

# BOOKS FOR KEEPS

September 1995  
No. 94 UK Price £2.70



WONDERCRUMP  
POETRY!

PLUS...

the children's book magazine

# Take out a subscription to **BOOKS FOR KEEPS NOW**

**FIND US A NEW SUBSCRIBER  
AND WE'LL GIVE YOU  
ONE FREE ISSUE OF BfK**

Obviously, we're always keen to increase our readership – not least because this helps us to offset our ever-spiralling production costs. If you know someone who'd like to become a subscriber, just pass this Order Form on to them. Before you do so, though, complete your own details in the bottom section. As soon as we receive the form, we'll move your expiry date on one issue – thus giving you your **FREE COPY** (worth £2.70).

Alternatively you could use this Order Form to take out a subscription for yourself! If you don't want to ruin our splendid cover, then feel free to photocopy the form.

## ORDER FORM

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to become a BfK subscriber:

UK £16.20  EEC/Non EEC inc. Ireland £20.00   
Student £10.00  Rest of the World (Airmail) £23.00   
*(Please tick appropriate box)*

Please invoice me £\_\_\_\_\_ / Cheque enclosed £\_\_\_\_\_  
(Cheques/postal orders payable to **Books for Keeps**)

I authorise you to debit my Access/Visa/Mastercard/Eurocard  
No. \_\_\_\_\_

Card expiry date \_\_\_\_\_ Amount £ \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Return this form Post Free to **BOOKS FOR KEEPS, FREEPOST,  
LONDON SE12 8BR**

This subscriber was recommended by \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_

BfK Account No. (if known) \_\_\_\_\_

<i>All about...</i>	<i>the principal children's library supplier</i>	<i>All about...</i>	
Primary to Secondary		Showroom	
Hardbacks/Paperbacks		The Kit Shop	
Servicing		Approvals	
Spoken Word Cassettes		Catalogues on Demand	
Library Furnishings		EDI / On-Line / SIMS	
CD Rom		Events	
Posters		Packington Hall	
Free Delivery		Promotions Packs	
<p><b>Peters</b> LIBRARY SERVICE</p> <p><i>Sponsors of the LA Carnegie &amp; Kate Greenaway Awards</i></p>			
<p>120 Bromsgrove Street, Birmingham, B5 6RL Tel: 0121 666 6646 Fax: 0121 666 7033</p>			

# Contents

- 4** **Wondercrump Poetry**  
Liccy and Ophelia Dahl
- 5** **Poetry the Wondercrump Way**  
John Lynch of Handford Hall Primary School, Ipswich
- 7** **Reviews**  
Series 7/Fiction 9/Non Fiction 16
- 8** **A Tale of Two Charlies**  
Julia Eccleshare interviews Lenny Henry
- 14** **Authorgraph No.94**  
Gareth Owen, interviewed by Adrian Jackson
- 18** **Power to the Book People!**  
Mary Hoffman on the campaign to save our libraries
- 20** **One to One...**  
Shirley Hughes assesses the work of Alan Marks
- 23** **Letters Page**
- 24** **Speaking in Blossom**  
Jack Ousbey on recent poetry
- 26** **News**
- 28** **Wodwo and After**  
Robert Hull celebrates the animal poems of Ted Hughes

## CoverSTORY

This month's cover features Quentin Blake's illustration for the publication **Wondercrump Poetry**. We feature this book on pages 4 and 5 and details of it are given there. Our thanks to Red Fox for their help in reproducing this cover.

## BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine

SEPTEMBER 1995 No. 94

ISSN 0143-909X: © School Bookshop Assoc. 1995  
Editor: Chris Powling  
Managing Director: Richard Hill  
Design and typeset: Rondale Ltd., Lydney, Glos.  
Printed by: The Friary Press, Dorchester.

Editorial correspondence: **Books for Keeps**,  
The Old Chapel, Easton, Nr Winchester,  
Hampshire SO21 1EG Tel: 01962 779600

**Books for Keeps** can be obtained on subscription by sending a cheque or postal order to Books for Keeps, 6 Brightfield Road, Lee, London SE12 8QF. You can also pay by credit card (Access, Visa, Eurocard or Mastercard) or use the telephone order service on

**0181-852 4953**

Annual subscription for six issues:  
£16.20 (UK); £20.00 (Europe including Ireland);  
£23.00 (airmail)

Single copies:  
£2.70 (UK); £3.35 (Europe including Ireland);  
£3.85 (airmail)

# Author! Author!

Poetry plus ... plus what, exactly? In the case of this issue, plus articles on illustration, on the current campaign for public libraries, on Lenny Henry's debut as a children's writer - and the inauguration of what's intended to be a regular correspondence page. More than sufficient to start off the new school year, I'd have thought.

Even as we settled on it, though, September's strapline suggested something else. Poetry plus ... performance, perhaps? For instance, it's clear from our Authorgraph just how versatile today's poets must be. Gareth Owen gives regular public readings of both his own and other people's work as well as presenting radio programmes and making regular author visits to schools and libraries. In this respect he's little different from any other professional writers for children whether of prose or verse.

## Why do they do it?

Well, for three reasons mainly. The first, and let's not be coy about this, is to earn money. Authors tend to be paid only twice a year when their Spring and Autumn royalty statements appear. Extra one-off cheques from a parents' association or local amenity budget - however late they are in arriving and by however bureaucratic a route - are a big help in eking out personal finances during the long months in between.

It's hard work, though. Quite apart from the wear and tear of the travel that's involved, there's the 'stranger' factor. Just like an actor or stand-up comic, the author-visitor will almost certainly be meeting most members of any audience for the very first time ... which can be something of a strain on the nerves. An illustrator friend of mine brought this home to me after I'd teased her about taking 'only three lessons a day'. She grinned wryly and said 'More like three assemblies a day, Chris ... in someone else's school'.

Before professional teachers burst into tears of sympathy, though, I'd better move on smartly to the second reason for making author visits. This is just as simple and just as basic as the first. The downside, not to say backside, of the writerly lot is the need to slave away in solitude for hours on end. Compared with this, a trip to a new place to promote bookish-ness generally, and one's own books in particular, can be enormous FUN.

For the truth is, and I say this with fulsome apologies to any shy and retiring poets and novelists who may read these words, that the link between authors, actors and stand-up comics which I suggested earlier on is much less tenuous than it may appear. Actually, there's more than a bit of 'ham' in many writers.

Take the great Charles Dickens, for example. Just published, with glorious illustrations by Alan Marks (see Shirley Hughes's article on pages 20-21) is the version of **David Copperfield** which Dickens himself abridged for public reading. It reduces the original novel to a recitation-length of an hour or so - if 'reduced' is quite the right word. Dickens didn't just cut, he re-shaped, re-wrote and learned his new script by heart. Also, as Professor Philip Collins makes clear in his

# Editor's PAGE

CHRIS POWLING



detailed commentary on Dickens's public readings in Britain and America - surely among the first and most famous of all author visits - the theatrical possibilities of such occasions were taken completely seriously. **The New York Times**, of 11th December 1867, was especially impressed with his rendition of the death of Steerforth:

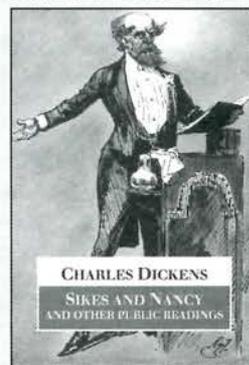
*'Here Mr Dickens displayed his dramatic power in a very remarkable manner. The tone in which David, knowing what the answer will be, and yet dreading to hear it, asks, "Has anybody come ashore?" - strikes to the heart of every person within reach of his voice. And the answer! In the book it is simply "yes"; but Mr Dickens, in the person of the old fisherman, does not speak. - he only bows his head; and in that simple action conveys the whole story which the lips cannot speak. Acting more impressive than this we have never witnessed. The whole audience felt its power, and the hush that fell upon the room was for the moment almost painful.'*

With Children's Book Week in the offing, the nation's poets, novelists and illustrators had better take note. Or maybe drama lessons.

Of course, and here's my third reason, the pay-off for Dickens's audience was tremendous.

According to Professor Collins, 'to hear Dickens

*read instead of reading the books oneself was like meeting someone instead of getting a letter from him - or like seeing a stereoscopic instead of a two dimensional photograph - or a great painting instead of an engraving of it.'* With suitable technological updating, this might describe the optimum impact of any author visit today.



Mind you, the pay-off for Dickens himself was far from negligible. In Professor Collins's estimate, almost half the £93,000 fortune Dickens left in his will - an enormous sum in those days - was the profit from his readings rather than his writing. Would-be imitators had better watch out, though. In the opinion of most literary historians, it's what killed him in the end.

Enjoy the issue!

**Sikes and Nancy and Other Public Readings**, by Charles Dickens, edited by Prof. Philip Collins, Oxford, 0 19 281617 9, £5.99

For more information about CHILDREN'S BOOK WEEK, contact Young Book Trust on 0181 870 9055 or 0131 229 3663.

Chris

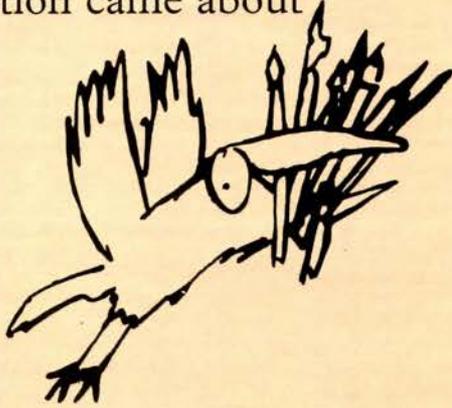
## PRICE INCREASE ON BFK SUBSCRIPTIONS

You may have read or heard about the volatility in paper prices over the last year. All publishers have been affected, including BFK. So great are the increases that we've had no choice but to put up the UK annual subscription for BFK to £16.20 from this September. Our overseas subscription rates will be £20.00 for Europe and Ireland, and £23.00 for airmail. Not only is this increase greater than we would wish but it's come earlier than normal (usually January). We've always had a policy of value for money for all BFK publications, indeed our March readers-survey decisively confirmed that you think we've got it right, so it's with considerable regret that we make this announcement. You can be sure BFK keeps its costs to the minimum - including, alas, its fees to reviewers and contributors!

# POETRY THE

## Liccy Dahl describes how the **WONDERCRUMP**

Competition came about



The Roald Dahl Foundation was set up in 1991, after Roald died. We help in three areas: literacy, haematology and neurology. Neurology was chosen for two reasons: brain damage has severely affected our family. Also, it covers such a large area of medical disorders which need a great deal of funding. Haematology was chosen because leukaemia was the cause of Roald's own death. Literacy, though, was Roald's passion and promoting it a lifelong crusade. So, when I was asked if the Roald Dahl Foundation would like to be associated with a poetry competition, I replied, 'Yes, we'd be greatly honoured.'

And so, the Wondercrump Competition was born. Teachers and pupils went wild, Random House was inundated and 15,000 poems flew in from all over the UK. A team of dedicated teachers was put to work sorting through initial entries. Another panel of expert judges spent many hours deliberating over and categorising the winners.

I, too, was involved in the difficult task of judging. The postman delivered to Gipsy House an enormous parcel filled with hundreds of poems for me to read. 'Help,' I thought, 'where do I begin?' I was then asked to write the introduction for the book. Imagine Roald's amusement at the thought of me, 'the illiterate member of the family', not only being asked to be a judge but to write the introduction for the first publication! I gave it the heading 'Poetic Justice' believing that perhaps I had the last laugh. However, in the end it was Roald, as ever, who came up trumps because I signed off with one of the poems he'd sent to a school:

*'When I grow old and just a trifle-frayed  
It's nice to know that sometimes I have made  
The children and occasionally the staff  
Stop work and have a little laugh.'*

This would surely set the theme for the competition. I wanted the teachers and the children to have FUN.

To achieve the final phase in this great enterprise, Quentin Blake's pens, paints and brushes created a cover. Random House and School Book Fairs sponsored the whole event. Let's hope that between all of us, we've helped to create a new world of poetry lovers and, who knows, with a bit of luck, some great poets for the future.

We're now in the third year of the Wondercrump Competition and I have a feeling that once again we'll be swamped with eager poets. You'll find an entry form in this issue. I've left Roald's daughter, Ophelia, to write about what this competition would have meant to her father.



Felicity and Roald Dahl from the cover of *Memories with Food: At Gipsy House* (Penguin). Photograph by Jan Baldwin.

## Ophelia Dahl writes:

Most of you probably know that my father wrote during the day in a small, brick hut at the edge of our orchard. Alone in this cool, quiet place, he could let his imagination talk to him. Every night he would lift his creaky body upstairs to tell my sister Lucy and me about the piece of the story he'd written that day. Usually, he walked slowly round the room as he talked and sometimes he parted the curtains and peered out into the evening as though he were looking for the BFG or Fantastic Mr Fox. When he came into the room holding a single leaf of yellow, lined paper, we knew he was going to read us one of his poems. I think we looked forward to the poems most of all. He tried to keep a serious face while he read them, but we could see the grin in his eyes.

At school he was expected to learn long, complicated poems by great poets like Keats, Donne, Kipling and Dylan Thomas. Because of one particularly eccentric and imaginative teacher, this was never a chore. He'd been inspired and this love of poetry remained with him forever. The best possible proof of this is that almost every one of his children's books contains at least one poem or a rhyming couplet.

So, it's with some authority that I'm able to say The Wondercrump Poetry Competition would have meant a great deal to him



*A Wondercrump Competition entry form should arrive with this issue of BfK - if it's missing, please telephone Random Century Children's Books on 0171 973 9000 and ask for one.*

# WONDERCRUMP WAY

## John Lynch on writing poetry with the children of Handford Hall Primary School in Suffolk - School of the Year winners for the 1994 Wondercrump Poetry Competition

There are many strategies for getting children to produce powerful and committed writing. However, all of them can equally produce the bland and mediocre if children do not sense the will of their teacher; the will to produce something exciting, original; something that takes reality by surprise. For me, and for other staff at Handford Hall, the role model offered by the teacher is critical; I often use my own writing to initiate or support writing sessions, and invariably write alongside the children.

Patrick's poem, 'Bullies', was written at an after-school Writers' Club that I run. I talked about my own experiences of being bullied when I was a child. Not surprisingly, most of the children didn't want to relate personal accounts to an audience of 30 or more of their peers so we decided to write about bullies in general; what sort of things they do; what they say, and so on. I read 'Duncan Gets Expelled' by Jackie Kay and we used her idea of the bullies having 'things' in their teeth and pockets.



of a discussion about personal experiences of being scared. I encouraged the children to talk to a partner, then to talk in larger groups. Then, if they wanted to, to relate a personal experience to the class. I related a personal experience of being scared. Next, I asked the children to write about a time *they* were scared. They wrote for about 15 minutes, in silence, with no input from me. The structure came from the sequences of talk, and the request itself. Some children wrote stories, some wrote newspaper-type reports; some, like Ellie, wrote in a more personal style.

Laura's 'Poem' was simply an idea borrowed from **Ink-slinger** edited by Morag Styles and Helen Cook. This was an off-the-cuff writing session where the children were asked to use metaphor as a way of talking about a poem. Laura's poem was a snowflake.

*I've thought of a poem.*

*I carry it in my hands*

*like a snowflake.*

*If it melts, I've lost it.*

*So I put it somewhere cold*

*until I can write it down.*

*A snowflake wouldn't*

*be the same without*

*the coldness, and*

*the stars inside it.'*

This piece of writing, like the others, was drafted. The emphasis, at the beginning, is on getting ideas on the page. After the first draft, the children edit their work. This can involve re-ordering parts of text, deleting parts, finding better, more appropriate vocabulary; ensuring that their writing makes sense and says what they want it to say, and so on. I also get the children to work together; each child has a response partner who gives oral feedback, then writes on a post-it and sticks it to their partner's draft. Spellings are checked; how many are corrected will depend on what the writer wants, and on the purpose and audience for the writing. Punctuation and handwriting are also considered specifically at this point in the writing process.

Above all else, it's how the children experience this writing process at school that is most important. Who do they see it belonging to? Who is the writing for? Why do they write? These are the fundamental questions, whether they are writing poetry, stories, science reports, thank-you letters or whatever. All are based around the issue of ownership. In terms of the writing I've focused on here, this issue is addressed when the teacher allows, and ensures, that the child's voice comes through on the page. ■

Wondercrump Poetry is published by Red Fox, 0 09 952261 6, £3.99.

### Other books mentioned:

'Duncan Gets Expelled' is from **Two's Company** published by Blackie, 0 216 93317 X, £5.99; Puffin, 0 14 036952 X, £2.99.

The Ted Hughes quote is from **Poetry in the Making**, Faber, 0 571 09076 1, £4.99.

**Ink-slinger** is published by A & C Black, 0 7136 3320 4, £6.95.

## Bullies

They say things like,  
'Shut up!' 'Oi, Smelly!'  
'Baby Boy! get out of me way!'  
'Gollywog!' 'Fatface!'  
They punch, kick, elbow,  
push, stare, break your arm  
in the middle of the playground  
to make you have a nose bleed.  
They've got lasers in their eyes,  
knives in their teeth,  
dangerous music in their brains.  
At home, they feel left out  
when their mum says  
it's time for bed.

Patrick Anderson (7)  
Handford Hall County Primary School  
Ipswich, Suffolk  
(Age Category Winner)  
(School of the Year)

## The bush

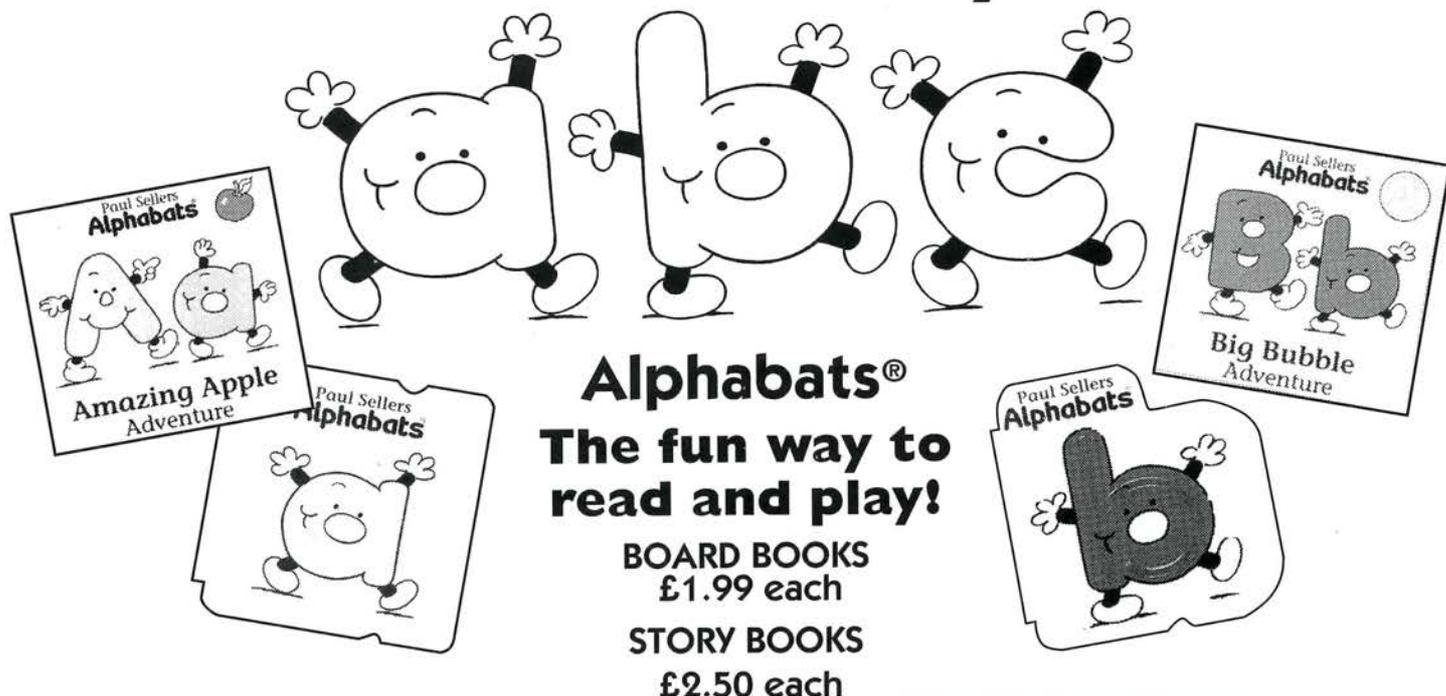
Next to my dad's grave  
there's a playground,  
to make us happy,  
and at the far end  
there's a bush.  
I never go into it.  
It's all prickles  
with bluebells, daisies  
and roses beside it.  
Joe went in  
the last time we went.  
I was scared  
because I didn't know  
what was in there,  
and I didn't know  
what was going to  
happen to him.

