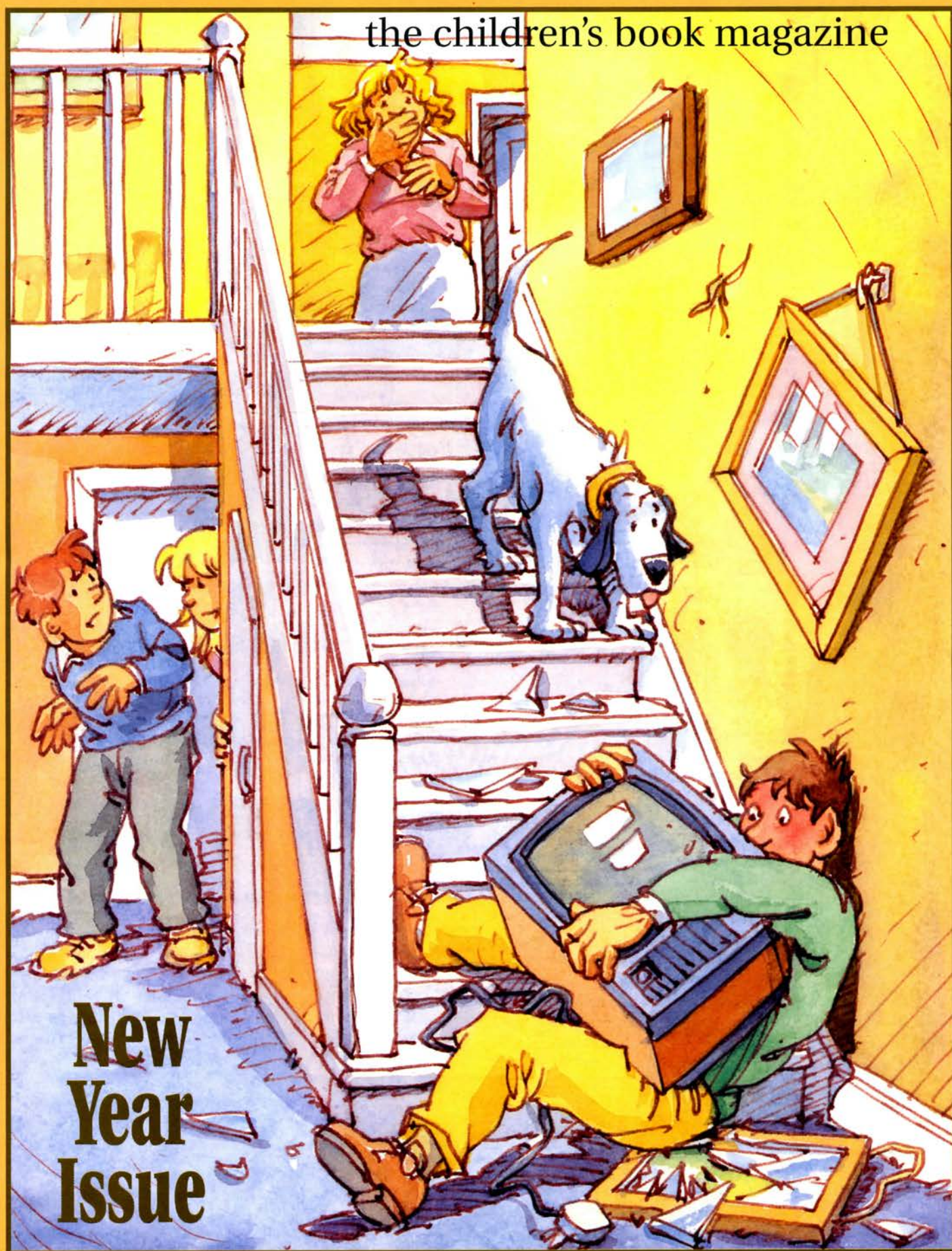


BOOKS FOR KEEPS

January 1996
No. 96 UK Price £2.70

the children's book magazine



**New
Year
Issue**

BOOKS TO REALLY MAKE A FUSS ABOUT...

