly written story with masses of room for character voices and dramatisation, giving a careful insight into family relationships of all sorts. All that and gentle humour makes this an enchanting read. PH

Sophie Hits Six

Dick King-Smith,
Walker (Oct 92),
0 7445 2366 4, £2.99

Sophie proves that size has nothing to do with persistence and her every effort is towards becoming a lady farmer. A new friend at school lives on a farm and Sophie is sure he can help her fulfil her dreams. He can, and does, but the dream is even more wonderful than Sophie had imagined.

Yet another sensitive story from Dick King-Smith, who must walk around his farm and see a tale at every corner.

After *Paddy's Pot of Gold* and *Martin's Mice*, my expectations were high: I wasn't disappointed and neither will you be. PH

Snuff

Quentin Blake, Picture
Lions (Oct 92),
0 00 663922 4, £3.99

Hopeless, but loyal servant, Snuff aspires to becoming a knight despite the poor status of his master and trainer, Sir Thomas Magpie. His ambition is realised thanks to the plight of the cobbler, his own quick-thinking and the agility of all-including the bony, but nonetheless four-legged horse.

This 1973 publication remains truly hilarious in text and illustration and will appeal to all ages. GR

Anna-Magdalena: the little girl with the big name

Kay Kinnear, ill.
Maureen Bradley, Lion
(Sept 92), 0 7324 0595 5,
£2.75

Anna-Magdalena could be anything from four to eight years old and certainly endears herself to children in that age range.

The ten tales chronicle realistic and major happenings, such as making new friends, having a new Dad and baby brother, learning to swim and more. But it's the credibility of Anna-Magdalena's reactions and how she copes with her fears and disappointments which make this such a warm experience. Kay Kinnear achieves a fine balance of humour and tenderness, and has created a character about whom readers will want to know more. The illustrations complement the text perfectly. GR

Speaking For Ourselves

Hiawyn Oram, ill.
Satoshi Kitamura,
Mammoth (Aug 92),
0 7497 1177 9, £2.50

Six and seven year-olds giggled with pure enjoyment at 'Em's Empty Egg' and a host more. They loved the language and rhythms, related immediately to the subject-matter and begged to see every one of Satoshi Kitamura's clear and funny illustrations. GR



Using the voices of three children, aged six, four and one-and-a-half, on subjects from falling down and eating to punching little brother and fishing, these poems stimulated valuable discussion and had huge appeal. I'm sure they'll be read again and again. GR

Mo and the Mummy Case

Robin Kingsland, Young
Lions 'Jets' (Sept 92),
0 00 663824 4, £2.50

Tut the Egyptian Mummy must search until the missing jewel is found and Mo, the violinist in the school orchestra, must spread an appreciation of music and school concerts. The two become inextricably linked through chaos and danger by day and night.

This is one of the highly

popular 'Jets' series, where detailed and hilarious illustrations are interspersed in an uncluttered way with speech bubbles and clear, bold print to stimulate and ensure easy reading. It's an action-packed story which is totally gripping. GR

No Hickory No Dickory No Dock

John Agard and Grace
Nichols, ill. Penny
Dann, Puffin (Sept 92),
0 14 034027 0, £2.99

A collection of Caribbean nursery rhymes which beg to be heard rather than read – they compel active participation rather than passive listening. The rhythm alone will have everyone of any age clapping or chanting – even against their will! GR

Friends Next Door

0 7445 2426 1

A Very Special Birthday

0 7445 2418 0

Susan Hill, ill. Paul
Howard, Walker
(Aug 92), £3.50 each

Tales of Lucy Billings, her developing friendship with Jane Jones next door, and life in Codling Village. With 90-year-old Mrs Tabb, Mrs Dobby's Post Office Shop, and Frank and his 'whiny whiny rattle chink' milk float, this community is the perfect stage for the recreation of a full, happy and secure childhood. Jane worries about the missing cat, Lucy finds kidnapped Baby Jesus, the two friends make and sell apple chutney, and the whole village is united in celebrating Mrs Tabb's 90th birthday and in 'pulling together' when cut off by the snow.

Susan Hill writes with child-like enthusiasm, optimism and genuine empathy. Great for reading to children of six upwards and fluent readers of seven-plus will enjoy the stories for themselves. GR

Amanda and the Star Child

Margaret Greaves, ill.
Diana Catchpole, Dent
(Sept 92), 0 460 88138 8,
£3.50

Amanda is afraid of the dark, until a star child takes her flying through the night to see all the good things that can only be seen when it's dark.

Like *The Owl Who Was Afraid of the Dark* this would be a very helpful story for young children who dislike night-time. The short text isn't simple, but it's clear and the ideas are thoughtful.

I wish the artist had made the dark darker; especially in the view of the city where the colours used are daytime ones. This is a pity since it weakens the interaction between a good text and its illustrations. LW

The Pantomime Witch

Hannah Cole, ill.
D S Aldridge, Walker
(Sept 92), 0 7445 2363 X,
£3.99

Younger children, especially if they've visited a pantomime, will really feel for Angela and her half-enchanted, half-frightened response to her first theatre trip. Older children will enjoy their superior view of the illusions and pretence involved and will identify with the wisdom and embarrassment of Angela's older sister.



The detailed and lively pictures greatly enhance the story. An ideal read-aloud or for more fluent readers to tackle by themselves. LW

The Pocket Mouse

Barbara Willard, ill.
Caroline Anstey, Walker
(Oct 92), 0 7445 2364 8,
£3.99

A wonderfully thoughtful book about many different experiences. Staying away from home, misunderstandings with and about adults, kindness, the captivity of animals – all are built into a deceptively simple story.



Colin's visit to Grandfather and his adventure with a toy and a real mouse are described so clearly and provide a lot to think about. This will satisfy a wide age range either as a read-aloud or for fluent independent readers. The illustrations enhance the story admirably. LW

The Hidden House

Martin Waddell, ill.
Angela Barrett, Walker
(Sept 92), 0 7445 1797 4,
£3.99

A lovely book this. A lonely, old man makes three wooden dolls to keep him company. After his death they stay in the house as it falls into decay, only to be found when it's renovated by a new family and a little girl adopts them.

Throughout the dolls remain dolls; they do not speak or come alive and their feelings are only guessed at by the author - 'I think they were happy.' Despite this, they have real presence and the whole story is very moving.

Angela Barrett's illustrations are enchanting - delicate, yet full of life. Highly recommended. LW



Good fun for those with confidence in their reading abilities. LW

Timothy's Teddy

Joanna Harrison,
Picture Lions (Aug 92),
0 00 664259 4, £3.99

This story has the added poignancy that it reaches out as much to us as adults as to children. It's the true story of Tim's friendship with his Teddy and the inevitable as he grows up. Infants were distressed at Tim's treatment of his Teddy, clearly regarding it as betrayal when Tim disowned him because friends had laughed at him. Teddy's rescue from the attic years later and journey halfway round the world to a reunion with Tim and his son Giles was, however, regarded as a very satisfying end. The strong storyline and sequential illustrations make this a book that appeals to a broad band from Nursery through to Lower Juniors - and all will get a great deal from it. JS

Belinda the Beetle

0 340 58006 2

Belinda Beats the Band

0 340 58007 0

Rev W Awdry, ill. Val Biro, Knight Books
(Sept 92), £2.50 each

Two books about an anthropomorphised VW Beetle car, called Belinda, aimed at an older age group than Awdry's 'Thomas' books.

These stories are densely and interestingly plotted involving thieves and criminals, kidnapping and car chases, in an attractively old-fashioned, innocent style. It's nice to have a female main character and Belinda shows commendable resourcefulness and courage.

Teddy Bears**POETRY**

Martin Leman, Pan
Macmillan (Oct 92),
0 330 32815 8, £3.50

This must be a book designed primarily for those old enough to have read *The Velveteen Rabbit*. Martin Leman's photographs more than live up to what one would expect from him and his selection of poetry is delightful. Just as the old Teddy Bears are given the photographic respect they deserve so, too, are the old favourite Bear poems. Much care and attention has gone into setting out the poems to their best advantage as well as to the meticulous detail of Leman's photographs. This is a book for all ages and did, I'm sure, feature in quite a few adult Christmas stockings! JS

Beeswax the Bad's Noisy Night

Andrew and Paula
Martyr, Picture Corgi
(Sept 92), 0 552 52734 3,
£2.99

A romping gallop of a book which has proved popular with one and all. Beeswax the cat loves a laid-back, quiet life during the day, but enjoys a dramatic and noisy night life. His most daring plan - to steal the garden gnome - goes badly wrong with long-lasting results successfully curbing any future forays! Neat rhyming forces the frenetic pace and the wickedly apt illustrations match it to make a book that's sheer good fun. JS

Stories for the Very Young

0 86272 770 7

More Stories for the Very Young

0 86272 876 2

Edited by Sally
Grindley, ill. Toni
Goffe, Kingfisher
(Sept 92), £3.50 each

Two absolutely superb collections. All young children will enjoy listening to these stories or reading them for themselves. Their bright, large format with lively and witty pictures and the clear print make both books very enticing. The stories, from a wide range of modern authors, are funny, thought-provoking and varied.



At least one copy of each should be in every home and school where there are under-eights. LW

JUNIOR / MIDDLE

A Hole in the Head

Nicholas Fisk, Walker
(Sept 92), 0 7445 2359 1,
£2.99

This ecological adventure is set at Ozbase, a research station near the North Pole, where scientists are trying to repair the hole in the ozone layer. Jonjo and Madi, offspring of one of the scientists, find and adopt an abandoned dog, victim of experiments which have taught it the rudiments of speech; together, outwitting the female baddie (who could have stepped straight from a Bond film), they stumble across the answer to the world's problems, which restores pre-greenhouse-effect conditions. A slick and unusual story with a topical theme. LN

Bingo Brown, Gypsy Lover

Betsy Byars, Puffin
(Sept 92), 0 14 034765 8,
£2.99

In Betsy Byars' third Bingo

Brown story, Bingo finds himself coping with a long-distance girlfriend, an admirer called Boots, problems over Christmas presents, and the imminent arrival of a baby brother. A warm-hearted humorous book which will appeal to Byars fans and attract new readers. LN

There's a Viking in my Bed

Jeremy Strong, ill. John Levers, Puffin (Sept 92),
0 14 034878 6, £2.99

A gloriously funny story in which a sense of the ridiculous runs riot with Sigurd the Viking wreaking havoc in his own century and then making mayhem in ours. It's reassuring to find that Sigurd is comfortable with people, it's the 'conveniences' of the twentieth century that cause the problems.



A slim volume that presents an encouraging challenge to readers fresh to tackling a whole book. The fun begins quickly and my giggles continued to an ending that effortlessly makes any world-weary ten-year-old groan! PH

Who's Been Sleeping in My Porridge?**POETRY**

Colin McNaughton,
Walker (Sept 92),
0 7445 2361 3, £6.99

With a title like this, a book doesn't stand a chance of staying on the shelf - even for a rest! It's an hilarious collection of 'daft poems' and daffier pictures that could only have come from the quirkily, wonderful imagination of Colin McNaughton.

The reader needs to have had earlier experience of fairy stories and nursery rhymes to appreciate some of the fun, as in the title poem, but its irrepressible bounciness never lets up for a syllable. This turns the nursery world on its head. PH

Pongwiffy and the Goblins' Revenge

Kaye Umansky, ill.
Chris Smedley, Puffin
(Oct 92), 0 14 034923 5,
£2.99

Witch 'Pongwiffy' and the Dump which has been 'Top of the Tips for three years running' is again party to unexpected happenings. Things go awry when Woody, Pongwiffy's broomstick, returns from an unexplained absence looking very shaken indeed. So shaken that Pongwiffy has to hitch a lift to the witches' meeting at Crag Hill.

Plotting goblins and unworkable plans, fancy dress and unscheduled solo broom flights are only a part of it. Pongwiffy exceeds even her own crazy standard of rib-achingly funny, witchy goings-on. I do hope this will be part of a long series. PH

The Much Better Story Book

Children and best-selling authors, Red Fox (Sept 92), 0 09 911531 X, £3.50

A wonderful dip-in collection of stories and poems from professional writers and illustrators, workshops and competitions through the Westminster Children's Hospital School. When you read about the circumstances under which the children write, then the amazingly talented results are simultaneously heart-rending and uplifting.



I particularly enjoyed 'The sun will chase your blues away' and the resoundingly rhythmic 'The bug poem', but my all-time favourite is... 'I had...', a 30-word disaster from Anthony Browne! With every copy contributing to Westminster Hospital School funds, this is a marvellous venture. PH

Dinosaur Superstar

Readathon, ill. Toni Goffe, Hodder & Stoughton (Sept 92), 0 340 562307, £2.99

This book is a great read – and royalties will be donated via Readathon to the Malcolm Sargent Cancer Fund for Children. Dick King-Smith, Tony Ross, Helen Cresswell, Joan Aiken, Robert Leeson and five more authors have contributed short stories of wide variety and appeal – among them a dinosaur with rock-star ambitions, blue apple-bearing monster trees, a beautifully written adventure of a raindrop and the tale of 'Orrid John', whom Father Christmas teaches a lesson.

Readers of 10+ will enjoy this for themselves and many Junior classes will delight in having the stories read to them. GR

Krindlekrax

Philip Ridley, ill. Mark Robertson, Red Fox (Oct 92), 0 09 997920 9, £2.99

Ruskin Splinter has little or nothing going for him when it comes to being chosen for the hero in the school play. Yet, behind that sand in the face demeanour cowers a Charles Atlas who, when forced into a showdown in Lizard Street between wimp and monster, saves the day in heroic style.

This is utterly wacky, full of outrageous cartoon-like characters and bound to be popular as its Smarties Book Prize (1991) testifies. Ridley has to be Dahl's successor. DB

Algernon and Other Cautionary Tales

Ill. Quentin Blake, 0 09 996480 5, £4.50

Matilda, Who told such Dreadful Lies...

