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July 1995
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the children's book magazine

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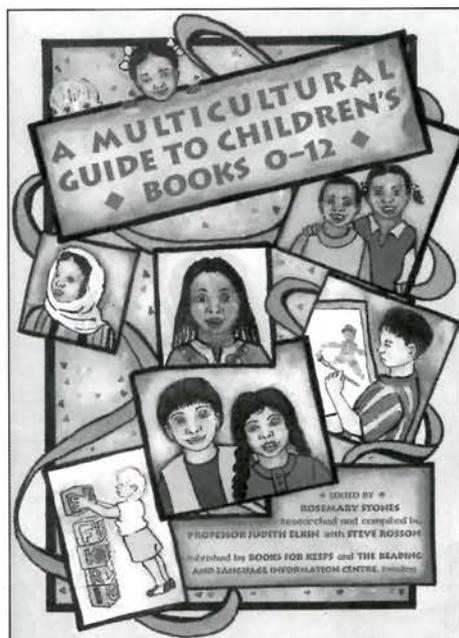
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with **STEVE ROSSON**

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CoverSTORY

July's front cover features the hardback version of Paula Danziger's **Thames Doesn't Rhyme with James**, using an illustration by Joe Csafari. The book is published by Heinemann and we're grateful to them for their help. For further details, see the Authorgraph on page 14.



BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine

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If It Ain't Broke . . .

Editor's PAGE



CHRIS POWLING

. . . don't fix it. This, overwhelmingly, was your response to the Reader Survey we included in our March issue – in a number of cases using those very words. More than ten per cent of our mailing list made a return (statistically very respectable) and every indicator in the questionnaire suggested a readership quite prepared for minor adjustments but very anxious indeed to avoid major alterations. 'We like BfK the way it is' seemed to be the message, 'don't make changes just for the sake of change.'

Well, thanks. As a vote of confidence, the survey had us beaming from ear to ear. Our motive in launching it really wasn't sinister, though . . . simply a feeling that, fifteen years on from our first issue, we should check that we're continuing to offer the right sort of children's book information in a form that remains convenient, appealing and appropriate both to the books themselves and the real-life context in which they're mediated. We'd be masochistic, or just plain daft, to ignore the resounding 'yes' we got as an answer.

Is that it, then? Cosy self-congratulation all round?

Not a bit. For a start, two facts emerged from the survey which could be crucial to any future expansion of BfK. The first confirmed something we've always suspected: that our actual readership extends well beyond our subscriber base since most issues are passed on to others within a particular institution. According to the figures we now have to hand, we're read by somewhere between 35,000 and 40,000 people. Secondly, and this was something of a surprise, more than 70 per cent of subscribers use BfK specifically to help them buy books not simply evaluate them. Potential advertisers, please note. After all, it's only through increased advertising and/or increased subscriptions that we'd be able to fund the standard 40-page issue, preferably monthly, which reader after reader urged on us.

What the survey also made clear was the need to keep the service we offer constantly under review. Warmly supportive though the questionnaire turned out to be, we still received plenty of suggestions for raising our game. All those have been carefully logged for further consideration. Among the most prominent topics you raised were

- * pages for children or by children
- * our reviews section . . . too many books? Too few books? Too up-beat? Too professionally orientated? Not professionally orientated enough?
- * a correspondence page
- * theme- or topic-based book selection
- * an expansion of our news coverage

. . . and so on. Admittedly, we've already tried out some of these and encountered difficulties but that's no reason to avoid a re-think or the devising of a fresh approach.

Of course, we can't hope to please everybody. This was brought sharply home by our enquiry concerning CD-ROM. For every two readers who wanted us to find room to review such material, there were three who gave it a flat, unequivocal veto. Similarly, the reader who congratulated us on our bigger, better illustrations of late and our 'more imaginative use of white borders' was countered almost at once by another who complained of over-size pictures taking up much needed reviewing-space. BfK subscribers may have a common interest in children's books but it doesn't follow from this that they all think alike . . . or, indeed, approach the magazine from the same viewpoint as the following quotation makes clear:

'I think there are not nearly enough lavish articles in praise of Colin McNaughton and his books – a whole issue or indeed a whole series of issues should be devoted to this modest and unassuming man.'

So said . . . Colin McNaughton.

He was joking, of course . . . we think. But Colin's remark was a lovely, tongue-in-cheek example of a general tendency for readers to prioritise their own immediate concerns – for teachers to want more teacherliness, librarians more librarianism, scholars more scholarship, publishers more on publishing, booksellers more on bookselling, bookish parents more on bookish parenting, etcetera. Now this is entirely fair and completely understandable. To shift our balance disproportionately towards any particular set of interests, though, would threaten what's surely one of BfK's great strengths: it's a forum where all constituencies in the children's book world can meet and find out more about each other. Our aim, it seems to us, should be to supplement and contextualise other more specialist publications in the field rather than strive to replace them.

Wouldn't you agree?

On second thoughts, don't answer that. We've got quite enough data to cope with for the time being. What's more, I'd better take heed of the reader who demanded less editorial 'waffle'. Since I'd been preening myself a bit after an earlier comment on how well the editor's page set the tone for the magazine as a whole, this sorted me out, I can tell you!

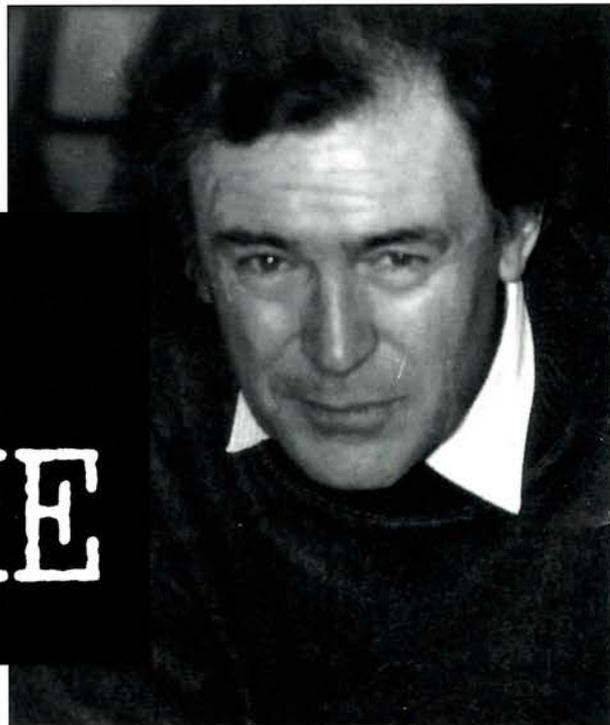
Enjoy the issue.

Chris

Dennis Hamley

On Writing

POINT CRIME



When I said I was attempting a 'Point Crime', some asked, 'Why are you doing this, Dennis?' I understand their problem. Series books are seen as formula fiction, cliché-ridden, slackly written, full of venal wish-fulfillment fantasy, actually inimical to the development of good reading habits: they are published for profit and exploitation of the market; bad money drives out good and children will drown in pap – or worse. 'So have I heard and do in part believe it.' Or *did*. Now I'm not so sure.

I'm not talking about changes in the sociology of children's books or new rules of engagement in the battle for their survival. Though I could, at length. But when my long-standing publisher Andre Deutsch sold the children's division to Scholastic I was suddenly in the Point camp: the UK 'Point Crime' list was being set up together with the existing US 'Point Horror' list, with Fantasy, Romance and Sci-Fi. And the intriguing proposition was put to me: 'Ruth Rendell or Colin Dexter for kids'.

Well, I regard Rendell and Dexter as among today's finest writers – in fiction generally as well as their own sub-genre. And what a sub-genre! All new writing is within a tradition: that's my central tenet. If you aren't in a tradition there's nothing to follow: nothing to rebel against. An invitation to join – in however small a way – the tradition of Poe, Wilkie Collins, Dickens himself, Conan Doyle, Dorothy L Sayers, Raymond Chandler and P D James was something to take very seriously. To check, I read previous 'Point Crime' titles by writers I admire – Jill Bennett, Anne Cassidy, Peter Beere, David Belbin, Malcolm Rose. These books, I thought, were no soft options. They bore the hallmarks which make crime fiction an important branch of the novel – and also important texts for young people to grapple with and interrogate.

All narrative starts with a problematic situation which, through action and formal construction, is resolved. Both author and reader have tasks in this resolution. The author plays fair, setting a track which, though concealed, can be followed. The reader attends to the text, asks it questions and reserves the right to find the answers unsatisfactory. Crime fiction, with its built-in puzzles, shows these features clearly. The ideal close for crime fiction, when the villain is unmasked, is for the reader to say two things at once: 'That was absolutely inevitable: that was a complete surprise.' That's a double seldom won, always aimed for. The two reactions together mean the great satisfaction for the reader. And, of course, it is so with *all* narrative.

I know this satisfaction. When I was 'Point Crime' age myself, I read detective stories, many by names I've long forgotten. Oddly, though, Agatha Christie was not among them. Dorothy L Sayers was – and I still think *The Nine Tailors* is one of the great twentieth-century novels. Like many of my generation I found radio a huge influence – if our parents could afford television sets, what was shown was choiceless, grey patronising rubbish. But Francis Durbridge's *Paul Temple* radio plays in particular held us agog – eight half-hour episodes, a murder an episode, the criminal unmasked at the end and *always* committing suicide before the police (*never* the cops or the Old Bill) came puffing up. We made bets on the school bus on the murderer's identity, discussed plot leads, character, relationships, motive. Unconsciously, we were learning to discriminate and talk critically. This is what Charles Sarland in his *Signal* articles on Teenage Horrors notes children doing with their shared 'Point

Horror' books – which Steve Rosson (I believe fatally for his case) does not (according to the November '94 issue of *B/K*).

For me, the form dropped away as I moved to other literature. But I knew detective and crime fiction had helped me become a critical reader and I still found peculiar pleasure when I read a Freeling, a Rendell, or a P D James.

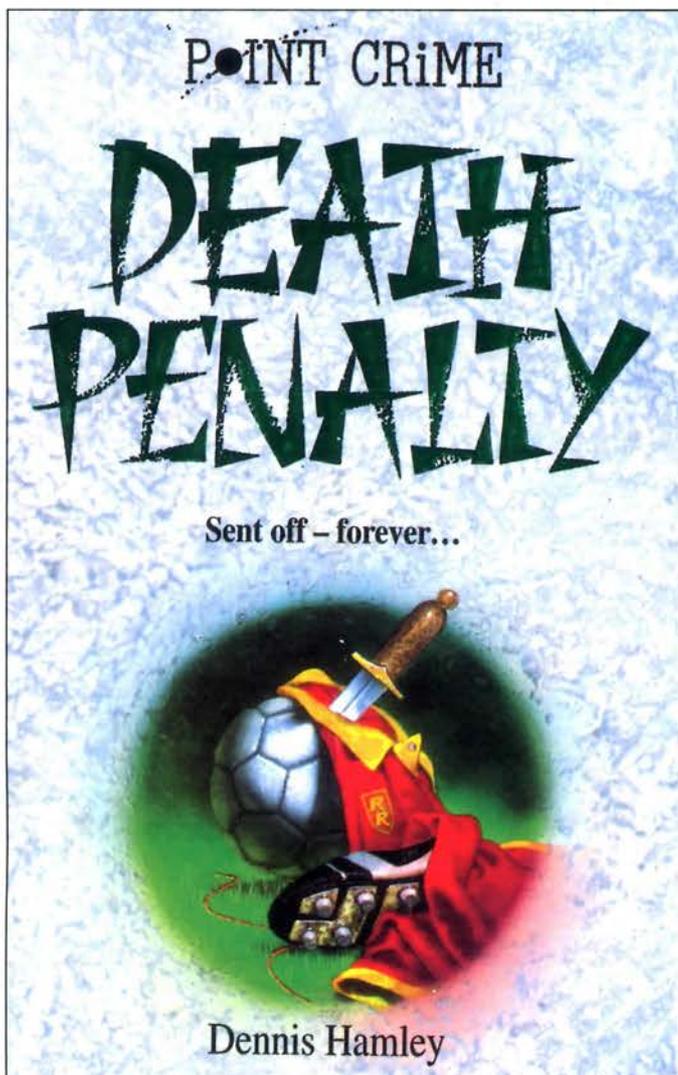
Then the suggestion came. I said at once, 'Yes, I *will*.' Here was a chance to attempt a significant form to the best of my ability. I was *not* writing *The Hardy Boys* or *Nancy Drew* (but what right have I to knock them?), nor was I indulging 'a morbid taste for bones'. (Let us, by the way, dispose of the canard that by writing murder stories we descend into the gutter. Deaths in these books are plot-led, not gloried in for their own sakes, are punished by an in-built and rigorous system of justice. I have no patience with those who think we are writing video-nasty equivalents. And they should be careful as well – we are *supposed* to be on the same side.)

So I was committed. The feeling which comes after promising to deliver, by an ominously close date, a 40,000-word work of original fiction when there's not a thought in your head is an odd mix of recklessness and despair – doubly so because this was a form I was not sure, despite writer's bravery in the face of the editor, I could tackle adequately.

However, I started from first principles. In all fiction, the background is important: in detective fiction the need is to introduce a tight cast of characters which includes the villain because you can't tack your solution on at the end. My first decision was quickly made. I would return to football, a lifelong passion and already the setting for novels and stories of mine. Straight away I had a potential cast-list of victims and suspects – the personnel of a football club. I had a structure – the rhythm of the football season: a match and a murder every week. The climax was obvious – it *had* to be at Wembley. What would happen there? As a football purist I don't like cups and leagues decided by penalties but as a spectator I find penalty shoot-outs incredibly exciting. Was there a way, I wondered, to make a whole plot balance on the tip of the final penalty which would decide everything? That was a good challenge because it properly defined the task and gave me a title – *Death Penalty*.

When I reviewed progress I realised I'd done nothing different from what I always do in setting up stories. Many writers see characters first, others pose questions to answer. I recognise what C S Lewis said in *On Three Ways of Writing for Children* about seeing pictures and from them deducing an appropriate form. But, so far, there were no individual characters, no motive. How would I find them?

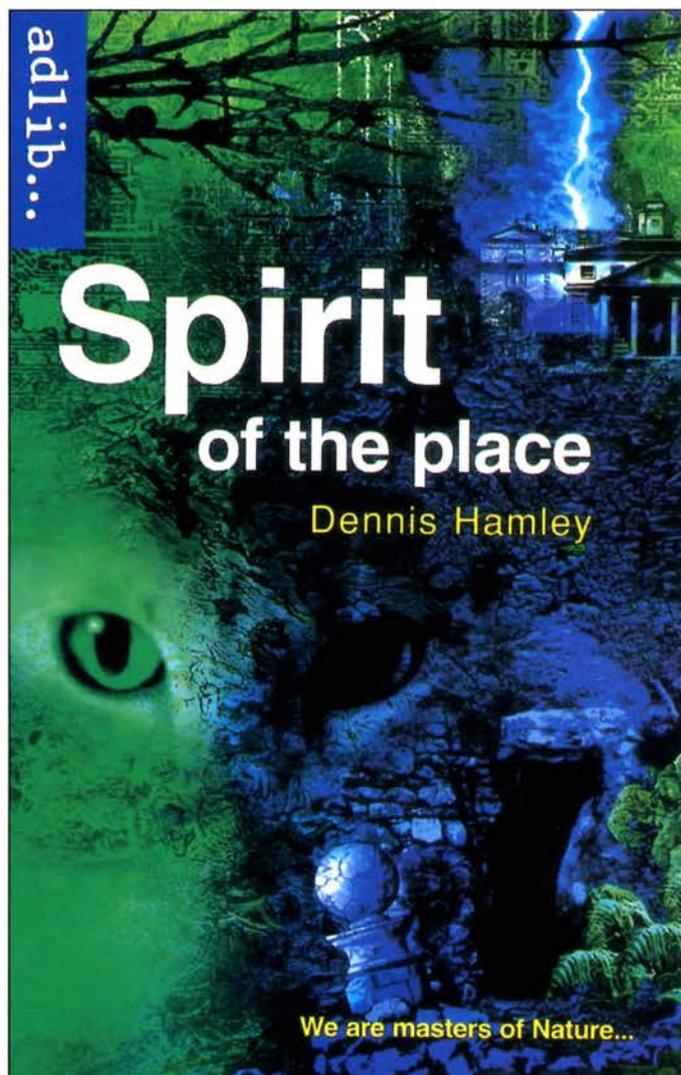
There's only one way. Look back into what you *know*. My football club needed a name. I wanted it to play real clubs although it was fictional. Into my mind swam 'Radwick Rangers', the club at the centre of a wonderful football story in *The Hotspur* in the early 50s: 'The Team That Died'. This uncannily forecast the 1958 Manchester United Munich disaster. Then came memories of a huge football bribes scandal in the 60s (that *Death Penalty* coincided with a new one was coincidence, not prescience), and with it the mainsprings for a revenge theme, a murderer and a motive. Good – but where was the dauntingly intricate construction of Dexter or James?



I used to think there were two sorts of writer. The first planned everything before writing; the second just wrote. I tried to be the first, failed, decided I was the second. Now, I see no difference. My first draft, bashed through quickly to see where it goes, *is* my plan. Only in the act of writing can I pick up the hints, make the necessary connections, experience the delight of 'Of course!' as the relationships and causes appear. I read my first chapter to Year 7 in a Middle School, asking them how they thought the story might progress. I was pleased: they picked up one big hint that I wanted them to but didn't spot what I feared was a real giveaway (and no one has since, which is amazing!). Then came a little miracle. I told them the finale would be at Wembley but I needed to know more details about the place. Whereupon one boy gave me exact details of the layout of the Twin Towers while another produced a ticket for a Wembley Tour. Wonderful! So was the tour: I recommend it. And Corry and Graham found the book dedicated to them.

I sent the manuscript to Scholastic three months and five drafts later knowing this would not be the end of things. Julia Moffatt, the Point Editor, is a close and critical reader, homing in unerringly on slips, illogicalities, non-sequiturs. For these books, that's essential. One miscalculation can make the whole edifice collapse. Julia gave me a daunting agenda of revisions, all of which tightened and improved the book, accounting for a complete extra draft.

Some odd things happened on the way. My first wish was for my murderer's justice-cheating leap to be from Wembley's famous Twin Towers. A telephone conversation with the Wembley press officer put paid to that! Hunting for an alternative high place I settled on a road bridge visible from our front bedroom windows. The spot now has an eerie significance for me. In reading the first manuscript, Julia showed why it's sometimes hard for males to write football books for female editors: 'I don't know much about football and I'm always intrigued to find out new things, so is it some sort of initiation rite that young players are "lid-gonged"?' I found the reference and corrected the typing slip in my first mention of Stu and his mates living in a 'club lodging house'. Another piece of editing showed how closeness to a story can make its writer sometimes peculiarly blind. I don't want to give too much away, but Mrs Grundy and her dead Radwick-supporting husband are not all they seem. I sent the manuscript in, quite sure there was no need to explain this. Julia conclusively demonstrated otherwise. Abashed at my



myopia I stitched in a passage I now regard as one of the best, most chilling things in the book.