Gamesroom
ages 9 +

Bedroom
ages 6 – 9

Playroom
ages 4 – 7

Nursery
ages 1 – 4

Bloomsbury Children's Books

Book covers shown include: *Cooking with Dad*, *I Must Tell You Something*, *Help! I'm a Hamster!*, *Poems to SHOUT out LOUD*, *GOODBYE BUFFALO SKY*, *LIZARD*, *My BARMY AUNT BOOMERANG*, *Hidden Danger ACCIDENT!*, *THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF JOE SLOOP*, and *ATZERS*.

New Books for 1996

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CoverSTORY

The January cover of BfK features an illustration from *No More Television!*, the latest title from Philippe Dupasquier who is the subject of this month's Authorgraph (see page 14). The book is published by Andersen Press and we're grateful to them for their help in using this on our front cover.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine

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Kinds of Prospero

If Sebastian Walker were introducing this month's BfK he'd direct the reader at once to our centre-spread authorgraph of Philippe Dupasquier. After this, a little reluctantly because he always preferred illustrators to authors, he'd indicate the articles by Beverley Naidoo and Susan Price. Only then, probably, would he refer to the pieces by Louis Baum, Julia Eccleshare and David Morton which give the issue its special focus – each of them an account of children's book trade facts and figures he'd regard as far from central to the enterprise.

How do we know this?

Well, one source is the interview he gave BfK in January 1985 when he was disarmingly off-hand about the contribution made by publishing houses, including his own, to the production of a good book. 'We're just the clerk and the nanny,' he insisted at the time. 'We do the dirty work of the commercial world.'

Of course, he had a point. Few would deny that a publishing team, however accomplished, exists to support other talents – the individual writers and artists who create, as Margaret Clark recommends on our back page, 'from the heart'.

Mere clerks, though? Only nannies? Not according to Maurice Sendak, a man by no means easy to impress, who summed up Sebastian Walker himself as 'a kind of Prospero'. In her new biography, *Sebastian Walker 1942-91*, Mirabel Cecil borrows the phrase for her title... something of a high-risk strategy since she's writing about her own brother as well as someone still fresh in the memory of the children's book world. Yet she makes a splendid case for its accuracy.

Much of the book's success stems from its frankness. This is no simple parade of Walker triumphs since the company was formed in 1978: the money made, the prizes won, the innovations in design, production and marketing. True, these are given their due. So, though, is the odd, obsessive personality of the firm's founder. Mirabel Cecil's refusal to overlook her brother's shortcomings, from his snobbery to his ruthlessness, has the happy effect of endorsing her account of his virtues – not least the originality and legendary charm which made his early death from AIDS so tragic. Sebastian Walker was as complex and contradictory as any of the artists he cultivated.

Here, though, is another Prospero-figure:

'... overwhelmed with business, his chief desire is to have still more. Every new proposal takes possession of his thoughts; he soon balances probabilities, engages in the project, brings it almost to completion, and then forsakes it for another, which he catches with the same alacrity, urges with the same vehemence, and abandons with the same coldness.'

No, not Gordon Gekko. This is Samuel Johnson's description of Jack Whirler... better known as John Newbery, recognised by most literary historians as the pioneer of publishing for children in the eighteenth century. It comes from John Rowe Townsend's fascinating

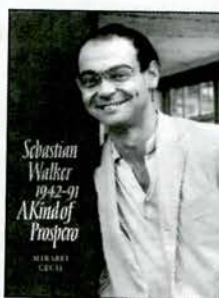
Editor's PAGE



CHRIS POWLING

compilation *Trade and Plumb-Cake For Ever, Huzzah!* published by Colt Books a year or so ago – a handy reminder that the Prospero Factor in children's books was there from the beginning and comes in a variety of shapes and forms.

Like Sebastian Walker, John Newbery was held in much affection by those who knew him – provided they weren't on the receiving end of



his business methods, that is. In most other respects, the two might have belonged to different species. Where Newbery was a gregarious family man with a hint of Dick Whittington about him, for example, Walker was a shy, often solitary, perfectionist. Newbery, it's suspected, may also have written as well as published his

children's books... something which would never have crossed Walker's mind. Indeed, the contrast between their subjects is signalled in the way each book looks: John Rowe Townsend's is chunky, common-sensical and 'adorned with cuts'; Mirabel Cecil's is cool, elegant and designerly.