Ellie Thomson (7)  
Handford Hall County Primary School  
Ipswich, Suffolk.  
(Age Category Winner)  
(School of the Year)

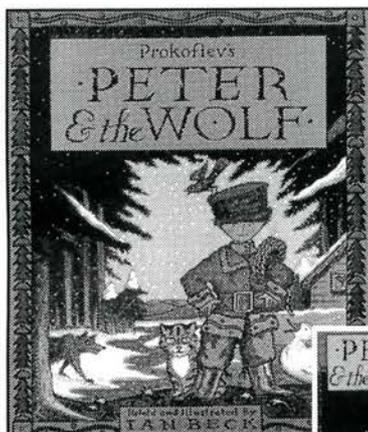
During the actual writing session the whole class wrote in silence, in response to a question, like 'What sort of things do bullies say?' or, 'What have they got in their heads?' My questions press buttons that activate the children's ideas; the silence and the limited time span between questions causes what Ted Hughes calls, 'a crisis, which rouses the brains resources: the compulsion towards haste overthrows the ordinary precautions, flings everything into top gear, and many things that are usually hidden find themselves rushed into the open. Barriers break down, prisoners come out of their cells.' Also, the reading out of separate bits by some of the children as others listen or continue to write, establishes a kind of collective consciousness where ideas are picked up, re-formed, altered and made personal. Sometimes, children will read out whole sections, and others will offer feedback: 'I like the bit where you say ...' or, 'Why don't you say something about ...'

Ellie's poem, 'The Bush', was written at Writers' Club, too. It came out

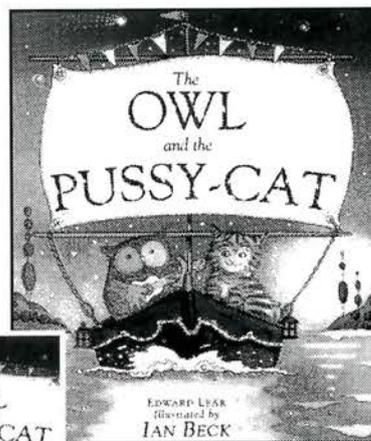
# Choosing books for your child is as easy as



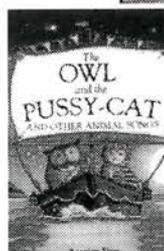
A stunning new telling of the traditional tale  
**Picture Corgi**  
£3.99



The tale told over Prokofiev's classic music  
**Corgi Audio** £3.49

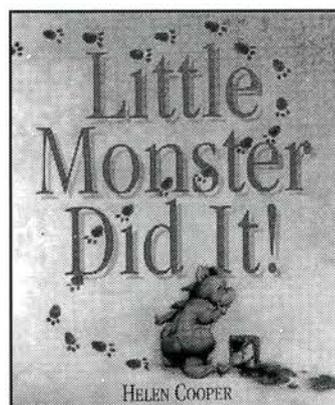
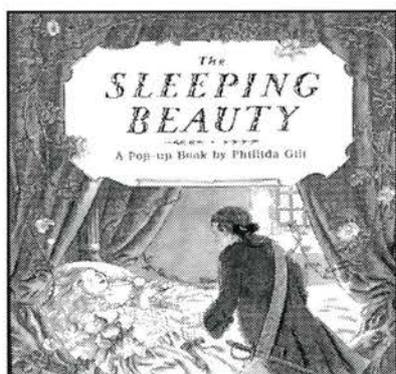


The Edward Lear classic beautifully illustrated  
**Doubleday**  
£8.99



The title rhyme and other children's favourites  
**Corgi Audio** £3.49

A sumptuous pop-up version of the familiar fairy tale  
**Doubleday**  
£9.99



The funny story of a mischievous little girl and her new baby brother!  
**Doubleday**  
£8.99

For more information, please contact Children's Sales Department 0181-579 2652  
Transworld Children's Books, 61-63 Uxbridge Road, London W5 5SA

Alphabats® is a registered trademark of Paul Sellers. Copyright © Vista Publishing 1995

# 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.

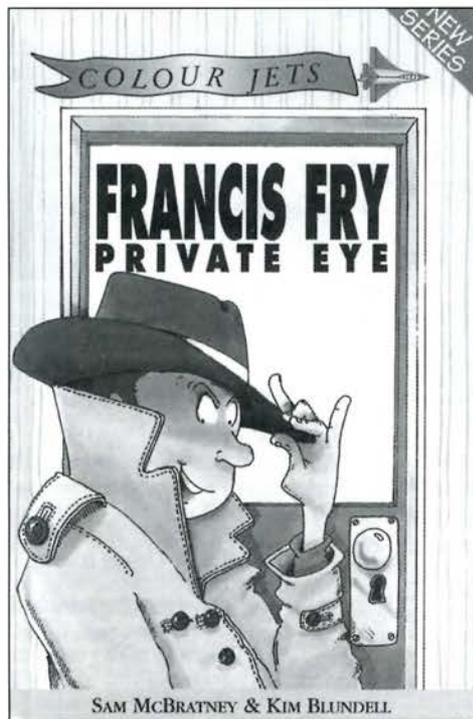
## Series Titles REVIEWS

### Some of the latest chosen by Steve Rosson

The latest sporting cliché seems to be that when you're entering a competition you have to 'hit the ground running'. Well 'Colour Jets' have certainly done that with their first four which are simultaneously released in hardback and paperback. The sporting analogy is appropriate, as included in the set is Michael Rosen and John Rogan's *Even Stevens FC* (A & C Black, 0 7136 4187 8, £5.99; Collins, 0 00 675084 2, £3.99 pbk). Now this football tale got a puff from Wendy Cooling in *BfK 93* so I'll say no more about it except that number two son (a football fanatic) told me I had to put it in my top three this time as it is 'wicked'.

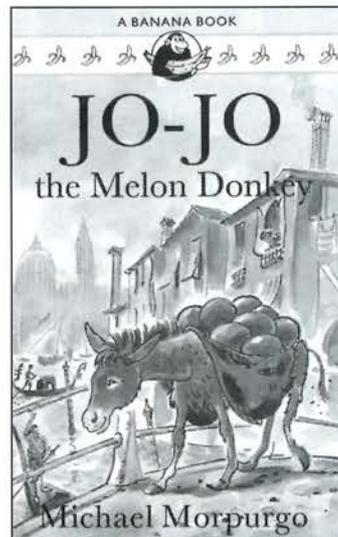
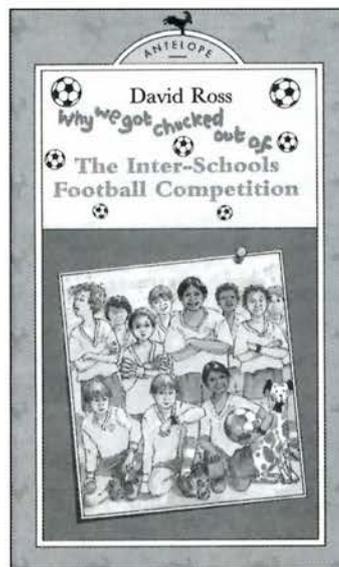
£5.99). Where Michael Rosen's book is the stuff of fantasy, this one is rooted much more in reality with various participants in Skimpole Street School's nightmare performance relating their part in the 22-0 defeat (this in a match abandoned at half-time). Everything that could possibly go wrong, does go wrong - the reserve goalie, a pair of arguing twins at centre-back, the sponsor's son needing to be selected, a dog invading the pitch and biting the referee's backside, an irate mum wanting to come as sub and scoring a goal, specially spiked samosas at half-time to give the opposition the trots!!! What did I say about reality?

The multi-narrator style works well and footballers everywhere will recognise and smile at Charlie Gibson, the prima-donna player.



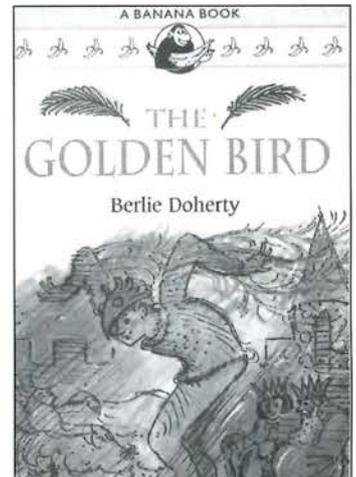
My own favourite is *Francis Fry Private Eye* (A & C Black, 0 7136 4188 6, £5.99; Collins, 0 00 675027 3, £3.99 pbk). Sam McBratney and Kim Blundell's detective has got the lot - trench-coat, fedora, overflowing waste-paper basket and revolving office chair - but boy is he dim? On the trail of a stolen parrot, he discovers that more and more tropical animals are disappearing but the reader will twig the 'baddie' long before he does. As usual from 'Jets' there are speech bubbles, press-cuttings and other printed stuff to hurry the story on and the big, bold, colour illustrations are a treat. When Fry does finally stumble over the 'villain', there's a nice green twist at the end.

Returning to football, another book worth a second look is *David Ross's Why We Got Chucked Out of the Inter-Schools Football Competition*, illustrated by Jacqui Thomas (Antelope, 0 241 13398 X,

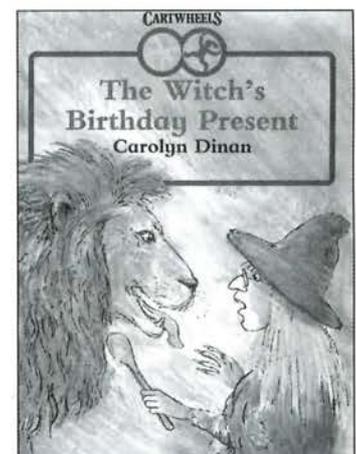


I don't know if *Jo-Jo the Melon Donkey* by Michael Morpurgo (Heinemann 'Banana', 0 434 97502 8, £3.99) is based on an old Venetian story but it feels like it *ought* to be. On the surface it's a simple enough, fairly predictable tale. Jo-Jo comes to Venice every day with his master, laden down with melons; the Doge's daughter sees him, befriends him, and wants her father to buy him in preference to all the magnificent horses she's offered for a birthday present. When father will not hear of it, she arranges to run away one night with the donkey. A storm breaks and Jo-Jo, with the help of the four golden horses in St Mark's Square, saves the citizens from a terrible flood. Simple yes, predictable yes, but beautifully told and Tony Kerns's illustrations are quite marvellous, especially the three large pictures of the city in flood - all brown and grey and slashing rain, and in stark contrast to the sunny colours of the opening pages.

Berlie Doherty gives us the school play as therapy in *The Golden Bird* (Heinemann 'Banana', 0 434 96799 8, £3.99) illustrated by John Lawrence. Andrew hardly speaks since the death of his dad but some inspired casting by Mr Swain has the desired effect. In amongst the hurly-burly of rehearsals and costumes, Andrew watches the birds in the playground and studies their movements - he begins jutting out his head, jerking it from side to side, looking down his nose as though it was a beak, hunching his shoulders and rippling his arms up and down. Does he actually fly at the final performance? Well, that's for the reader to decide, but *he* certainly feels as though he does and, more importantly, his life has taken off again.



Tim and Robin wake one morning to find the house has been burgled in *Trouble on the Day* (A & C Black 'Jumbo Jets', 0 7136 4179 7, £5.50) by Norma Clarke and Peter Kavanagh. They manage to get a glimpse of the robbers and their van, but as this is Aunt Tina's wedding day, they're soon into preparations and suitably appalled by the ghastly page-boy outfits they're forced to wear. The story seemed to be going in too many directions at the same time but it all falls nicely into place at the reception where the crooks arrive, having been hired as replacement DJs by the overbearing Uncle Charlie. Observant sleuthing by the boys leads to an arrest and there are some well-drawn characters, including a no-nonsense Mum, a battle-axe of a grandma and the raucous Uncle Charlie.



*The Witch's Birthday Present* by Carolyn Dinan (Hamish Hamilton 'Cartwheels', 0 241 00157 9, £5.99) will provide fun for younger readers. Expecting the traditional cat as a present from her sister, Ada Witch is disgusted to find she's given a dog instead. Her spells to make the necessary change all go disastrously wrong ... and, after a few days at sister Winnie's while the spell wears off, she learns one or two lessons.

# A tale of TWO CHARLIES

Lenny Henry talks to Julia Eccleshare about his route into reading ... and into becoming a children's author

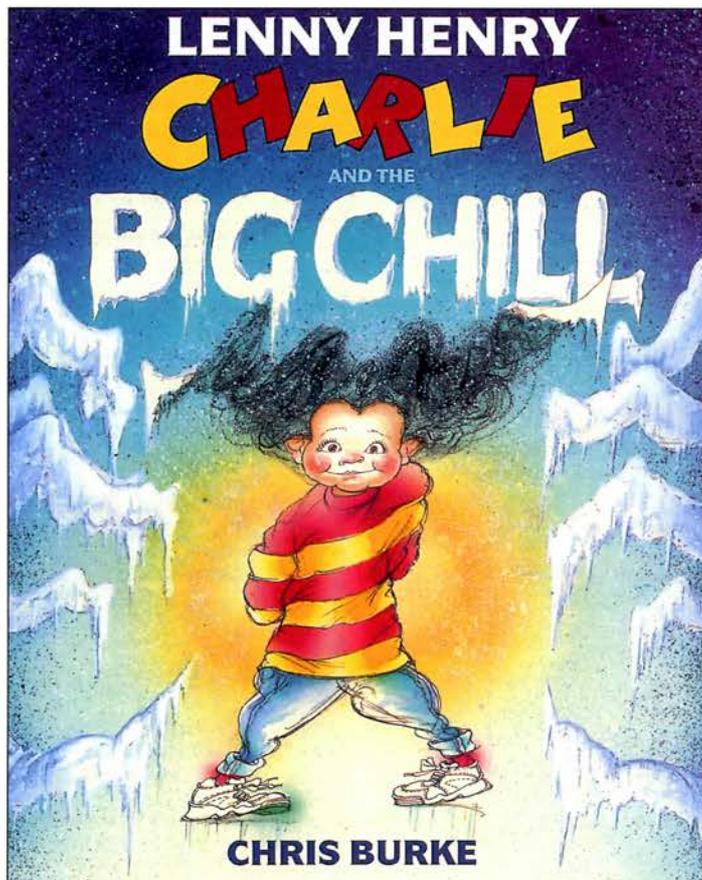
'Thank God for the Dudley Public Library,' says Lenny Henry. 'My Auntie Pearl took me to the library when I was four and she thought it was time I learnt to read. The first book that was plucked out for me was *Little Black Sambo*. My Auntie chose it because it was a starter book.'

Perhaps Auntie Pearl thought that a book about a black boy would be easy for the four-year-old Lenny to feel comfortable with, recognising one of the cardinal rules of reading - that it's important to identify with the character. The adult Lenny Henry has considerable reservations. 'It's a great little story but at school I was always called "sambo" or "golliwog". People didn't really think about what those words meant but they were incredibly prejudiced.' Lenny would certainly not defend the wilder extremes of political correctness, citing the recent fuss in the US over Big Ears as ridiculous, but he's against any book that encourages children to clump people together as all one kind just because they're black or fat. In his own book, *Charlie and the Big Chill*, he's created a black character whom he describes as 'iconic', someone who stands for many aspects of childhood, someone whom any child can identify with.

'There was no way that I could find anyone like me in a book,' says Henry. 'The only blacks in books when I was a kid were slaves.' But, luckily for Lenny, he had the imagination to identify with characters of all kinds and his early visits to the library had already instilled a delight in books which kept him going back and back. 'I used to borrow a pile of books every week. I was a voracious reader. I think it was because I knew that every week I could go the library and get three books out. Books were a big thing in my life - always.'

Encouraged first at home by Auntie Pearl and later at school, Lenny enjoyed reading for pleasure and not just as something associated with education. He's alarmed at the prospect of the current generation growing up associating books entirely with school because they're being deprived open access through libraries.

'It's important for children to have access to books in libraries. It's like a universe, not just a world but a whole galaxy of pleasure and knowledge is on offer



in a library ... because I was introduced to books early I was never scared of them, though I did jump ahead a bit fast. I remember being in junior school and wanting to succeed so I read and read.'

Like many others, Lenny cites Enid Blyton as one of his breakthrough authors. 'With the best writers you conjure up images yourself without any help from computer generation, video or

other visuals. You begin to take an active part in a book. When I read Enid Blyton I was there with the Secret Seven or Famous Five. I was on Puffin Island or right in the secret cave.'

Bowled along by the power of adventure, Lenny swiftly moved on to books with strong narrative which spoke more directly to a teenager. 'By the time I was at secondary school I was going to the library and getting out really

adult books with sexy bits in. I was a bit of a daydreamer, not really successful and I was really pleased to find books that were about people like me. I particularly liked *The Car Thieves* where a kid is held in a juvenile detention centre. He's a misfit and feels out of place everywhere. He goes out somewhere, meets a girl and has his first sexual yearnings. I found this very interesting when I was about 15 and it said lots to me. I realised one of the things books can do is provide a direct pipeline that links the reader to the character. In the same way I loved E W Hildick's *Birdy* stories (*Birdy Jones*, *Birdy and the Group*, *Birdy Swings North*, etc.). They're about a pop group which this boy Birdy runs. It's got all the fame and fortune stuff and I loved the idea of this guy who doesn't sing, he just whistles.'

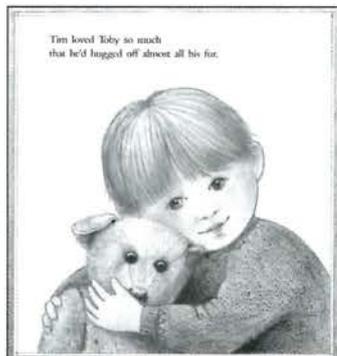
Alongside these more obvious teenage titles, Lenny also read horror compilations and 'lots of comics. They're a very strong influence on everything I do.' But the biggest influence came from discovering Dickens. 'I tried to read all of Dickens in one term. I had this great teacher at my secondary school called Mr Nash. He encouraged me to read Dickens and even more he encouraged me to read Dickens out loud. Lots of books would benefit from being read aloud, partly because when you're reading aloud or listening to a book being read aloud you can take your time over it. I re-read *Hard Times* recently which had been one of my favourites at school. Dickens piles on joke after joke after joke, but you have to take your time to understand it and to take in what he's doing. He also uses great expressions such as describing someone as having "commodious eyes" - brilliant, quite brilliant. Of course, at 12 or 13 I didn't really understand all of that. I thought they were all very serious books. I enjoyed them but I mostly read them because I thought that I *should* read them. Even then, though, I knew there was a lot of stuff going on in Dickens.'

Also, clearly, in Lenny Henry. As he says, thank God for Dudley Public Library ... not to mention Auntie Pearl.

Lenny Henry's *Charlie and the Big Chill*, illustrated by Chris Burke, is published by Gollancz (0 575 05938 9, £6.99) and was reviewed by Wendy Cooling in the last issue of BfK (No. 93, July 1995).