So there it was: my 'Point Crime' in the can. I wanted to repeat this invigorating experience, and resolved to make every autumn 'Crime Time' for as long as I can hold a pen. **Deadly Music** appears in November with the background of a youth orchestra on tour, playing a specially written piece. Elgar dedicated his Enigma variations to particular people. What if my composer did the same but every time the variations are played, a dedicatee is murdered? That's a nice 'What if?' - I made a story out of it. Next will be a horse-racing mystery (Dick Francis, eat your heart out . . .) and after that I hope to fulfil a long ambition and write a medieval mystery.

That's the beauty of writing for young people. I can write Crimes *as well as* other books, not *instead of*. I don't want to sound teacherish, but there's a real way in which books for young people enable them to tackle more complex and demanding texts later. When I wrote **Hare's Choice**, **Badger's Fate** and **Hawk's Vision**, part of me said, 'These readers one day may want to tackle Italo Calvino.' Anyone who reads my forthcoming **Spirit of the Place** may be drawn to Antonia Byatt and Peter Ackroyd. So if a reader comes to **Death Penalty** because of the football and leaves with the start of a taste for Ruth Rendell and Colin Dexter I'll be well pleased. And if the adult Rendell-addict finds **Death Penalty** worth reading I'll be equally pleased. After all, 'in my father's house are many mansions' and there are just as many routes to the ideal goal of a society of discriminating and critical readers. Critics of the whole Point concept carp at their peril. Evidence from the readers is overwhelming: the testimony of its writers, not just me, should be as significant. ■

Dennis Hamley's books mentioned all come from Scholastic:

Death Penalty, 0 590 55705 X, £2.99

Badger's Fate, 0 590 54019 X, £8.99

Hawk's Vision, 0 590 54129 3, £8.99

Hare's Choice is out-of-print.

Spirit of the Place is published in September and **Deadly Music** in November.

The Charles Sarland articles in *Signal* are:

'Attack of the Teenage Horrors: Theme and Meaning in Popular Series Fiction', No. 73, January 1994

'Revenge of the Teenage Horrors: Pleasure, Quality and Canonicity in (and out of) Popular Series Fiction', No. 74, May 1994

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 review.

Nursery/Infant REVIEWS



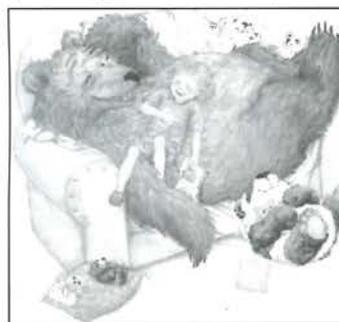
Draw Me a Star

Eric Carle, Picture Puffin (Mar 95),
0 14 054927 7, £4.99

A large, dramatic format suits this imaginative book perfectly. Eric Carle's artwork tells a cumulative story of an artist who is creating a picture, adding another element at each opening and then becoming part of the picture himself. If you wish, you could draw parallels with the story of the Creation or you may prefer the simple explanation offered by the biographical note at the end. Whatever might be read into it, this is a splendid book for its colour, its richness and its potential for thought and imagination. Highly recommended for any young child. LW

Jenny's Bear

Michael Ratnett, ill. June Goulding, Red Fox (Mar 95), 0 09 974370 1, £4.50



A 'pretend friend' story with a difference, since this pretend friend is a bear. Jenny loves bears and has a collection of toy ones, but wants a real bear to come to stay. She prepares the garden shed as a home for any bears that may be passing and is delighted when one arrives to play. His first visit is brief but when the snow falls he returns to spend the winter with Jenny. Imaginatively told and with warm, interesting illustrations, this will be popular with any child who loves teddies. LW

Fly By Night

June Crebbin, ill. Stephen Lambert, Walker (Apr 95),
0 7445 3627 8, £3.99

Mother Owl and Blink sit on a branch at the edge of the wood through a long summer's day. Mother Owl sleeps but Blink watches and waits and waits - when will it be his turn? He watches the creatures of the wood - but when will it be his turn? As dusk draws in, he dozes and suddenly the time is now - the anticipation, the nervous excitement and finally the timeless revelling glory of his maiden flight are exquisitely drawn in words and illustrations. This book will be treasured for it touches the spirit. JS

The Sheep Gave a Leap

Hilda Offen, Red Fox (Mar 95), 0 09 916521 X, £4.50



The sheep gave a leap.



Jump in the air

This is not a book, it's an exercise routine and must surely beat family aerobics in front of the television. It's guaranteed to send adults and toddlers into hysteria as the family is supposed to emulate dancing cows, twirling pigs, swaying hippos and somersaulting seals! No one can escape - there are specific instructions for adults - as the animal show rolls inexorably on.

P.S. Nursery Teachers please note - it adapts hilariously for movement sessions JS

Mr Little's Noisy Boat

Richard Fowler, Mammoth (Mar 95),
0 7497 1027 6, £3.99

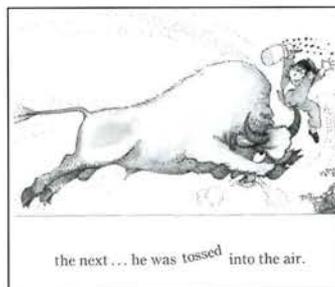
Here's an information book with a difference. Richard Fowler carefully

paces facts about the parts of a boat - fascinating to me, a landlubber, and the young children who shared the book with me - with flaps which hide zanier and zanier 'helpers'. JS

Mr McGee and the Blackberry Jam

Pamela Allen, Picture Puffin (Mar 95),
0 14 054501 8, £3.99

POETRY



the next ... he was tossed into the air.

Pamela Allen's delightfully awkward anti-hero sets out with Mr Bean-like determination to pick blackberries. Disastrous consequences inevitably follow when a jealous bull resents the unwelcome attention the cows shower upon him. The verse romps along and the illustrations provide a fitting accompaniment. This will be a great favourite in Nurseries and Infant Classes. JS

Walking Through the Jungle

Julie Lacome, Walker (Mar 95),
0 7445 3643 X, £3.99

Julie Lacome has produced a lovely repetitive book about the creatures of the jungle looking for their tea. It lends itself beautifully to drama work and re-reading after re-reading. The illustrations are bright and appealing, the text demands prediction and builds in mounting anticipation, while the catch-line is bound to be shouted in a resounding chorus. JS

Ellen and Penguin

Clara Vulliamy, Walker (Mar 95),
0 7445 3658 8, £4.50

A Big Day for Little Jack

Inga Moore, Walker (Mar 95),
0 7445 3626 X, £3.99

I've put these books together for review because their subject-matter is so similar and is an important one for young children. Both books deal, very sensitively and interestingly, with a small child's fear of taking steps into the outside world. They show how a loved toy can act as a catalyst and support by projecting the child character's fears onto the toy.



Penguin felt really horrible. He wanted to go home.

The first tells of a little girl who is nervous of the big playground in the park with its slide and swings and bigger, bolder children. The second is about a little rabbit asked to his first party and frightened of going alone. Perhaps there is rather too easy a solution implied in both books but small children will identify with, and find comfort in, the stories, while parents might find ideas for helping a shy child to find friends and social skills.



A question for the publisher - both books were published at the same time and are the same size; I wonder why the price difference? LW

Cat in a Flap

Shoo Rayner, Picture Puffin (Mar 95),
0 14 054860 2, £3.99

Shoo Rayner's latest paperback has all the verve and zany humour we've come to expect from him. It has been devoured and yet the flaps have taken the strain - thank you, Puffin.

Cat's attempts to catch a mouse start, as all good plans do, with research through the available literature. However, the wily mice are one step ahead all along, for they, too, have read the book! With every plan foiled, Cat resorts to the last injunction:

'6. If all else fails ... give up ... and make friends.'

Bubble text, illustrations and flaps combine to make this a book which not only appeals but brings with it an unlikely but reassuring message. JS

The winner of the 1995 Mother Goose Award for the most exciting newcomer to British children's book illustration is **Flora McDonnell** for

I LOVE ANIMALS

Charlotte Voake, one of this year's judges, reports

At this year's Mother Goose ceremony a guest asked me how we came to our decision so I thought it would be interesting to describe the process.

It begins well before the judges meet in March; from about Christmas, books start arriving in the post. This means we have plenty of time to think about them and look at them, which is good, because some books grow on you gradually. Actually, with this year's winner we were all pretty smitten from the very start. The titles considered are by illustrators new (not necessarily young) to children's books, and the variety of subject matter and style is, of course, huge.

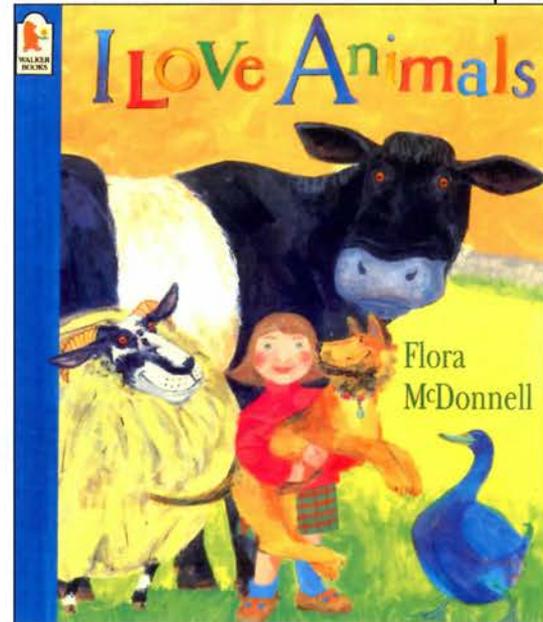
For this prize we're looking for something fairly specific – what the judges hope to see is something new and fresh (not necessarily perfect) – a talent that will develop. By the time the judges meet everyone has a good idea of the books they think are potential winners. We sit and compare thoughts and eventually arrive at a shortlist. Then we talk about each book and try to decide which one most fits the remit of the prize. And this year we thought the most exciting newcomer was Flora

McDonnell for her lovely, bold and thrilling paintings of animals in *I Love Animals* published by Walker Books (0 7445 3726 6, £8.99; 0 7445 4346 0, £4.99 pbk).

Everyone included on the shortlist is invited to the Award Ceremony and it's there that the winner is announced. For anyone who doesn't know what it feels like to be on the receiving end of this sort of judgement I'm reminded of something Quentin Blake once said: 'it's like being invited to a dinner where only one guest gets a meal.'

The golden goose egg and a cheque for £1,000 was presented to Flora McDonnell at a reception held by the sponsors, Books For Children. Julia Eccleshare, another judge, praised the quality and variety of this year's entries, but concluded 'it was the boldness, energy and direct child appeal of Flora McDonnell's illustrations that impressed the judges.'

On this year's shortlist were Andy DaVolls for *Tano and Binti* written by Linda DaVolls (Heinemann, 0 434 96630 4, £8.99); Sara Fanelli for *Button* (ABC, 1 85406 186 0,



£9.95); Cathie Felstead for *A Caribbean Dozen* (Walker, 0 7445 2172 6, £14.99) and Michael Gaffney for *The Secret Forests* (David Bennett Books, 1 85602 127 0, £9.99).

Other judges this year were Nicola Bayley, Wendy Cooling, Michael Foreman, Sally Grindley, and Colin Hawkins. ■

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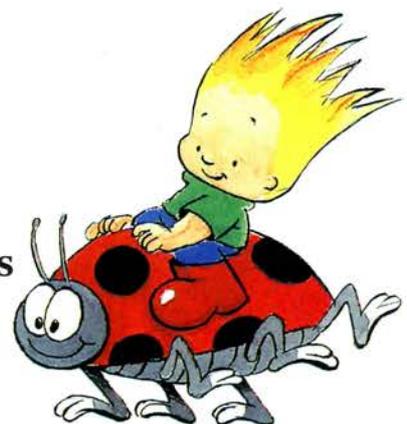
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Granny's QuiltPenny Ives, *Picture Puffin*(Mar 95),
0 14 054560 3, £3.99

Granny's patchwork quilt is really her autobiography for sewn into it are tiny pieces from the dresses she had as she grew up. While she tells her own story, readers (and her granddaughter) learn something of her memories of schooldays, her first dance, her wedding and her evacuation. This is a warm, evocatively illustrated tale and a marvellous resource for historical exploration at Key Stage One. **JB**

Under the StairsFiona Dunbar, *Red Fox*(Apr 95),
0 09 916511 2, £4.50

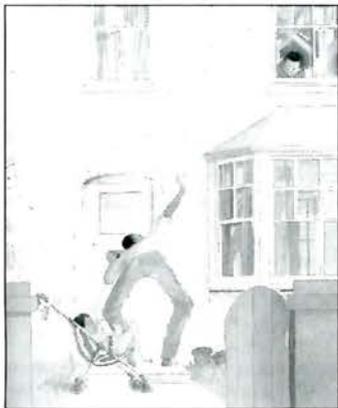
'It's boring spending Sunday afternoons at Aunt Sarah's.' At least, that's what Sophie thought until she disobeyed her aunt and went under the stairs. There she discovers a whole new world of strange creatures such as the Brush-hogs, the Golflogg, not to mention the terrible Hooversaurus with whom she does battle.

The transmogrification of familiar objects into surreal creatures is made the more dramatic by Fiona Dunbar's realistic illustrative style. A story which reflects children's imaginative and inventive play. **JB**

Mr Pam Pam and the Hullabazoo

Trish Cooke, ill. Patrice Aggs, Walker (Apr 95),

0 7445 4311 8, £4.50



Mr Pam Pam, a gangling beanpole of a man, kids young and old alike about the Hullabazoo. This apparition with yellow hands, green moustache, red-and-black spotted tie and purple socks, which bounces and twizzles, is always out of sight, just gone or around the corner. Until one day there he is . . .

A zest for life, colour, fun and movement bubble from both words and pictures in this appealing story. **JB**

You Should See My Dog

Martin Oliver, ill. Sami Sweeten, Hippo (Mar 95),

0 590 55711 4, £3.99

This is very good value, being a story and a puzzle book in one. Each page is packed with dense and action-filled pictures which, combined with the questions in the text, encourage children to look very carefully to find the answers to a number of different puzzles. The illustrations are partic-

ularly nice and make this more than the worthy but dull book it could have been. Young children will enjoy the challenge of looking closely and it's ideal for reading aloud with an adult as there's a lot to talk and wonder about. **LW**

Connie and RolloDick King-Smith, ill. Judy Brown, *Young Corgi* (Apr 95),

0 552 52795 5, £2.50

Two entertaining stories for young, newly independent readers or older, slower ones about two precocious children. Connie is born able to do the most difficult mental arithmetic, and Rollo always speaks in rhyme. Dick King-Smith evidently has more admiration for those who can use language than those who can do calculations, for Connie's talents become a terrible burden to her parents whilst Rollo goes on to a happy and long life.

They took off his nappy and sat him on the pot, and he performed. Then he exclaimed triumphantly:



His mum and dad looked at one another.

Both stories are amusing and, together with the short chapters, will be popular with 6- to 8-year-olds. **LW**

Cat's Witch and the WizardKara May, ill. Doffy Weir, *Red Fox* (Mar 95),

0 09 942751 6, £2.99

In this jolly tale Cat's Witch is being put out of business by the hi-tec wizard who's recently moved into town. With his computers, chemicals and lasers, he seems the perfect modern answer to the problems of the people of Wantwich. However, there are some complications, like Gobtrolls, which are not amenable to hi-tec solutions and Cat's Witch comes into her own with some genuine old-fashioned magic. The happy ending is the perfect compromise between the new magic and the old. Good fun, well-written, well-illustrated - this will be popular with younger juniors. **LW**

Prince Vince and the Case of the Smelly Goat

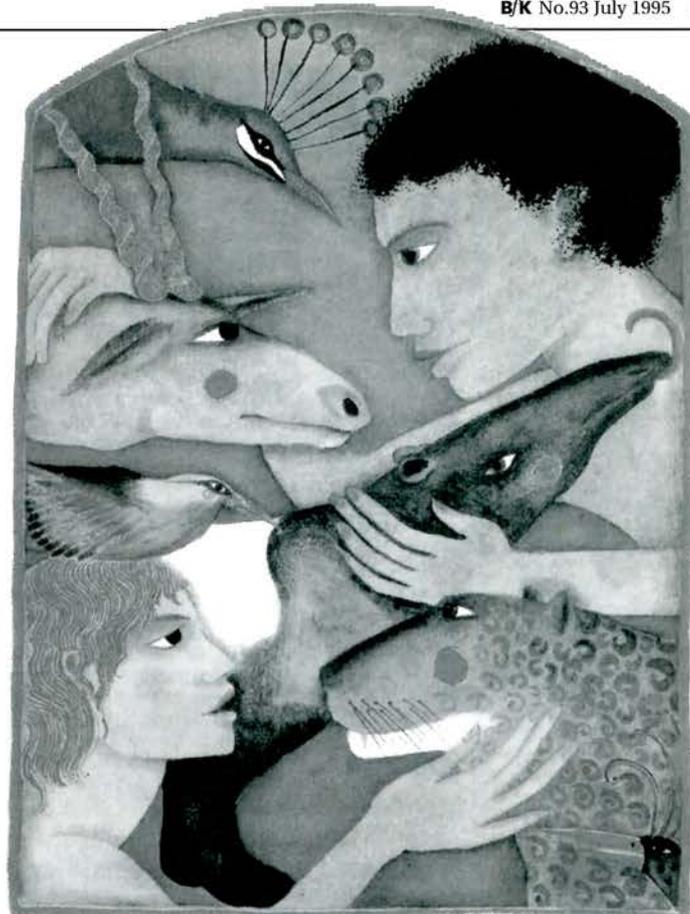
0 340 62653 4

Prince Vince and the Hot Diggory Dogs

0 340 62654 2

Valerie Wilding, ill. Guy Parker-Rees, Hodder (Apr 95), £2.99 each

Convincing your parents that you've really grown up is always a tricky business, particularly when you're



heir to the throne and been cursed with the name Prince Vincent Alexandro de Maximus Rot. In the first book Prince Vince, with real royal pluck, sets off to trail a goat. Spurred on by a collection of the wimpiest guardsmen I've ever seen, he eventually finds the goat and learns a lot about people too. A superb read for confident goat-lovers.



The second tale is a simply glorious confusion for Prince Vince to untangle. Good ideas for raising money come thick and fast, but no one has accounted for Hot Diggory. I loved the pace of this story; it bounces along making us giggle at every page, yet the vocabulary is suitable for the newly confident reader - and it's a real book! Do look out for Goofer: what a useful canine to have around. **PH**

The Story of the CreationJane Ray, Orchard (Apr 95),
1 85213 948 X, £4.99

Rich with words adapted from the

'Adam and Eve gave a name to every creature they saw.' From *The Story of the Creation*.

book of Genesis, Jane Ray's illustrations give immediacy and brilliance to a difficult story. The words have some lovely contemporary deviations; why do I always visualise sardines in cans? The pictures are dazzling and detailed - they beg to be talked about and shared. For the very young, this is a wonderful way into the Old Testament. **PH**

Tabby's C.A.T.