Ill. Posy Simmonds, 0 09 998360 5, £3.99

The Bad Child's Book of Beasts

Ill. Tony Ross, 0 09 998350 8, £3.99

Hilaire Belloc, Red Fox (Sept 92)

The latest re-issues of Belloc's classic verse, which was originally published around the turn of the century, are very handsomely produced: big, bold print is given plenty of clear white space in which to make its impact, and a trio of illustrious illustrators provide a wealth of dramatically outlandish graphics.

I loaned these books to a group of Year 5 and 6 readers and found it very difficult to retrieve them, as they passed from hand to hand so rapidly. The children enjoyed the unforced rhythms and rhymes of both the bestiary and the cautionary tales, and they were delighted by the vivacity with which the illustrators bring to life (and, as often as not, put to death) the various brats and pests who inhabit these pages. They particularly enjoyed the casual bizarreness and grisly endings of the cautionary verses, though the relish with which these accounts of being flattened, eaten alive, internally



strangled, blown up and burnt to death were greeted bodes ill for the efficacy of the books as a source of moral development! GH

The Collins Book of Stories for Eight-Year-Olds

Compiled by Julia Eccleshare, ill. Jackie Thomas, Young Lions (Aug 92), 0 00 674047 2, £2.99

Eight-year-olds? One of the stories in this book, 'Such a Sweet Little Girl' by Lance Salway, gave me my first serious nightmare for almost 20 years. Others, such as 'Fishing with Dicky' by Sally Christie and 'Blondin's Rainbow' by Judith Vidal, are thought-provoking enough to hold the attention of much older children.

This is a minor quibble compared with the strengths of the book, which provides a range of fascinating tales in a variety of moods and genres. Moral dilemmas, mythology, comical scrapes, ghost stories and urban surrealism come together in a collection which should appeal to readers throughout the primary age range and beyond. GH

MIDDLE / SECONDARY

Poetry Corner **POETRY**

A collection of poems for children

Edited by Colin Smith, ill. Ray and Corinne Burrows, BBC Books (Sept 92), 0 563 34980 8, £3.99

A varied and exciting collection of poems from the BBC programme. Ideal for dipping into as a read-aloud or for pure enjoyment as a read-alone. I loved the crisp black-and-white illustrations as well as the colourful cover – do look at the cat's hat.

It was difficult to find a favourite, they were all so varied, but 'Lunch Box' was a super starter (excuse the pun) for a poetry-writing lesson and Cosmo Monkhouse's 'Barber of Kew' proved to be a limerick of effervescent madness. The frothy bear in the accompanying illustration looks distinctly perplexed – and so he should! PH

In Black and White

Jan Mark, ill. Neil Reed, Puffin (Oct 92), 0 14 034352 0, £2.99

A major problem for many writers of the strange and supernatural is their deadpan seriousness. Jan Mark has no such problems. Her slightly wicked humour frequently cuts through and illuminates the quietly normal. These nine stories are both creepy and funny, leaving the reader tingling with the possibility of the ghostly. My only complaint is the repetition of a story from **Nothing to be Afraid Of**, but otherwise this is all pleasure – especially 'Efflorescence' with a wonderfully ingenious code to crack and a character with a huge vocabulary who becomes a Trappist monk. AJ

Normal Nesbitt

Nick Warburton, Walker (Sept 92), 0 7445 2440 7, £4.99

What an idea for a plot: the new boy is so average and normal that he becomes the

centre of attention, unwittingly creating such havoc in the school that he's expelled. It's very well done, told through a variety of narrators in short extracts that make the most of shifting viewpoints. There's much humour and many witty scenes. I particularly liked the scenes where Gordon talks with his dog and the grand finale where he takes part in an inter-school run that degenerates into chaos. AJ

Verse Universe **POETRY**

Edited by John Tuckey, BBC Books (Sept 92), 0 563 34982 4, £3.99

Derived from the schools radio programme of the same name, this fine collection contains favourites selected from their own and others' work by Rosen, McGough, Zephaniah, Gareth Owen, Richard Edwards, Libby Houston and the Circus of Poets. The poems are wonderfully lively and wide-ranging, and at this price, in such a good production, all schools should have a copy. Not easy to slip into your pocket, but great to read through once it's opened. AJ

An Older Kind of Magic

Patricia Wrightson, ill. Noela Young, Puffin (Sept 92), 0 14 030739 7, £3.99

Tiny tendrils of magic and mystery draw you into this tale, now 20 years old. There's a seductive furtiveness that only begins to assert itself just before the end, when the old powers of the world respond to the comet-magic that has returned after 1,000 years and the impossible can happen whilst purely temporal powers, like grasping land developers, are turned to stone.

This little gem, from an award-winning writer, is possibly too subtle for all but the most receptive and thoughtful readers. DB

A Fit of Shivers

Joan Aiken, Plus (Oct 92), 0 14 034949 9, £3.50

Joan Aiken's ten stories are crafted with the sure touch that we'd expect. I enjoyed the

battling sisters who deliberately give each other ghastly birthday gifts and the twins in 'The Rose-garden Dream' who share the same dream. There's a variety of writing styles throughout and in some stories no concessions are made on vocabulary, especially in 'Number Four, Bowstring Lane', which uses a great number of words that would be fairly out of the way for many young readers. DB

The Story of Bobble who wanted to be rich

Joke Van Leeuwen, trans. from the Dutch by Lance Salway, Piper (Oct 92), 0 330 32353 9, £2.99

Bobble is the child of Pina and Moss, artistic New Age travellers who eke out a



"Terrible Itch" (also by Pina)

radically unmaterialistic existence roaming the countryside in a tricycle-van. Bobble enjoys this life, but one day decides to become rich so that her mother can draw on good quality paper instead of on the toilet rolls she customarily uses.

Prosperous Uncle Fogey assumes custody of the child, but her unwillingness to accept the premises on which wealth seems to be built soon brings her into conflict with her new environment.

An intriguing story, with an eccentric and believably childlike perspective. The pages are adorned with examples of Pina's artwork and diagrams of Bobble's outlook on life. Independent readers should find it fascinating, and the book is rich with potential for discussion. GH

The Dancing Bush

Vivien Alcock, ill. Honey de Lacey, Puffin (Oct 92), 0 14 034736 4, £2.99

Jud helps his father in the

topiary garden of the local manor, where he is tormented by Annabella, the malicious daughter of the owner. He infuriates her by ignoring her taunts, finding solace in the cultivation of a woman-shaped bush. But when he begins to fall in love with his creation, he unwittingly provides his persecutor with an opportunity to vanquish him.

Vivien Alcock provides a sharp depiction of adolescent nastiness brought up short by robust decency. The denouement of the story, where the magical elements collude and collide with the human struggle, is somewhat confused and unconvincing, but dramatic enough to almost maintain a suspension of disbelief. GH

OLDER READERS

Kiss the Kremlin Goodbye

Alison Leonard, Walker (Sept 92), 0 7445 2360 5, £2.99

When a young drama group visits Moscow, shortly before the collapse of the Berlin Wall, their initial culture shock is gradually overcome as friendships form. By making the visitors a mixture of English and Welsh, and one of the hosts Estonian rather than Russian, Alison Leonard raises questions of nationality, loyalty and freedom, yet the focus on relationships among the teenagers (particularly involving Megan, who is torn between Dafydd at home and Kostya, an enigmatic student) makes this an easy and engaging read. By the end, Megan realises – and so will readers – that events portrayed in the news do affect the lives of real people. LN

No Surrender

James Watson, Lions Tracks (Sept 92), 0 00 674379 X, £3.50

Set in war-ravaged Angola, this is a starkly realistic tale of survival and persecution. Malenga, a volunteer nurse and daughter of a freedom fighter, is taken hostage by mercenaries; against all odds, she forms a close bond with another prisoner, Hamish, a deserter from the South African army. The clipped, cryptic style sometimes confuses but is appropriate to the knife-edge situations faced by the characters. Necessarily grim, but not without optimism; recommended for the discerning teenager. LN

The Wearing of the Green

Linda Newbery, Lions (Sept 92), 0 00 674306 4, £3.50

The last book in Linda

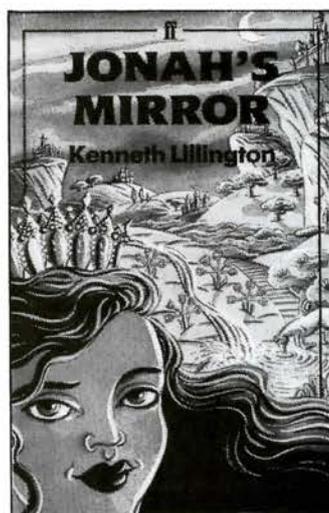


Newbery's First World War trilogy which follows Patrick Leary's fortunes as he awakens in Ireland after a near-fatal injury, sustained fighting at Gallipoli. An extended holiday with his family coincides with the Irish Rising of 1916 in which he becomes unwittingly involved. Newbery gives us a political and emotional dimension here: it's Patrick's cousin who is determined to fight in the Rising, so his own loyalties are tested (since he's a British Army officer) and an emotional entanglement with Siobhan brings him the first serious relationship of his life.

This is well-researched, convincing writing which provides a satisfactory conclusion to the trilogy – or is it to be a quartet? VR

Jonah's Mirror
Kenneth Lillington, Faber (Oct 92), 0 571 16736 5, £3.99

Jonah Sprockett, millionaire inventor, is bored. It's perhaps fortuitous that he invents a two-way mirror through which he vanishes! The world of Sudonia in which he finds



himself is, as the name suggests, an illusion – an elaborate fantasy created by his imagination – which Miss Wingbone, his rational, intelligent fiancée, discovers when she's propelled into it. How to get back to reality – at any level – is the problem.

Lillington's work is not for the word-shy: puns and slyly funny asides abound. This is intelligent prose, dense with ideas, but imbued always with an irrepressible sense of fun and invention. Competent readers of 13 and upwards will revel in this – a must for the library and book box. VR

Wolfsong

Enid Richemont, Walker (Sept 92), 0 7445 2432 6, £4.99

Ellie is an imaginative, troubled teenager, fearful of losing everything since her father ran off with a younger woman. She's coping badly with her emerging sexuality and is shaky in her friendships. A holiday in France sees her tensions mounting and matters coming to a head as she gets more and more infatuated

with the photo of a handsome young man in her room, who committed suicide in the '30s, a man with a scandalous past.

The reader is expected to work hard to unravel the significance and psychology of this one so it will need careful plaging. DB

An Eye for Colour

Norman Silver, Faber (Nov 92), 0 571 16779 9, £3.99

With wry humour and in very convincing detail, Basil Kushenovitz tells of his life and times with friends in South Africa. The thirteen inter-connected stories about adolescent dreams, fears and fantasies will speak to young men everywhere.



Additionally, Silver has deftly taken side-swipes at the politics of SA, where a young girl's life can be fatally re-directed by being re-classified as coloured, where parents and their children are ideologically at odds and where bullish prejudice goes hand-in-hand with cynical hypocrisy. DB

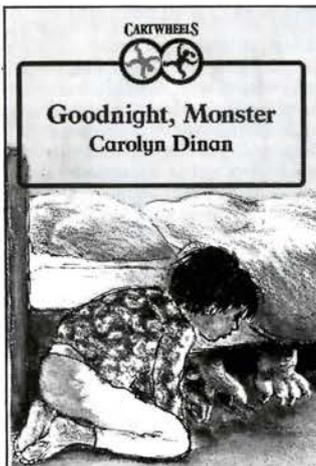
REVIEWERS in this issue

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

PICK OF THE SERIES

Steve Rosson

I'm a fan of series. Their bright, colourful covers and distinctive logos are signposts for children who need help selecting books they can cope with and enjoy. Readers need to make choices, though, and so do teachers and librarians who provide the books, since each series, just like a publisher's mainstream list, contains The Good, The Bad and (if not the Ugly) the Frankly Indifferent.



Goodnight Monster
Carolyn Dinan, Hamish Hamilton 'Cartwheels',
0 241 13021 2, £4.99

A familiar situation, but the story is told in a gentle reassuring way as the supposed monster's shadow, feet, teeth and eyes all turn out to be ordinary objects in Dan's room – but then a small, sad 'Waaahh' comes from under the bed! Now Dan plays parent as the monster complains about the things that are keeping *him* awake. 6/7 year-olds will recognise Dan's problems – and Mum's responses.

The Same Old Story Every Year

Anne Fine, ill. Vanessa Julian-Ottie, Hamish Hamilton 'Gazelle',
0 241 13244 4, £3.99

Nicely double-edged title. It's the School Nativity Play, of course, and Mr Kelly is strong-armed into producing it yet again despite all his protestations. Maya, new to the school, lands the part of Mary and politely, but firmly, makes the point that the pink plastic doll could not possibly pass as *her* baby, thus sparking some class discussion on what colour was Jesus anyway? Maya is eventually rescued from her predicament by the kindly, long-suffering Mr Kelly and she, in turn, rescues the play with some inspired ad-libbing when Eddie the Inn-keeper dries centre-stage.

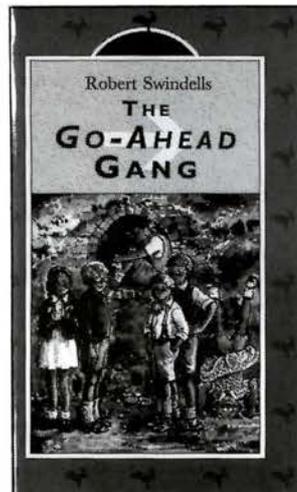
Everyone who's ever been involved with a school production will recognise the rehearsal scenes; and the

frisson between teacher and Head is a delight. The line drawings are superb (I'm sure Mr Kelly works at my son's school). A great read-aloud. Can Anne Fine do no wrong?

The Go-Ahead Gang

Robert Swindells, ill. Maureen Bradley, Hamish Hamilton 'Antelope',
0 241 13141 3, £4.99

Forty-something? Ever bored a group of kids with 'When I was about your age...'? If you answer yes to both these questions, this one's a must.