# Nursery/Infant REVIEWS



## The Best-Loved Bear

Diana Noonan, ill.  
Elizabeth Fuller, Picture Hippo (Apr 95),  
0 590 55851 X, £3.99

A delightful story about a competition for the best-loved teddy bear and a little boy who longs for his bear to win. But how could his sticky, threadbare, battered old friend win any competition? Tim decides to mend Toby, wash him and bandage him up ... and, guess what? Well, of course Toby wins because, as the judge says, 'this bear has been loved to bits!' LW

## Lazy Jack

Val Biro, Oxford (Apr 95),  
0 19 272200 X, £2.50

Another in the series of retold folk tales written and illustrated by Val Biro. These are excellent introductions to the stories young children have inherited from our tradition and should be in every Year 1 or 2 classroom.

Here we have the story variously known as 'Epomymandas', 'Silly Billy' or 'Lazy Jack'. Lazy Jack follows his mother's introductions to the letter when bringing home various goods, with highly comical effect. I



love telling, rather than reading, my version of this story, just for the pleasure of seeing the children's faces as they gradually get the joke, but this jolly book is the next best thing to telling it yourself. Good, too, for newish readers. LW

## Action Songs

Ill. Wendy Smith, Collins  
(May 95),  
0 00 664577 1, £2.99

This is a handy book and will go down well in any Nursery or Infant staffroom as well as in the class library. All the old favourites are here and it might help fuel a revival of traditional playground games. JS



## Foxy Loses His Tail

Colin and Jacqui Hawkins,  
0 00 664536 4

## Runaway Washing

Mark Burgess,  
0 00 664556 9

## My Perfect Pet

Rachel Prank,  
0 00 664415 5  
Collins 'Toddler' (May 95),  
£3.99 each

These three titles are samples of a winning new venture by Collins which aims to bridge the gap between board books and picture books. They are exactly the right size for little hands and crowded nappy-changing bags, and they're tough enough for a bit of chewing and rough and tumble. The one- and two-year-olds who trialed them for me will not relinquish them and follow any adult about endlessly for yet another read. Collins have made an interesting selection of authors and illustrators, giving the books a comforting uniformity yet giving the toddler varied content matter, forms of illustration, textual style and appeal. JS

## Spot's Walk in the Woods

Eric Hill, Picture Puffin  
(Apr 95),  
0 14 055274 X, £4.50

Spot is always popular and this lift-the-flap book, as one would expect, was generally enjoyed. However, both infants and staff concluded that it was done the wrong way round!

It was a bright sunny day

when  and his class

went on a bus 

to the woods. "We'll go for

a walk," said Miss ,

"and see what we can find."

The youngest children got some value in calling out the names of the pictures on the flaps and following the text, but that could have been accomplished by having pictures within the text. Looking at the words beneath the picture happened occasionally but tended to be ignored in the rush to get to the end of the tale. The older infants pointed out that the text is at a level of difficulty which challenges an early reader and if the keywords had been printed on the flap, and the picture clues hidden beneath (as a check-up) then it would have helped them along ... and a lot more fun would have been had by all. Worth thinking about, Picture Puffin? JS

# Infant/Junior REVIEWS

## The School Bus Comes at Eight O'Clock

David McKee, Red Fox  
(Jun 95), 0 09 950191 0, £4.50



David McKee has taken against the modern world and its obsession with time in this boldly illustrated and entertaining story. If you're worried about the theory of relativity - as applied to time - this will also help you grasp the concept.

The family acquires a clock and their happy lives are shattered. How do you know the clock is right? Get another one of course, to check the

first, but then they both tell slightly different times. Which is right now? Good fun for children old enough to see the point and the illustrations add to the oddity. LW

## Boots for a Bridesmaid

Ill. George McLeod and  
Lynne Willey,  
1 870516 30 3

## Are We There Yet?

Ill. Pamela Venus,  
1 870516 29 X

Verna Allette Wilkins,  
Tamarind,  
£3.95 each

These two books are published with the support of the Spinal Injuries Association and with the aim of offering all children a positive image of family life with a disabled parent. They are straightforward accounts of family events - a day out with dad, and getting ready to be a bridesmaid - clearly illustrated and interestingly told. Both stories have a parent who is in a wheelchair, but this isn't mentioned in the text at all and it's left to the pictures to show dad taking his children through the theme park and mum dancing in her

chair at the wedding reception.

This approach is much more valuable, I think, than the 'I Have a Spinal Injury' sort of book, worthy though those are, because these show the disability being taken absolutely for granted and, what's more, concentrate on the person in the wheelchair, not the chair itself. Especially suitable for young disabled children and their class-mates since they're allowed to assume, matter of factly, that they'll grow up to lead an active, normal family life ... despite the difficulties. LW

## Cat's Knees and Bee's Whiskers

Sandy Nightingale, Red Fox  
(May 95), 0 09 043271 4, £4.50

A story that can only be described as zany, about a witch's cat and a spell that goes wrong. Baldrick, the cat, answers an advertisement and gets a job with Witch Lobelia Gnomeclencher, 1st Class (Hons), but he gets over-ambitious in his hunt for mice, ending up on the moon. Well, it is rather obviously jokey ...but it grows on you and young fluent readers would enjoy the story and the very entertaining pictures. LW

## Good Girl Granny

Pat Thomson and Faith Jaques, Gollancz (Apr 95),  
0 575 05996 6, £3.99

A re-issue of one of the 'Share-a-Story' series first published in 1987. The idea behind 'Share-a-Story' is to support newish readers by offering the story as a dialogue between the left- and right-hand pages so that an adult and a young reader can take turns at reading alternate pages as different characters. Don't be misled into believing the words 'Beginner Readers' on the cover, however, since the child needs to be a fairly experienced reader to predict, connect and decode the text. They do offer an excellent way to encourage family togetherness and to encourage reasonably able, but reluctant readers to take part ...and the series works perfectly well as conventional stories to read aloud. This story about Granny's naughty childhood ('we had to behave in my day') is entertaining and the text is enriched by Faith Jaques' lively artwork.

Other titles in the re-issued set are **Thank You for the Tadpole**, **My Friend Mr Morris**, **No Trouble at All**, **The Best Thing of All**, all by Pat Thomson with various illustrators. The reading difficulty and attraction

of the story varies from book to book so, as with all series, choose carefully. **LW**

### Twin Trouble

Jacqueline Wilson, Mammoth (Apr 95), 0 7497 1985 0, £2.99

When twin babies arrive in the family, eight-year-old Connie is far from happy: her new brother and sister are given her bedroom, everyone's attention is centred on them and, worst of all, she's expected to help look after the noisy pair. Only Nurse Meade appears to understand her feelings: she plaits two blue glass beads into Connie's hair - 'they're magic,' she says. And so they seem for twin grannies, mothers and fathers suddenly start appearing.

Told in straightforward language from Connie's viewpoint, with humour effectively used to explore the feelings of jealousy and insecurity associated with the arrival of new siblings, this is an enjoyable read for younger juniors whether or not there are new babies on the scene. **JB**

### All the Magic in the World

Wendy Hartmann, ill. Niki Daly, Red Fox (Jun 95), 0 09 916021 8, £4.50



Sonnie, Stefan, Anna, Chrissie and Lena are five black American children who live in the rural deep South. They play in the yard and the road - running, jumping and climbing like children everywhere. But Lena, who is a little slow and clumsy, prefers to discover the secrets of odd job man Joseph's tin. In the old man's hands, a piece of string, a shell and a fistful of can ring-pulls unlock a world of imagination for Lena and her friends.

Both the story and the strong water-colour illustrations are beautifully composed, expressive and moving. An altogether powerful book - not to be missed. **JB**

### Jellybaby and other Problem Pets

Linda Jennings, ill. Jacqui Thomas, Young Puffin (May 95), 0 14 036919 8, £3.25 Luke had always wanted a pet: first he tried Dizzy, a spider, but that caused trouble at school. Next he tried Jellybaby, a mouse, but his mum insisted he return it to his friend, Sadie. Then a lost kitten adopts him, but the owners want it back. Just when everything seems hopeless, the landlady's nephew arrives with a surprise for Luke.

In the second story it seems Luke will have to give up his beloved spaniel,

Rosita, when Miss Webb, the landlady, goes into a nursing home and the house is put on the market. In the end though, it's George, Miss Webb's nephew, again, who saves the day. A pair of homely, readable stories with lots of dialogue. **JB**



Noah checking his list, from *Too Tired*.

### Too Tired

Ann Turnbull, ill. Emma Chichester Clark, Picture Puffin (May 95), 0 14 054841 6, £4.99

When Noah checks his list of animals, he finds the sloths are missing: they're too tired to get aboard. Despite the urgings of the other animals, they are in no hurry as the rising waters submerge their tree. Eventually, though, the sloths climb aboard, courtesy of the elephants' trunks. An amusing and colourful variation of the traditional story, given a present-tense telling which offers opportunities for audience participation. **JB**

### A Fish of the World

Terry Jones, ill. Michael Foreman, Picture Puffin (Apr 95), 0 14 055256 1, £3.99 They say travel broadens the mind, but it's just the opposite for this fishy herring hero. After returning from a journey round the world, he's too busy dwelling on the strange and wonderful sights he's seen to get on with the business of living. He won't eat, talk with his family or even spawn. 'I know everything there is to know,' he tells one of the oldest herrings. But he doesn't know about herring fishermen until it's too late.

This enigmatic tale, which is open to many interpretations, was (like the title reviewed below) first published in Terry Jones' *Fairy Tales*. Michael Foreman's illustrations of the wonders of the deep leave readers free to make of it what they will. **JB**

### The Beast with a Thousand Teeth

Terry Jones, ill. Michael Foreman, Picture Puffin (Apr 95), 0 14 055255 3, £3.99 Sam, the baker's son, longed to win the bags of gold on offer from the mayor and the king to anyone who could rid them of the terrible beast that was gobbling up men, women and children alike. Instead it seems he will become the beast's next meal when he gets caught as he delivers pink-iced cakes. But Sam's promise to make the monster all the cakes he

can eat saves him and, thousands of pink-iced cakes later, turns the creature into a toothless wonder and Sam into a very rich boy. Foreman's larger than life and fearsome beast is enough to send shivers down the spine of the bravest reader. **JB**

### The Day Matt Sold Great-grandma

Eleanor Allen, ill. Jane Cope, Puffin 'Chillers' (May 95), 0 14 036431 5, £2.99

A short, sharp story in which a boy, who surreptitiously sells a portrait of his tyrannical great grandma to a junk shop in order to finance the purchase of a birthday present for his mother, is tormented by the harridan's outraged ghost. The book is billed as a 'Chiller' but is unlikely to provoke many nightmares. Instead, it tells quite a touching tale through a 'Jets'-style mingling of clear type, vivid illustration and speech balloons. A promising choice for children who are acquiring more independence in their reading. **GH**

### Mummy Laid an Egg!

Babette Cole, Red Fox (Jun 95), 0 09 929911 9, £4.99



Babette Cole's contribution to sex education resources will be welcomed by those who are daunted by the solemnity sometimes surrounding the subject. The book approaches the issue of embarrassment head on, featuring two parents who are either hilariously ignorant of the facts of life or too shame-faced to share them with their children. In response to tales of babies bursting out of eggs or emerging from tubes, flowers and gingerbread griddles, the children present a vividly illustrated lecture in which the truth is told in the most brazen way imaginable. Educational, entertaining and vigorously conveyed in just 30 pages and a couple of hundred words. Invaluable stuff, but beware of interpreting too literally the diagrams showing 'some ways mummies and daddies fit together'. **GH**

### 3 Billy Goats Gruff

Ted Dewan, Picture Hippo (May 95), 0 590 55916 8, £3.99 The cover of this book has some of the most expressive eyes I've seen for ages. The goats are still grazing on almost anything but this retelling has what my children would call 'cool' language. (At least, I think that's what it is!) The modern vocabulary and the bright, lively pictures give this traditional story a freshness that it had the first time we all heard it. The troll still blusters and the goats still think their way out of a sticky situation. **PH**

### A Bad Case of Animal Nonsense

Jonathan Allen, Orion Dolphin (May 95), 1 85881 105 8, £2.99 A fun book to read at one sitting or dip into for that odd few minutes. The drawings are totally zany and leap about all over the page. The verse is so catching it makes you laugh out loud. I loved the animal alphabet best - it begged for funny voices and dramatisation when read aloud. **PH**

### The Singing Tortoise

John Yeoman, ill. Quentin Blake, Gollancz (Apr 95), 0 575 06026 3, £4.99

Animals of all sorts, shapes and sizes march across the pages here; the funny, the naughty, the brave and the beautiful. In twelve folk tales to read on individual occasions or to enjoy from cover to cover in one go, these animals make us think not only about them but about ourselves, as well. Quentin Blake's illustrations are clever and very funny and manage to extend the text - words and pictures complementing each other perfectly. **PH**

### Horrid Henry and Other Stories

Francesca Simon, ill. David Pace, Orion Dolphin (May 95), 1 85881 070 1, £2.99 I loved the alliteration in this one: Henry couldn't be anything but horrid and his brother Pete is simply perfection. Henry is the child every Infant teacher has nightmares about. The best bit for me was right at the end when, how wonderful, his ever-loving parents take him off on holiday! The family way to overcome a collapsed tent and torrential rain takes some beating. **PH**

### Something Else

Kathryn Cave, ill. Chris Riddell, Picture Puffin (May 95), 0 14 054907 2, £4.99



A special story about the very real need to belong and be accepted. 'With nothing to be friends with' Something Else is a different-looking soul/creature who lives alone on a windy hill. His many efforts at conforming prove fruitless and yet when a similar creature in similar circumstances turns up to befriend him Something Else almost forgets the feelings of smallness and sadness, and begins to behave as others did to him. Thankfully he suddenly recognises the situation which he rectifies with moving urgency and sincerity. Lovely illus-

trations perfectly complement this sensitive, necessary tale of tolerance and selflessness. Older children will appreciate more fully the wryness of the ending. GR

### The Littlest Dinosaur

Terrance Dicks, ill. Bethan Matthews, Young Puffin (May 95), 0 14 037365 9, £3.25

Two stories about 'Littlest' the dinosaur who hatches from a huge egg and then turns store detective.

Either story may be read independently, though there's a natural progression as Littlest develops some distinctive characteristics, as well as a tendency towards initial rapid growth. The twins' characters are well-defined and their

relationship is realistic.

Both tales are well-structured adventures and are ideal for beginning to read independently, as the chapters are not too long and the print is clear and appropriately illustrated. GR

### Communication

Aliki, Mammoth (Apr 95), 0 7497 1917 6, £3.99

Another book in the style of *Feelings* and *Manners* - Aliki doing what Aliki does best - giving children the means to explore some of the most complex, and yet the most important, areas of our lives. Like the other two, this book is difficult to use with more than two or three children, but invaluable if the teacher has a willing (and sensitive) parent volunteer. JS

### The Black and White Cat

Deborah King, Red Fox (May 95), 0 09 950131 7, £4.50

Some books insist on being shared and this one has done the rounds. The story of a black and white cat living in an urban black and white world and her search for a different life away from the dangers of the grey world in which she lives conveys a powerful (if somewhat stereotyped) message. This book brings together careful and precise language with some beautiful artwork. Its appeal is universal. JS

### Morris the Mouse Hunter

0 00 674895 3

### Morris in the Apple Tree

0 00 674894 5

Vivian French, ill. Guy Parker Rees, Collins (Apr 95), £2.99 each

'Brilliant!' 'The pictures make it just right.' 'It's like a cartoon but better!' Comments from the Year 2s who reviewed these for me showed that both books fitted the allotted niche perfectly and yet in no way does the reader feel that he or she is being pedantically catered for. Children who were not quite ready for a solo read were highly motivated by the contagious excitement of their mates to work with a will! I feel like echoing one of the higher-flyers, who also loved them - 'Are there any more?' ... 'Why not?' JS

## Junior/MiddleREVIEWS

### War Game

Michael Foreman, Puffin (Apr 95), 0 14 037139 7, £3.50



This tale of World War I and that famous football match on Christmas Day begs to be pored over again and again. The monochrome pictures, the deceptively simple, almost personalised, text and the addition of ephemeral posters, adverts and wartime advice are informative, intriguing and together become unforgettably moving.

Every school, primary and secondary, should have a copy - so should all Humanities departments. Tell them! DB

### Timesnatch

Robert Swindells, ill. Jon Riley, Yearling (Jun 95), 0 440 86322 8, £2.99

In a future century, Dr Rye invents a time machine and uses it to re-introduce extinct plants and creatures, like orchids, Red Kites and butterflies. It isn't long before the dangerous nutters get wind of her work and she and her children are placed in great danger as one group wants to re-introduce a pop guru and another wants to occasion the return of Adolf Hitler.

Swindells has posed the moral dilemmas of such an invention in a fast-moving, readable thriller which will provoke considerable questioning and thought. DB

### Children of Bach

Eilís Dillon, Faber (May 95), 0 571 17477 9, £3.99

Coming home from school one day, 9-year-old Pali can't understand why the flat door was open and everything is as though someone had just

left the room. Later in the day he learns that his parents have been taken away by the Germans. When his sister Suzy and her friend Peter arrive from school, they have to decide what to do next - three children on their own - Jewish children too, with nowhere to go, nowhere to hide. Then their aunt miraculously appears having escaped from the soldiers who took her, her brother-in-law and her sister away. She and the children plan a desperate escape plan to flee from Hungary.

The plight of children caught up in the Holocaust is graphically described in one of Eilís Dillon's last novels before her death a year ago. VB

### A Treasury of Funny Stories

Chosen by Andrew Matthews, ill. Frank James, Kingfisher (May 95), 1 85697 289 5, £4.50

The range of material in this lively collection is very wide, starting with stories like Sheila Lavelle's 'Harry's Aunt' and Margaret Joy's 'Miss Mee in a Muddle' at one end of the age-range to Jan Mark's marvellous 'Will's Version' (of the three little pigs) and Paul Jennings' 'UFD' which require a much higher level of sophistication on behalf of the reader or listener. So, it's not easy to say who this book is aimed at. It could be a useful and worthwhile standby for the staff bookshelf in a primary school, or a book for families to enjoy. JB

### Annelie in the Depths of the Night

Imme Dros, ill. Margriet Heymans, Faber (Jun 95), 0 571 17351 9, £3.99



From *Annelie in the Depths of the Night*.

Annelie is left at her grandmother's house by her father, who fails to explain this drastic change in her life, or to tell her where her mother has gone. After several weeks of perplexity, she discovers the depths of the night under her bedclothes, and upon entering them is swept into a phantasmagoria in which toys, rooms and animals talk to her - the moon becomes her living boat, her own head begins to argue with her, and a menacing Frock Woman relentlessly pursues her. Annelie's adventures, recounted in a vivid, whispery, present historic, seem to be a nightmarish exploration of her anxieties and longings, yet they are also touchingly magical. As in a child's restless dreams, reassuring voices punctuate the terrors. This is a truly haunting and original book. GH

### Not Yeti

Alan Gibbons, ill. Anthony Lewis, Orion Dolphin (May 95), 1 85881 068 X, £3.50

Joe Kelly's mum and dad have been kidnapped. He's been sent to stay with oppressive and repulsive relatives, and forced to attend a school full of rattling kids and sadistic teachers. Just when it seems things can't get any worse, he's snatched by a yeti and whisked away on adventures involving the machinations of an evil menagerie keeper, a couple of madcap vehicle chases, and a brush with the Loch Ness monster.