Stan Cullimore, ill. Peter Kavanagh, Yearling

(Apr 95),

0 440 86332 5, £2.99

First E.T. and now A.T., or rather C.A.T., not the furry variety, you understand, but the talking alien variety. Tabby wants a kitten but the C.A.T. she gets is far from home and needs more than milk and fish. An exciting series of hilarious adventures makes the journey uncertain and shows mankind to be a greedy, money-grabbing lot. Yes, there is a happy ending but not quite what you'd expect and not where you'd expect it to be. **PH**

Tales Alive!

Susan Milord, Williamson Publishing,

0 913589 79 9, \$15.95

(no UK price available)

A lushly presented collection of folk tales from around the world, many of them unfamiliar to this reviewer. Each story is accompanied by a teaching kit of related activities, which include toys, games and instruments to make, recipes, art projects, science investigations and book-making. The result is a little overcrowded and difficult to negotiate, but this is a handy resource for storytime and general browsing. **GH**

Junior/MiddleREVIEWS

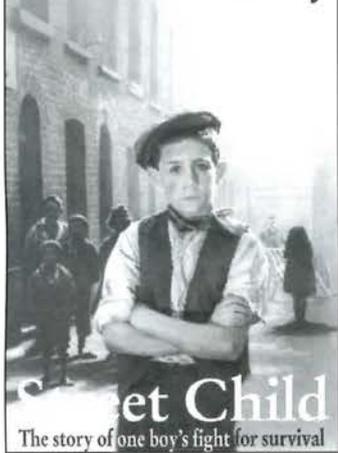
United on Vacation

Linda Hoy, Walker

(Mar 95), 0 7445 3697 9, £3.99

Don't worry if (like me) you can't stand football! I read this book in the name of duty and had the most wonderfully entertaining time. George is a passionate fan of Sheffield United and spends a good deal of his time (and parents' phone bill) taking part in 'Praise or Grumble', the phone-in on his local radio station. With the family business in dire straits, comforts are few in the household but George's luck seems to have changed when he's the winner of United's Christmas Raffle Star Prize - a fortnight's holiday for four in Djerba. However, when his mum and dad decide to sell the holiday and, worse, his gran comes home from Tenerife and presents him with a football strip of United's deadly rivals, things look bad. Very bad. But just as in his beloved game, victory can be snatched even in extra time and George does get his holiday - though not quite in the way he expected. VB

Berlie Doherty



Street Child

Berlie Doherty, Lions

(Mar 95), 0 00 674020 0, £3.50

'Only thing I've got, is my name. And I've given it away to this man. Barnie, his name is, or something like that . . . "Mister," I call him, to his face, that is. But there's a little space in my head where his name is Barnie.'

The Barnie of this story is Doctor Barnardo and the boy is Jim Jarvis, the lad who led to him founding his refuge for children of the street in Victorian times, and eventually to the worldwide institution of today.

Escaping from the cruel regime of a workhouse school, Jim and Tip, his friend, walk the streets of London where they find work as carpet-beaters, but eventually Jim decides to find the grand house where he'd last seen his sister. London is a cruel and lonely place for a child and after many terrors and adventures, Jim meets the man who was to change his life and those of countless children in the future. An exciting, moving story of the appalling conditions of Victorian London and the deprivation suffered by those who often, through no fault of their own,

lived lives of abject poverty and danger. VB

Red Herring

Eileen Dunlop, ill. Liz

O'Sullivan, Puffin (Mar 95), 0 14 036905 8, £3.99

This book reads like a chain of pulp fiction clichés: an over-inquisitive guest turns up at a hotel and alienates the proprietor's children with her nastiness; a cryptic message from a stranger's distant childhood is found by chance; a bag of jewellery is extracted from an old doll; the children are separated from their parents and locked in an attic; old family hatreds are rekindled and resolved . . . However, the chain is forged with such unassuming skill I found it impossible to put the book down. It's true that the pulp does get a bit over-soggy in the final chapter, but this will provide an exciting, escapist jaunt for newly independent readers, and a good spot-the-motif source for those more jaded. GH

William at War

Richmal Crompton, ill

Thomas Henry, Macmillan (Mar 95), 0 333 63793 3, £3.99



"LADIES AN' GENTLEMEN," HE SHOUTED ABOVE THE UPROAR. "WILL YOU KINDLY SHUT UP AN' LISTEN TO ME? I'M GOIN' TO TELL YOU HOW TO WIN THE WAR."

Ten stories featuring the way in which Just William did his bit for the war effort. The hero's unwitting ability to destroy the pretensions and composites of the adult world while attempting to emulate the public-spirited endeavours of his elders, are depicted in hilariously straight-faced prose. The final story, in which the outlaws' attempts to mount a victory pageant result in a farce as vulgar as anything seen on this year's VE Day, is an almost prophetic masterpiece. The social values reflected in the stories are, of course, of their time, providing the well-guided young reader with the bonus of some richly embedded anthropological data on a lost British tribe. GH

Ruth and the Blue Horse

Charles Ashton, ill. Emma

Chichester Clark, Walker (Apr 95), 0 7445 3685 5, £3.50

When her family move out of their farm to a quiet house with no animals but the family cats, Ruth grieves for the life and the lives she's had to abandon. Then she befriends

a strange blue horse in a nearby field, who seems to understand her feelings, and even her language. For a while, Ruth is comforted, but when she attempts to make new friends, it becomes apparent that the horse is a source of disruptive passion rather than consolation.

This is a haunting and enigmatic book, presenting an unusually indeterminate ending after an alarming climax. Highly recommended for fluent and newly independent readers in search of something different. GH

The Big Baby

Anthony Browne, Red Fox

(Apr 95), 0 09 921911 5, £4.50

The latest paperback picture book from the master surrealist of children's literature resembles a Technicolor version of one of the disturbing stories he illustrated for Ian McEwan's *The Daydreamer*. A very blokish bloke, obsessed with holding age at bay, reverts into a man-headed baby after chugaluging a whole bottle of elixa de yoo, and everybody around him finds his plight rip-roaringly funny.



The nightmarishly saccharine smiles of the adult pram-gazers on the cover of the book epitomise the story's troubling conflation of horror and hilarity. The young, for the time being, will love this fantasy. Many of us grown-ups will be unable to read it without a *frisson* or two . . . GH

The Brontës

Catherine Brighton,

Frances Lincoln, (Mar 95), 0 7112 0882 4, £4.99

This picture book presents the childhood of the four Brontë siblings, told through a somewhat bland, but nevertheless interesting, reconstruction of Charlotte's journals. The illustrations attempt to capture the wild beauty of the moors above Howarth and the contrasting orderliness of life in the rectory, while in frame after frame a phantom figure looms, gazing from windows and mirrors and half-open doors. Had this representation of the rich fantasy life of the children been elaborated upon, a pleasant and informative book might have been transformed into a much more striking account of the imaginative rhapsodies shared by this wonderfully strange family. GH

Kidnap at Denton Farm

Robert Swindells, ill.

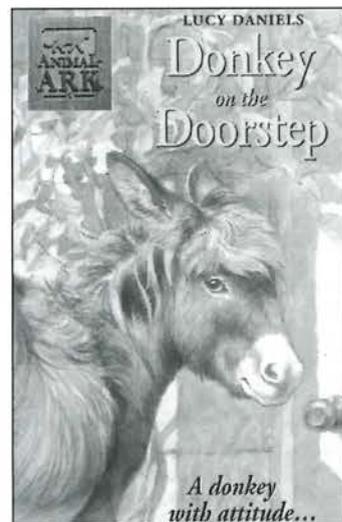
Carolyn Dinan, Hippo

(Feb 95), 0 590 55798 X, £2.50

The third book about The Outfit: 'four kids and a dog on the lookout for adventure' starts with a heated

local dispute about the aesthetic and ecological merits of a new wind turbine on a farm owned by the parents of two of the children. Things turn very ugly indeed when a child is kidnapped by somebody who believes the device conceals a ray gun which has been messing up the inside of his head.

Many of the ingredients for this story are taken off the shelf used by innumerable children's adventure writers, but Robert Swindells handles them with an individualistic feel for menace and an ear for contemporary voices. The result is a book which combines the familiarity of serial-writing and the excitement of a genuine cliff-hanger. GH



Donkey on the Doorstep

Lucy Daniels, ill. Shelagh McNicholas, Hodder

(Apr 95), 0 340 61934 1, £2.99

This is the twelfth in the alliteratively titled and enticingly packaged 'Animal Ark' series centred on a country vet's practice. Here Dorian the donkey takes affairs into his own hooves when it looks like his future rests somewhere in the dog-meat market. Fortunately Mandy and her pals are on hand to be manipulated into saving the irascible beast's matted hide.

Fast and eventful, but not too testing, it'll no doubt find willing readers. DB

Taking the Cat's Way Home

Jan Mark, ill. Paul Howard, Walker (Mar 95), 0 7445 3667 7, £2.99

For whatever reason, William definitely makes a false start to life at his new school. For Jane it's bad enough that he's nasty about her beloved cat, Furlong, without his also turning classmates against her. This is an all too credible situation which increases the readability of this already very readable, clever and sensitive book. Finally, and thanks to long-furred Furlong, the established bully is outwitted which must give hope to many victims who are temporarily caught up in a similar

time of torment. A significant book which can be read alone or shared aloud. GR

Uncle Bumpo

Dick King-Smith, ill. Toni Goffe, Young Hippo (Jan 95), 0 590 55410 7, £2.50

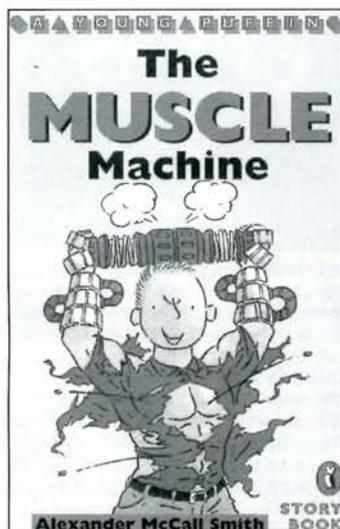
When 10-year-old Penny's Uncle Bumpo comes into her life for the first time, he appears generous and charming. Her parents' scepticism about whether his sticky fingers have really changed is surprising and a little upsetting. There's real pathos as Penny's regard for her Uncle deepens and is then shattered by a despicable act of crookedness she witnesses with her own eyes, and Bumpo realises, too late, the extent and value of Penny's trust and affection. The tragedy and denouement are quite credible due to the powerful creation of Penny, Bumpo and other characters in this fine story. GR

Bobby the Bad

Dick King-Smith, ill. Julie Anderson, Scholastic (Mar 95), 0 590 54162 5, £5.99

Bobby's bad, everyone knows he's bad and he's convenient to blame even on the rare occasions when he didn't do it. Testing his teacher's patience to the limit, the real Bobby suddenly finds that Miss Fox isn't the nasty person he thought. He discovers that she has feelings and can be hurt. A wonderful story with the true feel of the classroom about it. Bobby grows up learning as much about himself on the way, as he does about Miss Fox. PH

[What a pity Scholastic don't credit the illustrators of these last two books more obviously. We had to search acknowledgement pages for the information. Ed]



The Muscle Machine

Alexander McCall Smith, ill. Terry McKenna, Young Puffin (Feb 95), 0 14 036315 7, £3.25

Ted (not Ned as is written in the blurb on the back of the book) is responsible for Gordon's need to acquire greater strength as he doesn't want that bully to cause any more misery to himself or anyone else. Mr World's Muscle Machine certainly works and many exciting incidents

result. However, the real virtue of the book is in Gordon's character for 'really strong people don't boast about their strength.' Gordon always abides by Walter World's words and thinks more of others. This meaty story is sure to be popular with independent readers and would make a great class novel. GR

True Sport Stories

Tim Lardner, ill. David Wyatt, Scholastic (Feb 95), 0 590 55792 0, £2.99

With over 11 different sports and activities to choose from, there's something here for everyone. Inevitably, the first port of call is the reader's favourite sport, but I found myself engrossed in stories about horse-racing and even boxing! There are some fascinating facts here and stories that really show the tenacity of mankind when they think they can win. PH

The Dentist's Promise

Margaret Mahy, ill. Wendy Smith, Scholastic (Jan 95), 0 590 55412 3, £2.50

As a child Renata promised her aunt she'd always be true to the Oldmouse family name, no matter what she became. Because of her fondness for smiles and because she liked to see them well looked after, she decided to be a dentist and dedicate herself to providing an entertaining and specialised smile-maintenance service in an environment dazzling with flamboyance. Remembering the promise to her aunt, she turns down many proposals, but one day a good-looking acrobat with wonderful teeth trapezes in for emergency treatment and immediately declares his love which is, with Oldmouse honesty and drama, reciprocated, renounced and then...

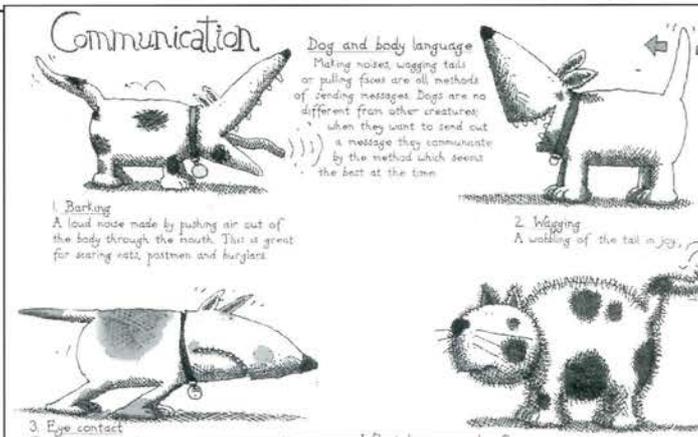
A fun book due to the exaggerated storyline and characters, which are almost caricatures. GR

Mum in a Million / Do-It-Yourself-Dad

Colin West, Macmillan 'Flipper' (Apr 95), 0 330 33746 7, £2.99



A Macmillan 2-books-in-1 'Flipper' where you read one story then literally flip the book over to read the



From **How Dogs Really Work!**

How Dogs Really Work!

Alan Snow, Picture Lions (Mar 95), 0 00 664319 1, £4.99

One of the funniest books about dogs that I've ever read. The detailed drawings treat dogs like machines, there are some hilarious notes and details, yet the text has a serious side, too. We're reminded, very gently, of dogs' needs and how we have to be responsible for them. Written in cartoon-form, the whole thing treats the dog with an amazing lack of dignity - no cat would allow it! PH

other. Mum routinely goes food shopping and becomes 'Mum in a Million' through being the millionth customer and also through (wisely?) giving her prize holiday in Florida to the rest of the family. In **Do-It-Yourself-Dad** the same Mum makes good Dad's questionably successful DIY, hurting his feelings, but then there's a brilliant suggestion by their son (who's the first-person teller of both tales) to role swap. With plentiful, fun illustrations any independent reader will appreciate all aspects of this book. GR

Dr Xargle's Book of Earth Relations

Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross, Red Fox (Mar 95), 0 09 943251 X, £4.50

The focus for Dr Xargle's latest investigation of the ways of Earthlings is families. A family he informs us, 'belong to each other whether they like it or not'. Both brand new and antique Earthlings participate in such unlikely events as 'bread-throwing contests' at the local pond, the winner being the one who hits the most ducks without falling in! Highly inventive, amusing stuff for junior readers and their Earthling families. JB

Agnes the Sheep

William Taylor, Scholastic (Mar 95), 0 590 54181 1, £6.99

Mrs Robinson's class have a topic to do, so she puts her two naughtiest children together - clever that! The story unfolds around Agnes, a mean and bad-tempered goat with amazingly filthy habits, and Mrs Carpenter, a sad and lonely old lady who has the most unsuitable but fascinating stories to tell. A gorgeous story of someone's else's topic going all wrong and taking on a life of its own. I loved it! PH



At night, she puts pink hedgehogs in her fur. The Grandpa Earthling puts his fangs in a glass.

From **Dr Xargle's Book of Earth Relations**.

Middle/Secondary REVIEWS

Eagle's Honour

Rosemary Sutcliff, Red Fox
(Feb 95), 0 09 935391 1, £3.50



These two stories, less than 70 pages each, were written 15 years apart but are well linked by the common setting and themes of Roman Britain. The first is an especially powerful and clever piece of storytelling. The humble horse-breeder seems to have been caught out admitting to being the hero of a past battle. Finally, we get the story of the battle and find out who the hero really was. This is wonderfully recounted and, though the older of the two stories, is as sharp as ever and just waiting for new readers.

AJ

Born of the Sun

Gillian Cross, Mammoth
(Mar 95), 0 7497 1794 7, £3.50

This was originally published in 1983 – a dramatic and powerful story of a journey through the dense South American jungle in search of the lost city of the Inca Sun King, Atahualpa. Paula is taken out of her rule-bound private school as her famous explorer father suddenly embarks on this long-awaited expedition. The journey is intense and full of the tension of strained relationships. The final discovery is as much internal as external with the old civilisation having much to teach those from outside. As a whole, it's not from Gillian Cross at her recent marvellous best. There's too much packed in and too much external drama, but there are still some wonderful scenes.

AJ

The Real Plato Jones

Nina Bawden, Puffin
(Mar 95), 0 14 036847 7, £3.99

Plato Jones, his name reflecting Greek mother and Welsh father, finds himself in between – his separated parents, his two countries and his two families. In Greece, for his Greek grandfather's funeral, he's

immersed first in the life of his mother's family and then in the past. His Welsh grandfather had been here in the war and become a hero, while his Greek grandfather turns out to have been regarded as a traitor during that same time. Discovering the realities of the past and caught up in a dramatic battle against a forest fire which threatens the village and its life-sustaining olive-crop, Plato is able to contain both worlds and both grandfathers inside his own skin.

AJ

A Time of Fire

Robert Westall, Piper
(Mar 95), 0 330 33754 8, £3.50

This has the setting and background of *The Machine Gunners* and is a strongly emotional and physical story. When Sonny's mother is killed in an air-raid, his father joins up determined to get revenge and Sonny is cared for by his grandparents.

Physical anger runs through Westall's books and there's violence here in the killing, a fight, the guns and the helpless fury of the survivors. Justice is what the book seems to ask for and the ending, wonderfully dramatic, provides it with an unexpected twist. This apparently effortless storytelling will delight many readers.

AJ

Agent Z and the Penguin from Mars

Mark Haddon, Red Fox
(Apr 95), 0 09 940931 3, £2.99



A real hoot of a story, wildly imagined, with episodes that seem impossible to avoid reading aloud. Mr Sidebottom, Ben's new neighbour, tries to take on Agent Z – Ben, Barney and Jenks – but he shouldn't have. His fascination with UFOs is his downfall as the three boys conjure up a visit from outer space with the help of a penguin and some Bacofoil. In a series of climaxes, which get funnier and funnier, Mr Sidebottom turns out to have a shady past. Silent reading is likely to suffer but the laughter will undoubtedly hook even more readers.