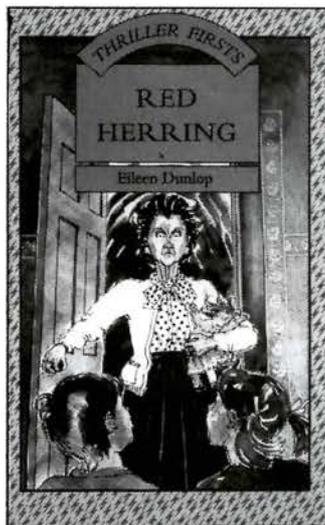


The fifties world of school caps, short trousers and Saturday morning pictures is well-evoked in these six stories of childhood scrapes and adventures which are each short enough to be read aloud in about five minutes. Boys and girls feature in the gang and the button-holing, conversational, first-person narrative demands to be listened to. I trialled them with a very weak Year 7 class who were held throughout and I'm sure that 'Knapton's Hand', the first story, will soon enter my 'Never-Known-To-Fail' category.

Red Herring

Eileen Dunlop, ill. Liz O'Sullivan, Blackie 'Thriller Firsts',
0 216 93281 5, £6.99

Quaintly old-fashioned ingredients in this adventure yarn that's long on coincidence and short on plausibility. Twin protagonists in parents' off-season boarding house rumble dark secret of eccentric



guest with aid of old photo discovered behind skirting board and long-hidden necklace. The plot gallops along at a lively enough pace to keep the reader engrossed. A thriller it isn't, but it should keep many 10-year-olds entertained.

A Friend In Need

Claire Duffet, ill. Mary Lonsdale, Blackie 'Thriller Firsts',
0 216 93280 7, £6.50

Old Ben lies dying in his big house and when great niece Katy arrives with Mum, who has come to help with the nursing, Ben's younger self comes out to play with her in the rambling garden and treats her to some home-spun philosophy about death. Echoes of *Tom's Midnight Garden* for the cognoscenti, but I don't suppose most of the readers of this first novel will be aware of them. The whole thing doesn't quite hang together as well as it might and perhaps this is a book that's struggling a little to get down to the necessary length.

Video Rose

Jacqueline Wilson, ill. Janet Robertson, Blackie 'Snappers',
0 216 93273 4, £5.99

Mega-disaster for couch-potato Rose when the ancient video player breaks down and her squabbling, hard-up family can't afford to have it repaired. Enter a magical repair man who not only fixes the machine with one touch of his finger, but leaves Rose

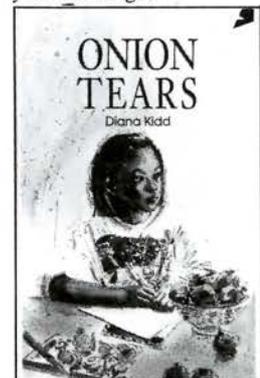
with the power to re-wind and fast-forward her own life. Re-wind is fun as she binges on the same sweets, pop and ice-cream over and over again and re-plays incidents to her own advantage – but fast-forward to herself as adult with ageing parents gives her considerable food for thought.

An entertaining variant on the time-travel theme with a well-realised domestic setting, a thoroughly modern heroine and convincing supernatural elements. Lots of laughs and some serious points for Year 5s and up. Love it!

Onion Tears

Diana Kidd, ill. Mee Yim Low, Viking 'Kites',
0 670 83840 3, £5.50

A strange bed-fellow for the rest of the series and a prime example of why you need to look at each title individually, since anyone handing this to a newly fluent reader would come a complete cropper. Although the language itself is quite straightforward, some complex skills of interpretation are required, pushing this book well into the 11/12 year-old range.



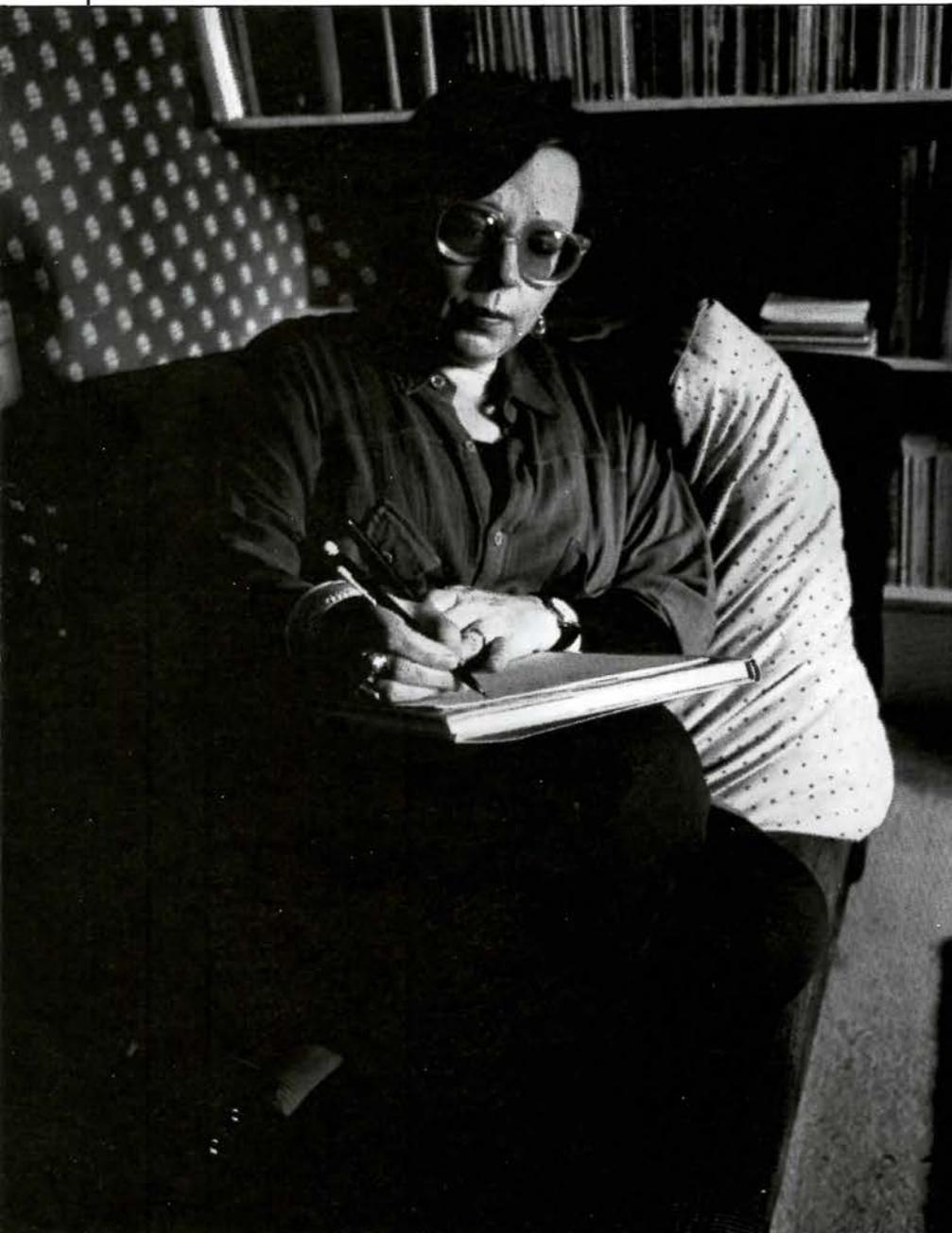
Australia-settled Vietnamese refugee Nam Huong is so traumatised by her experiences she does not speak and cannot accept that the rest of her family are probably dead. The only tears she can cry are when chopping onions in the kitchen of her adopted Aunt's restaurant. Nam's private writings, intercut with an episodic plot, slowly reveal the full horror of her flight and survival.

Based on the writing of Vietnamese girls settled in Australia, this is a haunting story for older, thoughtful children who will find many of the same themes in Bernard Ashley's *Boat Girl*.

Authorgraph No. 78

INTERVIEWED BY
STEPHANIE NETTELL

The name Geras (Russian, not French, with a hard G and an S), linked to Adèle, conjures up a cosmopolitan background, which is the right conclusion for the wrong reasons: it is her husband's. On the other hand, her voice has the ringing clear enunciation of an English actress and singer, if not quite a true Roedean gel, which is the wrong conclusion for the right reasons: her father, the Hon Mr Justice Weston, was a lifelong servant of Queen and Empire, and she once seemed destined for the theatre. In fact, she married a left-wing university lecturer and became a writer.



Her background is certainly cosmopolitan. She was the sixth-generation of her mother's family to be born in Jerusalem, where she still has relatives whom she visits. Her paternal grandfather was an Englishman who married a Moroccan, moved to Jerusalem, and produced a lawyer son who returned straight from Oxford to the Attorney General's Office in Palestine. He met her mother, and Adèle, an only child, was born in 1944.

'Later my father had to decide – should he throw in his lot with the State of Israel or with the King? He joined the British Colonial Service. Yes, possibly it distressed my mother's family, but my grandmother had had these hundreds of children and they had all disappeared all over the world.'

So, too, did her parents, to Borneo, Gambia, Tanganyika . . . 'My mother never owned a stick of furniture. My father used to say, not entirely joking, "I could never live in England, the policemen don't salute me!" He simply kept going till he died, having had a heart attack boarding the Victoria boat train on his way to Bechuanaland.' And Adèle travelled the world with them until boarding school at eleven: 'It was a sorrow to my father that I couldn't go to Eton or Harrow, so I was sent to Roedean.

'From then until I married at 23, I worried when people said, Where do you live? I never had an answer – I lived in my trunk! But now I say proudly, Oh, I come from Manchester – and actually feel I do. I've been here 25 years; Sophie (21) and Jenny (15) were born in the next street and have grown up in this one, and Sophie is at the university here.'

A gregarious soul with 'tons of cousins' she loved boarding school, 'though I'd hate to send my own children away.' She wrote poetry and was 'forever putting on little plays', but it was the performing that gripped her, not the writing.

'I was going to be a fully-fledged star, a Barbra Streisand! Oh yes, I'm basically a singer – this' (a sweeping gesture indicating her entire present life) 'is all a big fraud. My mother still half-feels I've wasted my life . . .' Her self-mockery is not entirely a joke. 'I definitely thought by the stage of Oxford and after that I was IN. Only marriage intervened.'

Yesterday, written for Walker's series of teenage memoirs, recalls that period with zest and humour, with emotional ups and downs and tantalising first names – Lynn (Barber) of the never-ending legs, Diana (Quick), Maria (Aitken), Marina (Warner), Terry (Jones), Michael (Palin) and, above all perhaps, the multi-talented Woody (David Wood). A scholar in French and Spanish at St Hilda's, she initially managed to fail Prelims through her immersion in Oxford's theatrical life. Within a few days of arriving she had become one of a group creating *Hang Down Your Head and Die*, a savagely comic piece of musical propaganda against hanging, so successful it went from Oxford's Playhouse to Stratford's Royal Shakespeare and on to the West End's Comedy Theatre. '*Judge's Daughter in Anti-hanging Play*': rave notices in the national press, Radio Three discussions, television's Late Night Line-Up.

Studying for finals paralleled rehearsing in a foursome for a musical revue called *Four Degrees Over* (geddit?), again with David Wood and again a success – the Mermaid, then Guildford, Worcester and the Edinburgh Festival, climaxing in London's Fortune Theatre and a George Martin LP. In between there had been Shakespeare, revues and solo cabaret – and she ended up with a good Second.

'If I'd stuck at it I'm sure I would have been fine. After *Four Degrees Over* I was having a bit of a hard time, going to public auditions where everyone was suddenly terribly wonderful. I did a lovely show for an

American Week in Newcastle, with a six-minute aria by a young composer called Carl Davis, setting to music a girl's loving fan-letter from *Elvis* magazine – something might have come of that. Then I married and came up here.'

Her Rhodesian husband was a post-graduate at Nuffield when she met him. A radical from Rhodesia? 'His dad was of the generation of Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer and all those lefties just after the war.' With interviews for two academic posts, Manchester and Canterbury, he had liked Manchester – and, now a Reader in that same Government department, still does.

They live in a pleasingly ordinary house at the quiet end of a leafy cul-de-sac in Didsbury, the walls of Norm's study lined with thousands of books that turn out to be solely on cricket, while other rooms are bright with originals and off-prints of the illustrations and jackets from Adèle's books, and touching sepia family photographs, from Jerusalem (little girls in a velvet frame) and Bulawayo long ago.

For a short time she taught French in a girls' grammar school. 'As an exhibitionist, I enjoyed every lesson like a show, but it is enormous work, and I was glad to get out of all the marking, exams and paperwork. That was 20 years ago – now it's much worse.'

With Sophie came her introduction to children's books. 'I believe *fanatically* that if you read to children every minute of the day from the moment they're born, chances are they'll become *readers*. And if you read enough books, you realise that 80% are pretty manky and, like every single adult from the Duchess of York down, you think "I could do better than that!" But I had no intention of trying until 1973.

'Sophie was two when I saw a £50 competition for a children's story in *The Times* – I'm still a sucker for competitions, and am always convinced I'll win. I wrote a brilliant, ace story about an old lady and a patchwork quilt where every square has a story. It didn't win. But I'd forgotten writing was such fun, such a liberation to *make up stuff* after years of academic theory and exams!'

She insists she is very lazy, that, seeing Sophie's books with a couple of lines per page, she'd thought, 'Wow, I could do one of those in half an hour. She wrote six little books, and for two years they kept coming back. At no point did I think there was something wrong with them – I was so stupid I decided they must need pictures for people to realise how beautiful they would be.' Down to the Poly, where Tony Ross, head of the art department, introduced her to one of his mature students, Doreen Caldwell ('a stunningly beautiful woman'), and together they went to London and walked their socks off. Everyone was very nice, and everyone said no.

'But at Hamish Hamilton, Linda Jennings, bless her, pointed out that pictures are frightfully expensive to produce and so are entirely the wrong way for unknowns to start. I noticed their Gazelles on display: nice and short – do you have to be famous to do one of those? No, anyone can have a go. So I studied Gazelles from the library, wrote one, Linda took it, Doreen illustrated it – we had started! That was *Tea at Mrs Manderby's*. 'The first thing I did was expand the story that hadn't won into an Antelope, *Apricots at Midnight*, with Doreen again – you see, I am lazy. There's energy and commitment, but also deep laziness!'