Beware, though. Here's a quotation from the one which could easily have come from the other:

'... (the) sense of an autocratic and demanding though highly benevolent father is crucial to the understanding of (him) and his career... he treated his writers as though they too were his children. The role of provider was merely extended from these relationships to the more general one of uncle to all the children who bought or read his books.'

Walker or Newbery?

Newbery, actually. Visitors to Walker's Vauxhall Walk Emporium, however, couldn't fail to spot a certain Plumb-Cake element in its nursery and dining room, its bottomless coffee pot and fresh orange juice apparently on tap. Trade it may be but for both men, it seems, the publishing of children's books – like the writing and illustrating of them – also comes best 'from the heart'.

Mirabel Cecil tells a story of an early audit at Walker Books when the accountants insisted

"You've got to cut down on frivolities." Sebastian asked what they meant by frivolities.

"Well, these fresh flowers," they said.

"I'll cut down on accountants before I cut down on fresh flowers," he replied crisply.'

To that, I'm pretty sure, John Newbery would have responded with a loud 'Huzzah!'

Enjoy the issue.

Chris

A Kind of Prospero – Sebastian Walker 1942-91, Mirabel Cecil, Walker, 0 7445 4423 8, £14.99

Trade and Plumb-Cake For Ever, Huzzah! The Life and Work of John Newbery 1713-1767, John Rowe Townsend, Colt Books, 0 905899 11 3, £24.95

FLASH

Susan Price on her contribution

I lie awake at night, worrying about my ancestors. How did they cope before aspirin was invented? How did they endure miserable British winters without central heating or draught-proofing? Did they get enough to eat? Were they spending all day with wet feet?

Despite the wide-spread belief that 'children don't like history', I was hooked from the first lesson. I was about seven, when the *headmaster* himself walked into our classroom and began talking about people who'd lived in caves, making tools out of stones. My father assured me this was true and, after that, the headmaster's lesson became my favourite. Spartan boys with foxes under their cloaks. Rome being guarded by geese, English girls with knives on their chariot's wheels - the Past was another country and I couldn't hear enough about the different ways they did things there.

Later I learned to see History as an explanation of the present and a Dreadful Warning. Now I see it as a foretelling of all the stupid mistakes we're repeating, tragically and comically. But my main interest remains, as ever, *How They Did Things Then*. A recent example of the sort of thing that keeps me awake: in the Roman Empire four vastly rich corporations ran the chariot-racing, each with thousands of share-holders. Without computers, how exactly did they keep track of who the share-holders were, and how much was owed them? Without cheques and postal services, how did they deliver the money due to each individual?

Early in 1994 I was delighted to receive a letter from Pat Thomson asking if I would like to write a book for a new series planned by A & C Black. She had, she explained, persuaded Black to 'try again' with historical novels. The books were to be lavishly illustrated, and set in periods taught as part of the National Curriculum. Naturally, the backgrounds had to be historically accurate, but the emphasis was to be on an exciting, entertaining story.

Three other writers had signed up: Pat Thomson herself, Adèle Geras and Robert Leeson. I was impressed, but not so overawed that I didn't bag the Viking Age before anyone else could think of it. I've been deeply interested in the Vikings since I was 11 and first collided with the Norse Myths. I had immediately wanted to know a lot more about a people who could come up with stories like those. So I already had a great deal of knowledge about the Viking Age stored in my head. Always keen to do as little work as possible, I thought this would save on research. Wrong again.

I hadn't much idea of what would happen in the story, except that I wanted to avoid the stereotype of the bloodthirsty Viking pillager,

and also to say something about the lives of women at the time.

Like most stories, it began with endless questions: Who are the characters? What are their names? Where do they live? In what kind of house? How do they make their living? And on and on and on: how did they fasten their shoes? How do they travel? What do they take with them to eat on the journey? How do they buy things? I soon found out that I didn't know as much about the Viking Age as I'd thought.