AJ

Walk the High Wire

Macmillan
(Apr 95), 0 333 62755 5, £4.99

1994 W H Smith Young Writers' Competition winners are gathered here in an attractive collection of prose, poems and artwork.

The 65 contributions are arranged into nine sections with headers like 'Time Capsules', 'A Heart That Thumps' and 'Litter-filled Wastelands, Oil-filled Lakes.'



Blanche McIntyre (12)

There's wit, humour and impressive philosophy here. It's well worth a copy to support the competition and to demonstrate young writers at their best.

DB

Maphead

Lesley Howarth, Walker
(Mar 95), 0 7445 3647 2, £3.99

And now for something completely different... It's amazing, but true, that Lesley Howarth has pulled off this piece of weird storytelling, where the utterly fantastic seems plausible.

Maphead is a child resulting from the coupling of an alien from the parallel Subtle World and an earth woman whom he saved from a bolt of lightning. Alien and boy return to Rubytown for a reunion between son and mother, but complications arise when feelings and love begin to intrude on what was intended as purely a fact-finding mission.

Rites of passage with a difference.

DB

David and Della

Paul Zindel, Red Fox
(Apr 95), 0 09 933661 8, £3.50

Zindel's enviable knack of making witty and credible links between bizarre teenage behaviour and deeper universal truths is as on-target as ever. Della is a talented, dipsomaniac actress who lives in her own fantasies and David is her lonely pupil, a would-be playwright with writer's block. Together they inhabit a world that is 'really nuts and lonely' and out of it construct an alternative existence where they achieve 'wanting what isn't.'

An acquired taste!

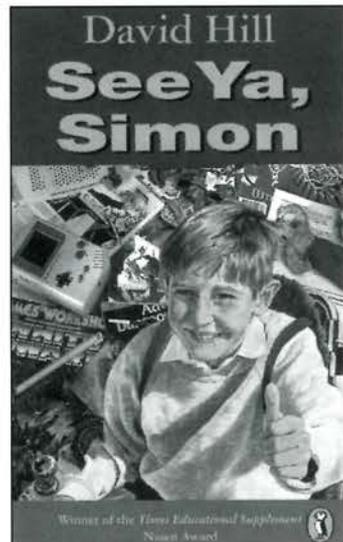
DB

See Ya, Simon

David Hill, Puffin (Mar 95),
0 14 036381 5, £3.50

'... he suddenly asked mum if he couldn't be a baby and start all over again. Except this time could he please be made like other kids?'

This is a rare self-absorbed moment in this no-nonsense, wryly comic, award-winning novel about the last month of a young muscular dystrophy sufferer's life, as seen through the eyes of his best friend and classmates. Virtuous without being tub-thumping, it has much to teach young readers, not just about MD



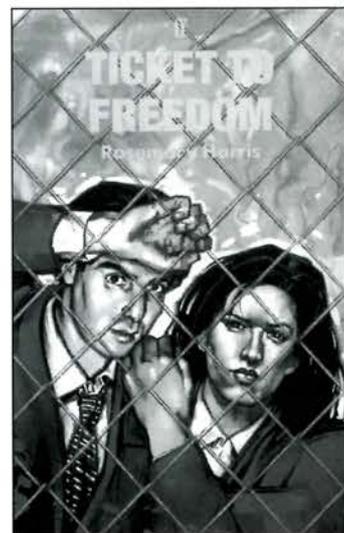
but about the human spirit and mankind's innate goodness.

DB

Ticket to Freedom

Rosemary Harris, Faber
(Mar 95), 0 571 17343 8, £4.99

First published in 1991, even such a short gap gives this book a dated feel.



It's a shame also that the hideous hardback cover has been used for this paperback edition. It's a powerful story, nevertheless, of Lallie and her boyfriend, Paul, both in trouble for petty crime. The book verges on the stereotypical with its portrayal of life on different sides of the class fence but it will find favour with 12- to 13-year-olds who are willing to suspend belief and indulge in a spirited read.

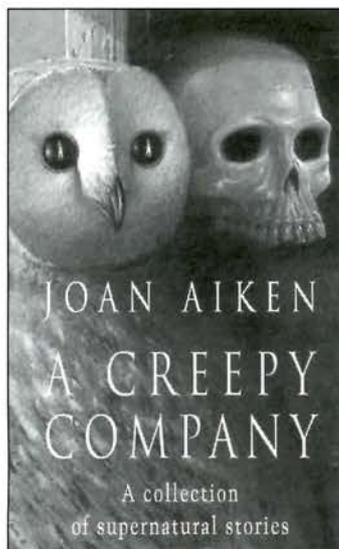
VB

A Creepy Company

Joan Aiken, Puffin
(Mar 95), 0 14 036789 6, £4.50

11 short, eerie stories, effective because they take the stuff of everyday life and slide it just out of focus. The most profound terrors surface when familiar landscapes acquire an unexpected dimension: the family house made ghostly by an unfamiliar creaking stair...

These stories should be read aloud: linguistic sophistication suggests that Year 9 pupils would be an



appropriate audience. The book would be most useful as a class text: 'Toomie' calls out for cross-curricular links with History; 'My Disability'

opens the way to myths and legends; 'The Traitor' provides intriguing insights into a moral climate very different from our own. VR

Always Sebastian

Jean Ure, Red Fox (Apr 95), 0 09 930198 9, £3.50

This sequel to *If It Weren't for Sebastian* shows Jean Ure as readable as ever. She has strong opinions about animal rights and these are clearly evident here. Her skill is that she communicates and persuades without adopting an evangelical tone.

Maggie and her family, Martha and Sophie, have always supported Sebastian's views and campaigns but when he allies himself to the militant Animal Freedom Fighters, Maggie becomes increasingly uneasy. Her daughters - Martha feeling the pangs of first love and Sophie fiercely combative - long for Sebastian to become a permanent part of their family but Maggie remains unconvinced.

I particularly liked the diary device which charts the relationship between Maggie and Sebastian and explores the morality of animal exploitation and those who protest against it. VR

The Place Between

Hugh Scott, Walker (Mar 95), 0 7445 3680 4, £3.99

A strikingly beautiful cover is slightly marred by the rather theatrical statement 'Master of Menace' emblazoned across it. Perhaps Walker feel that Hugh Scott needs more positive marketing - he's certainly one of the best writers for children around, though still sadly underrated.

Stella and Daniel become aware of strange happenings - trees which move, people who disappear and reappear - and after a near-fatal fire at a local farm an expert on the supernatural, Eric Railford, confirms their suspicions. Scott builds his tension through the interaction of a shadow-world and contemporary existence.

When Stella, her mother and an artist, are trapped in the place between the two, Scott tightens the screws by introducing a race against time as Railford reluctantly begins to close the door that connects them. I won't spoil the ending... VR

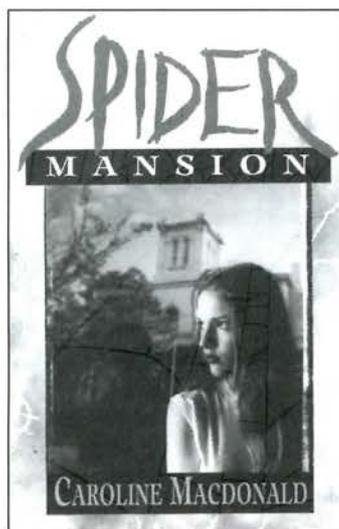
Rory's Fortune

Catherine Cookson, Corgi (Mar 95), 0 552 52791 2, £2.99

Although this is archive Cookson - first published in 1972 - like all good stories it's undiminished by time. She really knows how to tug at the heart strings. Set in the mid-nineteenth century, it tells the tale of Rory, poor but honest, who serves his master loyally and is lavishly rewarded.

Smuggling exploits add tension and the spice of foreign shores together with a pretty girl are thrown in for good measure. A sound purchase for the Lower School class library. VR

Older Readers REVIEWS



Spider Mansion

Caroline Macdonald, Viking (Feb 95), 0 670 85566 9, £5.99

Next time an older reader asks for something spooky, reach for this title.

The Days' holiday business is progressing well enough until the arrival of the Todds who just won't leave. They are determined to take over the lives and identities of their hosts by a cruelly tenacious, psychological campaign. You can't help but get wrapped up in the battle and feel outrage at the cynical injustice of it all. DB

The Night After Tomorrow

Sue Welford, Oxford (Mar 95), 0 19 271726 X, £5.99

The ingredients of classic horror meet roaming 'Beast of Exmoor' type carnage in this well-crafted and

sensitive tale for an older readership. Credibility gets very stretched, however, but if you can manage it, the story of Jess and the strange lad, who leads her right up the forest path to his gothic, seedy mansion (complete with mad mother), becomes very toothsome.

Worth reading for Sue Welford's conveniently clever ending. DB

But Can the Phoenix Sing?

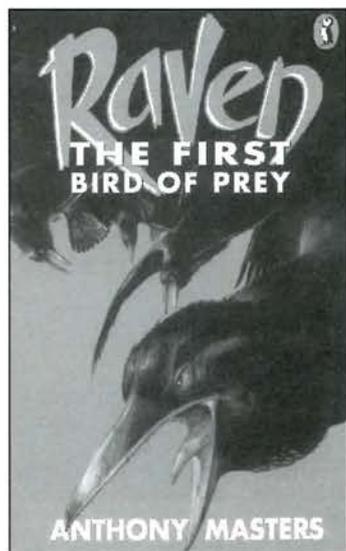
Christa Laird, Red Fox (Mar 95), 0 09 950121 X, £3.50

I defy anyone to read this book and not be moved to tears. Told in the form of letters, the extraordinary story of a young partisan, Misha, who escaped from the Warsaw ghetto at the age of 14, makes harrowing reading. Misha has the dubious advantage of having Aryan features which disguise his Jewish birth, but allow him to outwit the Nazis. It's a chilling tale of a young person becoming conditioned and hardened to violence, killing and the appalling slaughter going on around him. But there's also his love for Eva and the companions with whom he shares both life and death which gives him hope for the future despite all the evils of war. VB

Raven: The First Bird of Prey

Anthony Masters, Puffin (Mar 95), 0 14 036294 0, £3.99

Imagine a mixture of Hitchcock's *Birds* and Garner's *Owls* and you'll get the drift - a rivetingly gruesome story which begins in AD 842 with the execution, by stoning, then the burying alive of the magician, Gelert. Feared by the villagers, Gelert is accused of spreading plague to the Welsh village with his birds and of stealing their talisman, the wooden dove. Centuries later, following the flooding of the valley for a dam, Hugh Ellis is showing the borough



surveyor the ruined walls and the chapel, and speaks of the curse that was supposed to be on the valley. The action then moves to 1992 when a corpse is discovered in a bog - curled up and foetus-like, 'a bit like a tandoori chicken'. Gelert's spirit begins to possess Hugh - and the ravens are always circling, watching... VB

Ten Hours to Live

Pete Johnson, Mammoth (Mar 95), 0 7497 1793 9, £3.50

Ben falls in love with Sophie while he's playing Sir Lancelot, rescuing her from an unhappy love affair. Their relationship develops slowly, with the threat of Ryan, Sophie's ex-boyfriend, always in the background. A foolish argument ends the relationship but the end of the book sees the pair reunited.

Sound familiar? Standard love story fare, but with a big difference: Johnson makes his characters into real people and explores their preoccupations and obsessions with keen observation and insight.

This book will say a lot to many young readers - advance from here along the spectrum to *Romeo and Juliet*. VR

I Wouldn't Thank You for a Valentine POETRY

Edited by Carol Ann Duffy, ill. Trisha Rafferty, Puffin (Feb 95), 0 14 034632 5, £3.99

A collection of poetry by and for women, representing several cultures. These poems are fresh and lively, avoiding cliché and only occasionally lapsing into self-consciousness. There's plenty of scope for GCSE study and a good deal for the Lower School, too, as adolescent problems get an airing.

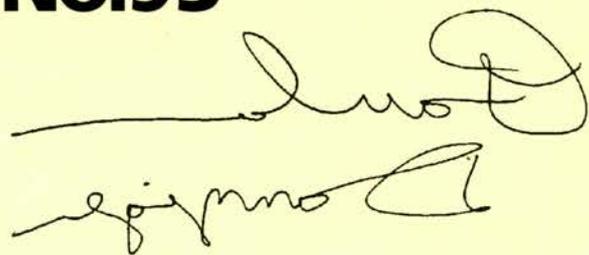
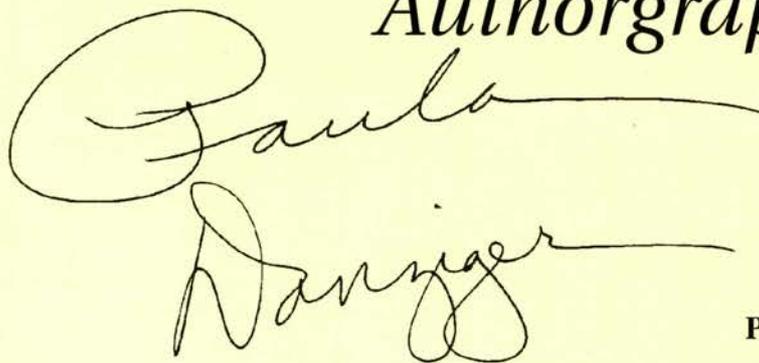


What's most important is the originality of much of the work. Poetry often draws groans from reluctant pupils but this anthology will hold their interest and spark controversy. VR

REVIEWERS in this issue:

Jill Bennett, David Bennett, Val Bierman, Pam Harwood, George Hunt, Adrian Jackson, Val Randall, Gill Roberts, Judith Sharman and Liz Waterland.

Authorgraph No.93



PAULA DANZIGER interviewed by Chris Powling

In Paula Danziger's view, you don't need to be a writer, an illustrator or any kind of artist to qualify as a 'creative' human being. 'I always say to kids – and to any grown-ups I can persuade to listen – that the most creative thing any of us can work on is our own lives. We can all create for ourselves a life that functions well and has some sense of whatever style works for us. That's why clothes and jewellery are so important to me, I suppose, because they're an adornment of who I am – another level to *play* at. And we can do this whatever our occupation.'

It's a typically generous and maverick opinion from someone whose whole career, perhaps, can be graded as 'A over F'. This was the mark she specialised in at school where 'A stood for what I'd managed to do and F for how closely I'd followed the assignment. Teachers were always telling me "It's great, Paula . . . but it's not what we actually asked for."

She's been confounding expectations ever since.

For instance, how many writers for children are as well known as she is on both sides of the Atlantic, have three homes between which they commute – in London, in New York and in Woodstock – and have established themselves on television talking about the books of *other* authors? Certainly Paula Danziger, as flamboyant in fact as she is in her fiction, has worked creatively on her own life.

So how did it all begin? How closely are characters like Kendra Kaye, Matthew Martin and Amber Brown modelled on Paula herself and her own experiences? Did she ride *The Divorce Express*? Or sue her own parents for malpractice? Did the cat eat *her* gymsuit?

As happens so often when the autobiographical dimension of a writer's work is explored, the answer turns out to be a firm maybe. 'I grew up in a family which nowadays would be called dysfunctional,' she says. 'My parents really cared about their kids . . . which makes it even sadder, I suppose. My father was a very angry man. He never hit my younger brother and me but was emotionally abusive, I felt. He wasn't very happy with his life . . . and my mother was very self-involved. We just didn't get along together. My parents never split up though I often hoped they would. I always used to think I was illegitimate but my father told me I was too ugly to be a love-child!'

It was this saving humour which helped her struggle through the unhappiness.

Later, at college, she considered becoming a librarian (but didn't think she'd be quiet enough) or a speech-therapist – and was told her low, husky voice was too sexy. ('Aren't speech therapists allowed to be sexy?' I wondered. 'Not in New Jersey,' replied Paula darkly.) So she turned to teaching – and instantly fell in love with 12-13 year-olds as an age-group even if her maverick disposition, well established by now, didn't endear her to many colleagues. Then, in the space of six



days, came two car accidents which changed her life. After the second she was hospitalised, had more than a hundred stitches in her face and, partly as a result of pain-killing drugs, suffered a terrifying loss of motor control with the consequence that, even today, she can write backwards and forwards with equal facility. Years of therapy followed . . . during which her therapist, Sam Slipp, encouraged her to explore her feelings through writing. Slowly, painfully, the text grew into her first book **The Cat Ate My Gymsuit** in which 13-year-old Marcy Lewis, and her independent-minded teacher Barbara Finney, seem to be substituting about equally for Paula Danziger herself.

Other Danziger titles followed – and, except for **The Pistachio Prescription**, they're all her *own* titles – as she began to rival the success of Judy Blume with her sharp, funny accounts of summer camp (**There's a Bat in Bunk Five**), sibling rivalry (**Can You Sue Your Parents for Malpractice?**), family splits (**The Divorce Express**) new relationships (**It's an Aardvark-eat-turtle World**), all too dominant parents in the 21st century (**This Place Has No Atmosphere**). In 1988 came **Remember Me**

to Harold Square with its account of Kendra, Frank and a New York treasure hunt. The same characters re-appear in **Thames Doesn't Rhyme With James** which provides the front cover of this **BfK**. There's the same spare, wry quality to the writing as well:

'I look at Frank.

He looks so sad.

My father called out again, "We're waiting."

I turn on the dishwasher and then Frank kisses me again.

I'm leaning against the turned-on dishwasher, and Frank, who is also turned on, is leaning against me . . .'

It's as far as Frank gets. Indeed, it's about as far as anyone gets in a Paula Danziger story.

Prudery?

'Not a bit,' she says. 'Other writers can follow through more explicitly if they want to . . . I'm not puritanical but I do make certain choices. My characters. I admit, tend to be careful, even cautious.' Mischievously, however, she goes on to point out that the main character in Judy Blume's notorious **Forever** is called Danziger. 'Not named after me, though,' she laughs.

'After her pharmacist.'

If, in its tact about sex, **Thames Doesn't Rhyme With James** follows an established Danziger pattern, it's changed utterly in one other respect: location. Paula's well-known affection for our capital city warms the entire book and includes a quiz (in which answers are provided) and a suggested itinerary for a visit which reflects her own fascination with its detail and atmosphere during the years she's spent as a part-time resident. 'I love London. I'm very happy here. Especially I like *me* in London . . . that's what it is. Granted I live in a comfortable neighbourhood where I feel safe but, then, I've never *not* felt safe in London. What I love best are the blue plaques. I have a friend who says my aim is to have blue plaques everywhere which say "Paula lived here . . . and here and here and here". I love the sense of history, the fact that you can still see the sky, the playing with language . . .'

Ah, the playing with language. Trust a writer to value this – and a writer like Paula to incorporate it in her titles. Is there another children's author who's acknowledged the help of 'all the taxi drivers in London' at the front of a book?