'Now I discovered that good editors are like good teachers: they see, before you can, what you're capable of tackling. I wrote *The Girls in the Velvet Frame* as an Antelope of 7,000 words. Linda summoned me to lunch (I was dead chuffed!) but it was to tell me that although she liked it, it was



not an Antelope – it was a Novel. I refused to believe it, but she told me to read it on the train home, ask myself what happens to this or that person, and think about it. And of course she was right.' It was as a novelist who demands stamina and emotional maturity from her teenage readers that Adèle Geras was to become admired and respected.

Her writing draws on the background-threads of her life if not her direct experiences: Jerusalem (repeatedly), Jewish voyagers to the New World, and Israel's War of Independence (*Beyond the Cross Stitch Mountains*); Roedean mirrored in *The Tower Room*; theatrical dreams and cabaret in *Happy Endings* or *Pictures of the Night*; a childhood event in Borneo (*Coronation Picnic*). Teachers and old friends tend to reappear, and even the wonderful dream cushion ('It works!') for the Fantora family derives from her devotion to Fasset and all kinds of handiwork.

Her 'fairy tale' trilogy (*The Tower Room*, *Watching the Roses* and *Pictures of the Night*) developed, bizarrely, from her daughter's prompting her to write a 'Fat Shiny', the sort that brings retirement to the Bahamas. Fine: all Fat Shinies are about three women, a nymphomaniac, a shy one and a rich awkward one. The women she knew were mums and teachers, not the right stuff at all. What *did* she know about? Theatre? Done that. School? Certainly – getting less Fat Shiny by the minute. Scholar in an ivory tower? Remember the Hockney print with Rapunzel's plait, Angela Carter's stunning *The Bloody Chamber* – fairy



stories! Terrific! Roedean had a three-room tower at the top of the house . . . it's getting steadily younger. Make it the year she did A-levels – no need to research.

She anxiously dodged the rape scene for a long time. In the end she solved how to avoid sensationalising it without reducing the agony, by her usual method of 'improvise as if you were talking, and fiddle with it after. An acting job in Alice's persona.' She assumes the books' audience to be young teens, because the 17-to-18s themselves are too grown up, but doesn't aim at any age. 'I'd love to be a banned writer, dangerous and bad, but I'm amazingly mild and wholesome – not out of censorship, but because one can only write the kind of books one can write.

'I have no missionary zeal at all, but perhaps it's a matter of *sharing* with the young, rather than *pointing*: don't you think this is marvellous? don't you think this is awful?

'It's like the story of the Jewish guy smuggling a suitcase of cut diamonds through Customs. "What's this?" "Birdseed." "Birdseed? You've got to be kidding – these are cut diamonds!" The old Jew says, "Well look, you know, I give them to my birds. They eat, they eat; they don't eat, they don't eat."

'I feel the same way about my books.'

Photographs by Peter Walsh.

Some Adèle Geras titles

The Tower Room, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 12956 7, £8.50; HarperCollins, 0 00 673910 5, £3.50 pbk

Watching the Roses, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13109 X, £8.99; HarperCollins, 0 00 674383 8, £3.50 pbk

Pictures of the Night, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13251 7, £8.99

Coronation Picnic, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 12554 5, £4.99

Voyage, HarperCollins, 0 00 672409 4, £3.50 pbk

The Fantora Family Files, HarperCollins, 0 00 673348 4, £3.50 pbk

My Grandmother's Stories, Heinemann, 0 434 94063 1, £10.99

Magic Birthday, ill. Adriano Gon, Simon & Schuster Young Books, 0 7500 1177 7, £7.99

Yesterday, Walker, 0 7445 2105 X, £8.99 (the cover of which is on the front of *BfK* this month – see also page 15 for further comment)

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.

Alphabet Songs

Easy Songs

Anonymous performers, Cassettes for Young People (346 Lea Bridge Road, Leyton, London E10 7LD; tel. 081 556 1125), one cassette, 20 mins each title, £1.99 each

Two new additions to CYP's Funtime Range. They're inexpensive, cheerful tapes with pleasant, infectious musical arrangements and sound effects. **Easy Songs** includes sing-along favourites like 'The Animals Went in Two by Two' and 'One Man Went to Mow'. **Alphabet Songs** is a useful fun tape for learning sounds with 'Alphabet Rhymes' and 'Easy Peasy Alphabet' as well as songs which cover the whole range of phonics. 'I is for insect buzzing around; J is for jelly a wobbly mound': slow enough for children to join in with; fast and varied enough to be entertaining. 1993 catalogue available from CYP.

Counting

Rhona Whiteford and Kanes Fitzsimmons, anonymous performers, Little Owl, one cassette with 24-page Little Owl hardback, 30 mins, £3.49

The Little Owl range offers lively books and learning tapes for the 3-7 age group. **Counting** is a jolly book with a brightly coloured circus theme where a new character joins the picture for each number up to 10. The rhyming text is simple: 'Next comes an acrobat / How many more? / Watch him somersault / That makes four.' One side of the tape goes through the book with catchy songs to a simple and infectious beat and a Little Owl turn-over-tone hoot. The other side has seven counting songs like 'Five Fat Sausages' attractively sung for joining in.

Jolly Snow and Other Stories

Jane Hissey, read by Anton Rogers, Random House Tellastory, one cassette, 30 mins, £3.99

These six stories, added to the Jane Hissey already available from Random House Tellastory, are ideal bedtime listening. Anton Rogers' sympathetic reading gives vigour and importance to the nursery world events concerning Jolly Tall, Old Bear and Little Bear. Old Bear brings home a tiny Tom Bear he finds inside a conker case; the toys try making

artificial snow out of soap suds and cotton wool, but nothing is as good as the real thing. They have an inventive time dressing up for Christmas and Rabbit, who wants to be a snowman, puts a carrot on his nose.

Noddy

Enid Blyton, read by Wendy Craig, Listen for Pleasure, one cassette, 2 hrs, no rrp

Noddy, his red and yellow car, his blue tinkling hat and his friend Big Ears have, rather mysteriously, retained their popularity. Here are four stories full of moral incident and cosy detail from the new Noddy editions. Noddy thinks there must be something wrong with his head as his hat keeps slipping off, but Big Ears explains it's just Noddy's swollen head caused by his high self opinion. Wendy Craig's characterisation of the Toylanders has enough imagination to add interest, yet remains comfortably familiar to young listeners.

zebras into their getaway van. All the characterisation, raven noises and sound effects make this a good racy story which was originally broadcast on **Jackanory**.

The Bangers and Chips Explosion

Brough Girling, read by Christina Rodska, Chivers, two cassettes, 2 hrs 12 mins, £10.95 + VAT

This instantly appealing story gallops along. Billy Baxter loves his chips and doesn't at all appreciate the new salad and yoghurt school dinners. His organised objections force Mr McKay, the headmaster, to advertise for new cooks, but because of a misprint it comes out as 'crooks'. When Hairy Harry and Cyanide Sid get the job, the children have their chips, but Mr McKay is held to ransom by the two villains. It's a witty, rollicking story and Christina Rodska brings the school children and the two dullard villains vividly alive.

Dr Monsoon Taggart's Amazing Finishing Academy and Wolf Pie

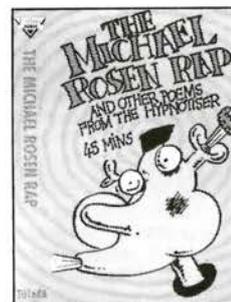
Andrew Matthews, read by Jennifer Saunders, Chivers, two cassettes, 1 hr 30 mins, £10.95 + VAT

Arabella Armitage's parents have stuffed her with titbits since she was a baby. At school in movement class she makes a mountain shape without even trying – and she's miserable. The story changes gear into fantasy when she meets Monty the talking dog on her way to Dr Taggart's Slimming Academy. Meeting the human-eating Ogre who offers her some left-over minstrel to eat, and Lady Carmen who can't stop eating cake, teaches Arabella to re-think her eating. Jennifer Saunders' controlled reading is sympathetic, showing both the humour and the serious message.

The Michael Rosen Rap

Written and performed by Michael Rosen, Collins Audio, one cassette, 45 mins, £3.99

These poems are typically accessible Michael Rosen: short, simple and embedded in friendly anecdotal chat and little jokes – 'You must NOT draw on Naomi's bed'; 'OK, I'll draw on mine.' This is the homely world of kissing goodnight routines, headaches – 'your skull squeezing your



brain' – where mums get sulky and dads shout. It's real life treated with humour and a simple enjoyment of words: 'My mum and dad don't get sulky, don't shout, don't live with each other.'

All the poems come from **The Hypnotiser**, published in Lions by HarperCollins.

Space Demons

Gillian Rubinstein, dramatised, ABC Spoken Word (available from Craftsman, PO Box 38, Stevenage, SG1 2SP; (tel. 0438 743280), one cassette, 1 hr 10 mins, £5.95 + VAT



Arabel: The Spiral Stair and Mortimer and the Sword Excalibur

Joan Aiken, read by Bernard Cribbins, BBC Young Collection, one cassette, 68 mins, £4.99

Bernard Cribbins' raven croak is just right for the determined Mortimer and only part of the characterful cast he creates. Arabel has gone to stay with her aunt and uncle, who help run Lord Donisthorpe's zoo, whilst her father is having his 'various' veins treated. . . . Mortimer is imprisoned in the meat safe as a punishment – until he and Arabel save the zoo from animal thieves who start loading limp, doped



This is most unusual and striking audio listening. It has a cast of nine Australian voices and the dramatisation is racy and convincing. The accent's inescapable link with **Home and Away** makes it immediately attractive to adolescent listeners, but the content is far superior. Four children become locked in a battle with the artificial intelligence of the computer game, Space Demons, on which they have become hooked. The battle is complex and sinister, and forces the children to confront their own disturbed natures and family relationships. The sound effects heighten the real dramatic tension and the whole is exciting and absorbing.

ALL THEIR YESTERDAYS . . .

Chris Powling, with supporting team, looks at a new series of memoirs for teenagers.

Adèle Geras opens with her father's glass-topped desk; John Gordon with his own near-drowning; and Laurence Staig with exotic animals screaming themselves awake in Manchester's Belle Vue Zoo. Nicholas Fisk, on the other hand, begins thus:

'Here he comes! Walking towards us! I see him distinctly, clear as day! – No wait. That's not true. I don't see him distinctly at all. *What we are looking at is a walking, talking, breathing, solid ghost. Not the ghost of someone dead: I am still alive. His flesh is my flesh, his heartbeat is my heartbeat.*

Because he is me. But so long ago . . .

I know the feeling . . . and recognise it in all four of Walker's new series, **TEENAGE MEMOIRS**, as each author grapples with the mystery of how they got *here* when they started from *there*. Despite this, and their inevitable preoccupation at the time with sorting out both themselves and the opposite sex, preferably in some kind of proximity, the writers remain quirkily individual throughout as well as totally convincing. You can't imagine any of them living the life of the others.

What of their common destiny as *writers*, though? Doesn't this unite their growing up? Surprisingly, not much – at least on this evidence. True, after his years as an accident-prone ordinary seaman, John Gordon joined 'a literary and debating society with dandy-ish pretensions' while working in local journalism but there's little here to suggest the future author of **The Giant Under the Snow**. As for Nicholas Fisk and Laurence Staig, their ambitions at this stage seem musical rather than bookish – playing in a jazz-band and a rhythm-and-blues group, respectively. Adèle Geras, meanwhile, has her heart set on an acting and singing career. For each of them, apparently, writing fiction must wait. Whatever else young readers take away from these memoirs, they'll know that authors aren't made to order.

How *are* they made, then? Could it be by reading? Or a relish for the marginal and the dramatic compounded with a distinctly maverick streak? These are shared traits, certainly, though much the same could be said of many a derelict in a local library. What really distinguishes this quartet is their way with words – their ability to make sentences sing and sizzle a bit on the page, whether they're writing about being young in the forties, the sixties or the seventies. There's not a dud amongst them in this respect and they'll hook many a teenage reader even if some, as indicated by our reviews opposite, may be left a bit puzzled about the actual point of these highly enjoyable excursions into social history. Personally, I'd have liked a heavier dose of hindsight all round – after all, presumably they were chosen as contributors *because* they've become celebrity storytellers. So let's hope the next batch, and with such a good start there's sure to be one, foregrounds *writerliness* rather more. Maybe a poet should take the lead. The series editor, Mick Gowar, perhaps?

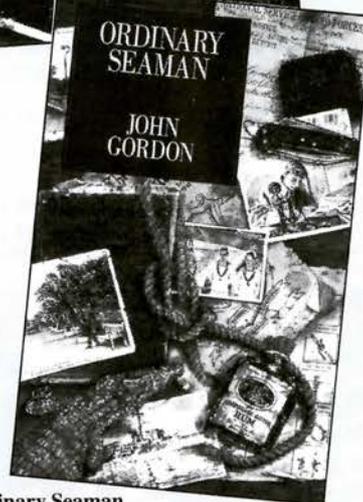
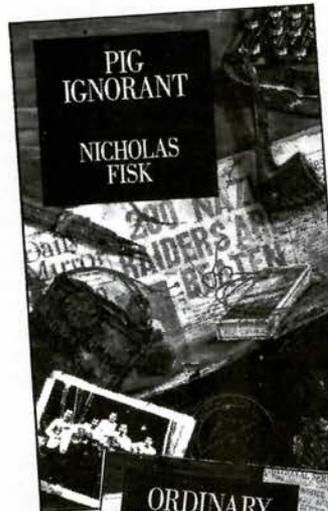
All titles are published by Walker Books in their series 'Teenage Memoirs' edited by Mick Gowar, and priced £8.99 each.

Pig Ignorant

Nicholas Fisk, 0 7445 2104 1

This book, part of the 'Teenage Memoirs' series, is a brief snapshot of the author's latter teenage years in war-stricken London. The book deals with life after school and the search for a direction in life as well as illustrating the effects of war from a naive, teenage perspective.