So I took books down from my shelves, walked to the library, and returning with a rucksack full of other big, heavy books, started some intensive research. I made notes onto my word-processor, which I printed off and stuck to the side of my filing cabinets with magnets. There were lists of Viking names kept in place by a tobogganing bear, a description of the great trading town of Hedeby held up by a sou-westered dog, and notes on Viking kitchens, slavery and the social status of women magnetized by the three monkeys. I only had to swing my chair round and they were to hand.

The research jolted my imagination, and I was soon able to piece together the synopsis which Black wanted. I told them I wanted to write the story in a very simple, straightforward 'Saga-style', not only because the story was supposed to be a saga, but because it would save on words. Months of time can be covered by the Saga formula, 'Nothing worth mentioning happened until -'.

While I waited for Black to accept or reject the synopsis, I worked on other projects. I was writing a fantasy for Scholastic's 'Point' series, choosing stories for a Kingfisher Horror collection and completing a collection of ghost stories for Hodder. I usually work on several things at once, and as I get stuck on one, move to another. By the time Black got back to me saying 'Go ahead', I was glad to be able to turn to their saga.

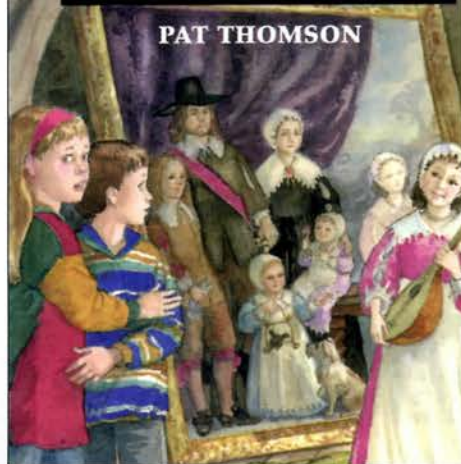
There are always unexpected difficulties when you try to turn a synopsis into a full-length story. Sequences which worked in summary reveal themselves to be slow and dull in full. Characters who, in synopsis, were easy to push around develop muscle as you work on them, and suddenly refuse to co-operate in a key scene. There are often long, frustrated pauses of days, while you wonder whether you're ever going to be able to finish the book.

There were a few problems with *The Saga of Aslak*, but far fewer than I feared. It turned out to be one of those happy books which almost writes itself. I was rather pleased with the way Aslak himself came to life, and even more so when Louisa Sladen, my editor at Black, said he was 'hot-headed and impulsive, a real Viking'. Then my sister

FLASHBACKS

A Ghost-Light in the Attic

PAT THOMSON



FLASHBACKS

All the Gold in the World

ROBERT LEESON

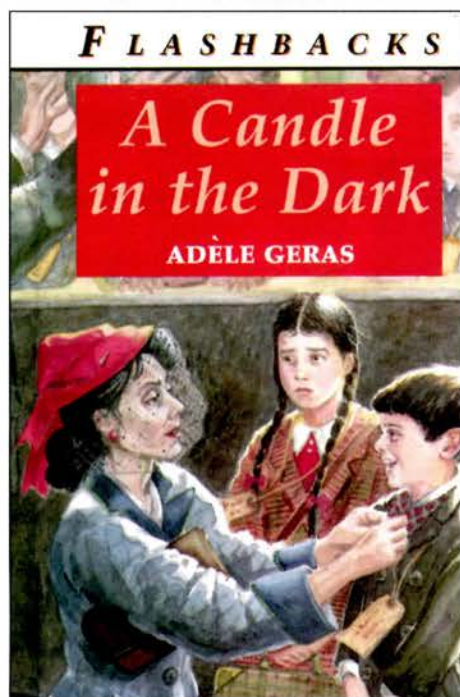
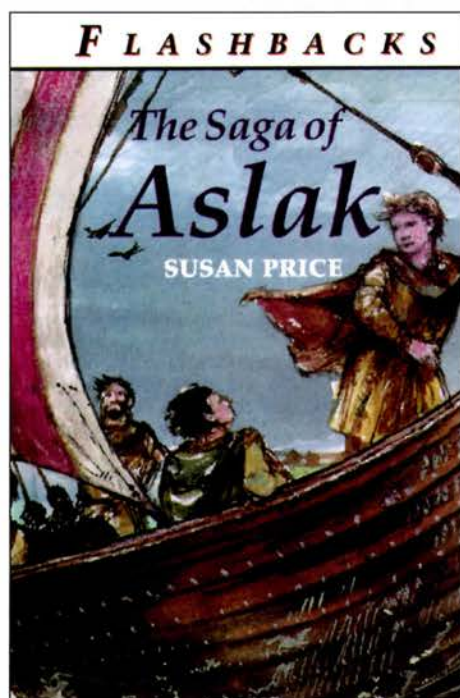


read the manuscript and observed that, in fact, Aslak took his impatience and crashing lack of tact directly from his author. So much for character creation.