Alan Gibbons' excursion into slapstick provides a highly eventful and entertaining book for independent readers. GH

### The Fantora Family Photographs

Adèle Geras, Puffin (Apr 95), 0 14 036508 7, £3.50

Writing in the last issue of *Books for Keeps*, Adèle Geras argued for the kind of children's book in which the author has leisure to unfurl a story in an unhurried manner, embroidering it with whimsical details as she does so. This collection of anecdotes about a marvellously outlandish family is such a book. It's narrated by the loquacious Fantora cat who, for readers who missed *The Fantora Family Files*, provides an introduction outlining the bizarre magical attributes of each member of the clan. These powers, ranging from straightforward invisibility to the gift of prophecy through knitting, enliven the humorous, fantastical, meandering stories that follow. A distinctive book for fluent and more patient readers. GH

### Memoirs of a Dangerous Alien

Maggie Prince, Orion Dolphin (Apr 95), 1 85881 073 6, £3.99

Set in an all too feasible 21st century, when rekindled East/West tensions have brought the world to the brink of nuclear war, this story describes the adventures of Dominic Gaunt following his discovery that war is being deliberately fomented by extra-terrestrials who wish to teach mankind a lesson. Though the central theme of brainwashing aliens is a hackneyed one, a wealth of convincing period detail brings the characters to life, while the plot hurtles through various death-defying interplanetary convolutions towards a disturbing climax. Although somewhat defused by a jarring reference to the sequel, this is one of the most exciting children's books I've read in a long time, and is particularly recommended for reading aloud. GH

### Always Adam

Sheldon Oberman, ill. Ted Lewin, Gollancz (Jun 95), 0 575 05989 3, £3.99

'Some things change and some things don't' is the theme of this beautiful picture book. The first half is a monochrome reminiscence of the life of a Jewish family in pre-revolutionary Russia. The younger generation of the family become refugees, but before they leave, Adam's grandfather gives him a

prayer shawl which has been passed down through the generations as a symbol of continuity. The story continues in colour as we watch Adam growing up and growing old in the New World, the prayer shawl ever changing as he repairs it, but remaining essentially the same when he hands it on to his own grandson. A simple story, but with rich and complex reverberations. **GH**

### Ride On, Sister Vincent

Dyan Sheldon, ill. Sue Heap, Walker (May 95), 0 7445 3694 4, £3.99

St Agnes in the Pasture will never pass their OFSTED inspection, but they do have a glorious charm of their own. Run down and dilapidated is an understatement - little at the school works properly and what does work they don't need! Sister Vincent, fresh from the city and wilder places beyond, comes to the rescue. I don't ride a motorbike, unlike the author, but I did go to a convent college; Sister Vincents really do exist. A gloriously funny book about highly improbable school life. **PH**

### Patrick and the Rotten Roman Rubbish

Norma Clarke, ill. Vanessa Julian-Ottie, Faber (Jun 95), 0 571 17354 3, £3.99 Starting from the very familiar, a loose tooth, Patrick's holiday doesn't promise to be different from many others. Miss Fox saves the day when she really does bring ancient history alive by finding Roman remains in the garden. A fascinating story that, for me, truly shows there's little to beat genuine enthusiasm to motivate and enliven a subject. I loved the last page and would have given anything to be next to Augusta when she was musing about the Centurion camping under the stars. **PH**

### Rosie Pugh and the Great Clothes War

Caroline Castle, ill. Belinda Evans, Red Fox (Jun 95), 0 09 944231 0, £2.99



Don't you just *hate* those girls who always look perfect? The kind who do a month's outward-bound course and, at the end, still have a curl in their hair. Rosie has just met one such person, Tamara - she's even got a name that's enviable. Poor Rosie tries to keep up, even though her superhuman efforts at grooming come to little, but there's a shock in store. A funny story that might makes us think very carefully about what we consider to be important in life. **PH**

### Silly Stories

Andrew Matthews, ill. Tony Ross, Orion Dolphin (May 95), 1 85881 098 1, £3.50 A simply splendid collection of foolish and silly stories proving that wishes that come true can be the most inconvenient things in the world. I loved the map at the beginning which showed me where everything was happening and the 'Outroduction' that came, of course, at the end! Well it would, wouldn't it. My all-time favourite, however, was 'The Leaning Sheep' - yes, have you ever seen sheep grazing on a hillside? **PH**

### The Revolting Baby

Mary Hooper, ill. Katinka Kew, Young Puffin (May 95), 0 14 036655 5, £3.25

To Katie it's the 'coochie-coo' fussing which is revolting and as she 'could probably run a playgroup single-handed' just looking after Baby Emily will be 'a doddle'.

Predictably, Emily's agility and curiosity are seriously underestimated and she soon gobbles an earwig, becomes covered in syrup, newspaper print, black boot polish ... and inseparable from her new toy, a large and dirty log, which, with the whisper-blue dress all crumpled, smeared and crumpled, can't create the spruced-up baby sweetness needed at the photographers. Katie's complacency is bound to have repercussions! Great characters, storyline and humour leave you smiling for a long time afterwards. Brilliant! **GR**

### Stories for Bedtime

Adèle Geras, ill. Amanda Benjamin, Collins (May 95), 0 00 675043 5, £2.99

Nine stories (some of which have appeared in other collections) perfect for bedtime quietude when ambitions are realised, lessons learned, fears allayed and magic at work. At last people in the Land of Eiderdown can rest at night; rabbit, no longer alone, finds eternity and wishes come true.

These tales present unique experiences and leave a sense of wonderment - not just at the truth about taffeta or the reason the bright night-time star twinkles so earnestly. A worthy collection best listened to on the audio version if no-one else will read it. Accomplished readers may prefer to tackle the stories for themselves. **GR**

### The Real Porky Phillips

Mark Haddon, Puffin 'Chillers' (Apr 95), 0 14 036430 7, £2.99

Anyone who dreads being in the limelight and knows the agonies of being forced there will empathise totally with Porky Phillips. Chubby, easy-going Martin Calras Porky is more sensitive than anyone realises and feels his dread of being 'genie' in the school play can't be legitimate so his instinctive polite refusals are soon overpowered and fear and loneliness mount. Luckily, the mysterious unknown 'double' eventually turns despair to anger so the real Porky Phillips can at last triumph quite magnificently - and relief, not least for the reader, is immense.

Powerful, poignant and pertinent, this is a fine Puffin 'Chiller'. **GR**

### Orson Cart and the Shipwreck Sharks

0 09 943861 5

### Orson Cart Saves Time

0 09 943851 8

Steve Donald, Red Fox (Jun 95), £2.50 each

These hilariously funny books continue the saga of the only boy who could possibly have been made radioactive by a close shave with a lawnmower. Full of hungry sharks who look ready to eat anything, and terrifying dinosaurs, this is not for the faint-hearted. The cartoon formula ensures the riveted attention of even the most ardent book hater. **PH**

## Middle/Secondary REVIEWS

### Galax Arena

Gillian Rubinstein, Mammoth (May 95), 0 7497 1984 2, £3.50



This is a difficult, highly imaginative work that leads its main characters and readers up a very long, slightly oblique, galactic path right to the

amazing end. Nothing is as it seemed and is, if anything, even more sinister than imagined. Joella, the narrator, calls it 'Blinding them with fake science'. Those blinded are street children snatched from misery, but at least possessing a kind of freedom, and duped to take part, like slaves, in a bizarre experiment.

For readers with imagination and stickability - who will be well rewarded. **DB**

### Monkey Island ORIGINAL

Paula Fox, Orchard (Apr 95), 1 85213 853 X, £3.99 Clay's mother walks out and abandons him just as his father had done earlier. He takes to the streets to survive and is minded by a near-to-death alcoholic and a young, resourceful black man. When, inevitably, he's discovered by the authorities and fostered, his life still feels empty, without the love and caring his two streetwise friends had given him.

The cover implies excitements that aren't within, but here's a well-written, thought-provoking book for serious-minded readers. **DB**

### Secrets Never to be Told ORIGINAL

Cathie Bartlam, Impressions (Apr 95), 0 862 01922 2, £3.25

I hope readers won't be put off by the Scripture Union tag on this realistic-sounding addition to books on the child abuse theme. This one is related through the eyes of Abi, the best friend of the abused, who is sworn to secrecy. She herself suffers great mental anguish knowing that for four years Karen has been sexually abused by her own father. To make matters worse Abi and Karen's fathers are best buddies and the families are very close.

Positive relationships are tellingly interwoven with the rotten one to lighten the depressing nature of the situation. **DB**

### The Baby and Fly Pie

Melvin Burgess, Puffin (Apr 95), 0 14 036982 1, £3.99

There's bound to be a fair amount of depression, I suppose, in a novel set amongst the scavenger children on the dumps of London in a future-time. Burgess offers no neat and

clean solutions to sweeten what is essentially a grim and tenuously held existence, doomed to degenerate for the main characters, even when they have stumbled upon the potential fortune of a baby kidnapped for a three million pound ransom.

Youngsters will be challenged by the emotional demands this will make on them. **DB**

### The Haunting of Jessica Raven

Ann Halam, Orion Dolphin (May 95), 1 85881 069 8, £3.99

Jessica Raven and her family are on holiday in France, sharing a holiday all the more precious because Adam, Jessica's eldest brother, is dying of Sales' Myasthenia.

Jessica meets a mysterious and disturbed group of French children and the most incredible adventure begins. This is genuinely affecting writing, exploring intricately and sensitively the very deepest feelings.

I was held at every turn of the plot: moved by tension and tears in equal measure. A superb class text for Year 9 pupils: an exquisite book. **VR**

## Tangled Fortunes

Margaret Mahy, ill. John Farman, Yearling (May 95), 0 440 86289 2, £2.99

It's Jackson who, with his love of rhythm, really untangles the complicated Fortunes and is first to solve the mysterious identity of the red-helmeted motorcyclist about whom Tessa has been particularly worried. There's much action in this clever and sensitively written fourth, and final, title about the Fortune cousins - Labradoodle is as accepting as ever and Tracey and Jackson are aware of the changes which have taken place in themselves as well as in the family generally. A saga with a fine balance of the original and the realistic which is also rich in plot, character and language. Is it really the last? GR

## Second Childhood

Morris Gleitzman, Puffin (May 95), 0 14 036878 7, £3.25

It's a joy to find each Gleitzman book - he's so funny about serious things. Here, Mark and his friends are having trouble researching the life of a famous person until they discover that they were, in previous lives, Henry Ford, Queen Victoria, Einstein and ... a famous racehorse. Then they realise they've been responsible for some of the world's major problems and set out to make amends: Japanese tourists are ushered into a demolition site to square things up

about the Atom bomb and, in a tremendous climax, they appear in the centre of town with the stolen, stuffed version of the racehorse: 'it's not fair that when we were stuffing the planet up we were heroes and now we want to fix it up we're just kids'. AJ

## Shadowmaker

Joan Lowery Nixon, Hodder (Jun 95), 0 340 62981 9, £3.50

Kate and her Mum are new to town but the mother's reputation for campaigning about the illegal dumping of toxic waste precedes her. Kate finds herself caught up detecting this and a series of robberies and then murder which have been committed in the town. The book opens with the first of a series of attacks on their house at night ...

Joan Lowery Nixon has been a superior user of suspense from pre-Point Horror time and this title will probably gain her those readers who'll be entertained by a skilful manipulator of story tension. AJ

## Mennymys in the Wilderness

Sylvia Waugh, Red Fox (May 95), 0 09 942421 5, £2.99

'Here we go like sparrows in the wilderness ... Looking for a place to hide.' For those who loved the first

book, this sequel has been eagerly awaited and there's the minimum of reference back to allow new readers to join in. The Mennymys's house is to be demolished to make way for a new road ... the ghost of Aunt Kate recruits Albert Pond (a real one this time?) to help transport the family to what ought to be the safety of the country. That fascinating dimension of 'pretence' in the first book is missing, but I think most readers will settle for the pleasure of being with these characters again. AJ

## The Wild Boy and Queen Moon

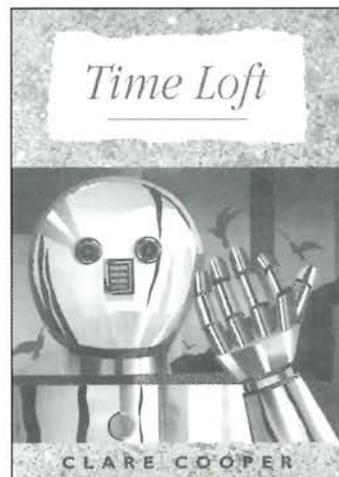
K M Peyton, Corgi (Jun 95), 0 552 52750 5, £2.99

Packed storytelling and a great deal more than just horses. The title suggests fantasy but the book actually settles for the realism of teenage friends centred on a livery stables. It's rich in relationships and the tensions of family and friendship, and there's a great deal of adventure including a mysterious set of robberies. This is the kind of book to move readers on a stage further, working from the comforts of the horse story but exploring the issues and characters more deeply. AJ

## Time Loft

Clare Cooper, PONT (May 95), 1 85902 144 1, £4.25

**ORIGINAL**



We settle into the realism of the opening where Jason, caught thieving in London, is now looked after by Uncle Reg and Auntie Pat in the Welsh valleys. His much-loved grandfather, JW, had predicted it all, and Jason goes out to tend the pigeons as JW would have done ... then he's kidnapped and taken 200 years on. The effect is as startling for the reader as it is for Jason. His battle to return from the strange world of the future is finally successful - well almost. He finds himself slightly further back in time, bringing the story to a wonderful and very clever conclusion. A great mix of genres and exciting storytelling. AJ

# Older Readers **REVIEWS**



## Parkland

Victor Kelleher, Viking (Apr 95), 0 670 85904 4, £5.99

Vicious Leopogs and electric prods are the main weapons used by the shape-changing keepers (Cosmic Gardeners) to subdue and control the species of apes kept in zoo-like conditions for their cosmic visitors to view and admire - in Parkland. Human apes, like Cassie, share the incarceration too and along with it, a desperate craving for freedom.

This long fantasy thriller works on many levels and leaves one with much to ponder on, particularly about political systems and society's approach to individuals' worth. DB

## The Shattered Room

Christine Purkis, Bodley Head (Jun 95), 0 370 31916 8, £8.99

**ORIGINAL**

A real breath of hot, French air comes with this fascinating novel set in the south of France. Seventeen-year-old Alison takes a holiday job as a nanny in St Secrets, a village high in the mountains near Montelimar. The village appears to be stuck on the top of a mountain, populated by old people, and weird ones at that if grand'mère and grand-père are anything to go by. The saving grace is Elly, the baby she's to look after, who turns out to be a delight. On looking through a drawer in her room, Alison finds an old diary and begins to piece together the secrets which have split this family both in their home and villages. A captivating story by a talented writer. VB

## Uncle Vampire

Cynthia D Grant, Mammoth (Apr 95), 0 7497 2303 3, £3.50

When I read the dedication for 'the Members of The Princess of Power Club' my heart sank - yet another high-school girlie romp, I suspected. But, as I began to read I was gripped by one of the most intensely disturbing books I've ever read. It's a difficult book to review without giving away too much, but suffice to say it's the story of 16-year-old Carolyn who is tormented by her uncle, whom she knows is draining her, sucking her blood, emptying her of life. She can't tell anyone - her twin sister, Honey, thinks she's crazy, her parents never

listen and her brother has his own problems. Carolyn isn't popular at school - not like Honey - her grades suffer, her life is becoming unbearable. Who can she turn to?

A darkly powerful story for mature readers which will shock and horrify, but hopefully open up discussion and thought. Highly recommended. VB

## Stone Cold

Robert Swindells, Puffin (Apr 95), 0 14 036251 7, £3.99

Link is homeless and at risk. Shelter is deranged - an ex-Army sergeant who's determined to clean up London's streets. The story is shot through with horror and suspense and the last chapter is both thrilling and shocking.

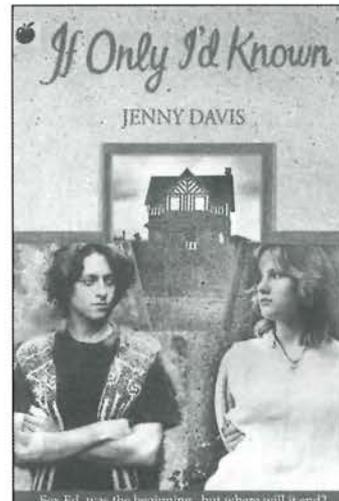
There's a determination here to present the other side of the homeless story: sympathy is evoked as we live through Link's deprivations - both physical and emotional.

Stone Cold, last year's Carnegie medal winner, would be an excellent library or book box purchase best used with Year 9 and above. VR

## If Only I'd Known

Jenny Davis, Orchard (Apr 95), 1 85213 866 1, £3.99

A sex education project is begun by a teacher with a burning concern to reduce the number of young teenage pregnancies. While undertaking a joint task in support of a new couple who have just moved to the town, David and Livvie explore their own developing love for each other. However, their care for the couple becomes complicated by the discov-

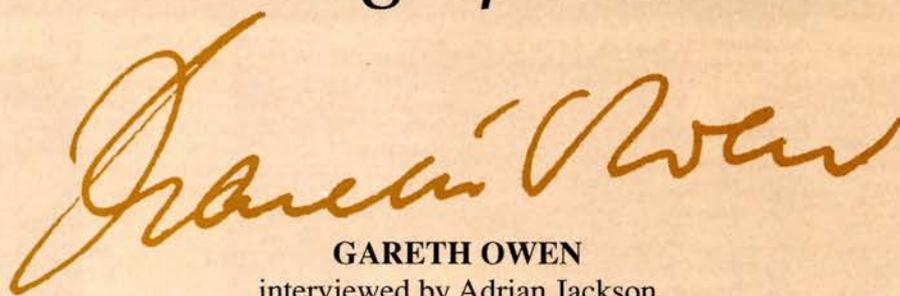


ery that the husband is beating his wife, and there's a dramatic climax which the prologue of Livvie in a psychiatric unit has primed us for ... With the worthiness of sex education clothed (should that be fleshed out?) in fiction, this is a thoughtful and skilfully written book. AJ

## REVIEWERS in this issue:

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

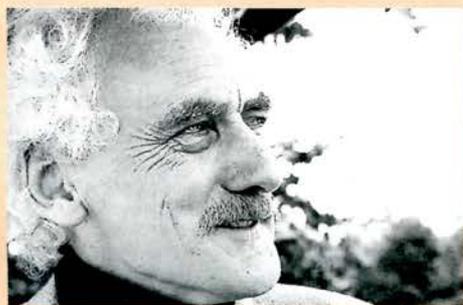
# Authorgraph No.94



GARETH OWEN

interviewed by Adrian Jackson

Gareth Owen has led a packed writing life and a packed life in general. It's taken in the Navy, teaching, working off Broadway, an involvement in the music business, managing the soul singer Ruby Turner and an independent record label, winning awards for his writing and his reading of verse, and now presenting Poetry Please on the radio.



Looking for Gareth's cottage deep in the Powys countryside can make these lines from 'The Secret' tease round your head:

*'a place I know*

*That no one can find except me, except me*

*That no one can find except me.'*

The titles of his well-known collections of poems, *Salford Road* and *Song of the City*, might lead you to expect somewhere urban but with writers the equation is never as simple as that.

Childhood was Ainsdale, pretty distant from Liverpool but convenient for watching Everton. He seems to have travelled a long way, although the poems and novels have tracked and fixed childhood memories as seen with youngsters' eyes. It's this which may begin to attract children to his writing but there was also and continues to be a deeper feeling for the variety and detail of the world as he sees it.

Writing was not an obvious career option for him and when he left school at sixteen he was faced with the choice of going into banking or insurance and being *respectable*. 'I was never going to do that, so I joined the Merchant Navy. It was the open sea for me ... there wasn't much else I could do since I couldn't add up - though there was a lot of adding up in the Navy.' He spent four years as a sailor but 'I was hopeless at it'. After falling from the mast, he left the Navy for good, having seen some of the exotic ways of the world, even if he was too young to appreciate it all.

He became a teacher, then Head of

English and Drama ('It was all a mistake') and for the next 16 years worked in a College of Education. He had impressed at interview by not liking D H Lawrence and, in the wake of the *Lady Chatterley* trial, was thought to be someone who could be trusted with pupils' welfare.

In the early 60s he began writing for his pupils, 'illustrating little nostrums by making up my own'. The birth of *Salford Road*, though, was long and protracted. He had written several of the poems when he met Barry Maybury, who was preparing an anthology, and was willing to include five of them in *Wordscapes*. This was 1970 and it seemed he was on the road to success but, try as he might, he couldn't get a publisher to accept a complete collection of his own. He was turned down by many publishing houses and a 'long silence' followed until, eventually, Viking published *Salford Road* in hardback in 1979. (Even then it took almost another decade to get the book into paperback.)