Although enjoyable and very readable, the book never really establishes a purpose. There are some very nice passages illustrating his 'Pig Ignorance', but the language never really compensates for the lack of storyline. Thankfully it's not the standard teenage problems page type lecture on puberty, but then it isn't a particularly graphic insight into wartime life, either. However, it's always entertaining and rises above the rather patronising tone that the series title suggests. (Jon Boden – 15)



Ordinary Seaman

John Gordon, 0 7445 2106 8

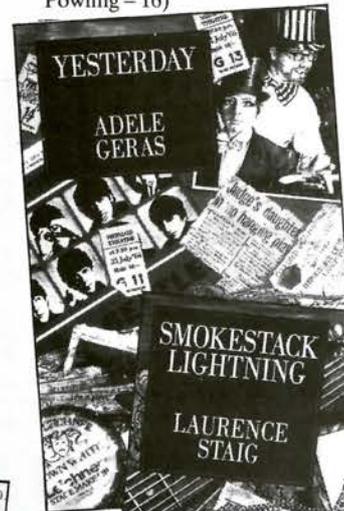
This book is certainly unlike any other that I've read. It is difficult to get a grasp of what it's actually about or get a feel for what John Gordon is telling his readers. But having said that, I still found many parts both interesting and funny, with different tones and characteristics being used. I enjoyed the book mainly because it has an ironic humour, and although the book seemed to me to 'drift', this fitted the atmosphere the author was portraying. It's an interesting tale, capturing unusual aspects of a wartime sailor's life, and plenty of people will enjoy it. (Helen Lawrence – 15)

Yesterday

Adèle Geras, 0 7445 2105 X

Once more Adèle Geras had me pinned to the sofa while I avidly read (from start to finish in one sitting) her latest in my collection. She hasn't failed to delight me yet and this book is no exception. **Yesterday** is about three years of her life spent at Oxford University. From page 7 to page 85 it's filled with beautiful descriptions of the city during the 60s, together with a fast-moving storyline incorporating wit and real feelings with which we can all identify. This book is immensely readable and informative and I'm pleased to say isn't in any way a self-congratulatory account of Adèle's years 'up' at Oxford.

The cover, too, is quite splendid – it's obvious the illustrator has read the book carefully – so far as I'm concerned, it's full marks also to Carolyn Piggford. (Ellie Powling – 16)



Smokestack Lightning

Laurence Staig, 0 7445 2107 6

A highly entertaining autobiography of the early years of Laurence Staig. It starts off with him as a young boy in the 50s living in a circus in Manchester, with exciting tales of childhood dreams and adventures, and finishes in his late teens with a family tragedy. His father was a motor-bike stunt rider (whose act was called 'The Globe of Death') and he was just one of the many extravagant characters who influenced Laurence's early life.

All in all this is a good read, but I think aimed more towards 12-13 year-olds because of the easy style used throughout the book. The storyline kept me interested and keen to read on.

Incidentally, **Smokestack Lightning** was a 60s R & B hit by one of the author's favourite artists – Howlin' Wolf. (Tim Tovell – 15)

REVIEWS – NON FICTION

Look at some old photographs of yourself.
How have you changed?



Growing 0 7502 0433 8
Staying Healthy 0 7502 0434 6

Barrie Knowles, Wayland (How my Body Works series), £7.50 each
INFANT/JUNIOR

One of the more irritating features of information books for younger readers is the frequent inclusion of pointless questions. Probably an attempt to imbue the text with a conversational quality, this strategy generally results only in the furnishing of user-unfriendly dead ends. It is therefore all the more pleasant to greet two volumes containing plenty of questions whose answers, be they provided by the text or from personal experience, can amplify and extend that text very helpfully – in the best Pluckrose tradition.

Growing isn't just about physical increase but includes the passage of time, acquisition of skills, and animal life-cycles. Likewise **Staying Healthy** doesn't stop at body maintenance but touches on safety, proper clothing and overseas aid.

If these two titles typify the whole series (look out for **Moving**, **Sleeping**, **Eating** and **Breathing**) then perhaps 'How my Body Works' is too repressive a name for it, but, no, I can't think of a better one either – suggestions on a postcard, please. TP

Magnetism

Pam Robson, Franklin Watts
(Science Workshop series),
0 7496 0934 6, £8.50

Electricity

Wendy Baker and Andrew Haslam,
Two-Can (Make it Work series),
1 85434 134 0, £6.99; 1 85434 109 X,
£3.50 pbk

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

My first real toy was an old brown horseshoe magnet, a piece of card and a bunch of iron filings. I've loved magnets ever since and particularly welcome Pam Robson's book. The well-illustrated approach is good; first you do an 'experiment' like using polar repulsion to propel a toy car, then you learn 'Why it works' (actually I'd prefer 'how'), and then you find some more things to do which use the same principle. Terrestrial magnetism and the compass are well explained and the different properties of permanent and electromagnets shown. From here it is but a short step to levitating magicians, acrobatic paperclips and the coin-sorting slot machine.

As much fun can be had with electricity, as long as you don't meddle with the mains. This message precedes everything in Baker and Haslam's book – which was actually written, it seems, by Alexandra Parsons. Simple circuits, elementary switches and

morse-flashers all appear in well-pictured d-i-y detail, and the introduction of magnets in the second half permits the construction of challenging electric cranes and boats and trains. The complexity of these latter examples suggests that a cooperative approach will be the most rewarding.

This is a bright and not dissimilar pair which will well serve any junior or middle school project. TP

Bullying

0 7502 0443 5, £7.99

Splitting Up

0 7502 0397 8, £7.50

Karen Bryant-Mole, Wayland
(What's Happening series)
JUNIOR

'What's Happening?' is a new series dealing with social issues which aims to provide practical information for children coping with difficult situations. The books are linked to ChildLine and the message for the child is clear – 'You are not alone'. Case studies of children recounting their experiences add to the feeling of shared problems, providing an opportunity to explore situations and consider solutions.

Thus in **Bullying** we hear from ex-bullies like Sasha and Jason, victims like Rob and James, observers like Lisa, and consider causes and implications of their behaviour.

Splitting Up explores parental separation from the viewpoint of the children involved and, again, considers causes. The point that this is unlikely to stem from children's behaviour and more to declining relationships between parents is well made. No easy solutions are offered but strategies for coping are given.

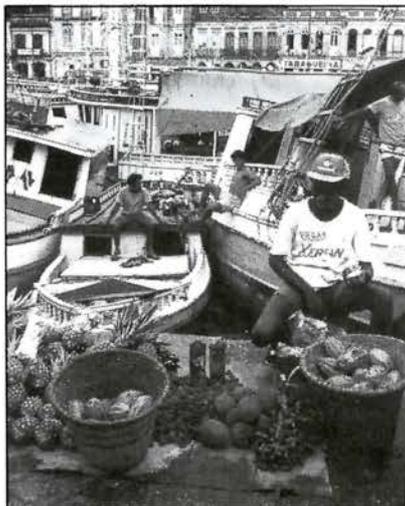
Both books would be valuable for individual reading and **Bullying** could also be used to aid classroom discussion. Brief but informative guidance for parents and teachers add further to the books' usefulness. GB

The Amazon

Julia Waterlow, Wayland
(The World's Rivers series),
0 7502 0387 0, £8.50

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

Back in the early 1980s Wayland produced a pace-setting series on world rivers – ten years on they seem set fair to repeat that achievement with this series.



'A boy sells pineapples and cocoa pods (in the baskets) from a waterfront stall in Belem'.
From **The Amazon**.



'Rob gave his dinner money to the bullies because he was scared'. From **Bullying**.

The volume on the Amazon is a super book; well illustrated, informative, disturbing and rewarding. All the facets of the river are explored: physical geography, people, wildlife, exploration, trade and industry, and the threat of destruction. The page layout and design allows adequate exploration of the subject. The style is also impressive – 'Like all rivers, while they are young, here in the mountains it flows fast crashing over boulders and tearing out rocks as it passes.'

This is a valuable book for the interested browser or to support the curriculum. GB

Making Music

Karen Foster, Carol Mahoney,
Josephine Paker and Danny
Staples, Merlion Publishing,
1 85737 076 7, £12.95

JUNIOR/SECONDARY

Twenty-five years ago I read another book with this title; it was by Nicholas Fisk and, refreshingly, it accorded none of the usual prominence to 'serious' music. Nor did it trivialise jazz, popular and folk facets but successfully celebrated their one-ness by means of the author's enjoyment of them.

Now here comes another **Making Music** which demonstrates this one-ness in a different but delightful way. It is a glorious catalogue of instruments – from the homely to the exotic, grouped according to their nature and described without prejudice. This means that as well as the expected descriptions of violin and trumpet we also get a fascinating four pages on the gamelan orchestra and a detailed look at the making of steel-band pans. Musical style is mentioned throughout en passant which frees authors and reader from boring attempts to define the various supposed differences and allows Charles Mingus equal prominence with Kyung Wah Chung in the string section. And there are plenty of curiosities – nose flute, shawm and rommelpot all have their moments.

There is some careless picture editing – Mozart and Stravinsky appear over captions

A special sound

The Indian musician Ravi Shankar is one of the best-known sitar players in the world. Look at the picture below. Can you see how hard Ravi Shankar concentrates as he plays? His music swoops and slides to the accompaniment of special drums called tabla. Audiences all over the world have been amazed by his playing.

Ravi Shankar has performed to enthusiastic listeners in western countries. The violinist Yehudi Menuhin and the pop group The Beatles have both performed with him, making an interesting mix of the music of east and west.



Above, marchers demonstrate peacefully for an end to the communist system. From **Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan**.

Left, a page from **Making Music**.

devoted to Beethoven and Tchaikovsky and Mike Stannard's photographs of clarinet and saxophone have the mouthpieces wrong way up, but the otherwise excellent illustrations and straightforward text make a fine combination to promote a lively interest in this liveliest of arts. TP

Abraham Lincoln

Anna Sproule, 1 85015 155 5

Eleanor Roosevelt

David Winner, 1 85015 142 3

Exley (People Who Have Helped the World series), £5.99 each
SECONDARY

One came from a background of grinding poverty, the other from a world of wealth and privilege, yet the achievements of both would reach far beyond their native shores. Farm-boy Abe Lincoln became one of his country's greatest Presidents, whilst Eleanor Roosevelt, niece of one President, wife of another, came to be recognized in her own right for the humanitarian work which gained her the accolade 'First Lady of the World'.

Anna Sproule sketches in the essential details of Lincoln's early life, but concentrates mainly on the two inextricably linked preoccupations of his Presidency, slavery and the Civil War. She paints a dramatic picture of the obscurities of the slave trade and the contrasting life styles of slaves and plantation owners. Concisely, yet clearly, she explains the economic and political factors which precipitated secession and the Confederacy, and the subsequent ebb and flow of military fortunes during the Civil War. She also succinctly conveys the inner turmoil experienced by Lincoln. He abhorred slavery but regarded his first priority as saving the Union. In 1863 he triumphantly resolved both issues.

David Winner charts the equally fascinating transformation of Eleanor Roosevelt from the wife of an up-and-coming politician to tireless and revered worker for peace, civil rights and women's causes. Jolted out of her cosy domestic milieu by the First World War, her husband's affair with his secretary

and his battle with polio, she flung herself into political work. She became a national and then international figure, and after her husband's death undertook perhaps her most significant role, chairing the U.N. Commission which drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The texts of these very accessible biographies are enhanced by a selection of excellent source material, both written and visual. Anna Sproule is to be commended for also providing a reading list which is helpfully annotated. VH

The Baltic States

David C. Flint, 0 7496 1061 1

Belarus, Ukraine and Moldavia

Elizabeth Roberts, 0 7496 1062 X

The Central Asian States

Paul Thomas, 0 7496 1965 4

Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan

Elizabeth Roberts, 0 7496 1063 8

Kazakhstan

Catherine Bradley, 0 7496 1064 6

The Russian Federation

David C. Flint, 0 7496 1060 3

Franklin Watts (The Former Soviet States series), £7.99 each
SECONDARY

With the break-up of the USSR, names both familiar and unfamiliar came to the forefront as the 15 former republics achieved independence and started to flex dormant political muscles.

The complexities of the ethnic and religious mix in the former Soviet bloc are quite staggering: over 160 different nationalities and 131 languages! In Armenia alone 'due to repeated foreign invasions throughout its history, up to 83 languages are spoken in the region, some by just a single village'. To gain some understanding of the current economic and social problems facing the newly independent states, it is necessary to have some grasp of this diverse cultural background.

Franklin Watts have published six 32-page books in a praiseworthy series to help us try to make sense of the latest events. Inevitably, in such relatively short, profusely illustrated volumes their authors have achieved varying degrees of success. Sometimes, as in **Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova**, the historical data is overwhelming and so many people and events are chronicled that the reader is left somewhat breathless and bewildered. Sometimes tantalising remarks are unexplained (Why did Khrushchev give the Crimea to Ukraine in 1954?), sometimes a brief reference in one volume is expounded at greater length and clarity in another.

Nevertheless there is much to applaud in these attractive titles and they bear careful reading and re-reading. Each has a useful 'Facts and Figures' section at the end for each individual state and there is also a prediction of what may happen in the future. Some of the prognoses are not very encouraging; there are ecological issues, security problems (four states have nuclear weapons), border disputes, and the overall economic outlook for many is uncertain. Having read about the problems we will have a greater appreciation of the task they face. VH

Know Your Rights

Sue Sharpe, Lions, 0 00 673471 5,
£3.99 pbk

SECONDARY

Know Your Rights is a clear, informative paperback for teenagers and will prove a useful addition to school libraries, home shelves and back pockets. A mass of information is presented without undue complication and, in addition, the author offers common sense advice. For instance the laws dealing with leaving home at 16, 17 and 18 are explained, the practical needs and items (including documentation) for home leavers are listed, and the dangers of leaving home with nowhere to go are not ignored.

Each chapter deals with an area of teenage life: Home and Family, School and College, Drink and Drugs, etc. and a thorough index and list of relevant organisations are usefully included.