The toughest job was getting the word-number down to Black's 12,000 limit. I never worry much about word-length when writing a first draft: I've learned that any story can be cut and it's best, at first, to concentrate on telling your story. Once finished, there are usually whole incidents which can be cut without harming the story, saving thousands of words. But this wasn't so with *Aslak*, which had been written from the outset in terse saga style. I rediscovered that dialogue

BACKS

to a new historical fiction series



better if Aslak 'shouted furiously'? (No.) At one point I included the semi-legendary story of how and why the Great Danish Army came to England. Louisa thought it distracting and wanted it cut. I'd suspected that she might, and had been preparing to be difficult about it - but on re-reading the manuscript, when it came back to me after months away, I had to admit Louisa was right. The arguments with Louisa, though, were amicable (which isn't always the case), and several of the best touches in the story are her ideas rather than mine (Aslak's nickname of 'Twice-Freed', for instance).

I was sent roughs of the cover, and was able to say which I thought the most striking. Luckily, my choice coincided with Black's (I've found that the publisher's choice always prevails). Soon after I was sent a copy of the completed cover, illustrated very pleasingly by Barry Wilkinson. It had been produced early, Louisa explained, to provide pre-production publicity. The actual illustrations for the book wouldn't be done until all the revisions had been made to the text, and the artist could be sure of what he had to work from. I promised to help by sending postcards I'd bought in Norway which showed household equipment from the Oseberg ship burial.

It's mid-July '95 as I write, and work on the book still goes on. It's been sent to an expert reader, whose opinion on the whole is favourable, but comes back with pages of small points to be considered. I accept most of them - the house of the Viking Jarl, as I've described it, is too large and sophisticated for the date; and the farmhouse I describe would be thatched rather than shingled. Other points - that sausages were unknown to Vikings, that the name of my hero was Anglo-Saxon, not Viking, and that his sister's name, Astrid, is modern - I reject, and have to go back to my notes to quote my sources. In London, meanwhile, Louisa is busy finding references for Barry Wilkinson to work from. I can assure everyone that, if the background to these books isn't historically accurate, it won't be for want of effort on the part of authors, illustrators and the editorial team at Black's.

I'm also sent roughs of the illustrations, which I like very much (this isn't always the case, either). I think Barry Wilkinson has done a wonderful job in the short time he was given. More questions come with the pictures. On the map of England, can I really have meant it to be York, 40 miles inland, where the ship carrying Aslak puts in? What did a Viking bier look like? (Search me.) And more alterations have to be made - the expert reader said the slaves would be tied with rope, not chained, so the artist has to alter the drawing and I have to alter the text. This is quickly done over the 'phone,



Susan Price.

with Louisa altering the proofs in London, and me altering the text on my computer. 'How about "roped the slaves together?"' - 'That'll shorten the page by a line.' - 'Will that matter?' - 'No, an extra line above the picture won't matter.' - 'Okay.'

And then I'm asked to write this article, which means I get to read the other 'Flashbacks' in proof. Pat Thomson, who started it all, has written **A Ghost-Light in the Attic**, in which two modern children are themselves flashbacked into the Civil War. Robert Leeson's **All the Gold in the World**, is a haunting story of the Elizabethan slave-trade and the Cimaroons, the free slaves. **A Candle in the Dark** is by Adèle Geras, and tells of two Jewish children, refugees from the Nazis. You are thankful for the happy ending. I hope they're all as successful as they deserve to be, and go some way to dispelling the myth that 'children don't like history'.