During the 70s his writing continued, but not predominantly as poetry - 'I'd given up'. His teaching work with students led him naturally into acting, and to writing his own plays (which he continues to do), forming his own theatre group and producing plays both here and abroad.

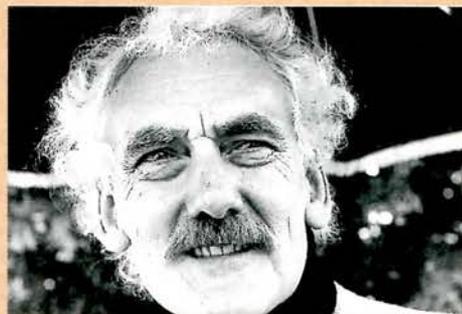
Performance has always been close to his work, as a teacher, writer and actor, and that sense and need of an audience stays with him. His recent plays for Radio 4 have included a pastiche Country and Western musical, in which he played the lead. Writing for the theatre has clearly had an important effect on all his work, especially his novels.

When *Salford Road* was finally published, people started to treat him as a poet, 'they asked me for poems' and he began to develop this again. Although he may seem a long-established children's poet, his new collection, *The Fox on the Roundabout*, is only his fourth though he might be seen to be suddenly prolific with two collections in successive years.

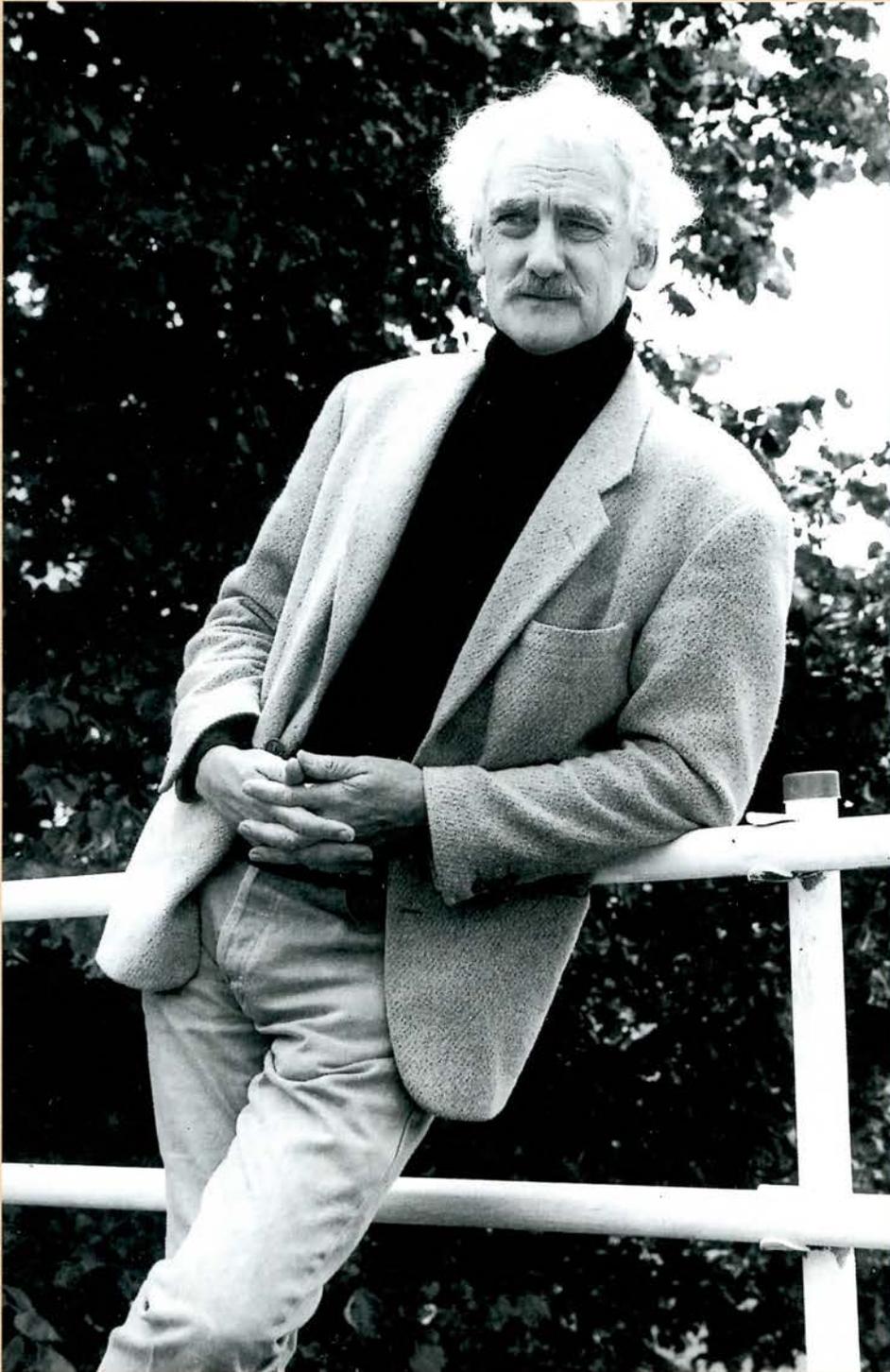
*Song of the City* was published in 1985, winning the Signal Poetry Award, and at about the same time a respected friend asked him why he didn't write a novel. 'A poem is a sprinter's job, a novel is a marathon and I couldn't think of anything to write about.' The pleasure of the plays had in part been in the contact with an audience, so he asked a teacher friend if he could read a chapter of the

novel to some pupils. His audience gave him the feedback he needed and he wrote and read them a chapter a week until it was finished. 'They liked it - the teacher didn't think much of it.' But Gareth was 'astonished' with what he'd done, 'it read like a real book'. Not only that but it (*The Final Test*) was a runner-up for the Smarties Award. 'I was asked what the next book was going to be and so went into another school to read to a class.' *The Man With Eyes Like Windows* followed and then *Never Walk Alone* and *Omelette*. It's a fine sequence of books and he's unhappy that all four have gone out of print, especially since he feels there's a readership for them. I can only agree. Still, undeterred, there's another ambitious title due out next year with which he's very pleased.

After his last collection of poems, which took his poetry into the world of adolescents, he wrote *Rosie No Name* and then *The Forest of Forgetting*, which he hopes 'bright 15-year-olds and adults will read'. He'd like it to be a 'crossover book - it's a different sort of a book ... an allegory.' Never has he wanted to write simplistic novels. With *The Final Test* he hoped to 'write Marcel Proust for Juniors', there was Ulysses in *The Man With Eyes Like Windows*, and he calls the latest one 'The Seventh Seal for teenagers'. His theatre background has helped too, he feels, because he turned it into a play which demanded some changes and shifts to catch the fantasy. When he changed it back into a novel he felt it had become tighter. 'The world of the fantasy, shifting from Arthurian legend to 1916 was something I could cope with ... I wasn't good at knightspeak'.



This bringing into vision and introducing his own voice have been key elements in his work - with theatre a clear and continuing influence. Catching the voice, though, was hard. 'The Catcher in the Rye' had it, but it didn't seem possible to



write that way in England ... You couldn't express yourself in the tongue that was about at that time.' **There is a Happy Land** impressed him because with this book he felt Keith Waterhouse captured the tones of the child, 'he really got it right'; it taught him that 'you've just got to look at real life.' That same use of the child, the mining of his own memories and childhood and seeing it clearly and precisely, without sentimentality, were the catalyst for the **Salford Road** poems and what he calls the 'confessional voice of a child of about ten'.

When he works with children he adopts the same approach. 'Children don't see anything, they're not very observant. If you can't see what's in front of your eyes, you can't see what's not in front of them.' He stresses the importance of making what you see *real* to your readers - 'We

confuse imagination with invention' - and encourages children to focus on what they really know as the best route into worthwhile writing.

It's this quality of observation which first made Owen's poetry so striking: it was what was there - fish and chips and Denis Law, what it felt like to be bored, and how to make a poem capture the action of table tennis. This was poetry that children might have written for themselves.

It was a delight for me to discover **Salford Road** and read it with youngsters at a time when so little poetry seemed to be produced on their terms. Some of its poems are timeless, some he thinks, like 'Denis Law', just need the latest star's name inserted ('but the rhyme isn't so easy')

*'His red sleeves flap around his wrists.  
He's built all thin and raw,  
But the toughest backs don't stand a  
chance*

*When the ball's near Denis Law.'*

and some may find their time again. How many children faced by a SAT would like to repeat the letter 'Dear Examiner'?

*'Thank you so much for your questions  
I've read them all carefully through  
But there isn't a single one of them  
That I know the answer to.*

*I've written my name as instructed  
Put the year, the month and the day  
But after I'd finished doing that  
I had nothing further to say.*

*So I thought I'd write you a letter  
Fairly informally  
About what's going on in the classroom  
And what it's like to be me.'*

In his new collection, **The Fox on the Roundabout**, there's the child's voice again, sometimes just as a voice, but in other poems as a way of regarding the world through older eyes: about being in love, or being in a world of unemployment. And there are older voices, too: one aware of the distance between now and memory, looking at what is happening 'beyond the edges of my life'; another 'Blind Date' - a monologue by a woman facing up to her husband's adultery. It's a collection which includes poems perfectly attuned to teenagers. The range is clearly demonstrated by the changing styles of the very distinctive illustrations by Danny Markey.

With **Poetry Please** Gareth Owen aims to popularise even the most demanding verse. He's won poetry reading competitions (most notably at the Cheltenham Literature Festival in 1992) and clearly delights in reciting - 'I love reading other people's stuff ... it's worth grappling with quite testing poetry.' Some of his favourites would gladden the hearts of perpetrators of the National Curriculum lists at Key Stages 3 and 4 - T S Eliot, Hardy, Wyatt, Crowe Ransome, e e cummings and Shakespeare. Perhaps if young teenagers heard him read, they'd find such writers much more accessible.

Gareth Owen is delighted his own poetry has reached a wide audience in schools: 'I've always thought the poems have got something about them that would go outside the small circle of poetry readers' and he hopes his new collection will continue to extend that circle.

Photographs by Richard Mewton.

Gareth Owen's books are all published by Harper Collins:

**Salford Road**, 0 00 672919 3, £2.99

**Song of the City**, 0 00 672410 8, £2.99

**My Granny Is a Sumo Wrestler**, 0 00 674883 5, £3.50

**The Fox on the Roundabout**, 0 00 185607 3, £8.99 hbk; 0 00 674882 1, £3.50

# Non Fiction REVIEWS

## Ant

Illustrated by  
Clive Pritchard  
0 7502 1287 X

## Rabbit

Illustrated by  
Phil Weare  
0 7502 1557 7

## Duck

Illustrated by  
Stephen Lings  
0 7502 1466 X

## Seagull

Illustrated by  
Andre Boos  
0 7502 1522 4

Stephen Savage, Wayland (Observing Nature series),  
£8.50 each

### INFANT/JUNIOR

Did you know that when a queen ant loses her virginity, her wings drop off? Or that duck eggs take 3½ weeks to hatch, that herring gull chicks must peck the red spot on their mother's beak before she will feed them or that buck rabbits mark their territories with their chins? It's surprising how few 'common creatures' have good accessible literatures while tomes about more exotic ones keep piling up, so this 'Observing Nature' quartet from the excellent Stephen Savage and four good illustrators fills a definite gap.

I like **Rabbit** best - perhaps because, if our garden is to survive, a full-bottomed knowledge of rabbit socio/biology is urgently required and this book supplies it. Simple but excellent typesetting and design (both by Jean Wheeler) make the most of the well-considered text and Phil Weare's observantly accurate paintings. It's a nice bunny book as well as a scientific contribution which should appeal to a wide age/ability range.

The same virtues and achievements pervade **Ant**, **Duck** and **Seagull** - all creatures that have been accorded stereotype status in the past. TP

## Flowers

0 7136 4166 5

## Insects

0 7136 4178 9

## Soil

0 7136 4164 9

## Trees

0 7136 4165 7

Karen Bryant-Mole, photographs by  
Barrie Watts, A & C Black (See for Yourself series), £6.99 each

### INFANT/JUNIOR



'What animal do you think this mosquito is feeding on?' From **Insects**.

Barrie Watts' photography is as inviting as ever in these four books, showing us familiar things and encouraging our further exploration of them. A fine example, in **Trees**, is his micrograph of the underside of a leaf: it looks like an Aran jersey. The rest of the book explains the tree as a botanic and as an ecological entity and ends by hoping we will look after existing trees and plant new ones.

**Soil** recommends further stewardship of mother Earth, its constituents and its population. **Flowers**



goes from buds to seeds, explaining the purpose of colour and scent but remembering those which have little of either and inviting the growing of wild flowers on bare patches. And to the flowers come the **Insects** whose variety is well displayed, the sight of a mosquito bloating its belly on human blood almost compensating for an absence of water-dwellers.

Each book contains plenty of starting points for things to do. Rarely does one find environmental responsibility - often the object of mere lip-service in such books - so ingrained in the whole opus as it is here. TP

## My Tudor Home

0 7496 1962 7

## My Victorian Home

0 7496 1961 9

Karen Bryant-Mole, Watts (Who Lived Here? series), £8.99 each

### JUNIOR

These imaginative titles show period houses which are still being lived in as family homes today, and compares and contrasts the use made of them by their first and their current owners.

This is achieved by a clever juxtaposition of modern photographs and artwork which recreates the appearance of each room as it would have been in its heyday. Floorplans of the original layouts also help to place each room in the overall scheme of things. Illustrations of artefacts and interiors from other sources are occasionally used to supplement and broaden our knowledge of everyday life and times, but the main focus of the lively, informative text is on the changing personality of one particular house.

Although we are told the names and occupations of the original householders, and even how many children and servants they had, we are not told how this provenance was established. It would have been helpful to have explored some of the primary source material which could be used to obtain such data. VH

## Airport

0 7502 1560 7

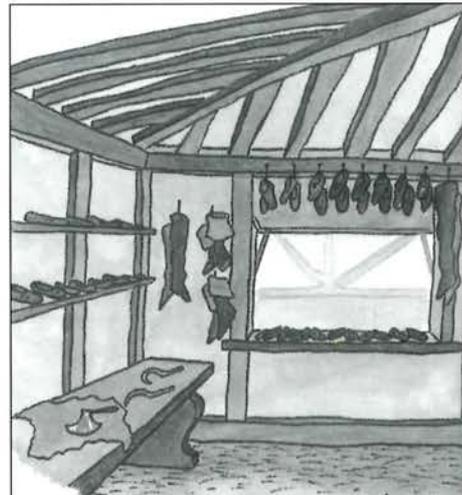
## Hotel

0 7502 1561 5

Philippa Perry and Stephen Gibbs,  
Wayland (Teamwork series), £8.50 each

### JUNIOR

These titles form part of a series which aims to provide insight into a variety of busy and complex workplaces by showing how each individual employee's job contributes to the overall team-



Left, the parlour now in use as an artist's studio. Above, the same room used as a shoemaker's workroom and shop, in Tudor times. From **My Tudor Home**.

work necessary for their smooth running and successful operation.

After a few succinct paragraphs giving some general historical background information, we are introduced to the dozen or so named individuals in each of the chosen locations - London's Stansted Airport and The Grand hotel, Brighton.

Most of the jobs featured in **Hotel** are fairly easy to predict (manager, receptionist, room attendant) but books about airports usually include only the high profile roles, so it is refreshing to find in this volume some of the equally essential but relatively unsung personnel such as the baggage handler, refuelling attendant and passenger agent.

Easily absorbed texts, specially commissioned photographs and additional fact-file boxes ('In a large hotel one member of staff just has the job of changing the light bulbs') are combined in visually attractive formats to provide some stimulating new contenders for those inevitable 'people-who-help-us' projects. VH

## France

0 7496 1952 X

## The U.S.A.

0 7496 2094 3

Ed Needham, Watts (Land and Peoples series), £7.99 each

### JUNIOR/MIDDLE

Cultural diversity and the avoidance of stereotypes is the theme of these simple national portraits, so we learn that French people may be Algerian, Alsatian, Basque or Breton and that Statesiders may derive from European, Asian or African origin as well as Native American. Children of different cultural groups act as the vectors of much of the information - avoiding, thank goodness, the 'Hi, I'm Chuck, I live in Flagstaff' approach.

It must be difficult to present the essence of a country in 32 pages of large type and simple text: and it's hard to explain how and why this presentation appears to be successful. The sympathetic objectivity of the texts is a great help. We learn about Harlem 'enduring more than its share of violent crime' as well as about the 'lush green fields and rolling hills' of La Belle France.

Illustration is nearly all photographic, and there are some really good ones - take away the backyard pools from Beverley Hills and it's Milton Keynes to the life - and each final spread is devoted to useful (and accurate) key facts. There's definite unforced authenticity here. TP

## Benjamin Franklin's Adventures with Electricity

0 575 06005 0, £8.99; 0 575 06006 9, £4.99 pbk

## Marconi's Battle for Radio

0 575 06010 7, £8.99; 0 575 06011 5, £4.99 pbk

Beverly Birch and Robin Bell Corfield, Gollancz (Science Stories series)

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

## Benjamin Franklin and Static Electricity

1 85561 371 9

## The Lumière Brothers and the Cinema

1 85561 382 4

Belitha Press (Science Discoveries series), £7.99 each

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

'He's lucky he wasn't killed' is the usual response to the tale of Franklin's key and kite capers; Birch and Corfield show us how true this was with a sparky text and energetic illustrations concentrating on this one aspect of Franklin's crowded life. Steve Parker's book tells us much more, albeit less dramatically, about the polymathy of the candle-maker's son who started work as a printer, initiated the Philadelphia fire brigade, invented the heat-efficient Franklin stove, the glass harmonica and bifocal spectacles before turning his mind to matters electrical and the Declaration of Independence. A really interesting read about a truly varied life.

Marconi's battle was fought chiefly against the North Atlantic weather which wrecked nearly all his gear before the initial transoceanic transmission was achieved. It's nice to see such events, often elsewhere reduced to a line in a time chart, brought to life and to be reminded that scientists are human.

The Lumières were extremely human - but two days after making their first movie (knocking off-time at the Lumière factory) they were exploring its commercial implications and six months later pocketing their first cinema takings. By being not only cameramen but technicians, screenwriters, directors, producers and distributors they invented not only the film but the whole cinema industry. This year sees the centenary (28th December) of their first show and Parker's book is an engaging tribute. TP

## The Atlas of Endangered Peoples

1 85561 360 3

## The Atlas of Endangered Resources

1 85561 361 1

Steve Pollock, maps by Creative Cartography, Belitha Press, £9.99 each

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

Actually, these are very good atlases of resources and peoples full stop - what's endangerment for one is success for another, after all. As befits atlases, the meat of these two lies in their maps which show what's happening resource- and demography-wise in and around the earthly land-masses. A complex but workable array of symbols directs our attention to, say, the pros and cons of Brazilian sugar-alcohol production, the growth of wind farms in California, gross atmospheric pollution in Eastern Europe and habitat loss in the southern Sahara.

The text comes in energy-rich goblets headed by the same symbols and catchy one-liners like 'Monoculture madness', and 'Sex-change pollution'. This makes for rewarding browsing as well as gratifying the systematic approach via each book's double index (one for places, one for subjects). And the two atlases act symbiotically -



'British troops use a tank to batter down the door of a house during their search for snipers.' From *The Easter Rising*.



when read in parallel, their contributions continuously complement each other so that the reader realises the two endangerments are but different sides of the same garment that humankind has made for itself - to which may be added that 'endangerments' is very nearly an anagram of 'garment ends'. Enough said? Definitely worth seeing for yourself. TP

## Bangladesh

0 7502 1001 X

## Ghana

0 7502 1002 8

Steve Brace

## Brazil

0 7502 1003 6

## China

0 7502 1004 4

Anna Lewington and Edward Parker

Julia Waterlow

Wayland (Economically Developing Countries series), £9.50 each

SECONDARY

With the study of economically developing countries now firmly entrenched in the National Curriculum at KS3 and KS4, these books are very welcome additions to any library. The concepts discussed and the language used make them most suitable for the more able students in Year 9 and above.