It's not a perfect book (there is no mention of GMS status for example) but it will be a useful one. It considers responsibilities as well as rights for teenagers and for adults too. GB

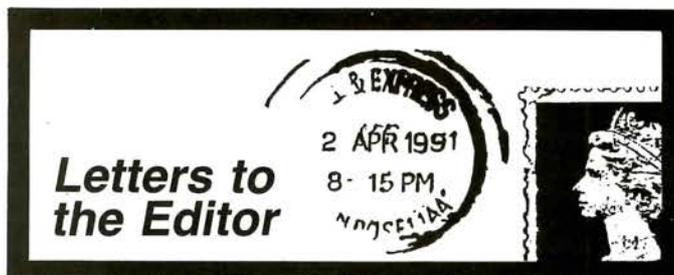
Ziggi Alexander is co-editor of the autobiography of Mary Seacole and, more recently, a book on multicultural librarianship.

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



Colin Ray writes:

The article by Alison Leonard about IBBY (**BFK 77**, Nov 92) must not pass without comment lest there are readers as naive as the author. I am glad she enjoyed the IBBY Congress, where she was able to listen innocently to the stories from other countries and retail them as examples to us. So IBBY groups in Germany take books to children in hospital; has she noticed that librarians and others do the same here? The South Africans are 'bridging the gulf between black and white' (and) between urban and rural children; great, but has she had a look at most inner-city area children's library services here?

Her answer is a revival of the British section of IBBY. For nearly 20 years a small group of members struggled, usually at their own expense, to keep the section going. I don't recall Ms Leonard at any of its functions: was she a member? Time, energy and funds were the major problems, but the biggest drain was the annual, and increasing, demand of IBBY's international office in Switzerland, calling now for around £2,000. And for what? Not for the biennial IBBY Congress (was Ms Leonard there when we held it 10 years ago in Britain?), because this is the host country's problem. Not for the Hans Andersen awards, the list of diploma books: great publicity – can she name a few winners offhand? Not for supplying books to developing countries – the only move on that was the fund set up by the British. Not for seminars and day courses of the kind the British held for several years. And not for translation of children's books; **Bookbird**, IBBY's journal, recommends books for translation, but ask any publisher what the demand is – are they to be charitable organisations?

I am pleased to see that the Children's Book Foundation is keen to be involved. In the early days of the British section, there was active support from the then head of the NBL children's section. This gradually dwindled under pressure of other work, but if Ms Leonard's enthusiasms bear fruit, one hopes the Foundation will not merely concur, but take a lead. But, the question remains: who's going to finance IBBY's international 'activity'?

Jay Heale (Editor of *Bookchat*) writes:

Greetings from the bottom end of Africa! Thank you for allocating an entire page to Alison Leonard's pleas for the restoration of British IBBY. So few people seem to CARE! I myself played a part in the acceptance (this year) of South Africa into IBBY, which is exciting for writers out here. But for heaven's sake – I am *British!* I was born in Somerset amongst the cider apples.

It's high time that book people in England realised (a) that a country which is the birthplace of most of the world's children's literature (and adult literature, too) has a duty to belong and share its expertise; and (b) that exclusion means NO British IBBY Honour Books, NO Hans Andersen nomination, NO nuffin.

So thanks again for giving space to the matter. Please pursue it.

Marianne Adey (Chair of FCBG) writes:

I was pleased to read Alison Leonard's forceful article decrying the disappearance of the British branch of IBBY. Although I share Ms Leonard's sense of indignation at this course of events, I feel that to label the Children's Book Foundation, the School Library Association and the Federation of Children's Book Groups as 'insular' is beside the point as well as being untrue. Each organization plays a different but complementary role in bringing children and books together.

As Chair of the Federation, I feel I can speak with some assurance about our long tradition of taking an interest in the children's book world outside this country. In the 70s we sent books to Zambia; many of our branches have supported UNESCO's Books For All project for many years. In 1990 we launched 'Story Aid', a major project which has, to date, sent a number approaching 100,000 books to the Third World. A number of other charities, such as Oxfam, seem to have followed our lead.

In addition, National Tell-a-Story Week, an annual event organized by the Federation in schools, libraries and Children's Book Groups all over the country, had as its theme last year 'All Together Now', with a booklist and suggested activities on an international theme. Finally, our Jubilee Conference in Birmingham early this year and our 1994 Conference in Edinburgh both focus on trans-cultural themes.

Can we do more? No doubt we can. We have been long-time members of IBBY and would be anxious to support any initiative to 'rekindle the flame'. Perhaps IBBY itself might look again at its fee structure so that membership is not a financial impossibility for us.

Alison Leonard replies:

I do apologise, especially to the Federation of Children's Book Groups, of which I'm a constantly-stimulated member, if I implied that British children's book enthusiasts don't look beyond these shores, which of course they do. Colin Ray is right: I'm a naive newcomer to the IBBY scene; and, stuck away in my writer's garret in the north, I'm not an expert in librarians' initiatives or the history of IBBY-UK's struggles.

But the fact remains: British IBBY died. Maybe a bit of naiveté might help it to be born again? Responses like Jay Heale's show that it's vital to our own and our children's literary life. We have a duty to belong – and so much to gain, too. If a small group were keen to re-start, could they approach IBBY International to ask for financial patience; then, on that basis, approach the British Council and the Publishers' Association for backing?



Editor's Note:

For those readers asking 'What is IBBY?' here's the answer direct from their handbook:

'The International Board on Books for Young People is a non-profit organization that was founded in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1953. It is an international network of people from all over the world who are committed to bringing books and children together. IBBY's mission is:

- * to promote international understanding through children's books
- * to give children everywhere the opportunity to have access to books with high literary and artistic standards
- * to encourage the publication and distribution of quality children's books, especially in developing countries
- * to provide support and training for those involved with children and children's literature
- * to stimulate research and scholarly works in the field of children's literature

IBBY is committed to the principles of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by the United Nations in 1990. One of its main proclamations is the right of the child to a general education and to direct access to information. The resolution appeals to all nations to promote the production and distribution of children's books.'

Enquiries about IBBY membership to Children's Book Foundation, Book House, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ; tel. 081 870 9055.

Robert Leeson writes:

Jean Ure is a rotten little twerp, picking holes in my composishun about School Stories. Bet she was swotting up the history while the other kids were snogging behind the bike sheds.

Well serve her right if you asked her to write an essay on Recent School Stories. Only she's got to do it in sixteen words for every year - like what I did in my piece.

And when she's written it, I'll write a letter saying how many she's missed out. So sucks,

Robert Leeson (Minor)

Fourth Remove

PS. You'd better print this. My brother's bigger than you.

Hazel Townson writes:

I hope I'm not too late to join in the discussion about series books, which I think of as lifeboats thrown to readers drowning in a voluminous sea. Without series books many a potential reader-for-life would sink without trace.

Children's life-patterns are changing whether we like it or not. Their days are filling with more technological time-demands, so that there are fewer moments for curling up with a good book. But if there's no time for a seven-course meal, one still needs sustenance, and quality sustenance at that.

A well-written series book offers not only its own immediate pleasure but also the pleasure of further similar excitements to come. Watch the children in a public library and see how many of them search eagerly for the next book about their current hero or heroine. No genuine, committed writer with children's needs at heart will be influenced by critics who look down on series writing, for these are the books which win readers, not prizes.

Editor's Note: see page 11 of this issue for the first of Steve Rosson's Series Round-Up.

Gordon Dennis writes:

I was sorry that Peter Thomas included in his valuable, enthusiastic and classroom-wise appraisal of **Shakespeare: The Animated Tales (BK 11, Nov 92)** his own unargued dogma. 'Statutory Shakespeare erects an icon'; 'a compulsory Shakespeare test for all will do nothing'? Well, it depends how he's taught, how he's regarded; neither prediction will be true, I'd bet, in Peter Thomas's own classroom. And, he avers, it's only 'purists' who'll be offended at the *Tales's* abridgement of the plays and the decision to lay the blank verse out as continuous prose. Why link those very different editorial practices? Real purists will know that Shakespeare himself for good reasons abridged his own plays, just as for good reasons he distinguished - stylistically, but also in layout - between prose and poetry. I can't see how it will help KS3 students to hide from them a distinction Shakespeare felt significant, nor to let them up grow up thinking that he and Patience Strong share an indiscriminating prosody.

PLUGGING CLASSICAL GAPS

Myths and Legends used in the Secondary Classroom

DAVID BENNETT

A former colleague of mine used to despair when teaching Marlowe, Milton, The Bard, etc., because, as she put it, her students' classical gaps were always showing. What she meant was that with the disappearance of Latin or Classics from the timetable her exam students simply didn't have the ability to comprehend literary allusion to myth and legend. She was so fearsome that I never let on where my sympathies lay; my own classical knowledge was pretty much the size of a black hole rather than a mere gap. When I chanced upon **Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology** my ability to impart erudite comment on the doings of gods, goddesses and ancient heroes apparently knew no bounds, providing I'd prepared thoroughly enough beforehand. I found the Bible very useful, too, because I rapidly realised there's also a vast chasm when it comes to biblical allusion; but I'll spare you my thoughts on that until another time.

As far as doing something positive about plugging the classical gap early with my pupils I must admit I've been a bit dilatory; brief forays into Rex Warner's **Men and Gods** have never quite seemed to strike the mark and it's been a bit of a hit and miss affair, including my own rendition of the appropriate story as the occasion demands. I used to be quite moving as Demeter when she discovers the abduction of Persephone, but transmission was discontinued when D H Lawrence's **Bavarian Gentians** went off the syllabus.

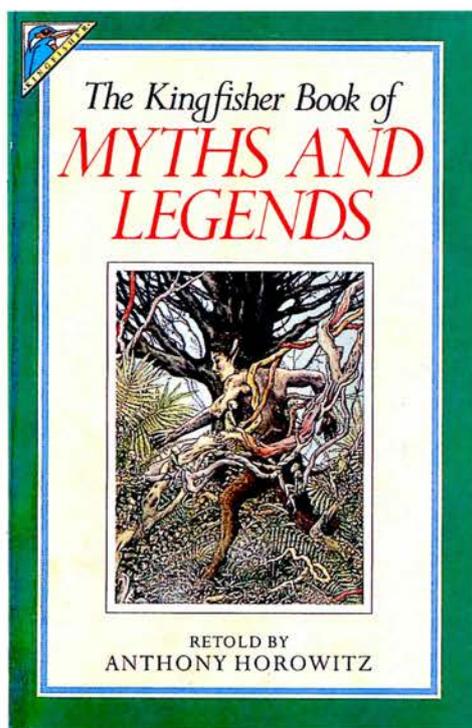
Fortunately for all concerned **The Kingfisher Book of Myths and Legends** retold by Anthony Horowitz came to me for review. Here were thirty-five myths and legends from seventeen different cultures that were very entertainingly told, well-presented and, importantly, affordable for a class reader. As another plus point, they are so written that they savour of the oral tradition and read aloud incredibly well.

'Hypaepae was such a wretched place that only the people who visited invariably turned out to have lost their way and those who lived in it would really have preferred not to. Hypaepae didn't have a village green. It had a village mouldy brown. Although it seldom rained, the high street was always full of puddles and the whole smelt of fish.'

(from 'The Spinning Contest')

'You would certainly have been ill-advised to kick sand in the face of Hercules had you see him on the beach. Not unless you wanted to find yourself several feet under the sand with your legs tied in a knot behind your head.'

(from 'The Mares of Diomedes')



My colleagues unanimously endorsed my enthusiasm and it's a fact that our set has barely been in the stock-cupboard since. I've noticed boys have been especially receptive and there's been an unusual amount of overnight/over weekend lending to accommodate enthusiastic demand. The fantasy-gamers seem to come out of the closet and presumably pick up tips about dealing death blows to Gorgons and dragons. At the same time sexual innuendo merchants get their share of cheap thrills on the basis of 'you can find double-meaning in anything, if you know how'; whilst Anthony Horowitz has been discreet, the characters he's telling us about generally weren't!

Other than the appeal to these two sub-culture groups, reading the tales has generally created class excitement and interest. Leaving aside the writer's skills and droll delivery, I wonder if this is because they deal with very basic, real and identifiable human emotions and traits, and their original function was to explain what often seems inexplicable, possibly as much so now as when they were being created and refined. Maybe it's this to which pupils are responding so willingly; the magic of these tales, when told well, is that they strike resonant chords in that part of us which is about what it is to be human.

Love, hatred/kindness, revenge/hope, despair/courage, cowardice, etc., they're all there in action-packed, often gruesome, bite-sized blocks that cement together to form valuable life

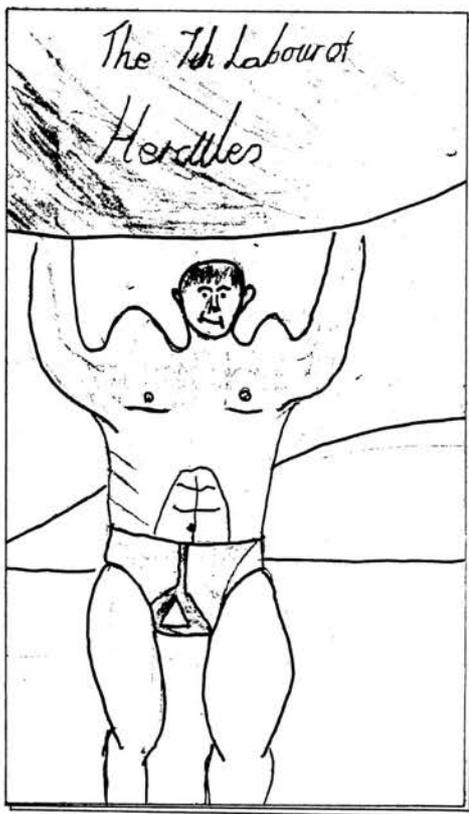
references. Something deep within our being responds to them, even when we are children. This is especially noticeable with the myths and legends of the Inuits, American Indians, Incas, Polynesians and Africans, which have such a striking wise primitiveness and a knowing simplicity.