Of course, place hasn't been the only change in her working life in recent years. Also she's discovered the heady delights of television performance. 'Working with people like Phillip Schofield and Sarah Greene on **Going Live and Live and Kicking** was wonderful – especially as a way of promoting books and reading. I found I absolutely loved appearing on screen. In fact, it cost me a fortune because I was constantly flying back from New York, at my own expense, to do a programme!'

Already she's looking forward to the new series this autumn.

An even bigger, and more significant, shift professionally was brought about by a move down the age-range via two new central characters. The first was Matthew Martin – indefatigable and irresistible 11-year-old – who in **Everyone Else's Parents Said Yes, Make Like a Tree and Leave, Earth to Matthew and Not For a Billion, Gazillion Dollars** reminds us that the tradition of Richmal Crompton's William Brown is alive, well and flourishing in a suitably updated, transatlantic form. Later, though, and Paula's eyes light up when you mention her, came another Brown altogether . . . called Amber.

Now, such is the odd alchemy of writerly



inventiveness, no one can ever be entirely sure of a character's provenance – or any other aspect of literary creation, come to that. When, for instance, I remarked on Paula's evident preference for the present-tense, and for writing in the first person when her central character is a girl and the third when it's a boy, she stared at me blankly. 'Really,' she said. 'I've never noticed.'

About Amber, though, there seems much less doubt:

*'To Carrie Marie Danziger
niece, consultant and pal'*

runs the dedication. And Paula's enthusiastic endorsement of her brother's daughter in all three capacities certainly matches her delight in the storybook version whose voice, one suspects, would disqualify her from speech-therapy, at any rate in New Jersey, as instantly as Carrie's apparently does . . . or Paula's.

And there's the rub, as usual. Paula, and the themes which continue to preoccupy her, is fully implicated in Amber as well. Behind the apparent simplicity of **Amber Brown Is Not a Crayon** – the tale of Amber/Carrie's friendship, in the third grade, with a classmate who moved away out of her life – lies a tale with a rather different resonance, of a grown-up pal of Paula's who moved away out of her life by dying. No, she's not equating the two. What, instinctively, she knows (without ever mentioning it) is that, to a third grader, they might *feel* the same. This ability to take the emotions of young people completely seriously without losing touch with their fresh, irreverent light-heartedness is seen again in **You Can't Eat Your Chicken-Pox, Amber Brown** which transports Amber to England, to Aunt Pam . . . and towards coping with some of the post-marital split perplexities that confront many kids these days:

'My father has his arms round me. "I've missed you so much, Amber."

We hug for a few minutes and we just stand there, looking at each other.

"You got taller," he says.

"And scabbier," I grin.

"You really did have the chicken pox."

He grins back.

Aunt Pam comes over to us. "Hi, Phil."

"Pam." He reaches out and shakes her hand. "How are you?" They always used to hug each other before my mom and dad got separated.

I guess Dad and Aunt Pam are getting a relative divorce.'

Already there's a third Amber Brown book on the way. It's a show, Paula reckons, which will run and run. Writing, for her, is a painful business, quite literally, owing to an inherited ailment which puts every bone in her body, including her fingers, all too easily out of joint. With her trusty lap-top to hand, though, and her even trustier editors, Gill Evans and Margaret Frith, on the end of a 'phone in London and New York respectively – 'Sometimes they gang up on me,' she says – **Amber Brown Wants More Credit** promises to be as safe an investment as any current literary project whether it's completed in England, the USA or on some aircraft in-between. Happy landings,

THE BOOKS

All Paula Danziger's books, unless otherwise stated, are published in hardback by Heinemann at £8.99, and in paperback by Piccolo at £2.99:

The Cat Ate My Gysmsuit, 0 434 96577 4; 0 330 29849 6 pbk

The Pistachio Prescription, 0 434 96576 6; 0 330 30018 0 pbk

There's a Bat in Bunk Five, 0 434 93413 5; 0 330 30234 5 pbk

Can You Sue Your Parents for Malpractice?, 0 434 96570 7; 0 330 30019 9 pbk

The Divorce Express, 0 434 96571 5; 0 330 29657 4 pbk

It's an Aardvark-eat-turtle World, 0 434 93414 3; 0 330 30375 9 pbk

This Place Has No Atmosphere, 0 434 93414 3; 0 330 30559 X, £3.50 pbk

Remember Me to Harold Square, 0 434 93416 X; 0 330 31476 9 pbk

Thames Doesn't Rhyme with James, 0 434 96916 8; Mammoth, 0 7497 2325 4, £2.99 pbk

Everyone Else's Parents Said Yes, 0 330 31476 9 pbk

Make Like a Tree and Leave, 0 434 93412 7; 0 330 32225 7 pbk

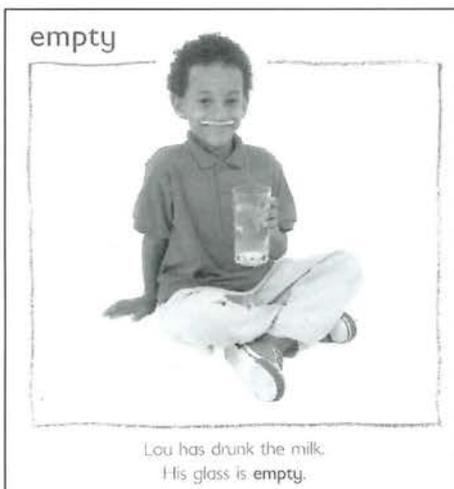
Earth to Matthew, 0 434 93410 0; 0 330 32501 9 pbk

Not For a Billion Gazillion Dollars, 0 434 96216 3, £4.99; 0 330 33165 5, £3.50 pbk

Amber Brown Is Not a Crayon, 0 434 96492 1, £3.99; 0 330 33143 4 pbk

You Can't Eat Your Chicken-Pox, Amber Brown, 0 434 97569 9, £3.99

Non Fiction REVIEWS



From *Is it Heavy?*

Does it Bounce? Is it Heavy?

0 7136 4127 4

0 7136 4125 8

Is it Shiny?

0 7136 4126 6

Where is it?

0 7136 4124 X

Karen Bryant-Mole, A & C Black
(Buzzwords series), £6.99 each

INFANT

'Science is measurement' was one of the topics I got used to arguing fluently for and against during my 'A' level years; now here's the concept hallowed at infant level in four volumes devoted to qualitative and quantitative differences, an ability to observe which is basic to the furtherance of any sort of science (there, I told you I was fluent).

Where is it? deals with positional words – up/down, through/between; **Is it Shiny?** looks and feels texture and substance – stretchy/springy, wet/dry. Energy and its effects condition **Bounce** to cover go/stop, lift/press etc., and **Heavy** is the measurement one – long/short, thick/thin, full/empty.

All volumes share a thoughtful choice of basic words, excellently illustrative photographs and extremely clear demonstrative sentences, for example: 'Lou's glass is full of milk; Lou has drunk the milk - his glass is empty' (with a lovely white moustache to show there's no deception). Add to this a refreshing choice of concept-portraying subjects and a bunch of multi-racial kids to show them off and you've got something really valuable. Of course they don't have to be used as 'Language of Science' texts – they can be nice books for any infant purpose, but do check them out – they're lovely. TP

Secrets of the Rainforest

Dailan Pugh and Margaret Dunkle,
Hyland House,
1 875657 11 8, £11.50

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

Coral Trail

Tim and Sue Vyner, Gollancz,
0 575 05663 0, £8.99; 0 575 05935 4, £3.99
(pbk)

INFANT/JUNIOR

Against the Northern Australian background of loggers versus 'Greenies', Kevin, a logger's son, is introduced to the flora and fauna of the forest (where his father works) by the greeny Rainbow kids. And he realises for the first time what he's been missing as he contrasts the natural opulence of the untouched forest with the desolation left by the loggers to whom the extinction of 2000-year-old trees is a way of life. Presented as a story, this

is really a fine display of Dailan Pugh's wildlife paintings and, of course, a strong conservation message. Students of the BfK Green Guide will remember Dunkle's excellent *Conservation*; her text here is just as spare and just as telling.

Also presented in story form *Coral Trail* takes self-preservation as its theme. Octopus warns her fellow reef-dwellers that 'something's coming' and they all show how well they can hide (like clown fish) or defend themselves (like puffer fish). When the fearsome Moray eel arrives only octopus is left to face it, which she does with a sepia-squirting disappearance.

Two gentle books, each visually very pleasing and each with a memorable message upon which later, fuller understanding of things could be built. TP

The Best-Ever Book of Castles

Philip Steele, Kingfisher,
1 85697 291 7, £9.99

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

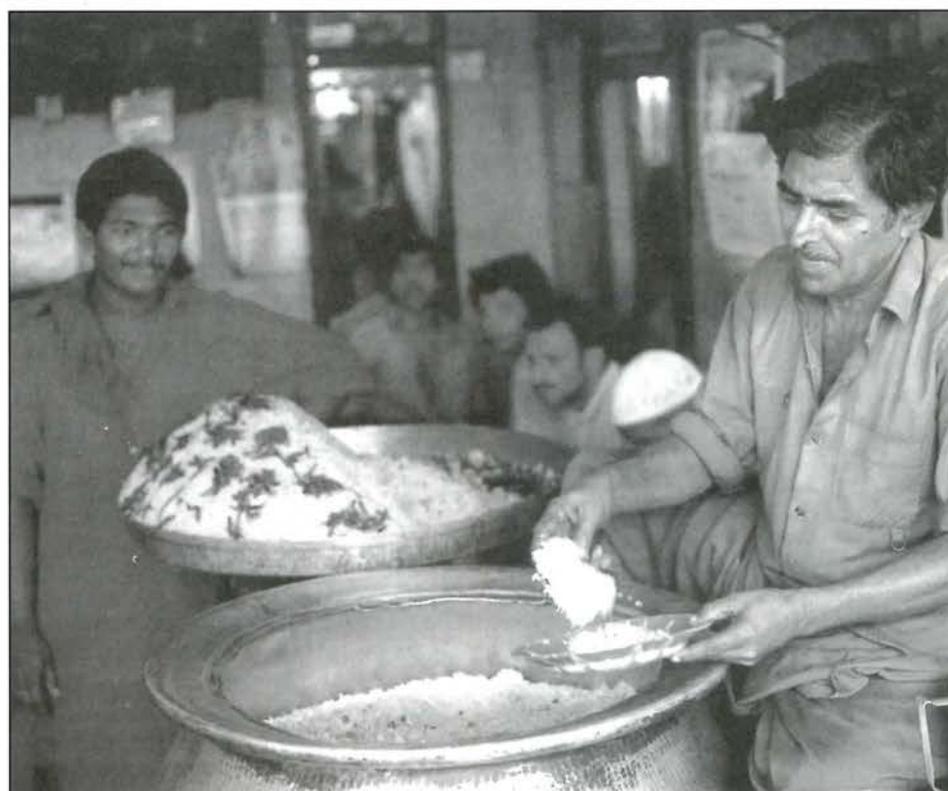
A title claiming to be the 'best-ever' has a lot to live up to, but even a random dip into this appealing production is enough to convince you of its merits.

Despite being packed with facts about all aspects of castles and castle life (how and where they were built, who lived in them and how they were defended), the book's generous format and attractive page layout ensures that information on each topic can be readily absorbed.

Philip Steele's engaging literary style brings his subject matter vividly to life with such phrases as



Loading a crossbow, and an esquire helping his knight prepare for battle, from *The Best-Ever Book of Castles*.



'This freshly cooked curry is perfect for a healthy diet. The rice and chopped vegetables are full of fibre, vitamins and minerals.' From *Fibre in Food*.

'the courtyard would ring with commands and curses' whilst 'the kitchen buzzed with activity.'

His picturesque prose is accompanied by a profusion of colourful illustrations and cutaway pictures - a winning combination which will ensure that the book will be pored over with great enjoyment. **VH**

Additives in Food Fibre in Food

Deb Turner,
0 7502 1435 X

Miriam Moss,
0 7502 1426 0

Vitamins in Food Sugar in Food

Miriam Moss,
0 7502 1436 8

Deb Turner,
0 7502 1427 9

Wayland (Diet and Nutrition series),
£7.99 each

JUNIOR/MIDDLE/SECONDARY

'A packet of crisps is much more expensive than the same weight of potatoes. You are paying the person who makes the crisp for peeling the potatoes (and removing the fibre), and for adding fat, salt and chemical flavourings, which are all bad for you!' Strong irrefutable stuff from Miriam Moss in **Fibre** which shows fibre-power at work keeping us healthy (fibre-filled bowels move up to seven and a half times faster than those without) and tells how and where to find it.

Vitamins does the same for these essentials (half a cup of bean sprouts equals six glasses of orange juice for Vitamin C) acknowledging the benefits of supplements while preferring natural sources. The message from **Additives** is 'as few as you can' while observing the difference between preservation and promotion, and **Sugar** steers us firmly but gently towards molasses and honey.

This punchy quartet started life in 1992 as 'Food Facts'. Here it's been skilfully boiled down, but not refined, to preserve all the fibre, flavour and vitality of the original without the use of condescending additives, resulting in a very easy to read set about dietary constituents, sensible eating and beating the food industry at its own game. This brings the information to younger and less able people who probably need it most. **TP**

Energy Light

0 7500 1666 3 0 7500 1593 4

Steve Parker, Macdonald (Science works series), £8.99 each

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Steve Parker is, by now, an old hand at science information writing and it would be reasonable to wonder if his combination with two perennial subjects could add anything exciting, new or even noteworthy. Happily Parker's professionalism is such that it can, and these two seem to get to many parts of their subjects that other books don't reach. How many 'light' books encourage striking flints (safely), include the Brocken Spectre, explain the workings of the 'flourescent' (sic) tube, show us a lacemaker's condenser or accord Ayer's Rock its proper name of Uluru? What other energy book shows you how augers are vital to the combine harvester, tell you that derailleur gears have a centenary in 1999 and mention the energy-rich submarine sulphur vents?

These are both fascinating browsers. For those who want it, each has a narrative text but the bulk of the entertainment comes from 'Famous Firsts', 'Fascinating Facts', 'Special FX' and 'DIY science' boxes which contain information of the sort cited above. Illustration is almost entirely by line drawing - more selective of purpose than agency photos.

Parker's in a good mood here; if you were thinking of enhancing your physics collection, now's the time. **TP**

Gagarin and Armstrong

Clint Twist, Evans (Beyond the Horizons series),
0 237 51452 4, £9.50

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

In April 1961, when Yuri Gagarin became the first



Yuri Gagarin shortly after the flight which made him the first person to fly in space



Neil Armstrong pictured a few hours before the launch of Apollo 11 to the Moon

From Gagarin and Armstrong.

person to travel through space, exploration of the 'final frontier' became a realistic goal; eight years later Neil Armstrong landed on the moon.

This fascinating, wide-ranging yet succinct narrative explores all the various scientific, technological and political developments which culminated in that giant leap for mankind. It explains the importance of World War Two as the catalyst - from von Braun's V2 rocket, through the rise of the two superpowers, the ensuing Cold War and subsequent Space Race - so that in less than 30 years the world leapt forward from piston-engined aircraft to rocket-powered space vehicles.

Fundamental principles of space travel and the main problems which had to be solved are clearly explained and illustrated. We are also reminded that whilst the bravery of those pioneering astronauts is unquestioned, their success was due to the many thousands of unsung scientists, engineers and technicians.

In the final chapters the author documents all the subsequent major achievements up to the present and concludes that 'living and working in space for up to a year at a time is now a reality.' **VH**

The Condom: three thousand years of safer sex

Eric Chevallier, translated by Patrick White, (History Through Objects series),

Puffin, 0 14 036963 5, £3.50 (pbk)
Viking, 0 670 85529 4, £7.99

SECONDARY

In his introductory letter Dr Chevallier claims that 'condoms are as much part of our lives as the chewing-gum that sticks to our shoe.' Really? Well, if not, would that they were, and this is the book to help. It's a companionable gossamer-thin

paperback dealing with the nature, history and evolution of the device. Among many fascinating facts we learn that the original Dr Condom 'may have been' physician to Charles II who used ones made of sheep gut, that their first mass-producer was MacIntosh the raincoat king and that the European Standard for condoms insists that each one be capable of retaining 15 litres of air which, we're told, is 'considerably more than in normal conditions.'



'Use a condom for seduction. The pleasure begins when the fear disappears.' Poster published in Germany, from **The Condom**.

Emphasising the condom's role in the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, the book presents an attractively sensible portrait of an essentially friendly object. There's good humour in plenty, even if some of the willicisms don't exactly translate from the French. For the price of a bargain dozen here's a good read which should prove popular and useful among young explorers of either gender - and especially to anyone who habitually steps in chewing gum while leaving the chemists with yet another packet of cough-sweets. **TP**

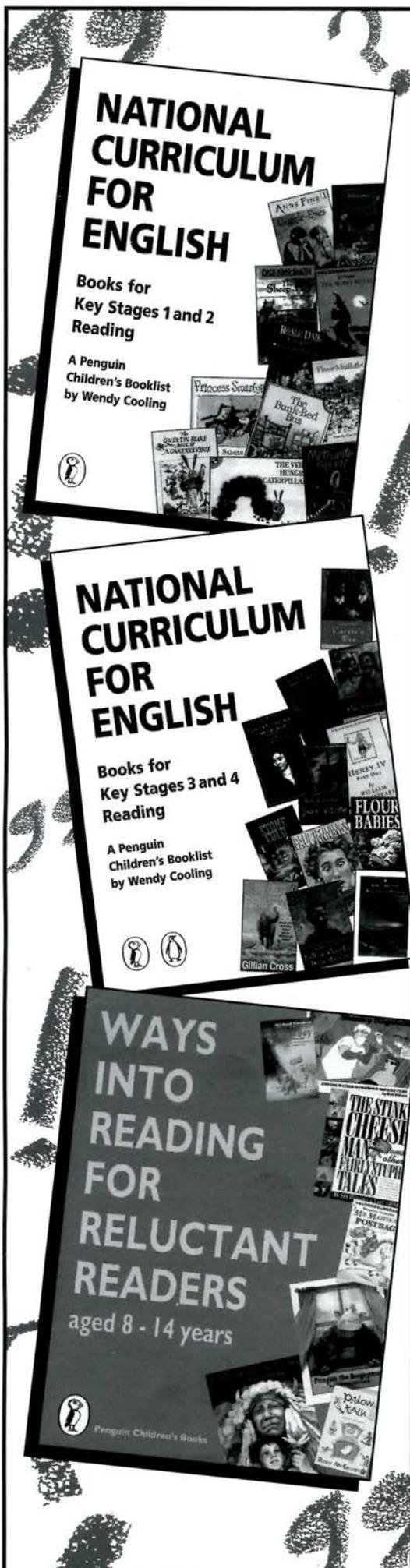
Non Fiction REVIEWERS:

Vee Holliday and Ted Percy.