The two by Steve Brace engaged me most on a personal level. He is the Education Officer for ActionAid and has used the charity's own experiences of these countries in his writing, particularly

in the various case studies of development work in action. It is through considering and comparing the day-to-day lives of ordinary people like ourselves that we come to realise the true horror of the inequities of our world.

All of the books are well presented with carefully chosen colour photographs, and clear maps, graphs and diagrams plus a useful address list for further information. SR

## The Easter Rising

Richard Killeen

0 7502 1473 2

## The French Revolution

Adrian Gilbert

0 7502 1450 3

Wayland (Revolution series), £9.99 each

SECONDARY

Although it only lasted six days, the Easter Rising proved to be one of the decisive turning points in Irish history and Richard Killeen has chosen to emphasise the point by arranging the chapters of his book chronologically to reflect each day's events during that momentous period from Easter Monday, 24th to 29th April, 1916.

His graphic, almost blow-by-blow account of the fighting that ensued is accompanied by maps showing the locations of all the rebel garrisons and the cordons which the British troops eventually established. Interwoven amongst the unfolding drama are 'snapshot' biographies of the key figures, quotations from participants and eyewitnesses and other relevant background material which help place this extraordinary episode into an overall historical perspective.

The social and political upheavals of the French Revolution are dealt with in a slightly more orthodox fashion by Adrian Gilbert who begins with France in the 1780s and ends with Bonaparte crowning himself Emperor in 1804. Each twist and turn along the road to revolution is very clearly delineated and profiles of all the major protagonists and factions help to shed even more light on the complexities of the scenario.

It's heartening to note that the publishers have aimed to provide more than the usual perfunctory 'further reading' list by including novels, films, plays and short stories. VH

Non Fiction REVIEWERS:

Vee Holliday, Ted Percy and Steve Rosson.

Non Fiction Reviews Editor:

Eleanor von Schweinitz

# POWER TO THE BOOK PEOPLE!

Mary Hoffman, author and campaigner, writes about the Library Power Campaign and surveys the battles that lie ahead.

If 'Library Power' seems a bit of an oxymoron to you, it's because libraries and librarians have such a poor public image. How did the stereotype of a dull person in a dull place ever take hold? Libraries are the most subversive places in the world, much more so than smoke-filled back-rooms, because they hold everything you need both to teach you your civil rights and empower you to use them.

And this is just one tiny aspect of what they do. They are also time-machines to take you back into history or forward into unimaginable futures. And supersonic jets to take you anywhere in the world at the turn of a page. And they are so full of mind-expanding substances, it's a wonder to me that they aren't regularly raided and closed down.

Well, actually they *are* sometimes closed down. Or at least they have their hours and staff reduced and their book funds frozen. This happens or is threatened to happen about once a year. As the days shorten and local councils start to think about setting their budgets, local library campaigners dust down their old banners, get out their writing paper and heave a great sigh.

## When the budget comes into bud

They know they will have to lobby Councillors, MPs and the press all through the winter, until they see what kinds of 'victories' they achieve come the spring, when the budgets come into bud. Waving placards outside my Civic Centre on a freezing night last winter and recognising all the usual faces, we agreed we were getting too old for this.

Against this rather gloomy background the Library Association has been running, all this year, a Library Power initiative that has put the spotlight on children and young people. The LA decided to commission research (funded by the British Library) into exactly what kind of library provision an individual child might receive in different parts of the country, including public libraries, school libraries and the activities of the local schools' library service. Amazingly, this had never been done before.

## The rates are slipping

The results were published at the beginning of Library Power Week in May, at a launch in Westminster which neither the Secretary of State for National Heritage nor the one for Education attended. The research was carried out in a hundred places in the UK, covering services to 66,000 children and, surprise, surprise, 75% of these locations was found to have 'sub-standard library services'.

The standards were set by establishing a new Library Power Rating based on the answers to simple questions like 'what is the school library expenditure per pupil?' and 'is there a public library within 20 minutes' walk?'

A practical outcome is that the LA has prepared a checklist for parents and carers, reprinted on the opposite page, so that you can carry out your own mini-survey of the kind of services your child is receiving and take appropriate action if they don't fall within that quarter of the sample whose children are getting a good deal.

## Pop Quiz

Who is the current Secretary of State for National Heritage? And for Education? And before them? And before that? Give your answers going back to the beginning of 1992. (They should really be upside down at the bottom of the page where they belong.) I reckon for DNH it's Tim Renton, David Mellor, Peter Brooke and Stephen Dorrell, before the arrival of the present Secretary known throughout the Health Service as Golden Virginia. And over at Education we've had (after Kenneth Baker) John MacGregor, Kenneth Clarke, John Patten and Gillian Shephard. By any standards that's too high a turnover in both jobs.

## Value for Money?

The beginning of '92 sticks in my mind because that's when I launched my national campaign, in the pages of this very journal, to save the Schools Library Service. Since then I've fought two out of the three campaigns to save my own local SLS from extinction and helped with others from Islington to Solihull. I've had numerous letters from Government departments, assuring me that LMS was no threat to SLS (my life is now conducted entirely in initials) and that where the local service was providing value for money, it would always survive.

The Primary service in Buckinghamshire has closed, Waltham Forest's has no librarian and has changed its name to Project Loan Service, Barnsley SLS has closed down and Solihull's has had its budget halved ... need I go on?

## Labour promises

This July the Labour Party launched its own Keep Libraries Public campaign, claiming that Tories plan to privatise libraries by the back door, through compulsory competitive tendering and the like. They also claim the Peat Marwick survey commis-

# POWER

Photographs courtesy of The Library Association.



sioned by the Government was looking at ways of extending contracting out parts of the library service.

But at the launch of this campaign, Mark Fisher, the Shadow Spokesperson for Arts, told me that his party were revising their manifesto commitment of '92 to make SLSs statutory. He and Chris Smith and David Blunkett are drafting the new policy for the autumn - there may yet be time to write to them - believing that the checkered pattern of SLS provision all over the country makes that promise difficult to renew.

## Library Power Rangers

I recently received an invitation to speak from an organisation called the SAS. It's the name they give to their SLS in Croydon and it stands for Schools Advisory Service. But for a moment I had a wonderful vision of these dedicated librarians as a swat team, yomping into schools, de-fusing the devices of ignorance and lobbing little imagination grenades into classrooms.

We continue to use the language of the battlefield. We carry on 'campaigns', seek to discover who is 'the enemy', send off 'fusillades' of letters and continue to 'wave the flag'. The checklist will do something to raise standards in the other sense and perhaps restore 'library power' from being an oxymoron to what it out to be - a tautology. ■

LIBRARY POWER			
THE LIBRARY CHECKLIST			
for parents and carers			
Does your child's school... ...have a designated library area	Yes No	Good Poor	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Does the school library... ...have a full-time librarian in charge (Secondary only)	Yes Part time librarian or 50% of teacher's time No librarian at all	Good Fair Poor	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
...open for more than 41 hours per week	Yes 31-40 hours per week Fewer than 31 hours	Good Fair Poor	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
...replace more than 10% of its stock every year	Yes Any target at all No target	Good Fair Poor	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
...have a total stock of	13 or more items per pupil 10-12 items per pupil Fewer than 10 items	Good Fair Poor	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
...have computer workstations in the school library for children to use	more than 5 2-4 Less than 2	Good Fair Poor	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
...have a Development Plan for the school library or is planning to introduce one	Yes No	Good Poor	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
...involve library staff in teaching information skills	Yes No	Good Poor	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
...subscribe to the local Schools Library Service	Yes No	Good Poor	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a public library within 20 minutes walk of your house or does a mobile stop once a fortnight?	Yes Public library 20 minutes by public transport No	Good Fair Poor	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Is that public library open more than 45 hours per week?	Yes Over 30 hours including some evenings No	Good Fair Poor	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Does it have three or more of the following: Special collections e.g. for teenagers and under fives; computers for use by children; videos & audio cassettes; desk areas for private study; promotions and special events e.g. holiday reading schemes, story trails, homework clubs; CD ROMs	Yes No	Good Poor	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
			Score <input type="text"/>

You can obtain copies of the checklist leaflet from Donna MacLean, The Library Association, 7 Ridgmount Street, London WC1E 7AE.

You can join CENTRAL (Children's Education Needs Teaching Resources And Libraries) by sending £5 subscription to Mary Hoffman, 28 Crouch Hall Road, London N8 8HJ (tel: 0181 292 5542, fax: 0181 292 5543).



... a new series in which we ask an author or illustrator to comment, as an insider, on the work of a fellow professional

## SHIRLEY HUGHES meets ALAN MARKS



Alan Marks is a true illustrator. This struck me from the first time I encountered his Nursery Rhyme collection, **Over the Hills and Far Away**, in the hands of a small grandchild who was enjoying it every bit as much as I was. Unworthy feelings of envy at such mastery quickly gave way to sheer pleasure. Here, unmistakably, was the age-old hybrid skill, balanced somewhere between literature and painting (but belonging to neither) borrowing much from theatre, mime and movie syntax, springing from good draughtmanship; a practised observation of life taking off into imaginary worlds. It was heartening to see it still surfacing - not all that common even in the hot-house fecundity of today's children's book industry.

Marks is in his late thirties. His style is rooted in drawing, a felicitous line (something he cares about passionately) overlaid by fluid watercolour washes. His figures populate the pages, flowing and tumbling across the spreads, sturdily bulked out but light as a feather. They are real people all right; no reliance on a simplified cartoon style, no gimmicks, faces and hands meticulously observed. Animals, domestic and otherwise, are completely true to nature. The surprises come in the fresh viewpoints, the new perspectives, the way he makes the eye of the beholder animate the scene.

This seemingly artless vitality is, of course, like all good illustration, underpinned by a carefully honed and hard-won technique. Marks makes many pencil roughs, done on semi-transparent paper which are over-laid, juxtaposed - 'you drop the eye-line and the whole thing changes' - until he arrives at his final composition. This is then drawn straight onto the page in biro or pen. He's not afraid of the surface of his paper. He clearly loves it, works it into wet washes, uses erased areas and stop-out (a masking fluid which keeps the paint away from chosen areas of the picture) to dramatic effect. But the essential characterisation is done in a lightly hatched pen drawing.

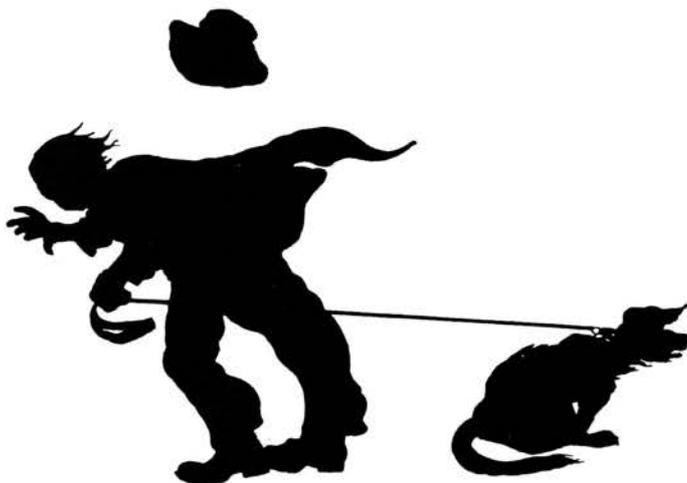
Marks first came seriously to grips with all this at Bath Art College, Corsham. From an early childhood in London - 'I lived in Docklands before it became fashionable' - he had always known he wanted to create books. There were no artists in the family, save for a grandfather who would have loved to have been one. No art gallery outings either, though his talent was never discouraged. He read widely, especially books about African wildlife and Marvel comics, was aware of exciting visual images of the Space Race and 60s' posters and record covers. At secondary school in Kent he asked if they could visit an art school but they came up with a trip to a paper mill. He applied for an art course at the age of 15, but was considered too young. It was after A-levels and a foundation year at Medway that he arrived at Corsham and found himself surrounded by just the right stimulating atmosphere.

Though he admired artists like Jim Dine and R B Kitaj for their energy, he never liked painting - 'I was terrified of colour.' All his interest was graphic, expressed in black and white. There was a lot of life-drawing, printmaking, book-binding, etching and lithography on offer, though he did not take to silk-screen - 'like juggling with yoghurt'! All along his subjects were led by literature.

He made a book, Robert Tressell's **The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist**, illustrated it with etchings and handset the text. A drawing of his London childhood was seen by Heinemann who commissioned him to do an adult jacket. So he went straight from art school into freelancing. His illustrations at this point were huge

- 'my portfolio was bigger than the average publisher's desk.' Now he mainly works actual size. He did black and white illustrations for literary magazines, mostly dark subjects like nuclear proliferation or the rise of fascism. These were drawn in biro onto heavyweight paper, hatched to produce a magnificent range of tone.

When Heinemann asked him to illustrate a children's book, Kevin Crossley-Holland's Carnegie winning **Storm**, it was his first essay into colour, at this point elegantly restrained. Marks, as one might expect, loves the challenge of interpreting good writing. It has certainly come his way since then, in the form of Jill Paton Walsh, Joan Aiken, Chris Powling and poetry collections such as **Golden Apples** and a superb World War II anthology, **Peace and War**. He is intensely influenced by different writing styles, adapting his own to grow out of the text. But, as with all distinctive techniques, it is always highly recognisable, like a beautifully tailored suit of clothes in which he feels entirely at home.



Kevin Crossley-Holland's **The Green Children**, for instance, is a poetic text offering a stimulating challenge - that of bringing a young reader to inhabit the being of a stranger from another world, one who comes into a human and sometimes bruising and confusing society where she is not understood. Here the colour green is crucial to the characterisation and to the whole feeling of the story. Marks has enhanced the archaic setting by carved borders running along the top and bottom of each spread. Jill Paton Walsh's dreamily evocative **Birdy and the Ghosties** and **Matthew and the Sea Singer** both elicit the same kind of watery, other-worldly pictures, sometimes so fragile they seem to hover and float above the page.

When Austrian publisher, Michael Neugebauer (who incidentally publishes Lizbeth Zwerger, an illustrator long admired by Marks) offered him the chance to do a collection of nursery rhymes, it was a completely open brief. Neugebauer is a great book-lover who gives his artists free choice of content, size, and design of page. Marks found this wonderfully inspiring. **Over the Hills and Far Away** has a sequential rhythm which connects through both the seasons of the year and the time of day. It is, at first sight, a traditional children's rhyme book, often using colour on one side of the spread offset by lively silhouettes dancing off across the opposite page. But it's full



'And its big, big eye in the mirror – even a kind, sparkly eye like this could seem glinty across in the moonlight.' From *It's That Dragon Again*.

of surprises. The reeling, filmic viewpoints sometimes have us down on the pavement, bowling about among the dustbins or deep in the depths of a huge barn as the north wind doth blow, or with the crumbling masonry of London Bridge toppling over us. Then we are soaring with the crows high above the Bells of Shoreditch, or looking down from the oak tree like the wise old owl, or from an attic casement, or teetering at the top of a dizzying flight of stairs. He catches the essential earthy humour too, and gives us a story within the rhyme, as with the grocer hastily adjusting a 'CLOSED' notice on his shop door as Betty Botter fussily approaches.

It is sometimes assumed, usually by non-artists, that a story set in our 'real world' of today is somehow easier to tackle than period or fantasy. But Marks admits that he, like the rest of us, finds it taxes all his skill to infuse the everyday with a sense of poetry. He pulls it off brilliantly with his illustrations for Chris Powling's *It's That Dragon Again*. His sombre colour-range is let loose on the shadowy corners of little Sam's bedroom, where she is convinced the dragon lurks (only Grandpa takes its existence seriously and so exorcises the fright). Once again the drama is in the eye-levels, the flying curtains, the clouds blowing across the moon.

There are flashes of lyricism too in Elizabeth Laird's *Sid and Sadie*, a sparsely simple text of two children walking home on an autumn evening. Marks loves the poetry of wet pavements. And a little girl, on tiptoe outside the front door, is lit by rainbow colours from the glass panel.

Illustrating Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, edited for public reading by the author himself, is perhaps Marks' greatest challenge. He has some way yet to go with developing facial expression to match this kind of emotional range. But he skilfully avoids the trap of overloading the pictures with excessive Dickensian detail. The period is effortlessly set. Dramatic filmic viewpoints give us David

walking in a windy Yarmouth street with a huge expanse of sky and ragged clouds above a rattling inn-sign, and light thrown up on the ceiling of Mr Peggotty's home in the upturned boat, with figures eloquently grouped backview against the firelight. Also - one of his most powerful double-page spreads - the shipwreck scene where waves tower over the watching figures on the shore.

Marks has written two texts of his own, *Nowhere to be Found* and *The Thief's Daughter*. I hope there will be more. The sheer breadth of subject matter which he's able to encompass - from Dickens to the naturalistically observed chimpanzees for Jane Goodall - displays a rare professionalism. In the current rather over-heated struggle to be noticed in the market place, there is a lot of pressure on an illustrator to establish a niche, invent a highly recognisable character and stick with it, repeating the same (only completely different, of course!) with each book. It takes not only a mature skill but guts to resist. Marks clearly has both, fuelled by an abiding passion for his work.

What, if he could choose, would he like to do next? Illustrate Paul Gallico's *The Snow Goose*, he says. Or Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Publishers, please note. Readers, watch this space. ■



From *David Copperfield*.

#### Details of books mentioned:

*Storm*, Heinemann 'Banana', 0 434 93032 6, £3.99

*Golden Apples*, ed. Fiona Waters, Heinemann, 0 434 96391 7, £9.99; Piper, 0 330 29728 7, £3.50 pbk

*Birdy and the Ghosties*, Macdonald, 0 7500 0684 6, £3.50 pbk

*Matthew and the Sea Singer*, Macdonald, 0 7500 1175 0, £8.50; 0 7500 1176 9, £3.50 pbk

*It's That Dragon Again*, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13167 7, £5.99

*David Copperfield*, North-South, 1 55858 453 6, £12.95

*The Thief's Daughter*, Macdonald, 0 7500 1377 X, £8.50; 0 7500 1378 8, £3.50 pbk

The others are all, sadly, out of print.

# A really good way to get them READING!

**ENROL  
NOW!**



**ORGANISED BY BOOKS FOR STUDENTS**  
BIRD ROAD, HEATHCOTE, WARWICK CV34 6TB.  
TEL: 01926 314366 • FAX: 01926 450178

*Campaign Director: BROUGH GIRLING*

**READATHON** is a national reading event which encourages children to read by raising money for sick children. It works just like a sponsored walk or swim, except that the children taking part read books. It encourages children to read recreationally and at the same time fosters their natural desire to help others.

All the money raised by READATHON '95 goes to The Malcolm Sargent Cancer Fund for Children and The Roald Dahl Foundation, where it will be spent on providing practical help to children in Britain with cancer, Hodgkin's Disease, leukaemia, epilepsy and brain damage.

READATHON is very easy to organise – we provide you with everything you will need to hold a successful reading and fundraising event.

Now in its eleventh year, READATHON has already raised over **£7,000,000** for charity, and is a regular Autumn term event in thousands of schools throughout Great Britain. It is the ideal focus for Children's Book Week (9-13th October), but you can hold your READATHON at any time during the Autumn term, or for longer than a week. You decide how READATHON will best work in your school.

Once we have acknowledged your enrolment we will prepare a full READATHON pack with everything you need for a successful and rewarding READATHON.

Your pack will be delivered for the start of the Autumn term.

## To enrol for Britain's biggest reading event, complete this form and return to...

**CHRIS KENNY – READATHON OFFICE, Books for Students Ltd., Bird Road, Heathcote, Warwick CV34 6TB.**

Please enrol us to take part in READATHON (PLEASE PRINT IN BLOCK CAPITALS) BFK

Name of school .....