We are still learning how to use this text and its wide range of myths in our classrooms but we know that for succeeding years there are cross-curricular links possible because some stories tie in with several Humanities units, e.g. Native Americans. However, most importantly for us, we can be covering literature from other cultures and at the same time comfortably and confidently plugging some of the classical gap with important tales like 'Pandora's Box', 'The Minotaur' and 'Orpheus in the Underworld'. Part of the attraction of Horowitz's delivery is his cross-referencing between the tales and his sly inclusion of bits of other stories and brief pen portraits to augment the main themes. 'The Judgement of Paris' is a case in point; besides the basic ingredients, we are treated to the full low-down on Peleus and Thetis, Hera, Athene, Aphrodite and so on.

The possibilities for classwork that have come out of the stories seems infinite. There is a myriad of opportunities for oral work and digressions into all kinds of language activities including Greek and Latin word derivations. My special success was a three-week project with Year 8 (mixed ability) that sprang out of 'The Mares of Diomedes':

1. After reading the story in class and odiscussing the general content, our thoughts turned to the ingredients of 'Heroic Language' and 'Action-packed Storytelling'.
2. The findings were then applied in a small group assignment which was to devise a new labour for Hercules. This would be told to the rest of the class with an emphasis on vivid language and exciting action. In the oral sessions that followed, each group told its tale firstly to one other group and then to the whole class, each time receiving the criticisms and suggestions for adaptation from the listeners.
3. Finally each group set about producing both the book and the story tape of 'The New Labours of Hercules' series. This multi-media enterprise ended up in the Resources Centre appropriately packaged for other pupils.

My tutor group had someone's granny in for the day towards the end of the project. (We'd been looking at old age



in Pastoral and she'd agreed to spend the day with us and talk about the differences between her school days and now.) She was impressed at how the pupils had imprinted their own modernday concerns onto their stories. We had Hercules sorting out the ozone layer, watering the Sahara to reduce famine, involved in rescuing a cure for aids which had got lost under the polar ice-cap and plugging the erupting volcanoes in the world. In one story he ended up mixing it with the fire dragon from Rosemary Sutcliff's **Dragon Slayer** which we'd read in Year 7.

The multi-media angle meant that everyone had a contribution to make and impressive efforts were made by some of the children with special learning difficulties, who seem to be much better dab-hands with IT software than the rest of us and wield microphones better than pens. The artists/designers came into their own with matching book jackets and cassette box covers, whilst the bossy ones supervised noisily and I, with Herculean effort, plugged the gaps in my National Curriculum checklists like an English teacher possessed.

The Kingfisher Book of Myths and Legends, retold by Anthony Horowitz, is published by Kingfisher, 0 86272 156 3, £8.95; 0 86272 786 3, £3.99 pbk

A back-up book box is recommended. Some suggested inclusions are:

Mythical Creatures, Bert Kitchen, Walker, 0 7445 2046 0, £4.99 pbk
Griffin, Hydra, Minotaur, Pegasus, Cerberus and eight others graphically drawn and fully described, plus a useful index to creatures, people, gods and places.

Greek Myths for Young People, Marcia Williams, Walker, 0 7445 2101 7, £9.99
An amusing, busy gem with eight myths told in technicolour cartoon style. There's a wry humour both in the speech bubbles and in the visuals that shouldn't fail to provoke a response.



From **The Greeks and Their Myths**.

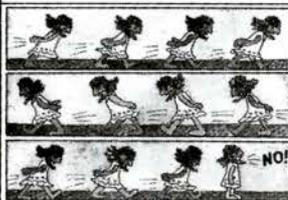
The Greeks and Their Myths, Michael Johnson and John Sharwood Smith, ill. Peter Dennis, Peter Lowe, 0 85654 656 9, £9.95

Quite self-consciously informative, this is excellent value and material for the bright, interested child who demands to know more than the stories. It's brimming with all kinds of scholarly, but accessible background detail about the original makers of the tales and their beliefs, not written specifically, I feel, with a young audience in mind. The contents; index and list of further reading are impressive and should facilitate quick referencing. The dramatic black-and-white line drawings are fiercely evocative and heroically striking in themselves.

Look, too, at this publisher's 'World Mythology' series which is very comprehensive.

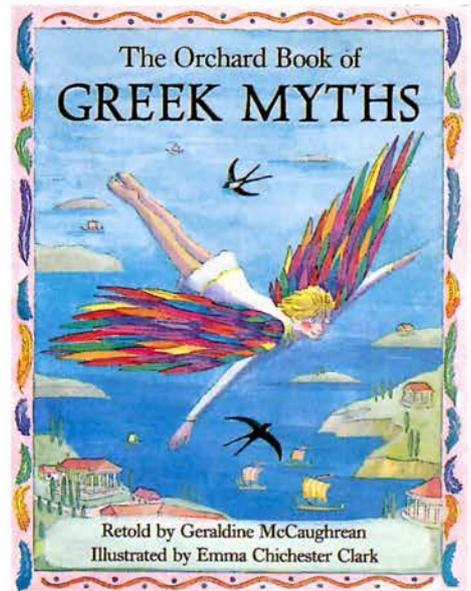


Like most Greeks, Periander, King of Corinth, was a music lover.



So when Arion asked to visit Sicily for a music festival, Periander hated the idea.

From Arion and the Dolphins, **Greek Myths for Young People**.



The Orchard Book of Greek Myths, retold by Geraldine McCaughrean, ill. Emma Chichester Clark, Orchard, 1 85213 373 2, £10.99

Sixteen myths are told here with one or two that aren't often included – like 'Atlanta's Race' and 'Echo and Narcissus'. In her brief foreword the author gives a short background to the stories and ends with a good reason for perpetuating them:

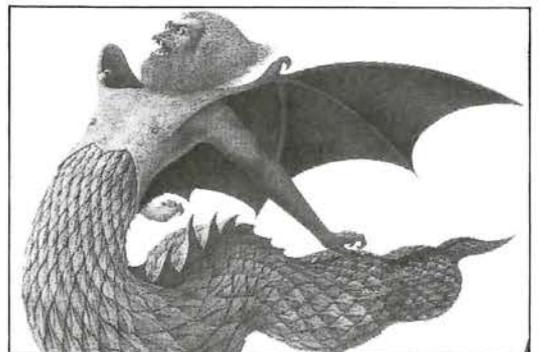
'Because they are full of the things that fascinate anyone in any country, at any time. There are adventures and jokes, fables and fairy stories, thrills and happy endings. In short, the Greek myths are just too good to forget.'

She artfully translates these precepts into a batch of stories where the style is straightforward and homely with understated humour. The full-colour illustrations ably augment the text.

Men and Gods, Rex Warner, New Windmill, 0 435 12012 3, £3.99

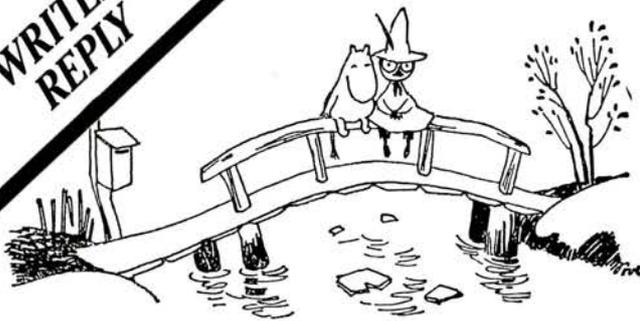
The presentation of this book does it few favours and in truth the style is a bit dated in the light of the titles mentioned above. However, on revisiting it, I found some of the less popular, but nonetheless interesting stories, like 'Phaethon' and 'Oedipus'. This is another choice for the able or inquisitive child who wishes to delve further than the 'picture book myths' and get the closest he can to the original Ovid, or who wishes to follow up a reference from elsewhere. As Rex Warner says in his short introduction, '... they [the myths] have deeply affected our own literature. Those who are ignorant of them will not enjoy English poets as much as they might do.'

There is an accompanying volume – **Greeks and Trojans**, 0 435 12013 1, £3.99.



Typhon, from **Mythical Creatures**.

David Bennett, a regular BfK reviewer, is a senior teacher responsible for the English and Modern Languages Faculty at George Spencer School in Nottinghamshire.

WRITER
REPLY

Why do writers need good teachers as much as teachers need good writers? HENRIETTA BRANFORD explains . . .

'One grey morning the first snow began to fall in the Valley of the Moomins. It fell softly and quietly, and in a few hours everything was white . . . Soon Moominhouse would be nothing but a big, round snowball. The clocks stopped ticking one by one. Winter had come.'



Henrietta Branford. Photo by Paul Carter.

Thus begins my favourite Moomintroll book. There's a map with their house on, the two floors drawn separately so you see where everybody's bedroom is, and Chapter One starts with a picture of Moomintroll and Snufkin sitting on the bridge. A few words underneath tell you what's coming next – five small clouds unexpectedly appear, then Hemulen finds himself a new hobby; that sort of thing.

This whole book is written, illustrated, and designed in a way that's truly inviting: 'Come in,' it says, 'explore, see what you make of all this snow!' (I wrote to Tove Jansson when I was little and she answered in careful printing, in English, with lavish illustrations. I remember feeling rather narked because she seemed to know the Moomins better than I did.)

Fred Inglis in *The Promise of Happiness* says that we write and teach literature because we want children 'to live well, to know and tell the truth', and certain books seem likely to help them do this. I like a bit of dross, who doesn't, and I wouldn't deny it to my children either, but I agree with Fred Inglis. Books which call you into a deeply imagined and well-constructed new world are beyond price; they open doors and windows in your life which, if you're lucky, stay permanently ajar. Not only books, of course: music, rock-climbing, a walk in the woods all quicken the spirit. Television has its uses. But books are so handy, so cheap, so portable somehow. They're one of the most available sources of growth and pleasure that we have at our disposal, a human artefact that can delight and dumbfound us without our having to set foot outside the house. That for me is reason enough for writers to write them and teachers to labour to make them accessible to roomfuls of children.

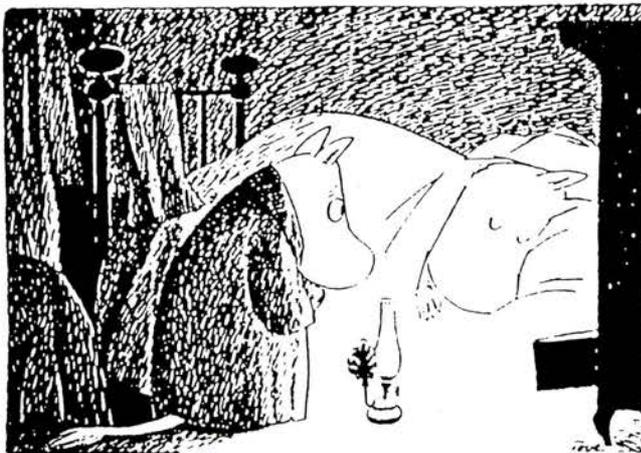
So how can most children find their way to books, living as they do in a profoundly unbookish culture? Not the way I did, surely. I must have been unusually lucky. Education in a more formal sense didn't touch me. I didn't let it. But I was read to, by my mother and by the headmaster of my boarding school, who allowed me to lie under the piano combing my hair while

he read *Great Expectations* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* alternately. Most children, I suspect, must come to books, if they do, in less indulgent ways. Our education experience in Britain is both narrower and shorter than that of our more liberal European neighbours. School anyway is not the best place for books: they should be read in privacy, in the airing-cupboard (if yours is large enough), or by torchlight under the blankets. But for lots of children school is the only place where books are available. I'm amazed that it's possible, in the hurly-burly of the classroom, to make books come alive for children, but I know that if large numbers of teachers weren't doing it successfully, even Roald Dahl wouldn't sell like he does, and the rest of us wouldn't stand a chance.

There are writers who write dull books and get them published by the cartload and some who write nasty, boring books and win prizes. And there are teachers who don't belong in classrooms, whose beggarly practice it will take government legislation in the form of the National Curriculum to shift.

Yet there are others who read aloud well-chosen, lively stories doing all the voices; who knowingly encourage the sort of chaotic and unbridled assemblies that result from studying the work of certain poets; those teachers welcome children into the heart and start of education. They, like most good writers, are in the business of seduction, trying to make a habitat in which children can grow and stretch and open and enjoy and rest. If I could court my readers as lusciously as Enobarbus describing Cleopatra's progress down the Nile, I would still need those teachers to be there, in the leaky overcrowded classrooms, making welcome their motley Monday morning classes. However well a writer writes, for many children it will always be teachers who make safe the place where it feels right to imagine. Chris Zajac in Tracy Kidder's *Among Schoolchildren* should have the last word in any discussion of this process: welcoming a shy child on her first day she says 'I like having you here, Juanita. Do you like being here?' ●

Henrietta Branford is the author of *Royal Blunder*, Doubleday, 0 385 40034 9, £6.95; *Young Corgi*, 0 552 52713 0, £2.50 pbk.



There are eight Moomintroll titles available in paperback from Puffin.

The Promise of Happiness: Value and Meaning in Children's Fiction is published by Cambridge (0 521 27070 7) at £11.95.

Among Schoolchildren is published by Picador (0 330 31817 8) at £5.99 – see Ed's page of *BfK* 69 (July 91) where it got a very enthusiastic review.

A ROUND-UP OF PRIZES

The 10th Anniversary of EMIL

The Kurt Maschler, or Emil, Award was established in 1982 to celebrate the way in which text and illustration work together.

Past winners have included titles with authors and illustrators as distinguished as Ted Hughes, Martin Waddell, John Burningham, Michael Foreman and Barbara Firth.

This year's judges were Quentin Blake, Margaret Meek, Elaine Moss and Chris Powlung, who shortlisted six books from over 100 entries:

Incredible Cross-Sections by Stephen Biesty and Richard Platt (Dorling Kindersley, 0 86318 807 9, £12.00)

A Thousand Yards of Sea by Laura Cecil and Emma Chichester Clark (Methuen, 0 416 18872 9, £9.99)

Jocasta Carr, Movie Star by Roy Gerrard (Gollancz, 0 575 05118 3, £7.99)

The Mink War by Gene Kemp and Andrew Davidson (Faber, 0 571 16312 2, £4.99)

Stanley Bagshaw and the Ice-Cream Ghost by Bob Wilson (Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 12760 2, £8.50)

The winner, who receives a bronze figure of Emil, Erich Kästner's famous character from **Emil and the Detectives**, sculpted by Diana Welch, as well as £1,000 in prize money, was:

RAYMOND BRIGGS for

THE MAN published by Julia MacRae (1 85681 191 3, £9.99)

Readers of **BfK** may recall our haunting front cover last September (No. 76) and our interview with Raymond Briggs on the back page.