Non Fiction Reviews Editor:

Eleanor von Schweinitz





Children's Books from Penguin for the National Curriculum for English

KEY STAGES 1 - 4

In January 1995 the revised orders for the National Curriculum for English for England and Wales were sent out to schools. The long list of prescribed authors and titles have gone and have been replaced with a new emphasis on encouraging children to read widely for pleasure and enjoyment.

Although the National Curriculum stipulates a wide range of literature that children should be reading, it does not provide guidelines as to which books are appropriate. In our two new booklists Wendy Cooling has chosen a range of books from the Penguin Adult and Children's lists which fulfil the criteria laid down for Key Stages 1&2 and 3&4.

Puffin have also produced a booklist for children and teenagers who have mastered the mechanics of reading but who need encouragement to read for pleasure. Written by Wendy Cooling, **WAYS INTO READING FOR RELUCTANT READERS AGED 8-14 YEARS** is a selection of books guaranteed to generate enthusiasm in even the most reluctant readers.

All three booklists are available FREE.
Call Puffin on: 0500 807 981.

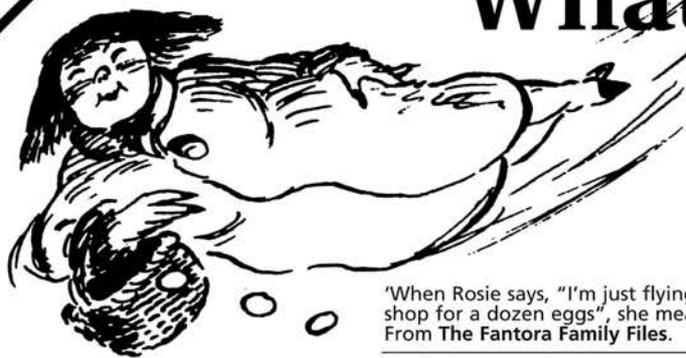
Wendy Cooling is an ex teacher and former Head of the Children's Book Foundation. She is now a freelance children's book consultant, reviewer and in-service trainer.



Penguin Children's Books



Adèle Geras asks 'What's the Rush?'



'When Rosie says, "I'm just flying down the shop for a dozen eggs", she means it literally.'
From *The Fantora Family Files*.

Overcoming the urge to begin this article with the words: 'why, oh why?', I would like to try to enlist some support. Is anyone else out there irritated by the current lust for speed in children's books? Don't get me wrong. There's nothing the matter with speed in the right place at the right time. Of course there are plenty of books which whizz pleasurably along at a fair old lick, and that's fine. There does seem to be, though, a growing dread of the SLOW, the leisurely, the atmospheric and the very detailed which strikes me as sad. It goes along with a terror of the complex, the ornate, the problematic and the ambiguous. Incidentally, it emphasises the modern, the relevant, and the new and overlooks the historical and the foreign, but that's another whole article! It's almost as though some publishers are saying: 'Children watch a lot of TV and movies; they play a lot of video games, therefore what they expect from their reading matter is exactly the same instant gratification: speed, thrills, incessant action, constant high excitement, etc.' I call this a positive reinforcement of the famous three-minute attention span.

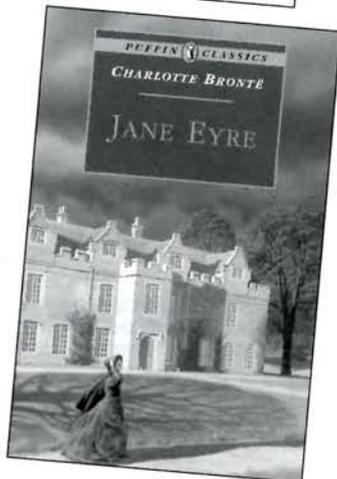
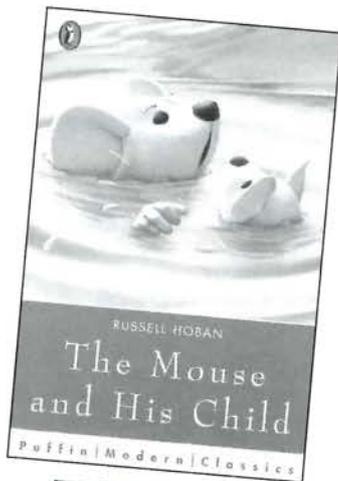
I have to exempt from this diatribe my own British publishers (Hamish Hamilton and Heinemann) who have never uttered the P-word in my presence. A US publisher, however, has recently turned down my *Fantora* books because they were 'not Pacey enough'. I think she meant they were not wham-whizz-whoosh in the best cartoon-style, and, of course, she's right. They amble along fairly gently, it's true, and this is because *Ozzy* is a narrator who refuses to be rushed, being a sensible sort of chap and a cat to boot.

I wouldn't want anyone to think that what I'm after is the plotless, the meandering, the BORING. A book needs a firm narrative line; believable, full-drawn characters, and lots of strong emotions and conflicts. Still, I think it's time that those of us who are not afraid of descriptions, who revel in meals, clothes, conversations and trying to create a world so that others may inhabit it, come out and say so - LOUDLY.

'But the children won't read such stuff!' I hear someone cry, and to this my answer is: try. They certainly *can't* like it if it's

never presented to them at all. Try reading aloud the slow beginning of a book such as *The Bear Nobody Wanted* by Allan Ahlberg, or *The Mouse and His Child* by Russell Hoban. I would also say: children are often under-estimated and surprising, so try.

Fantasy buffs, Tolkien lovers, and SF fans have no trouble at all with long descriptions, detailed topography and proper nouns which tax me to the limit. Therefore I'm pretty sure that *as long as the narrative thread is strong enough to hold*, a writer really doesn't have to provide a body on every page, or someone doing something overheated to someone else.



The trouble with speed is this: unless the writer is very good indeed, the book is in grave danger of THINNESS. By this I mean: language is reduced to easy words,



From *The Bear Nobody Wanted*.

sentences cropped to Hemingway shortness, and all problems posed simplistically. For example: which of two suitors should she choose is a strong plot element in *Jane Eyre* and also in countless Sweet Valley High books. The difference lies in the way each is written. Well, (you may say) Charlotte Brontë was a genius and the SVH writers are not. That's true, but any SVH book could be improved 3000 percent if the writer had the leisure to go more deeply into character and motivation and spend more time on 'thickening' the physical detail of the book. Okay, we wouldn't end up with *Jane Eyre* but we'd be some distance away from complete drivel.

This desire for speed doesn't only happen in children's books. There are many adult novels that are little more than movie outlines; skeleton stories waiting for actors to clothe them with flesh.

I'm a great believer in 'the drunkenness of things being various'. There ought to be room on the shelves for books of every sort of pace. How would it be if composers were allowed to write only up-tempo songs with a catchy hip-hop rhythm? Music is marked with a neat word in Italian to tell you how it should be played. I don't at all object to some books being marked 'allegro con brio' or even 'prestissimo', as long as we may still be allowed to read and write stories and novels labelled 'andante', 'adagio' and even 'largo', if we feel so inclined. ■

Details of books illustrated:

The Fantora Family Files, Adèle Geras, ill. Tony Ross, Lions, 0 00 673348 4, £3.50

The Bear Nobody Wanted, Janet and Allan Ahlberg, Puffin, 0 14 034809 3, £3.50

The Mouse and His Child, Russell Hoban, Puffin, 0 14 036455 2, £3.99

Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë, Puffin, 0 14 036678 4, £2.75

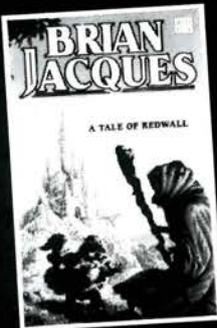
Sweet Valley High titles are available from Transworld.

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Philip Pullman laments the out-of-printness of *The Magic Pudding* by Norman Lindsay

first published
by Angus and
Robertson in
1918

Norman Lindsay had a robust idea of children's literary taste. Given a choice between fairies and food, he believed, they'd go for food every time; fighting and eating were what stories should be about. The result of this conviction is *The Magic Pudding*.

Quite simply, it's the funniest children's book ever written. It concerns the adventures of Bunyip Bluegum, 'a very well-bred young fellow, able to converse on a great variety of subjects, having read all the best Australian poets', who sets out to see the world and meets Bill Barnacle the sailor and Sam Sawnoff, the penguin bold, the owners of the Puddin'.

'Bill was a small man with a large hat, a beard half as large as his hat, and feet as large as his beard. Sam Sawnoff's feet were sitting down and his body was standing up, because his feet were so short and his body so long that he had to do both together.'



The Puddin' is magic, because if you want to change him from steak-and-kidney to boiled jam roll or apple dumpling, all you have to do is whistle twice and turn the basin round; and no matter how much you cut from him, there's no sign of the place where he's been sliced. Clearly this Puddin' (whose name is Albert, and who possesses a pair of extremely thin legs and a filthy temper) is highly valuable, and this provides the main-spring for the plot; for the book consists of a series of adventures in which the Puddin' is repeatedly stolen by the Wombat and the Possum, professional Puddin'-thieves, and regained by the daring and resource of the rightful Puddin'-Owners. That's where the fighting comes in; the eating is *passim*.

In one way, writing about *The Magic Pudding* is easy; all you have to do is quote and go on quoting.

'The other was a bulbous, boozy-looking Wombat in an old long-tailed coat, and a hat that marked him down as a man you couldn't trust in the fowl-yard.'

'The Rooster was one of those fine upstanding bumptious kites who love to talk all day, in the heartiest manner, to total strangers

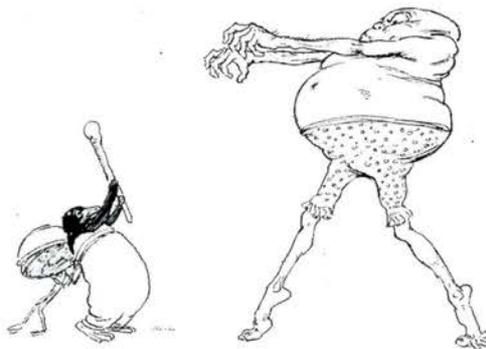
while their wives do the washing.'

'... his face was one of those feeble faces that make one think of eggs and carrots and feathers, if you take my meaning.'

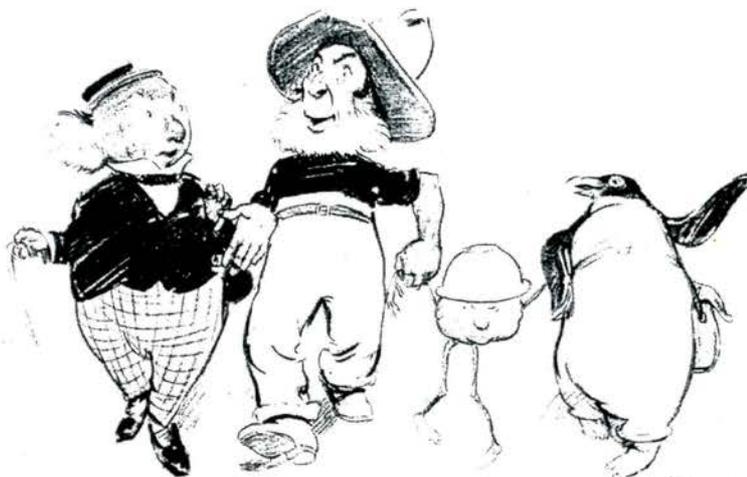
What these word-sketches (and many, many others) have in common, besides the brisk vigour of their characterisation, is an intensely visual quality. Lindsay was a fine draughtsman, and a large part of the delight of the book lies in its illustrations.

He was born in Victorian Victoria, and from an early age displayed a talent for drawing which, if he'd lived in Europe or America, might have made him an artist of some importance; but the only model of Great Art he saw as a boy was a lamentable oil by the third-rate Symbolist, Simeon Solomon, which had somehow ended up in the Ballarat Museum. At a time when the greatest upheaval in the visual arts since the Renaissance was taking place in France, the young Lindsay, twelve thousand miles away in the bush, was passionately struggling to depict Life, or Woman, or Temptation, in a manner that had been worn-out for decades without his knowing it.

In the course of doing that, however, he acquired a facility with the pencil that allowed him to earn a living as a cartoonist; and it's that aspect of his talent which is so brilliantly displayed in *The Magic Pudding*.



A characteristic delight of the book is the way in which characters break into verse to express heightened feelings. For example, Sam Sawnoff is explaining to Bunyip about



the free-and-easy behaviour of Puddin'-Owners at breakfast:

"None of the ordinary breakfast rules, such as scowling while eating, and saying the porridge is as stiff as glue and the eggs are as tough as leather, are observed. Instead, songs, roars of laughter, and boisterous jests are the order of the day. For example, this sort of thing," added Sam, doing a rapid back-flap and landing with a thump on Bill's head. As Bill was unprepared for this act of boisterous humour, his face was pushed into the Puddin' with great violence, and the gravy was splashed in his eye.

"What d'yer mean, playing such bung-fooding tricks on a man at breakfast?" roared Bill.

"What d'yer mean," shouted the Puddin', "playing such foodbungling tricks on a Puddin' being breakfasted at?"

At this tense moment, Bunyip Bluegum restores the goodwill of the Puddin'-Owners by reciting:

*'Then let the fist of Friendship
Be kept for Friendship's foes.
Ne'er let that hand in anger land
On Friendship's holy nose.'*

'These fine sentiments at once dispelled Bill's anger,' says the author, and well they might. The method is typical: earnest pomposity brilliantly rendered ludicrous by the last word.

The book ought to be back in print. But there's one moment towards the end that raises the political correctness question. It comes in another verse:

*'So I'll tell you what to do
You unmitigated Jew,
As a trifling satisfaction,
Why, I'll beat you black and blue.'*

What should we do about that? Personally, I'd substitute another word to rhyme with blue. That's not tampering with a sacred text – it's common sense. So is a lot of political correctness; but that's another question. ■

For a review of Philip Pullman's latest book, *Northern Lights*, see Wendy Cooling's round-up on page 24.

The Demise of

Nicholas Tucker reflects on the changing status,

Cricket and children's literature are two of Britain's most notable gifts to the rest of the world. They also have in common a past in which those individuals most famously associated with them tended to fall into two different social groupings. In the world of cricket, the game at county or national level was traditionally played and captained by amateurs, who ostensibly did it free and for fun, and professionals, who did it for a living. Perversely, this arrangement sometimes meant that amateurs like W G Grace still managed to make vastly more money than did his poorly paid professional colleagues. But in principle, the distinction between 'gentlemen' and 'players' lasted for over 150 years.

Children's literature shows a similar pattern. Prominent amateurs here have been Oxford dons (Lewis Carroll, C S Lewis, J R R Tolkien), a secretary of the Bank of England (Kenneth Grahame), career civil servants (Richard Adams) and ladies of independent means (Beatrix Potter). None of them wrote principally for money, although some found the extra income very handy. Walter de la Mare, for 18 years clerk in the offices of the Anglo-American Oil Company, reputedly saw one son through boarding school largely on the royalties of his much-quoted poem 'The Listeners'.

Freedom from commercial pressure gave these authors extra confidence in their own approaches. Lewis Carroll drove his illustrator, Tenniel, to distraction with his constant criticisms. Beatrix Potter also insisted on interfering with the finished published article until she finally approved of it, roundly declaring to her publisher, 'You are a great deal too much afraid of the public for whom I have never cared a twopenny button.' She and other famous amateur authors also set new standards of plot and imagination by writing chiefly for themselves and a few loved ones rather than for the market. Indeed, most of them knew nothing about contemporary children's books, being inter-

ested only in those stories heard or read long ago in their own childhood.

Now enter the professionals: those who have a good idea of the market and write to earn their living. These have been around since John Newbery first set out his stall in St Pauls Church Yard in 1744, selling popular children's books plus the option of a ball or pincushion for an extra twopenny. Sometimes these professionals wrote for children as their principal source of income, making no bones about trying to earn as much as possible. As Frances Hodgson Burnett firmly stressed in her letter to an editor accompanying an early story: 'My object is remuneration.' E Nesbit was also pushed financially when young, churning out couplets for Christmas cards before discovering the more lucrative world of children's literature.

Others turned to writing for children as one good commercial option among others. Jasper Milvain, the pushy young literary entrepreneur in Gissing's late 19th-century novel *New Grub Street*, is one such. 'I'd make a speciality of Sunday-school prize-books: they sell like hot cakes,' he enthuses. And later on, 'It's obvious what an immense field there is for anyone who just hit the taste of the new generation of Board school children.' Successful literary men can still be heard giving similarly worldly advice today. Thus Roald Dahl, recorded in Kingsley Amis's memoirs: 'What you want to do is write a children's book. That's where the money is today, believe me.' When Amis objected he had no feeling for that sort of thing, Dahl was typically forthright: 'Never mind, the little bastards'd swallow it.' Here he was wrong; when Amis eventually wrote his *We Are All Guilty* for teenage readers, it was a flop critically and commercially.

In cricketing terms, it was once thought that only the well-born amateur had the leadership qualities and disinterested belief in the values of the game to set the right example. Technically, amateur players were also the

ones who were supposed to go for their shots and set bold declarations to opposing sides, since unlike professionals financially dependent upon the game they could afford to take risks. In cricketing life, such distinctions were very confused. The amateur captain of England, D R Jardine, master-minded the bodyline bowling that shamed Britain's sportsmanship in the 1930s. Before him, W G Grace – the most famous amateur of all – indulged in the type of gamesmanship unthinkable for any seasoned professional operating under orders.

In the world of children's literature, there is also no easy line to be drawn between fearless, exploratory amateur authors writing for love and market-oriented professionals writing principally for money. Full-time writers like Arthur Ransome and Noel Streatfeild produced deeply felt fiction which also greatly extended the scope of pre-war children's literature. By contrast, Enid Blyton – the first millionairess of children's books – kept to a rigidly unimaginative writing style throughout her life and always drove a hard bargain with publishers. Despite never being dependent upon the money she earned, she worked at a pace whose speed rivalled any 19th-century penny-a-line hack writer. The desire to have a children's story in print can be very intense: it is not only those who rely financially upon their royalties who yearn to produce a story pleasing to the market.

A few of the most successfully innovative post-war children's writers have also been the best paid professionals. Roald Dahl's stories and rhymes significantly pushed out the boundaries of language and good taste in children's literature. He was able to defy disapproving critical opinion because he was so commercially successful. In America, best-sellers like Judy Blume and Robert Cormier have taken children's books into controversial new areas, their high sales providing a shield against critical unease. American comic-book illustrators, not always particularly well paid, have also produced



Lewis Carroll



Frances Hodgson Burnett



E. Nesbit



Kenneth Grahame

the Amateur

and situation, of the children's author

high-quality imaginative work. Writing directly for the market does not necessarily have to mean low standards and a craven devotion to well-worn approaches.