Full mailing address .....

Post Code (important) ..... Telephone .....

Number of classes to do Readathon ..... Approx. number of pupils aged 8 and over .....

Approx. number of pupils aged 7 and under ..... *(these children will receive a special sponsor activity form)*

Name of teacher organising Readathon ..... Position .....

Type of School *(please tick any which apply to you):*  
 PRE-SCHOOL  INFANT  PRIMARY  JUNIOR  MIDDLE  SECONDARY

## A sponsored reading event in aid of sick children



**The Malcolm Sargent  
Cancer Fund for Children**

Registered Charity No: 256435



**The Roald Dahl  
Foundation**

Registered Charity No: 1004230



Funded by  
**THE  
ARTS  
COUNCIL  
OF ENGLAND**

## Correspondence PAGE

# RUMINATIONS

According to the Reader Survey we conducted in the Spring, a number of BfK readers would like a Correspondence Page. Well, here it is ...

### James Watson writes:

As another author with the softest of spots for Norman Lindsay's comic masterpiece, **The Magic Pudding**, might I advise Philip Pullman (BfK 93, July 1995) that the book's out-of-printness seems to be confined to British oversight? For Father's Day this year I received from my daughter, Francesca, currently living in Sydney, a fine Angus & Robertson hardback edition printed in Australia in 1990.

Of the many books I used to read to my children, **The Magic Pudding** - a treat to read aloud - was one which certainly entertained me the most. Alas, I overheard two of my grown daughters in an almost out of earshot exchange the other day complain about 'Dad reading that dratted magic pudding story ... again'.

However, all is not lost for Bunyip Bluegum and his friends Bill Barnacle and Sam Sawnoff: the note which came with my Father's Day gift confessed, 'If I'd known **The Magic Pudding** was all about Australia, I'd have paid more attention.' Perhaps I should have paid a little more attention to explaining the difference between a possum and a wombat, a bandicoot and a kookaburra.

Philip Pullman commends Lindsay's characters for frequently breaking into song and verse, usually in unrestrained praise of Albert the puddin's capacity to defeat the greatest appetite. As solace for readers still denied the four delicious slices of puddin' chasin' adventure offered by Lindsay so long ago, here's Sam Sawnoff in eloquent stride:

*'That Puddin', sir, and me, has, back to back,  
Withstood the fearful Rumty Tums' attack,  
And swum the Indian Ocean for our lives,  
Pursued by Oysters, armed with oyster knives.  
Let me but say, e'r these adventures cloy,  
I've known that Puddin' since he were a boy.'*

At which Albert retorts:

*"All lies," sang out the Puddin', looking over the rim  
of his basin. "For well you know that you and old  
Bill Barnacle collared me off Curry and Rice after  
rollin him off the iceberg."*

Come to think of it, my daughters may have had a point. **The Magic Pudding** is probably savoured to the full by grown-up kids; the kind who will prove too impatient to wait till the 'right time'. They will reach down the volume, dust it off, and by way of apology to their own children, begin, 'Now at first you may not love this as much as I do, but ...'

### Jean Ure writes:

Having read Nicholas Tucker's excellent article in the July edition, I have to say that I feel *extremely* depressed about children and their reading habits - or non-reading habits. Teenagers in particular seem to have become non-readers by definition.

A while ago, at a conference on just this subject, I heard the very experienced Julia Eccleshare speaking. She said (I have to quote from my rather shaky memory) that as far as she was concerned the fears that teenagers were no longer reading were without foundation. She visited a great many schools and in her opinion teenage reading was alive and well. They were all reading *something*.

I only wish my experience marched with hers! I too visit a great many schools and as far as I can make out large numbers of teenagers aren't reading anything at all - certainly not on a voluntary basis - and of those who are, almost all are stuck on Point Horrors and/or Stephen King and Virginia Andrews.

Now, I don't see anything in the least bit wrong with Point Horror as such (nor, I daresay, with Stephen King or Virginia Andrews) but so strong is their grip that virtually no other fiction for older readers is any longer economically viable, with the result that virtually all publishers have severely curtailed their teenage lists or even cut them altogether - except for the ubiquitous horror series. Variety is no longer an option. All we are getting is more and more, and ever more, of exactly the same: clone-upon-clone of sure-fire, written-to-a-formula, walk-off-the-shelf, megabuck-makers.

Of course there are honourable exceptions, but this does appear to be the trend; and should we wonder at it? We live in a society devoted to profit. Books that aren't likely to make any might as well be strangled at birth. Publishers, after all, are not answerable to their authors but to their shareholders. Quick returns are what it's all about - and I don't mean the sort of returns that are starting to figure with such depressing prominence on our royalty statements!

And, in a similar vein ...

### Pat Thomson writes:

Adèle Geras raises a matter for concern ('What's the Rush?', BfK 93, July 1995).

In a democracy, we need people to be thoughtful and reflective, able to concentrate, and able to read everything. The needs of children, aware parents and good teachers coincide at this point but they do not match the needs of commerce. Booksellers want titles which walk off their shelves. They haven't time to wait for a book and a reader to grow together. Teachers blame the publishers and it does seem that longer novels are out of favour, but the quality of the Book Fairs some schools are using suggests that fast, effortless sales are a priority for them, too. Are the days of the excellent, substantial novel numbered?

In darker moments, I am ready to write myself off as hopelessly old-fashioned, but then I see yet again what happens when children are led into a book that makes demands of them, and I decide to stay and fight after all. We need our children to be literate for more than passing SATs.

... will there be a Correspondence Page in the next issue of BfK? That's up to our readers. In this case, by chance, all three letters came from professional writers but we'd also welcome contributions from teachers, librarians, illustrators, publishers, booksellers, parents, children - from anyone, in fact, with an axe to grind, an itch to scratch or just an opinion about children's books to air.

Please send your letters to **Books for Keeps**, The Old Chapel, Easton, Nr Winchester, Hampshire SO21 1EG or fax them to 01962 779600, preferably six weeks ahead of the magazine's next issue.

If poetry is that which startles, delights and challenges the reader; which is sometimes wayward, often lucid and occasionally disturbing; which baffles and bewitches and begs to be said aloud, or sung, or whispered to oneself - then there's a lot of it around this autumn. And I'm pleased to have got my hands on it early.

Take **Walking the Bridge of your Nose** (Kingfisher, 1 85697 290 9, £8.99), for instance, selected by Michael Rosen. This collection guarantees a lot of fun, not just in reading the poems but in trying to say them aloud, along with the rhymes, tongue-twisters and puzzles which pack this book. Michael's rich store is enhanced by page after page of humorous, detailed illustrations by Chloë Cheese, which help the whole thing fit together in a most attractive way for 4-7 year-olds.

Then have a look at **Tickle in Your Tummy** (Macdonald, 0 7500 1602 1, £8.99; 0 7500 1602 7, £5.99 pbk), chosen by Judith Elkin and Carlton Duncan. It jingles and jangles so brightly it's earned a little rhyming review of its own:

Festivals, colours, strange insects and grannies,

Humpty-Dumpties and monkeys and bright picaninnies;

Laughter and friendship, mummies and daddies.

Rasta Garges and rainbows and Rack-a-bye babies.

- a lovely, smiling look at the world of Black and Asian children, also for 4-7 year-olds.

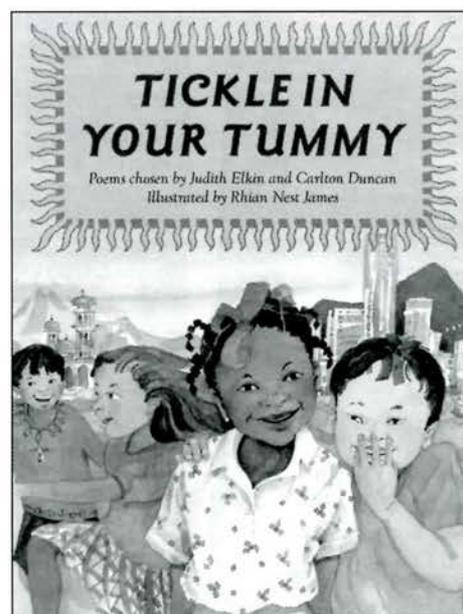
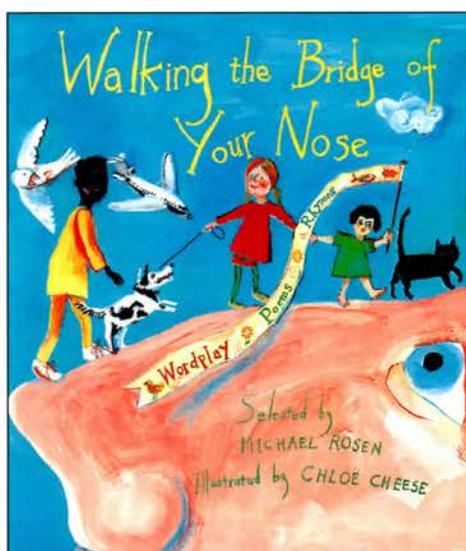
Illustrated in a most imaginative and witty way, by Penny Dann, the pieces in **Collins' Treasury of Poetry** (0 00 193046 7, £14.99) have been selected by Stephanie Nettell. There are more than 120 poems divided into sections like Fun and Fantasy, Sunshine and Showers, Very Special People, and Golden Days, Silver Nights. The mixture of old and new - de la Mare and Berlie Doherty, Masfield and McGough, Clare and Causley - with a sprinkling of traditional rhymes, works beautifully in this special collection for the very young.

For the same age-range there are two new titles in the Wayland **Poems About** series - **Day and Night** (0 7502 1125 3) and **Growth** (0 7502 1126 1) - at £8.99 each. Eclectic in their scope, the editors (Amanda Earl and Danielle Sensier) have chosen poems by Sansom, Frost, Rossetti and Farjeon, as well as poets currently writing for children. The colour illustrations by Frances Lloyd seem to me to work far better than the colour photographs. However, the books are sturdy and inviting, and I like the poems.

June Crebbin has written a flip-over book called **Cows Moo, Cars Toot** (Viking, 0 670 85511 1, £9.99). You start at one end, read to the middle, then reverse the process. One set of poems deals with town life and has titles like

## SPEAKING IN BLOSSOM

Jack Ousbey on recent poetry publications



'City River', 'Neighbourhood Watch', 'A City Dog's Dream'; the other half concentrates on country matters such as stream-dipping, conkers and frogs.

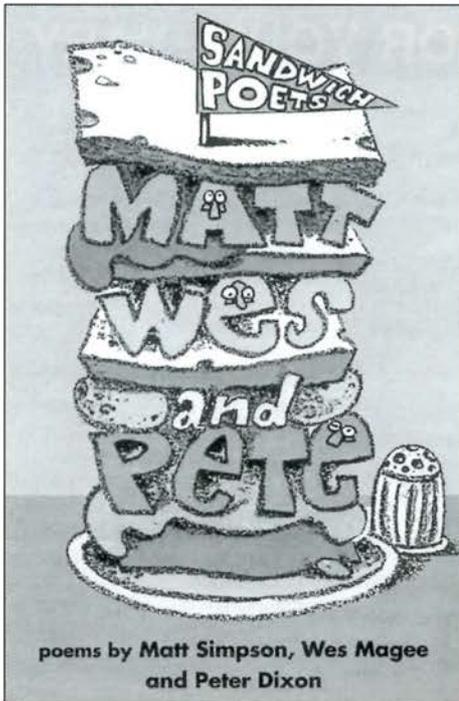
The poems are jaunty, appealing and fun, stepping out neatly in a variety of forms. I didn't like the cover but everything else about the book, including the black-and-white line drawings, is sure to appeal to 6-8 year-olds.

**Pigeons and Other City Poems** (Macmillan, 0 333 57214 9, £5.99), compiled and illustrated by Annie Owen is a real charmer of a book - a bobby-dazzler, an inner-city razzler. Many of the poems were new to me and some, like 'Dancer Man' and 'Rhubarb Street', I can't wait to share with a young audience. When you mix together Kit Wright, Laurie Lee, Thomas Hardy and Gareth Owen, you're bound to get something that sings a good tune. Not only has Annie Owen chosen well, she has provided a lovely collection of illustrations which appear above or below the poems, nudge into them when that seems appropriate, sometimes encircle or sit alongside them, and always shine on them with palpable pleasure. If I decide to part with this one, it'll be to a 5-year-old, or a 6-year-old or a 7-year-old, or a grandpa like me who enjoys sharing books with children of that age.

Macmillan's **Sandwich Poet** series is sure to go down well with top juniors and lower secondary pupils. Three poets each contribute around 20 poems to each collection, and a quick glance at the titles indicates that the tone is going to be light-hearted - 'Dazzledance', 'Grotty Borlotti', 'Parent-free Zone', 'Big Aunt Flo', 'Teabag' - and keen readers will recognise quite a few of the pieces. **Rice, Pie and Moses** (0 330 35874 9, £3.50) feature in one book; **Matt, Wes and Pete** (0 330 35875 7, £3.50) in the other. That's John Rice, Pie Corbett, Brian Moses, Matt Simpson, Wes McGee and Peter Dixon respectively. Let your children practise, rehearse and present their favourites and hope that somebody has a stab at 'The Chewy Toffee Poem':

'UH GLUG CHEWING GLOGGEE  
GLEAT IG ALL THE GLINE'

There's no mention of dragons chewing toffee in John Foster's **Dragon Poems** (Oxford, 0 19 276108 0, £2.99), though these fanciful creatures seems to do almost everything else. They have birthdays, visit classrooms, become pets, warm the world awake, play recorders and guitars, and avoid being put into zoos. John has a network of poet-friends from whom he commissions new work, thus this new collection contains a big percentage of previously unpublished materials, all of it illustrated in Korky Paul's inimitable, uproarious, exuberant way for dragon

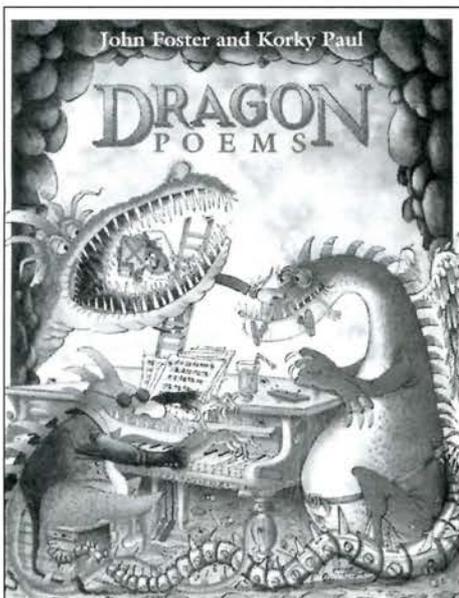


lovers from 7 upwards.

I have to say that Gerard Benson's poems get better and better. His collection, *Evidence of Elephants* (Viking, 0 670 85960 5, £9.99), is simply a cracker. Hold your breath on the rock-face; feel the wind and rain eroding the cliff-sides; solve riddles, visit strange gardens and measure elephant bones; meet Elliot the cat, and the dog who sleeps in The Temple of Dendera, and laugh aloud like I did when I read 'Goal!'. And then there's:

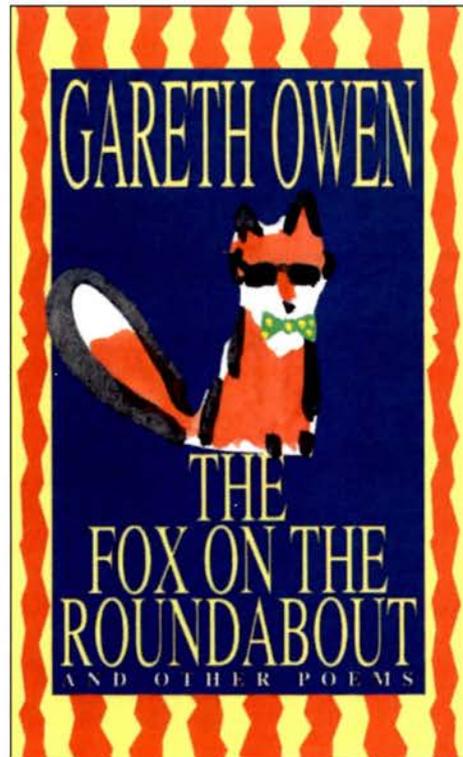
*'April Thackeray  
The music teacher's daughter  
Had eyes like skies  
And hands like water.  
She wore a shirt  
Of daffodil yellow  
And we played duets  
On her Pa's piano.'*

And I haven't even mentioned the way 'River Song' sings its way straight into your mind. Ring up a friend and tell



them to buy it for anyone in the 9-90 year-old range.

And then again, there's nothing quite like the moment when you're about to open a new book by a favourite author. *The Fox on the Roundabout* (Collins, 0 00 185607 3, £8.99) more than meets that expectation. Gareth Owen understands people and their concerns, as clearly as he knows about poetry and the way it functions, and he matches content (fame and fortune, first love and farms, pop-groups, soccer, tigers and travellers) so perfectly with form. The voice young people hear when they read his poems is one they know they can trust. That's why Gareth Owen is so popular with teenage audiences. This is an essential title for all English departments.



So, too, is *Otherworlds* (Faber, 0 571 17216 4, £9.99), a collection of poems concerned with the numinous nature of things - darkness, trespasses; shadows and hauntings; moonlight and dreams; midnight and echoes - the kind of poems, in fact, that Judith Nicholls, the compiler, tells us 'often, for reasons other than fear, create a shiver down the spine'. The book opens with a lovely poem by John Agard, 'First Morning', and closes with Grace Nichols' 'Back Home Contemplation'. In between we're able to meet mysteries in many shapes, from Clare and Wordsworth, Causley and de la Mare, Hopkins, Herrick, Hughes and Blake; in old favourites like 'Dover Beach' and 'La Belle Dame'; and in a number of interesting riddles. Pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 will enjoy the variety and challenge of *Otherworlds*.

There's variety in abundance in *Rainbows* (Oxford, 0 19 276124 2, £8.99), by Barrie Wade. Lullabies and haikus; poems with choruses that rhyme; new versions of old nursery

rhymes; poems that don't rhyme when you expect them to; poems that leave the reader to supply a rhyme; poems that march in time but don't rhyme; poems that sing, or snore, or keep on repeating themselves - they're all here in this jostling, bustling, ear-catching, gentle, rumbustious, golden pot of poetry. That's what *Rainbow* is. Buy it for 12-14 year-olds, but don't forget to sneak a look for yourself first.

I suppose I should have known that Diana Hendry would be an accomplished poet, but I didn't. I read the proofs of *Strange Goings On* (Viking, 0 670 86219 3, £8.99), at one sitting on an inner-city train. I loved every bit of it. I've been reading poetry for as long as I can remember and only a handful of poets have made me nod and smile and return to the text as readily as Diana Hendry. Her poems are gentle, poignant, watchful pieces. To pinch a phrase from one of her own poems, she has:

*'an ear for sap, a way  
of speaking in blossom.'*

Older pupils should read these poems alongside two Faber publications: *Fatso in the Red Suit* (0 571 17519 8, £8.99) by Mathew Sweeney, and *Scratch City* (0 571 17535 X, £5.99) by Philip Gross. Both poets have distinctive, vigorous, compelling voices and both deal with disturbing, off-beat, sometimes frightening themes. *Scratch City* is a dangerous, decaying place, flaring with disco lights and dodgem stands where violent confrontations threaten in a world of joy-riders, beggars and dark short-cuts. Mathew Sweeney reconstructs his own childhood in *Fatso* - a time and place where there are mysterious puzzles and dilemmas to be faced. Teachers who like poetry know that good writers produce work which is challenging in its scope and unswerving in its truth. Sweeney and Gross both follow that route.