My hope for mine is that some child somewhere enjoys **Aslak** only one-sixth as much as I enjoyed Henry Treece's **Viking Saga**. ■

FLASHBACKS are published by A & C Black at £6.99 each

The Saga of Aslak, Susan Price, ill. Barry Wilkinson, 0 7136 4076 6

A Ghost-Light in the Attic, Pat Thomson, ill. Annabel Large, 0 7136 4057 X

All the Gold in the World, Robert Leeson, ill. Anna Leplar, 0 7136 4059 6

A Candle in the Dark, Adèle Geras, ill. Elsie Lennox, 0 7136 4058 8

Henry Treece's **Viking Saga**, is published by Puffin (0 14 031791 0) at £6.99. It brings together as a single volume **Viking's Dawn**, **The Road to Miklagard** and **Viking's Sunset**.

is almost always a shorter way of conveying information than narrative, and so recast many scenes into dialogue. Then it was a matter of going through, sentence by sentence, cutting every word that could be cut. Thank god for the word-counters on word-processors. And for calculators.

I submitted the book to Black, and it was accepted, but that's far from meaning that my work on it was finished. Instead the usual alarms and skirmishes began, sometimes by letter, often by telephone. Could I expand this point to make it clearer? Why does so-and-so do this, say this? Is 'bashed' quite the word we want here? (Yes.) Would it be

REVIEWS

Reviews of paperback fiction are grouped for convenience under teaching range. Books and children being varied and adaptable we suggest you look either side of your area. More detailed recommendation for use can be found within the review.

Nursery/InfantREVIEWS

Farmer Duck

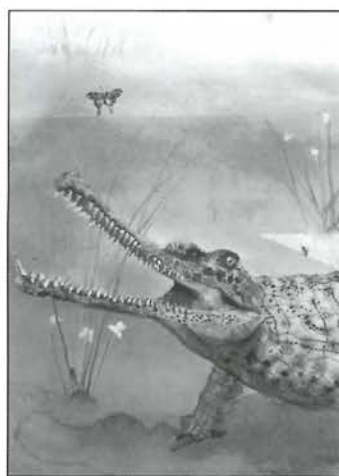
Martin Waddell, ill. Helen Oxenbury, Walker, 0 7445 3660 X, £4.50

A hapless, but far from helpless, duck lives with an idle farmer who lazes all day in bed eating chocolates. So, Duck has to fetch the cow from the field, bring down the sheep, put the hens in their house and do all the household chores. This leaves the poor creature 'sleepy, weepy and tired'. That's when the other farm animals resolve to take the matter in hand: they drive the fat farmer far away and form their own contented co-operative.

Helen Oxenbury's illustrations speak volumes: her weary, sorrowful duck almost brings tears to the eyes and it's easy to see how the anger in the animals' eyes alarmed the farmer. They're a perfect match for Martin Waddell's equally excellent text. **JB**

The Butterfly Kiss

Marcial Bóo, ill. Tim Vyner, Gollancz, 0 575 05978 8, £3.99



A simple story about a butterfly kiss looking for a home. The tale manages to avoid the sloppy and sentimental with its straightforward and clear prose, interesting animal characters and exceptional illustrations. The little kiss travels the world before finding a home with a small child and a grandad. The animals it visits are beautifully painted and realised in the text as well. A lovely book for any young child, especially at bedtime. **LW**

The Wild Woods

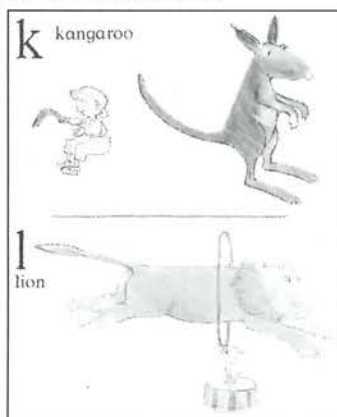
Simon James, Walker, 0 7445 3661 8, £4.50

A delightful story about a little girl and her grandad who go for a walk together. On the way they see a squirrel and Jess decides to chase and catch it to keep as a pet. How and why she changes her mind is never explicit but the splendid, lively illustrations hold the clue with their

bold, sweeping views of the woods and water. A simple and charming story to help young children think about the natural world and whether it exists in its own right or just for our entertainment. **LW**

First Steps

John Burningham, Walker, 0 7445 4320 7, £4.99



Ten years on, Walker have gathered together some established pre-school favourites reaffirming the quality of John Burningham's work.