Congratulations to **THE MAN!**

The Smarties Book Prize

Chaired by Stephanie Nettell, no stranger to the pages of **BfK**, the judging panel this year consisted of Angela Beeching, BBC TV's executive producer of fiction; Elizabeth Hamill, children's manager at Waterstone's in Newcastle-upon-Tyne; Michael Morpurgo, children's author; and Bob Wilson, children's author and illustrator. From over 300 entries, producing a shortlist of 14 titles, came the following winners:

0-5 Years Category Winner (£2,000):

Nice Work, Little Wolf by Hilda Offen (Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13128 6, £8.50)

6-8 Years Category Winner (£2,000):

The Story of The Creation by Jane Ray (Orchard, 1 85213 281 7, £8.99)

Smarties Book Prize and 9-11 Years Category Winner (£8,000):

The Great Elephant Chase by Gillian Cross (Oxford, 0 19 271672 7, £8.95)

A list full of child-appeal? Let's hope so. A parallel panel of judges, ten members of Class 7C from Edwinstree School in Buntingford, Hertfordshire, who earned their title of Smarties Young Judges by entering the Smarties Schools Competition last summer with an anthology of their own book reviews, thought rather differently...

0-5 Category: **Cockatoos** by Quentin Blake (Cape, 0 224 02885 5, £7.99)

6-8 Category: **Fantastic Stories** by Terry Jones and Michael Foreman (Pavilion, 1 85145 957 X, £12.99)

9-11 Category: **The House of Rats** by Stephen Elboz (Oxford, 0 19 271664 6, £7.95)

From the kids' list, of course, kudos rather than money.

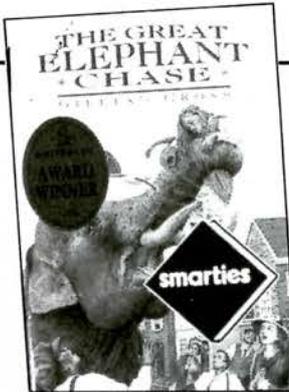
TES Information Book Awards

Winners for 1992 were as follows:

Junior Award – **My First Book of Time** by Claire Llewellyn (Dorling Kindersley, 0 86318 784 6, £6.99)

Senior Award – **Black and British** by David Bygott (Oxford, 0 19 913314 X, £9.95)

See page 31 of **BfK** 77 (Nov 92) for a full review.



The Writers Guild/Macallan Award

... for 1992's best children's book was won by Roy Apps for his novel **The Secret Summer of Daniel Lyons** (Andersen Press, 0 86264 353 8, £6.99) which describes 13-year-old Tom Jube's involvement with a pioneering film company in Sussex in 1909. A self-discovery story with a difference, Margery Fisher wrote of it in **Growing Point**: 'Period details are capably woven into a spanking tale of young curiosity and its uses in an adult world.' Highly recommended.

THAT ELEPHANT AGAIN...

Still hotfooting it, Gillian Cross's **The Great Elephant Chase** (see Smarties Prize above) also won the 1992 Whitbread Award for Children's Fiction. At this rate, Gillian Cross soon won't need any publisher's advances or royalties – she'll be living handsomely on her prize money! Good luck to her, says **BfK**. And so does Keith Barker of the School Library Association who's just published his monograph **Gillian Cross**, following his

own earlier study of Dick King-Smith and Anne Taylor's of Joan Lingard.

It's a warm, generous account of a writer whose stories span the full age-range of childhood, is briefly but accessibly written and takes full advantage of a rare critical luxury: the space to quote extensively from the work of its subject. This, and the previous monographs, are available from The School Library Association, Liden Library, Barrington Close, Liden, Swindon, SN3 6HF, price £5.50 each (£4.50 to SLA members).

The Federation of Children's Book Groups

Silver Jubilee Conference: 5th-7th March 1993

How about helping the Federation celebrate its first 25 years at The Moat House, Stratford-on-Avon? More than 20 children's authors and illustrators will be there from Gollancz, HarperCollins, Hodder & Stoughton, Ladybird, Puffin, Random House, Reed International, Simon & Schuster, Transworld and Walker.

The celebrations include an exhibition of children's artwork (winners of the CBA Competition 1980-1992) and a catalogued display of original drawings and paintings from many top children's illustrators. These will be auctioned and sold to the highest bidders.

Other activities between Friday and Sunday include breakfasts, lunches, parties, receptions, after-dinner speeches, presentations, etc. – which delegates will share with a range of celebrities from the children's book world.

For the full conference programme and booking details, write to Haydn Mudford, 156 Wensleydale Road, Great Barr, Birmingham, B42 1PJ.

THE WAY FORWARD

A day conference to look at pre-school literacy initiatives; to share ideas and to begin to look for a possible national direction.

Saturday, 27th February 1993

9.30 am registration, 10.00 am - 4.30 pm

School of Education, Birmingham University, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT

Conference Fee: £25

Dr Barrie Wade of Birmingham University's School of Education and Maggie Moore, Senior Lecturer at Newman College, will present a report on the BOOKSTART project.

Small group presentations will be made by a range of speakers working in the area of emergent literacy.

Trevor Dickinson, retired HMI, will end the day with a talk entitled 'Life of Language'.

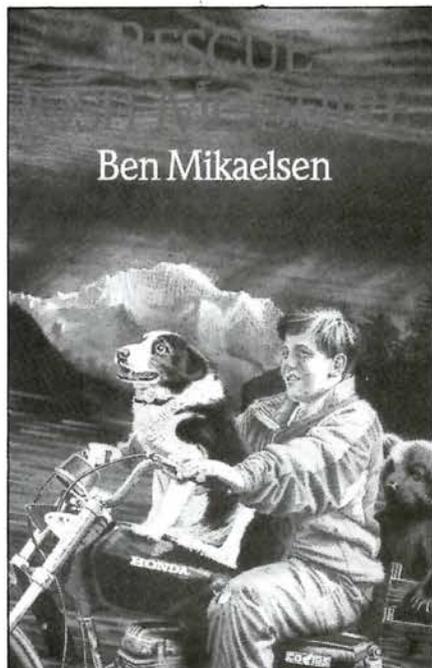
For further details, please contact Wendy Cooling or Jean Egbunike at The Children's Book Foundation, Book Trust, Book House, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ (tel: 081 870 9055/8).

Applications as soon as possible, please!

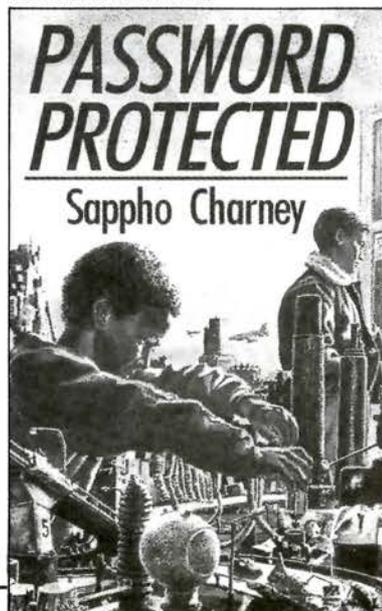
NAOMI LEWIS

Chooses Fiction for Teenage Readers

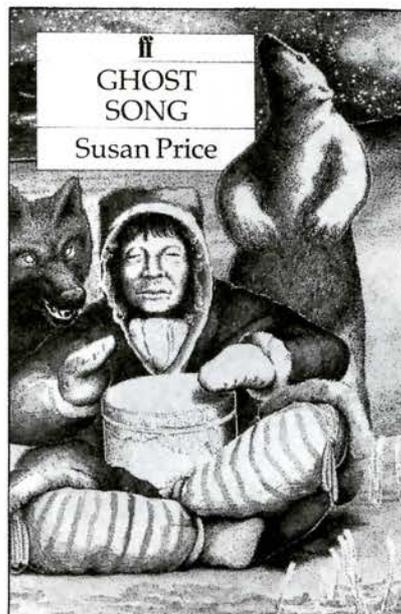
To make a choice of five current novels is not so easy. Let's assume that the co-ed teens and the Sweet Valley lot take good care of themselves – along with one or two other kinds, perhaps. I've finally chosen what seems to me the less predictable and more rewarding books for this age group – though each one belongs to a different area of fiction.



Rescue Josh McGuire by Ben Mikaelson (Julia MacRae, 1 85681 135 2, £8.99) is both timeless and topical. On a spring morning in Montana, macho Dad denies that the bear he has just killed is a female. But Josh (13) has seen the little orphaned cub, and goes back to find it. Learning that it will be sold to the 'laboratories' he hides with it in the mountains; his dog insists on coming too. The story becomes national news; through the boy's one ally, Otis, an embittered scholar and conservationist, now a recluse who takes in injured animals, he sets out his terms. It's a compelling non-stop read. But note the Postscript. The hunting laws were indeed revised in 1984, but a few years later the old bad ways returned. A new tale waits to be told.



Sappho Charney's **Password Protected** (Hutchinson, 0 09 176437 8, £8.99) is included for several reasons. For one thing, it is often very funny. When the school combines computer-training with pen-pal exchanges, the reluctant pen-pal letters provide us with some joyful reader-hilarity. Walt and Quince, 11 or so, are the two chums. Both are bright at school but Dad is Walt's problem. If Walt gets less than 100 for decimals, say, Dad wants to know why. Quince, who gets 100 in every test without even trying, lives with absent-minded teacher Dad. Mum left home two or three years ago, supposedly to study art in New York. Where is she now? But Quince suddenly thinks that he sees her, a bedraggled figure going into a bar. He calls out; she turns, and vanishes into the night. Obsessed with finding her, he makes Walt join in the daily mapped-out search. Yes, there is a weird confrontation. Did I mention that Walt is black and Quince a redhead white?



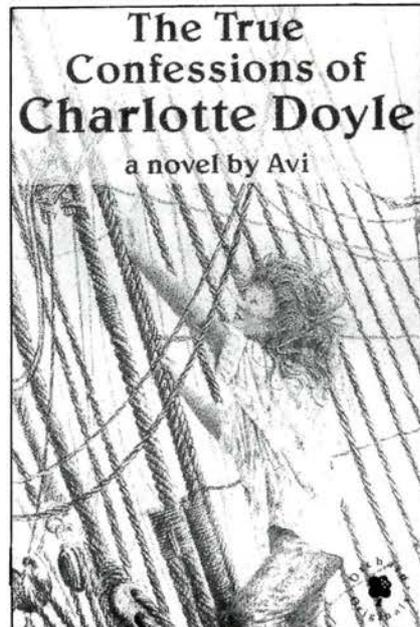
Ghost Song by Susan Price (Faber, 0 571 16410 2, £9.99) is, quite literally, a marvellous book. A serf in the far north, by trade a hunter, toils alone through the winter dark to keep the Czar supplied with furs. Preoccupied, he fails to appease the ghost of a dead trapped sable, and on his return a shaman comes to claim the man's new-born son as his apprentice. The man refuses and refuses (a memorable scene). But the shaman haunts the man through his life, and still more, through his son Amrosi's life as he grows. At last, to free his dead father's spirit (cunningly trapped by the shaman) Amrosi has to find a path to a realm which the living may not enter. *'The spell is carved on a curse-bone, and that curse-bone is in the sable's nest, high in the Iron Ash, at the centre of the Iron Wood, in the Ghost World.'*

'Only shamans travel the road to the Ghost World more than once,' the teller reminds us, 'and it is best left to them.'

IN OUR MARCH ISSUE

Michael Rosen on Books and Schools
Jill Coleman discusses Non-fiction and the National Curriculum
Gordon Dennis on Vernon Scannell
Morag Styles reviews the Latest Verse for Children
Michael Morpurgo in Authorgraph
... plus reviews, reviews, reviews

This is the barest account of an intricate tale told in a stunning alliance of imagination and words. The author clearly knows her Norse myths and Russian fairy lore – maybe her Dante too. But in her rendering of the great final journey, she does not only hold the reader spellbound; she writes as if she were bewitched herself.



'If strong ideas and actions offend you, read no more,' warns the young diarist in **The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle** by Avi (Orchard, 1 85213 299 X, £8.99; 1 85213 300 7, £4.99 pbk). The book isn't this year's currency, I know, but it could have been missed and that would be a pity. In June 1832 Charlotte (13), a prim young miss from a fashionable English boarding school, is about to join her family in America. But why do the porters shun her appointed ship? (Father's choice; he knows the owners.) Why are there no other passengers? Still, there is one gentleman on board – the captain, and she willingly reports to him all the crew's mutterings. What she does not know – yet – is that he is a sadist and killer; that the men can get no justice on land, and intend to overpower him and hold a trial at sea. Of the great storm, of her standing trial for murder (Captain is accuser, judge and jury), of her father's response to the diary, of the splendid end, you must read for yourself. There's a diagram, too, of the ship if you require it.

I see that I have left too little space for a full length treatment of Book Five – maybe because of the question: which should it be? Instead I'll name the great possibilities: Margaret Mahy's **The Underrunners** (Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13170 7, £8.99) and the new paperback of her **Dangerous Spaces** (Puffin, 0 14 034571 X, £2.99); Peter Dickinson's **A Bone From a Dry Sea** (Gollancz, 0 575 05306 2, £10.99), William Mayne's **Low Tide** (Cape, 0 224 03151 1, £8.99), the paperback of Garry Kilworth's **The Drowners** (Mammoth, 0 7497 1049 7, £2.99). Extremely varied as they are, all are distinguished in writing and, indeed, in plot. All show an absolute understanding of the curious, troubling, transitory state of being young – on the edge of the adult world, and often involved with it, but seeing it with a unique and surprising vision.