It's good to be able to end a round-up of this kind with a collection which fairly hums along. *Hearsay* (Bodley Head, 0 370 31861 7, £8.99), compiled by Paul Beasley, has such a strong, earthy, knockabout feel to it you can almost hear the voices behind the print. It's not surprising to find the book is inspired by the performance poets whose work is featured here. I would have had more to say about *Hearsay*, I dare say, (like buy a copy *at once*), but I've just noticed a few lines in the piece which completes the collection - Norman Silver's 'This Poem':

*'May it never be the property  
of anyone, may no-one ever  
force a commentary upon it.'*

O.K. I can take a hint, Norman! ■

**Jack Ousbey** has taught in primary and secondary schools, and a college of education. He was an inspector with the Nottinghamshire authority, before devoting his time to writing, reviewing and running in-service events.

# BfK News

## PRICES ON PAPER...

That well-known phrase about text which 'isn't worth the paper it's printed on' has acquired a new resonance in the last 18 months or so. According to Peter Ingram, who publishes *The Paper Market Digest*, the average price of paper has risen by £200 a tonne over that period - adding almost £50 million to the cost of book publication, for instance, which consumes nearly a quarter-of-a-million tonnes of the stuff a year. 'What has happened in one and a half years normally takes place over four or five years,' he says, with the comment 'many people aren't latching on to the significance of this.'

Not BfK readers, alas. The increase, while varying according to the type of paper used, affects all kinds of print - not least this very magazine. Hence the price rise we announce on page 3. These are parlous times, indeed. We'll be reporting on the current situation in the children's book world generally in our January 1996 issue. In the meantime, though, whatever happened to that economic upturn?

## CHARLES SHIRLEY

11th August 1938 - 27th July 1995

If anyone ever had a hard word to say about Charles Shirley then it never came BfK's way. He enchanted everyone who knew him, personally and professionally.

Best known, in recent years, for being managing director of Ragged Bears, the publishing firm he founded in 1984 with his wife Pamela, he spent more than three decades in publishing. He joined Associated Book Publishers in 1964 where his responsibilities eventually included Winnie-the-Pooh, Tintin, Babar and Dick Bruna's Miffy. His flair, though, included a healthy maverick streak - he pioneered the selling of children's books in unconventional venues, for instance.

Perhaps it was inevitable, then, that he should leave ABP, at the height of his career as group marketing director, to set up as an independent publisher in Ragged Appleshaw, Hampshire. By the time of his death, after a three year battle with cancer borne with grace, fortitude and humour, Ragged Bears had achieved an impressive list and a twomillion pound turnover.

He'll be sorely missed and long remembered - not least, as a rare and resonant example that sometimes, after all, a nice guy can also be a winner. CP

## KICKSTART II

Following the success of *KICKSTART*, a selection of books with a High level of interest but a Low reading age, Cornwall Library Services now provide an update - including a hundred new titles covering both fiction and non-fiction. As before, the list covers picture books, novels, short stories, poetry and information books and is aimed at parents, teachers and librarians faced with the problem of luring into reading those youngsters who all too easily settle for other pursuits.

Practical, unpretentious and clearly compiled by experts who are also enthusiasts, *KICKSTART II* is a rare example of a sequel which, if anything, improves on the original. Don't miss it.

Excellent value at £2.50, it's available from Cornwall Education Library Services, Unit 17, Threemilestone, Truro TR4 9LD or 'phone 01872 323456.

## INSPECTION AND THE SECONDARY SCHOOL LIBRARY

With OFSTED in the offing for most of them, it's a brave secondary school which can ignore this publication - expertly but accessibly written and covering all aspects of the necessary paperwork in a workbook format. Good advice, crucial coping strategies, says BfK. Price £7.50 (cheques payable to Hertfordshire County Council) from Jill Calder, New Bramfield, Travellers Lane, Hatfield AL10 8XG.

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

12th OCTOBER

NATIONAL POETRY DAY

20th-21st OCTOBER

Children's Literature Association of Ireland 6th Annual Conference. Speakers include Philip Ridley, Hugh Scott, Catherine Sefton and Eddie Lennihan. Details from CLAI Conference, Church of Ireland College of Education, 96 Upper Rathmines Road, Dublin 8.

10th-12th NOVEMBER

'Take a Book at This' Conference, Ramsgate, Kent. Speakers include Chris Powling, Philip Ridley, Korky Paul, David Fickling and Susanna Gretz. Contact Lindsay Prestage on 01227 742443.

11th NOVEMBER

'Visions of the Future', IBBY Conference at the Roehampton Institute, London SW15. For further details contact Susan Hancock at

the Institute on 0181 392 3008.

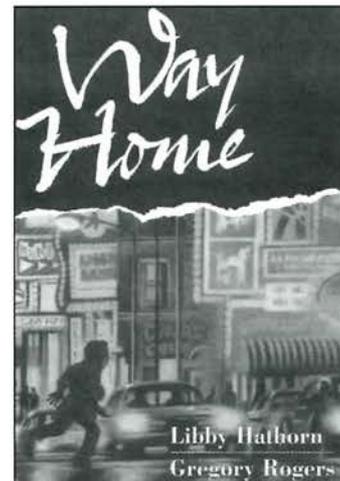
11th-25th NOVEMBER

Northern Children's Bookfair, Newcastle and environs. Speakers include Tony Ross, Anthony Browne, Mairi Hedderwick, Janni Howker, Berlie Doherty and Ian Strachan. Contact Jan Clements on 0191 268 9999.

23rd-25th NOVEMBER

Wessex Children's Bookfair, Winchester, Hampshire. Taking part will be Terry Deary, Anne Fine, Michael Foreman, Colin and Jacqui Hawkins, Jane Hissey, Mary Hoffman, Jill Murphy, Korky Paul, Chris Powling, Robert Swindells, Kaye Umansky and Jacqueline Wilson. Details from Jan Powling, P & G Wells, College Street, Winchester SO23 9LZ.

## AWARDS UPDATE



### Carnegie/ Greenaway

Theresa Breslin has won the Carnegie Medal for *Whispers in the Graveyard* (Methuen, 0 416 19052 9, £8.99; Mammoth, 0 7497 2388 2, £3.50), a supernatural drama for children of nine and upwards.

And

Gregory Rogers has won the Greenaway Medal for his illustrations in *Way Home* by Libby Hathorn, (Andersen, 0 86264 541 7, £8.99), a picture book for older children with a powerful message about homelessness.

### The Signal Poetry Award for 1995

has gone to *Secrets* by Helen Dunmore, published by Bodley Head, 0 370 31882 X, £7.99.

### The Rhone-Poulenc Science Books Prize

This year *The Most Amazing Pop-Up Science Book* by Jay Young (Watts, 0 7496 1481 1, £14.99) was one of the winners.

### Tir Na N-Og Awards

The prize for the best English book with an authentic Welsh background went to *The Candle Man* by Catherine Fisher (Bodley Head, 0 370 31889 7, £8.99).

## MORE MEANS VERSE ...

... in this issue it does, at any rate. Further to our poetry theme, here are three poetic possibilities for the autumn:

### NATIONAL POETRY DAY

Officially designated as Thursday, 12th October. For 24 hours, every announcement on radio and television will be made in rhyme, heroic couplets will dignify all newspaper reports, question-time in the House of Commons will be conducted in limericks and the only permitted utterance, nationwide, will be blank verse.

We're joking, of course. Given its proximity to Children's Book Week, though, here's a marvellous excuse - if one is needed - to focus on POETRY for a day. Don't miss the chance.

To help you set things up, here's the perfect publication ...

### HANDS ON POETRY

Edited by Sue Ellis with Myra Barrs (plus a contribution from Morag Styles), this 48-page booklet, according to James Berry in his introduction, 'deserves getting smudged and dogeared with use'. Quite right, too. Full of ideas, advice and enthusiasm - and completely practical in its approach - the compilers succeed splendidly in conveying both the magic of poetry and its centrality to classroom listening, reading and writing. It's available at £8.00 (inc. p&p) from CLPE, Webber Row, London SE1 8QW, tel: 0171 401 3382. Also available at £1.25 is the CLPE's *Read It Together*, an accessible and attractive guide for parents and other carers on every aspect of literacy.



### WALL-TO-WALL POETRY

Poster poems, in full colour, by Welsh writers Gillian Clarke and Duncan Bush, are available for secondary schools at £3.50 each, plus 95p p&p.

Gillian Clarke's 'Haymaking' celebrates first love and the rhythm of the seasons ... but the mood of 'Pneumoconiosis' by Duncan Bush is rather different. Here's an extract:

*'I take things pretty easy, these days;  
one step at a time.*

*Especially the stairs,  
I try not to think about it.*

*I saw my own brother: rising,  
dying in panic, gasping  
worse than a hooked  
carp drowning in air.*

*Every breath was his last  
till the last.'*

Powerful stuff.

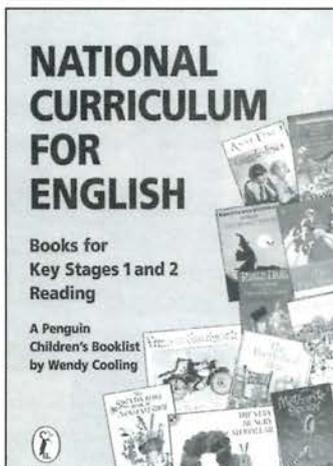
Contact HMSO/Oriel, The Friary,  
Cardiff (tel: 01222 395548).



### NATIONAL CURRICULUM FOR ENGLISH

Books for  
Key Stages 1 and 2  
Reading

A Penguin  
Children's Booklist  
by Wendy Cooling



### PENGUIN CHILDREN'S BOOKLIST

'For most children the real key is enjoyment', says our premier children's book publisher. Good to see this so strongly emphasised in the context of National Curriculum English ... but, then, the compiler here is Wendy Cooling who trawls the Puffin and Penguin lists and comes up with over 500 titles, classics included, that are guaranteed to re-assure the most grouchy of governing bodies without short-changing the kids. Sometimes annotated, occasionally quirky, always personal in flavour, it's a list that's extensive and open-minded enough to spark off reminders of other books, from other publishers, as you browse through it ... and is none the worse for that, of course.

It's available, free of charge, in two packs for Key Stages 1 and 2 and Key Stages 3 and 4. Contact Justin Somper on 0171 416 3316 or write to Penguin Publicity, 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ. ■

ff

faber and faber

## A wonderful new look for Faber Children's Poetry

Available in an appealing new hardback format, these three new books feature inventive and delightful work from some of the world's best loved poets.

Published 23 October, £8.99 each

### The Grasshopper Laughs A Faber Book of First Verse

Michael Bird  
illustrated by Andrew Stooke  
For readers aged 3+

### Fatso in the Red Suit

Matthew Sweeney  
illustrated by David Austen  
For readers aged 8-12

### The Last Thesaurus

Paul Muldoon  
illustrated by Rodney Rigby  
For readers aged 6-9

Also new in  
Faber Paperback Original  
**Scratch City**  
Philip Gross  
For readers aged 11+  
20 November, £3.99



## SCHOOL YEARBOOKS for both Primary & Secondary Schools



### A BESTSELLING BLOCKBUSTER!

– written and designed by **YOU**,  
produced in glorious colour by **US!**

Together we produce a colour book to illustrate your students' memories of their school and friends – a sturdy hardback book, gold or silver blocked, for each to keep for the years ahead. Our staff support your editorial team throughout.

We at RONDALÉ are a very experienced company specialising in educational graphic and printing needs. We offer full design and marketing advice, expert photographic service, excellent computer typesetting facilities, quality printing and even a complete signage service ...



**RONDALÉ Design & Print**

Telephone NOW for further details, on  
**01594 - 843136**

# WODWO AND AFTER

## Robert Hull on The Collected Animal Poems of Ted Hughes

In the 60s, Ted Hughes' wodwo found the world continuously 'very queer', but undertook to 'go on looking'. The four new volumes that comprise his *Collected Animal Poems* are an unavoidable buy, not least for the revelation of what that commitment has come to mean.

Poems from all Hughes' books (except 'Gaudete') and many uncollected pieces are arranged in 'a sequence of increasing complexity'. A warning: to adults not to stay at the 'complex' end of the offer for their own reading; and to those buying for children not to choose a volume to 'fit the age-range'. Adult and child, and those in between, need them all.

Young readers first. Familiarity with the whole four-volume collection makes entirely plausible the claim that it is 'for children to cut their reading teeth' on.

Hughes often tracks to the same creature, the same moment. Reading this poem puts you on the path to reading that. Wandering forwards or back, unhurriedly, the young reader discovers Hughes has certain preoccupations. And helpfully, many poems are stories, and as stories, straightforward, like the lovely 'Birth of Rainbow'.

Hughes' selection and ordering of his tales usher the reader towards similar encounters. *A March Calf* includes 'Crane-fly in September' and 'Sheep'. They are fine poems in a Hughes genre, the narrative elegy, written out of intense seeing and a terrible compassion - for the dying crane-fly 'blundering with long strides ... from collision to collision', 'with the simple colourless church windows of her wings'; for the lamb 'born / with everything but the will ... / Life could not get his attention'.

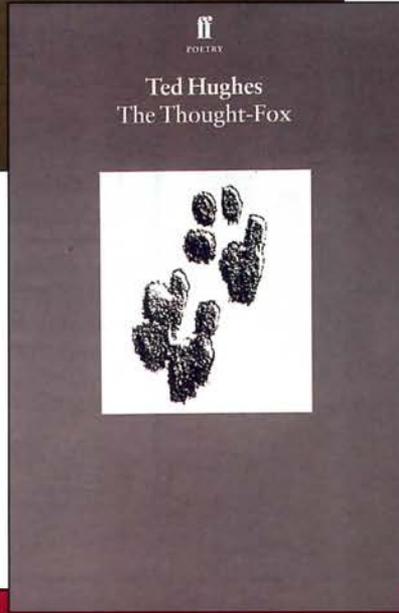
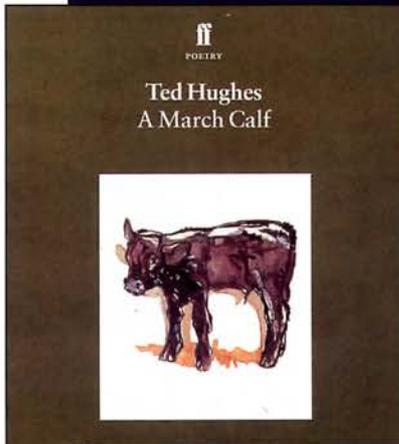
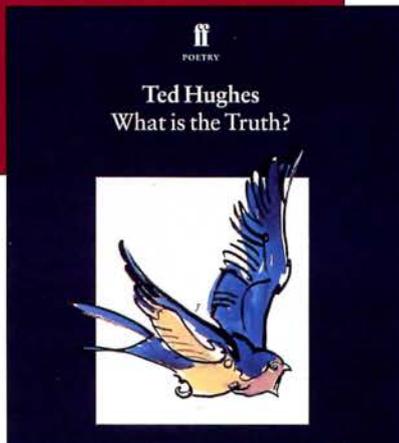
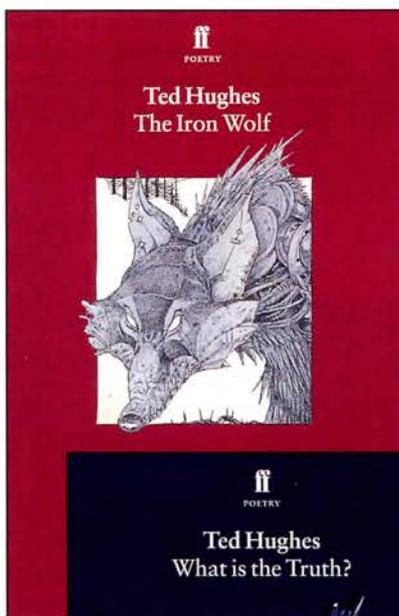
These anticipate others in the genre, like 'Coming down Through Somerset', about a dead badger, and 'October Salmon', just as they succeed tales, like the account of a fox's death in *What is the Truth?*, that prefigure such dark events. At the same time they are balanced by moving affirmations, like the celebratory 'A March Calf' or the affectionately observed 'Hen' of *What is the Truth?* - which is also wonderfully funny. (The truth is, Hughes is also funny.)

So children encounter variations on recognizable themes. The collection instructs them in the habits of Hughes. On a large scale it works the way Hughes suggests individuals do: 'If they can recognise and be excited by some vital piece of experience within the poem, very young children can swallow the most sophisticated verbal technique.'

The poems continuously assume in children 'adult' concerns, with birth, death, joy and pain. His 'children's poetry' is distant by a universe from the sort that self-consciously targets its audience, trapping it in childhood. Hughes doesn't know how to write down to his six-year-olds. So those who might opt for the main 'complex' poems - for themselves or on behalf of older young readers - will also miss out.

In some ways, indeed, Hughes' most magical apprehension of the animal world comes at the latter end of his wodwo's decades-long attention span, in the short rhyming poems written for the youngest children.

Here, Hughes has his creatures by heart: 'My water-bag wobbles / Until I spill / At the river sill / And



flow away thin / As an empty skin / That dribbles bubbles. / Then I jut up my mutt / All spiky with wet.' Often you don't need titles: 'Wherever I go / I travel by hole ... I don't eat alone. / At my table sit / Centurion / And Ancient Brit.'

Out of compression comes a wrought wit, Donne-like, or Marvellian. The cuckoo to the linnet: 'Your eggs look so ill! / Now I am the doctor, and here is my pill.' Mainly by force of wit, the 'Sparrow' of *The Iron Wolf* is finer than the (previously uncollected) 'Sparrow' of *A March Calf*, in which the beggar/ex soldier image, common to both poems, is immersed in competing metaphor. The 12-lined 'Sparrow' is all old soldier: 'Help an old soldier, he cries / He doesn't care if he lies. / All he wears on his back / Is a raggy sack. / All day the same old shout: / "I'm back from the wars, worn out!"'

He has said himself: 'Writing those verses taught me a great deal - about writing verse.' It is fascinating to watch Hughes' metamorphosis - struggle at times - out of a poetic that Lawrence would have recognised into a musical terseness near to Emily Dickinson or Blake. And like Blake in *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, Hughes, in writing what is offered to children, children's poetry, produces poetry absolute.

But the vision of these 'simpler' poems is entirely of a piece with the rest of Hughes. Wherever you look - in indifferent poems too, where the imagination can seem to be flying, as it were, on autocrow - are deep efforts of perception, or just brilliant bits of before-your-very-eyes verbal cinema: the rhino as 'elastic boulder'; the salmon on 'the floor of his chapel' where 'he sways at the altar'; the reservoir with its 'rusty harness of old waterlines'.

Hughes' vision is for the children to see with, and think with. Children will learn from it that you 'go on' looking. The truth is, nothing's finished. You re-scrutinise salmon, hen, sparrow, cuckoo, goose, curlew. You keep writing.

I hope readers will take the lot, and if they teach, use the lot. And that if the curriculum says it hasn't time and the money door's closed, they'll bring the geese on to 'carol out their discords ... / With a rusty-shipyard bonging echoing hollow din.'

Inspired meanwhile, I shall go back to my poem on the mythical Great Delivery Bird, swooping from Key Stage to Key Stage, mindless and menacing. ■

Vol. 1 *The Iron Wolf*, 0 571 17622 4, £3.99

Vol. 2 *What is the Truth?*, 0 571 17623 2, £3.99

Vol. 3 *A March Calf*, 0 571 17625 9, £5.99

Vol. 4 *The Thought-Fox*, 0 571 17628 3, £5.99

The four volumes are also available as hardbacks in a boxed set at £30.00.

[Hughes' remarks are quoted from an interview by Heather Neill, published in the *TES*, 2nd June 1995.]

### NEXT

November's BfK features 'Books That Do Things'

- Brian Wildsmith on his new book, *The Creation*
  - Judith Elliott on the *Perennial Pop-up*
  - Steve Rosson on *Puzzle Adventures*
  - Chris Powling interviews Martin Handford
  - George Hunt with a round-up of 'Books That Do Things'
  - Stephen Biesty in *Authorgraph*
- plus reviews, reviews, reviews