The distinction between amateur and professional in cricket was abolished in 1962. At around the same time, the concept of the amateur children's author also more or less disappeared. Wives stuck at home who may once have seen writing for children as a way of earning pin-money now considered themselves professionals in their own right, eager to make money and then to hang on to it. The leisurely lifestyle that enabled former dons, civil servants and clergymen to pen the odd children's book or detective story began to disappear. Those who still put aside what time they had left for writing novels tended now to do so in more earnest hope of publication.

Publishers too began to change. New, bigger firms sometimes with increasing cash-flow problems were less concerned with nurturing early talent in the hope one day of bigger sales. There was also more reluctance to stick by older but increasingly unfashionable children's authors, however well they had served in the past. Names more renowned for quality than for high sales began to disappear from publishers' lists. Sometimes their works were replaced by low quality material whose only justification was to make as much money as possible over the quickest period of time.

In cricket, the abolition of the professional-amateur distinction has made for much fairer terms of employment for players, but has not led to greater sporting achievements or to more entertaining matches. What has been the effect of similar changes in writing for children? Authors of great talent but little commercial success like William Mayne and Alan Garner are still around, but if they were starting again it is unlikely they would receive the support from publishers that they did before. Artistic progress does not only come from publishing high quality writers of

limited appeal like these two, but such authors are an invaluable part of any literary conspectus and deserve to be cherished, both for what they have to say and for how they choose to say it.

But the need for bold, unfettered children's writers is always an important one. Unofficial taboos on certain attitudes in children's literature still remain of the type that may once have been challenged by writers more concerned with saying what they think than with staying within the confines of current attitudes. This is nothing new: in the 1930s Geoffrey Trease complained in a letter to George Orwell about the difficulties of getting across any reasonably left-wing views in children's books. Today there are other limitations. Richard Adams, one of the last amateur best-sellers for children, had to try over 20 publishers before his rousing tale *Watership Down* got into print. It is in fact a somewhat sexist and backward-looking story, whose lowly rabbit characters are addressed very much as privates on parade. The fact that some of its attitudes did not fit into current publishing trends at the time almost certainly worked against its early acceptance.

Anxiety about the way some publishers now try to impose politically correct attitudes upon their writers was the subject of a special report by the PEN Committee on Censorship, which appeared a year or so ago. This document also discusses interference coming from the right wing. Christian fundamentalists in America now bring considerable pressure to bear upon publishers. Although this has not happened in Britain, there are indications of publishers becoming concerned about losing their lucrative American sales. Numbers of British writers have been asked to make various textual changes to suit the American market.

One example of where British teenage fiction is now playing extra safe is in the area of abortion. While there are numbers of teenage novels dealing compassionately with a

young, unmarried mother's decision to have a baby, there are hardly any stories where the decision to have an abortion is treated with similar understanding. There are also few novels about a young unmarried mother's subsequent struggle to bring up a child on her own with adverse consequences for both parent and child when the going gets tough, as it often does. The sympathetic fictional treatment of abortion is of course deeply unpopular among the American right wing. But stories offering a different point of view surely need to be written in order to balance other novels giving a more optimistic picture of birth outside marriage in the life of an ordinary teenager.

Each generation has some such gaps in its literature whether for children or adults. But fewer publishers, attempts by government to influence the choice of literature within the National Curriculum and a greater need for writers to get a good financial return could eventually lead to children's literature that always stays within broadly predictable channels. Amateur writers, occasionally in league with semi-amateur publishers, have always had the most potential for striking out against current attitudes of their own day. The economic conditions that once made their survival possible have now changed. So it's extra important that - especially during a long recession - there should still always be room somewhere for high quality but also high-risk children's literature, however much it may challenge the present status quo. ■

Nicholas Tucker is Lecturer in Developmental Psychology at the University of Sussex. He's written several books for children as well as books about children's literature including *The Child and the Book: A Psychological and Literary Exploration* (Cambridge, 0 521 39835 5, £6.95). Photos of Frances Hodgson Burnett and E Nesbit from Peter Hunt's new book *Children's Literature: An Illustrated History* (OUP, 0 19 212320 3, £22.50 hardback).



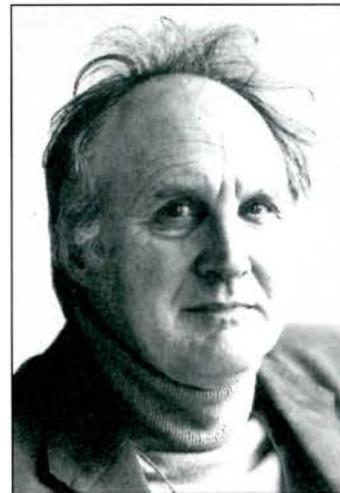
C.S. Lewis



Enid Blyton



Roald Dahl



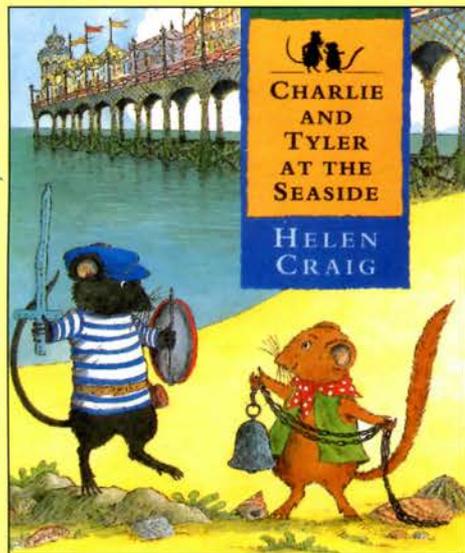
William Mayne

Pick of the Summer Hardbacks

Wendy Cooling

This year summer came to me early – 'The pick of the latest hardbacks', said your Editor, 'littlies through to teens'. Thereafter heaps of advance copies, proofs and manuscripts landed on my doormat. The titles I've chosen begin with some for the very young and move on to books for secondary school readers and adults, too.

For those who've enjoyed Nick Butterworth's board books, *All Together Now!* (Collins, 0 00 198134 X, £8.99) is bound to be a winner. It's a splendid flap-book featuring the same toddler planning a picnic for his animal friends who are all playing a hiding game. The sort of book adults will have to read again and again as young children join in the rhyming text and lift the flaps (which are such an integral part of the pictures). It's irresistible!

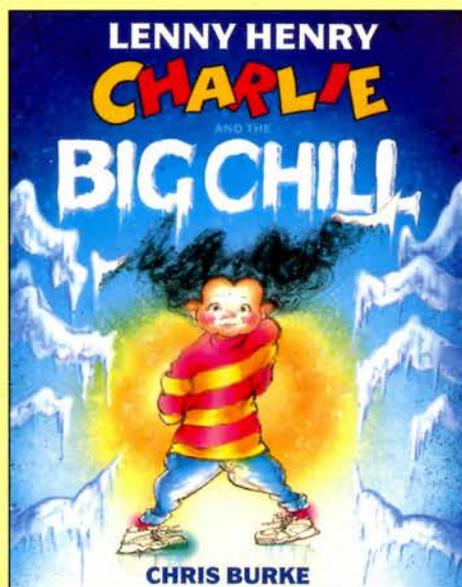


In *Charlie and Tyler at the Seaside* by Helen Craig (Walker, 0 7445 3700 2, £8.99), Charlie the country mouse and his cousin Tyler, the town mouse, share another adventure. The boat trip is rather more terrifying than expected; beach-combing is great fun and the pier quite an experience - in fact the day is going well until Tyler is carried off by a huge seabird. Charlie, after a few tears, finds unexpected courage and becomes an unlikely hero. A rich text, varied page layouts and illustrations that give a mouse-eye view of the environment, and at times a tremendous sense of movement, force the reader to turn the pages.

In fact, picture books this summer are as strong and full of child-appeal as ever. *Bedtime Story* (Doubleday, 0 385 40648 7, £5.99) was selected for me by a toddler friend and is a pop-in-the-slot book written by David Wood and

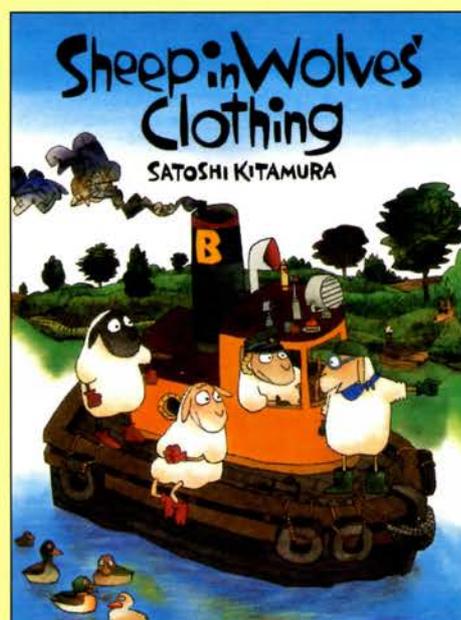
illustrated by Richard Fowler. Mole must be slotted through the pages and put into bed but finding the right bed isn't easy. It's an ingenious book with lively language, bright illustrations and a final double-spread in which everyone says 'Good-night'. The book is tough, too – my copy has survived dozens of readings.

Skip Across the Ocean (Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 0966 9, £9.99) is a fresh collection of world-wide nursery rhymes collected by Floella Benjamin and illustrated by Sheila Moxley. Sometimes rhymes are in the original language as well as English – they're both familiar yet unusual, showing the extraordinary similarities between rhymes originating from different parts of the world. Such rhymes says Floella Benjamin 'are children's first introduction to rhythm, poetry, music and the world around them' and in this case, I would add, to the diversity of language. A special book to read together and talk about.



Lenny Henry's *Charlie and the Big Chill* (Gollancz, 0 575 05938 9, £6.99) is something quite different. Charlie, drawn by Chris Burke, is a bit of a menace and, like so many children, really hates shopping – until she's sent to the other side of the supermarket to pick up half-a-dozen eggs. On the way she meets the Ice-cream Posse! In a wonderful dream-like adventure Charlie learns to dance the Funky Chicken, the Boogaloo and the Mashed Potato as well as meeting the huge snow giant. By the time she returns to her mum she can't wait to go shopping again. A fast and funky story with wonderfully whacky illustrations that simply dance through the pages.

In Satoshi Kitamura's *Sheep in Wolves' Clothing* (Andersen, 0 86264 585 9, £8.99) wolves, as so often in children's literature, are the baddies. It's always a pleasure to open a new book by this illustrator whose distinctive style is full of humour and originality. Three sheep decide to go for a swim and foolishly leave their coats in the care of four wolves – the expected happens, both wolves and coats have gone by the time the sheep leave the water.

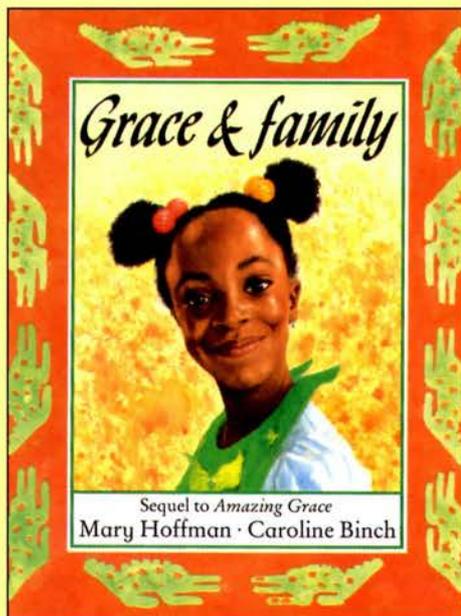


They call on a detective friend, Elliott Baa, for help and come upon a gang of cats playing rugby with a slowly unwinding ball of wool. Following the wool into the building of Wolfgang and Bros, Quality Knitwear, they defeat the wolves in a wonderfully visual battle. The illustrations are superb and changes in mood are established by using the pages in different ways as well as with the use of colour. By breaking up the page the battle comes alive and full of action – these extraordinary scenes contrast well with the last double-page which shows the sheep back home, grazing peacefully.

Any addition to Dutton's 'Folk Tales of the World' series is very welcome and *Kesuna and the Cave Demons* (0 525 69040 9, £9.99) by Gini Wade comes from Bali. The story of two sisters, one sweet-tempered and kind, the other nasty and greedy, will seem familiar as versions of it are told all around the world. Illustrations in all the titles set the stories in their geographical location and take the reader on a cultural journey; this, as much as the stories themselves, makes these books important. This one has end-papers and borders from Indonesian textile designs. Although life is very different, the emotions and concerns of the characters are universal.

The warmth of family shines from the pages of *Grace and Family* written by Mary Hoffman and illustrated by Caroline Binch (Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 0868 9, £8.99), the sequel to *Amazing Grace*. In this picture book for slightly older readers, Grace journeys to Africa to meet the father she only knows from letters and photographs, during the visit she learns more about herself and her family and the power of love to cross continents. The story is told with honesty and sensitivity and the glowing illustrations, cover and endpapers included, reflect the warmth and colour of Africa.

Finally, a picture book for older readers full of the sophistication of text and illustration we expect from Chris Van Allsburg. *The Sweetest Fig* (Andersen, 0 86264 498 4, £8.99) is a story



Grace & family

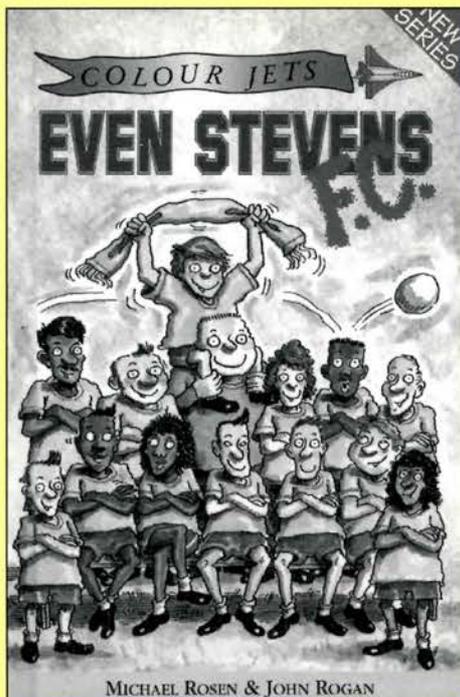
Sequel to *Amazing Grace*
Mary Hoffman · Caroline Binch



"The dentist turned and ran into an alley. "Sacré bleu," he thought, "What happened to my clothes?" From *The Sweetest Fig*.

of sweet revenge tautly told and illustrated in muted colours and almost surreal style. The story of Monsieur Bibot, a dentist, begins when a poor woman offers him two figs as payment, promising they will make his dreams come true. He believes this when, on the morning after he's eaten the first fig, he finds himself walking his dog in his underwear – just as he'd done in a dream. He's determined to use the second fig to make himself rich but the dog has other ideas. Like other Chris Van Allsburg titles, this is a book to look at again and again.

For children about to start school, there's nothing better than Kaye Umansky's Sophie stories. In the first, *Sophie and Abigail* (Collanz, 0 575 06016 6, £7.99; 0 575 06017 4, £3.99 pbk), Sophie Rabbit enters school feeling nervous and alone. She soon finds a friend and settles in. The stories are happy and fun and illustrated with great charm by Anna Currey. We now have 'Colour Jets' and the one that made me laugh most is *Even Stevens F.C.* (A & C Black, 0 7136 4187 8, £5.99; Lions, 0 00 675084 2, £3.99 pbk) by Michael Rosen and



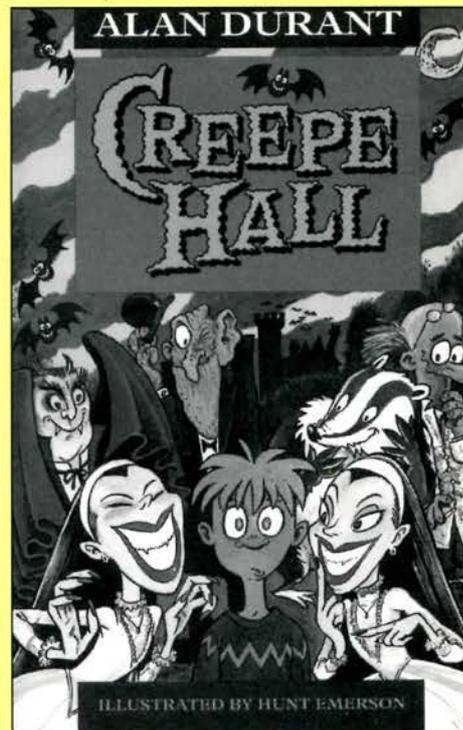
MICHAEL ROSEN & JOHN ROGAN

John Rogan. Wayne is mad about football and because of injuries he gets to play for Even Stevens, the Shakespeare Street team - they all live in houses or flats with even numbers. Miracle follows miracle as the team make it to the first round of the FA Cup - and in fact all the way to Wembley. A strong story with the sort of imaginative leap that will delight young football fans. The mix of text, speech bubbles and illustration follows the very successful 'Jets' formula that works so well.

Grown-up looking stories for newly independent readers are sometimes hard to find. Charles Ashton's *The Giant's Boot* (Walker, 0 7445 4106 9, £6.99) is a good one with its mix of fantasy and family problems. Ritchie finds a boot that once belonged to a giant; it's been lost for thousands of years and has turned to stone. There's tension and magic in this well-told story as Ritchie returns the boot to the giant and brings about a satisfactory conclusion. Peter Melnyczuk's atmospheric black-and-white illustrations really complement the text. Completely different in mood is Alan Durant's *Creepe Hall* (Walker, 0 7445 2455 5, £6.99), a story of vampires, ghosts and were-beavers! Oliver's parents have gone to the Himalayas and he has to spend the time with relatives he's never met.

There are many shocks in store for Oliver but once he gets used to life without television and gets to know the strange inhabitants of Creepe Hall, he has the kind of holiday he'll never forget. A fast-moving story – loads of fun, written with style and humour – plus illustrations to match from Hunt Emerson.

Moving up the age-range, Paul Zindel's *Loch* (Bodley Head, 0 370 32430 7, £8.99) offers suspense and a touch of horror. Luke Perkins, camping with his family on the shore of Loch Ness, wanders out alone one night and sees the Loch Ness Monster – but who will believe him? This claim earns him the name Loch. Ten years later he's by another lake where his father is involved in a dangerous project. Here is an action-packed story with powerful descriptions of huge sea creatures and, although the monsters attack, our sympathy is with them as they fight to survive the threat of man and modern



weapons. A book that may well appeal to young male readers generally unwilling to pick one up.

I've always loved long reads so couldn't resist the first part of a new trilogy. *His Dark Materials, Book 1: Northern Lights* by Philip Pullman (Scholastic, 0 590 54178 1, £9.99) is a book for serious readers. This is gripping, thought-provoking and extremely frustrating at the end, as it could be months, even years, before Book 2 is published! It's set in a world in some ways like our own and in an unspecified time, a time when everyone has their own personal daemon, a living creature often able to change shape, linked to them. Daemons are very sympathetic and able to reflect the feelings of their particular human. Lyra's daemon is a moth at the start of the story and Lord Asriel's a snow leopard. The lives of these two characters are connected in way that becomes apparent

... continued on page 28

BfK News

Books Holding Their Own

Rumours about the death of the book have been greatly exaggerated. Well, that's according to the business information company, Key Note, in a report issued earlier this year. Here's what they say in their press release:

'A survey conducted by Gallup revealed that most people would rather turn a page than plug in a CD, and just 9% of over 1,000 people questioned said that they would be likely to read a book in a multi-media format. While no one would expect older people to be keen to jump on the technology band-wagon - only 4% of the over 65s said that they would tackle reading a multi-media book - young people were similarly unenthusiastic - just 10% of 16-24 year-olds said that they would have a go.