This is an introduction to letter sounds, numbers, colours and opposites in an unconfused layout. Each clear and sensitive illustration has loads of pertinent detail to aid and develop observational skills and language generally. Why is elephant being pushed? Are zebras sole boast-ers of stripes? Climbing trees is fun until... and size is really relative. A happy and enriching experience to be repeated repeatedly and still find new fun. **GR**

Benny the Breakdown Truck

Keren Ludlow and Willie Smax, Orion, 1 85881 154 6, £5.99

Well, yes, £6 is a lot for a paperback picture book, but my word you get a lot for your money here!

This great big, bold book is full of bright pictures, huge black print and five racy stories about a yellow truck which will gladden the heart of any vehicle-mad infant. It's a perfect read-aloud packed with details about cars, lorries and motor bikes. The high quality production and lively text make it a real winner. **LW**

Off to School

Jean Chapman, Young Hippo, 0 590 1352 7, £2.50

It's a little disconcerting to find that the name of the publisher is three times the size of the title and author on the cover but, with that reservation, this is an excellent book for the teacher or parent of a reception-aged



child. Seven stories about everyday happenings in Lisa's school year will be interesting and informative for any four- or five-year-old, and those a little older will enjoy the feeling of recognition if they read it for themselves. Many children will wonder if the school Santa is the real one or not! **LW**

The Snow Angel

Angela McAllister, ill. Claire Fletcher, Red Fox, 0 09 950261 5, £4.50



A little girl creates a snow angel by lying down in the snow and moving her arms about to make wings. This book has hardly touched the shelves – the story of the girl, her friend and their magical encounters with a snow angel has captivated all of us. Glorious illustrations and a text that's so careful, so spare and yet so perfect make this a wonderful book. **JS**

It's a Perfect Night

Abigail Pizer, Macmillan, 0 333 63755 0, £3.99

Abigail Pizer always seems to produce books that meet a need. This is no exception. As the sun sets behind the woods, we share the wonderful secret world of Night. The creatures of the night give their chorus and the whole builds to a magnificent crescendo which fades as dawn comes to usher in the new

day and a different crew of characters. **JS**

First Snow

Kim Lewis, Walker, 0 7445 4325 8, £4.50

Kim Lewis has carved herself a special place in the hearts of many young children, their parents and teachers. Her books pay tribute to those small, but magical, moments of childhood all of us need to hold onto and celebrate. In this case it's sharing a child's first experience of snow. As one has come to expect from Kim Lewis, this is a book in which carefully chosen language develops a deliberately under-played 'story' to create a special quality confirmed by illustrations that will take your breath away! **JS**

Harry's Stormy Night

Una Leavy, ill. Peter Utton, Orchard, 1 85213 861 0, £3.99



Another book which has struck a chord for so many children with its description of a stormy evening and the events in a warm, loving family – you can almost smell the apple tart coming out of the Aga and shiver with the chill and eeriness when leaving the warm kitchen to go to bed by candlelight. Every member of this story is caring and supportive and when Baby Tom has nightmares, Harry's affection brings the necessary comfort even if it does leave him asleep cold and stiff on the floor beside the cot. **JS**

The Tangleweed Troll

Cliff Wright, Gollancz, 0 575 06095 6, £3.99

When you have a father who can be a jumbled giant, a wily wizard or a pesky pirate who'll join in your wildest adventure tracking the Tangleweed Troll into the wilderness beyond the garden gate, then anything is possible. Children loved the mixture of imagination and reality here. Cliff Wright's glorious illustrations, which use a range of techniques to entice the reader to scamper with the squirrels and romp with the rabbits, match the sheer cleverness, as well as the perfect timing, of the text. **JS**

Goldilocks and the Three Bears

Prue Theobalds, Dutton,
0 525 69042 5, £3.99

My children have been fascinated by this one. The only problem has been that they'd like toys and a house like the one in this book – now – so they

too can make the dolls act out the story.