'Television and video - often cited as the arch enemies of the book - can spur the square-eyed to reach for the latest Joanna Trollope or a literary classic. 17% of those questioned in the survey said that they would be likely to buy a book having watched a TV or film adaptation. Young people were much more likely to be inspired by the big screen - and a quarter of 16-34 year-olds said that they would be tempted by a TV adaptation, compared to 9% of the over 64s.'

Not much here to surprise BfK readers, perhaps, even if it's nice to have confirming facts and figures. For the full report, called **UK Publishing**, contact St John Farley or Clare Williams Fannin on 0181 783 0755. Since it'll set purchasers back a cool £375, though, maybe we'll take their word for it.

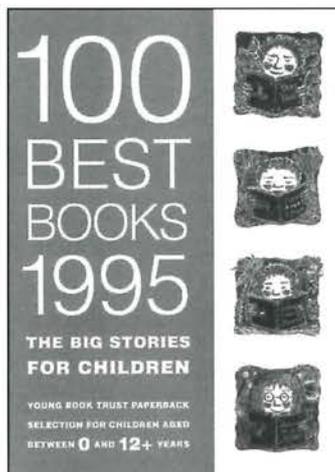
100 BEST BOOKS 1995

It's trim, smartly presented, lucid and carefully age-ranged. Also, at a quid a copy - thanks to the financial support of Marks & Spencer and the Scottish Arts Council - excellent value for money. So don't miss this publication by Young Book Trust under its new head, Lindsey Fraser.

In addition, this guide to the best paperback fiction for children (between 0 and 12+ years) published last year offers a complete list of children's book prize-winners for 1994 and the personal choices of guest critics Tony Bradman, Nichole Carmichael, Julia Eccleshare, Anne Fine, Steve Hocking and Michael Rosen.

So far, so good - indeed, so very good. Doesn't it make you long for those more opulent and expansive days of Children's Books of the Year, though, when that unsung hero Klaus Flugge, of Andersen Press, provided so much of the funding? Well, yes. It does actually. In these straitened times, however, this will do nicely.

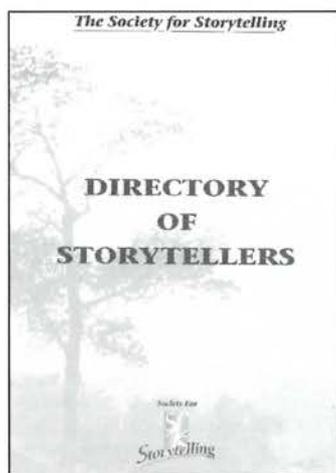
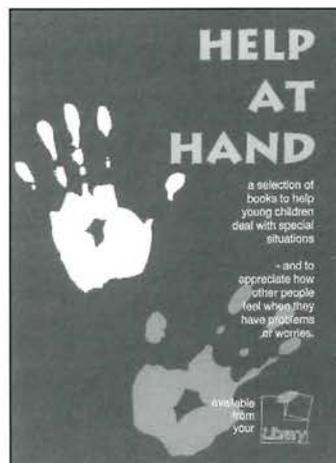
100 Best Books 1995: *The Big Stories for Children* (0 85353 455 1) is available from bookshops and libraries throughout the country or from Young Book Trust in London on 0181 870.9055/8 or Edinburgh on 0131 229 3663.



HELP AT HAND

Cannily, this list - compiled by Judith Wilkinson of Leicestershire Libraries - isn't just subtitled 'a selection of books to help young children deal with special situations' but goes on to say 'and to appreciate how other people feel when they have problems or worries'. It's a straightforward aide-memoire which covers issues as specific as going to the dentist and as general as being 'different'. It doesn't claim to be exhaustive or evaluative, and is all the more welcome for its total lack of pretension and the sensible advice it offers. It was designed and produced by Peters Library Service who've already distributed their print-run... so cross your fingers and ask for it, free of charge, at your local library.

Also available, free of charge, from Peters Library Service is a poster for teenage readers showing their hero, Terry Pratchett, looming - just about - over a huge pile of his books. For this, send an A4 envelope, stamped and addressed, to Peters Library Service Ltd, 120 Bromsgrove Street, Birmingham B5 6RL.



DIRECTORY OF STORYTELLERS

So, you'd like a professional storyteller to visit your school... who, though? What kind of stories? How large should the audience be? These, and other questions, are answered in *The Directory of Storytellers* which provides full information about more than 150 professionals, nationwide, with details about how they can be contacted, as well as advice on making their visit a success. Big names include Pie Corbett, Ben Haggerty,

Grace Hallworth, Mary Medicott, Betty and Harold Rosen... all with a description of their approach and background.

Copies of the Directory retail at £10.00 (half price to society members) plus £1.00 p&p, from Tina Tilbe, The Society for Storytelling, 12 Belle Avenue, Reading, Berks RG6 2BL (tel. 01734 665983).

HOWLER

This issue's crisp fiver goes to Robert Leeson who spotted a classic clanger in your favourite magazine - on the very page we devoted to his Blindspot about Jean Webster's *Daddy-Long-Legs*, in fact. Bob writes:

'I am (as is well known) slow on the uptake and it was only on (by chance) looking through the March BfK that I noticed a gross error in the limerick attacking Rachel Anderson.

I am quite sure that it will be too late for you to use but I could not resist putting this on paper:

*How pleasant to know Mr Lear
To treasure his humorous words
But Whiteman and Escreet
Are rather in-descreet
The 'Snark' is by Carroll, you
nerds.'*

Oh, well. It was bound to happen one day so we'd better be BIG about it:

*How lucky to know Mr Leeson
Whose brain moves like lightning
with grease 'n
We'd have been in the dark
About Carroll's 'Snark',
If he hadn't complained with
good reas'n.*

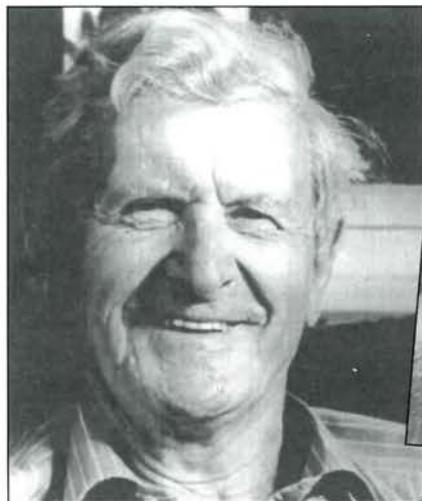
Keep the howlers coming...

AWARDS

The Winner of the 1995 Children's Book Award is Harriet's Hare

by Dick King-Smith

published by Doubleday (0 385 405324, £8.99).



Voted the most popular book for 1995 by over 60,000 children in Britain, this award, with its magnificent trophy in oak and silver, was presented to Dick King-Smith as the overall winner.

The two runners-up were *The Rascally Cake* by Jeanne Willis, ill. Korky Paul (Andersen, 0 86364 477 1, £8.99) in the Picture Book category, and *Walk Two Moons* by Sharon Creech (Pan Macmillan, 0 330 33000 4, £2.99) in the Longer Novel category.

ELEANOR FARJEON AWARD

The winner for 1995 is HELEN PAIBA

For 20 years Helen transformed her bookshop at Muswell Hill, in North London into a Mecca for lovers of quality literature for children. She certainly represents the true spirit and passion of the independent bookseller and is a worthy recipient of this prestigious award.

Helen has continually fought for quality in all areas of book production and was a pioneer of the successful campaign to obtain a 10% discount for all educational establishments. She's served on many award panels and committees, including the Children's Book Circle, who are responsible for the administration of the Eleanor Farjeon Award.

Congratulations from everyone at BfK.



September BfK offers you Poetry Plus

- The Wondercrump Poetry Competition
- Robert Hull on the verse of Ted Hughes
- Jack Ousbey's Poetry Round-Up
- Julia Eccleshare interviews Lenny Henry
- Shirley Hughes on the Art of Alan Marks
- Mary Hoffman on Library Power
- Gareth Owen in Authorgraph plus reviews, reviews, reviews.



BfK News

MIND BOGGLING BOOKS AWARD 1995 goes to *Memoirs Of a Dangerous Alien*

by Maggie Prince,

published by Orion (1 85881 041 8, £9.99; 1 85881 073 6, £3.99 pbk)

This award is chosen by children from a shortlist drawn up by W H Smith. Julie Randles of their Children's Book Department commented: 'We selected six of the best, gripping new reads around today for the shortlist and it is a particular thrill that the children chose Maggie's book as this is her first children's story for 9-12 year-olds.'

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

August 12th:

National Book Day - a focus to the Scotland-wide Rediscovery campaign. Phone 0131 221 1995 for information.

August 12th-28th:

Edinburgh Book Festival, Charlotte Square Gardens. For the full list of the many children's events, contact Alison Plackitt on 0131 228 5444.

September 1st-3rd:

2nd Cape Clear International Storytelling Festival in County Cork - phone/fax 028 39157 for more details.

September 16th:

The Federation of Children's Book Groups BOOKFEST at the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington -

contact Enid Stephenson on 01603 629651 to find out more.

September 22nd-24th:

University of Exeter - 'Celebrating Children's Literature in Education' 25th Anniversary Conference. Details from Maureen Lewis, School of Education, Exeter University, St Luke's, Heavitree Road, Exeter EX1 2LU.

October 6th-15th:

Cheltenham Festival of Literature - 'Bigger and bolder than ever before' promise the organisers. Find out more from Nicola Russell on 01865 511065.

October 7th-14th:

Plymouth Children's Book Festival - contact Libby Allman on 01752 668607 for details. ■

KING ALFRED'S COLLEGE
OF HIGHER EDUCATION
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A University Sector College

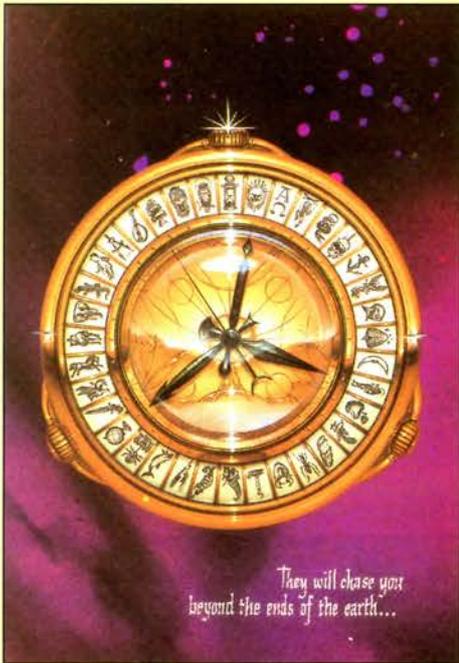
MA in Writing for Children*

A new and unique creative writing course to help you develop your abilities and talents as a writer for a child audience.

Commencing in September, the MA in Writing for Children can be studied on a one year (full time) or two year (part time) basis.

To find out more, contact Jo Roffey, Postgraduate & Advanced Studies Office, King Alfred's College, Winchester SO22 4NR
Tel: 01962 - 827375 Fax: 01962 - 842280

*Subject to validation



From the cover of *Northern Lights*.

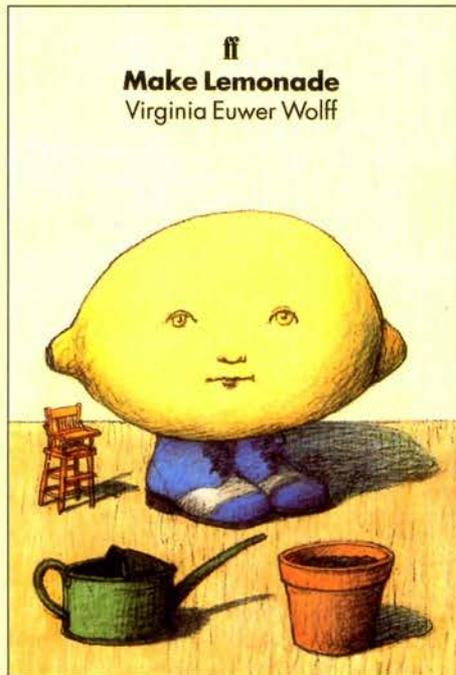
well into the story and Lyra's journey to reach him is the content of Book 1. Overhearing conversations and concern for her missing friend, lead Lyra to take a journey that demands all her strength and brings her into contact with animals, people and places beyond her imagination. Read this powerfully written story and you, too, will be waiting for Book 2.

Nancy Farmer is well known in the USA and I was very excited by *The Ear, The Eye and The Arm* (Orion, 1 85881 147 3, £10.99), the first of her novels to be published here. Set in Zimbabwe a hundred years from now, it follows, in almost picaresque fashion, the journey of Tendai, Kuda and Rita, the children of General Matsiki, the country's Chief of Security. The children live in a protected world until one day they trick their father into giving them Pass Cards. The General and his wife consult the mutant detectives Ear, Eye and Arm for help and these three are always just a step behind the children. This is a huge novel, in one sense a fantastic adventure but, on a more serious note, extends the different ways in which we already live to show an even greater economic and social disparity. So much happens in this strongly written book - it's not easy, but it's a worthwhile and rewarding read.

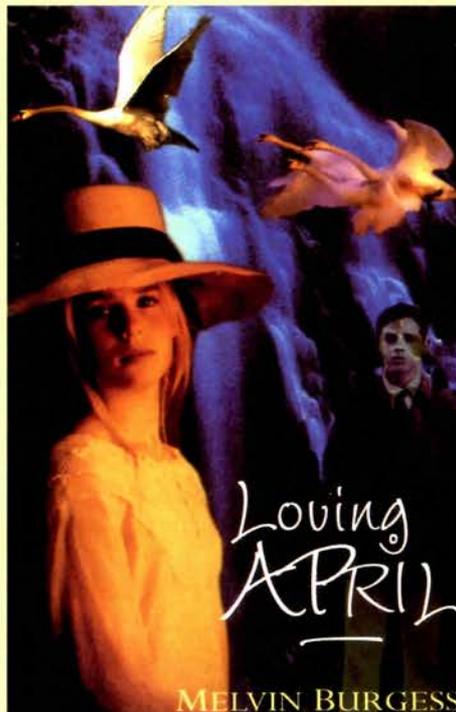
Melvin Burgess tackles a difficult subject in *Loving April* (Andersen, 0 86264 527 1, £9.99), an exceptional novel, both brutal and sensitive, with strong characters. Tony and his mother, abandoned by his father, suddenly find themselves poor and forced to live in an awful house close to April, 'the mad girl'. April, of course, is not mad, she's deaf and hardly able to speak. She lives in fear and isolation and, as she grows up, finds herself more and more threatened and abused by local boys. An extraordinary relationship, not understood or accepted by anyone else, develops between April and Tony. Against all the odds this well-crafted book ends with a note of optimism as April finds someone who understands her needs and gives her hope for the future.

There really are some tough novels around for teenagers this year and Robert Cormier's *In the Middle of the Night* (Collancz, 0 575 05983 4, £10.99) is the kind of uncompromising book

we expect from him. The themes are justice, revenge and guilt as 16-year-old Denny finally realises why his family are always moving and why he's not allowed to answer the 'phone. Eight years before he was born his father, then a teenager, was working in a cinema when a fire broke out and 22 children were killed. One child, badly injured in the accident can never forget and, as no one has ever been convicted and found responsible, she delivers her own kind of justice by making the 'phone calls just before each anniversary. Denny defies his parents and answers the 'phone and the breaking of a 25-year pattern begins. This is a tautly written, terrifying and compulsive novel: it shows how hatred and a need for revenge can turn the mind.



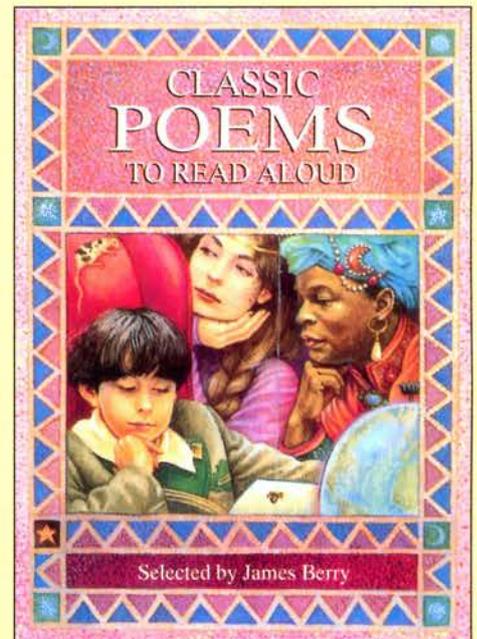
You can't help but notice the cover of *Make Lemonade* (Faber, 0 571 17502 3, £9.99) by Virginia Euwer Wolff, another American writer published in this country for the first time. Fourteen-year-old LaVaughn wants to earn money for college and so responds to a notice



Pick of the Summer Hardbacks

continued from page 25

on the school bulletin board, 'Babysitter Needed Bad', and her involvement with single-parent Jolly, two-year-old Jeremy and baby Jilly, begins. Jolly is 17 and as she says, 'I can't do it alone' for the third time, LaVaughn finds herself agreeing to babysit so that Jolly can work the evening shift at the factory. The story is warm and compulsive as LaVaughn takes on the family and sticks with them even when there's no money to pay her. She offers a kind of optimism reflected in her attempts to grow a lemon tree from lemon pips. But, against all the odds, she helps Jolly to take some control of her life. This is a very special book; it reflects the lives of a growing number of young people in our inner cities and is both disturbing and cheering. There are young people like LaVaughn who take on the problems of others, and by telling her story in a form of naturalistic monologue it becomes very accessible to teenage readers. Forget your preconceptions about the novel and read this one.



When Kingfisher published Michael Rosen's *A World of Poetry* some years ago, I carried it around with me constantly. Now I can recommend another of their superb anthologies, *Classic Poems to Read Aloud* (1 85697 253 4, £10.99) selected by James Berry. This book looks inviting, is one to hold close and to dip into - a real celebration of poetry. James Berry's sense of rhythm and feeling for words are reflected in his choices which range through time and cultures from Homer to the youngest poet included, Grace Nichols. On the way there are English classics, a creation story from Mali, a Navaho Indian poem, excellent pieces of contemporary verse, the words of Muhammad, the Buddha and Jesus and much more. A book for everybody; there's something here for every child and every adult to read aloud, savour and enjoy - the experience will be enriching. ■

Wendy Cooling now works freelance, as a book and reading consultant.