This is a lovely retelling of an old favourite. The children were a bit puzzled by the illustration at the beginning of the book being repeated for the end pages. However, they decided it was so the child to whom the toys belonged

could make them tell the story again and again and again. JS

Say Please

Virginia Austin, Walker,
0 7445 4319 3, £3.99

The latest in a delightful series for toddlers (by the same author who

previously wrote as Virginia Miller). It really captivated all the youngsters who shared it. A simple idea – a toddler observes animals displaying good manners and, when needing to say 'Please' to his Auntie Bea, does so beautifully... in their languages as well as his own. This is a joy to read as many times as you like for you can guarantee wonderful audience participation. JS

Infant/Junior REVIEWS

Smoke Cat

Linda Newbery, Young
Hippo, 0 590 13438 8, £2.50

When Simon moved into his new house, he's intrigued to see an old lady wandering through next door's garden, nuzzled by a throng of cats, and restlessly summoning one strange, misty blue cat who refuses to join the hoarde. He's even more intrigued to learn that both the lady and the mysterious cat died long before he arrived at the house but when he learns of the connection between the ghost and the garden that she's left behind, he devises a way of bringing her peace.

Classed as a Young Hippo 'Spooky', this is a gentle and reassuring story you can read to upper infants or younger juniors without risking damage to their sleep. It's also an interesting book for newly independent readers to enjoy on their own.

GH

Monster Poems **POETRY**
Sel. John Foster,
ill. Korky Paul, Oxford,
0 19 276147 1, £3.99



The monsters so gaudily presented in this book are mainly of the caricatural kind, with luridly mucilaginous flesh, pustule eyes and sabre teeth. They come snarling and slithering off the page with a ferocity that will delight some readers, though I would have preferred far more diversity of tone. This is, however, provided by the poems. Rowena Somerville presents a touching soliloquy for a monster with a human heart; Judith Nicholls' monster is composed of fears and murmurs; while Brian Moses' Grumposaurus suggests a petulant child.

An interesting and visually striking collection which might inspire spirited writing and painting. GH



Noah's Ark

Jane Ray, Orchard,
1 85213 947 1, £4.99

The text of the story comes from the Authorised version of the Bible, the verses carefully selected to give just enough support for a tableau of bold and brilliant paintings. Jane Ray's Jehovah is a Ra-like deity, shown on the first page gloomily surveying rascalities which include modern assaults against the natural world. The rest of the book provides a celebration of that world; the ark and the pages across which it floats are crammed with living riches and the fruits of harvest. When Jehovah sets the rainbow covenant in the sky, his flaming corona perhaps suggests 'the fire next time' but the story ends with blissful panoramas of liberation. This beautiful book is recommended for all age groups. GH

Frog and the Stranger

Max Velthuijs, Andersen,
0 86264 625 1, £3.99

Frog can teach all of us a lesson or two about prejudice and friendship, but Max Velthuijs never makes us feel that we're being improved. Instead we share frog's nervousness at encountering somebody different, we share his courage in standing out against the prejudice of his friends and we share his sadness at understanding that sometimes we have to let our friends go. All sorts of issues, carefully handled, both in terms of text and illustration, are there to explore; this book ought to be in every school. JS

Pass It, Polly

Sarah Garland, Puffin,
0 14 055521 8, £3.99

Sarah Garland has created a football yarn with her usual verve and catchy illustrations. Although discouraged by their own poor showing, her heroines are determined and, with the help of books from the library and Nisha's brilliant Grandpa, they not only make the team but dazzle everyone with their skills. Great, everybody loved it... but there does seem to be a dearth of football books for this age group with boys as heroes –

how about it, Sarah Garland? JS

Peter and the Wolf
Retold and ill. Ian Beck,
Picture Corgi,
0 552 52755 6, £3.99

This an interesting retelling of Prokofiev's story and a book that should grace every school's music collection. Ian Beck's illustrations are toned down to give an 'olde worlde' folk tale feel and the whole story maintains the impression that perhaps time has elapsed and it's now being told by an elderly Peter to his own grandchildren. JS

The Queen's Knickers

Nicholas Allan, Red Fox,
0 09 928161 9, £2.99



The mere mention of knickers is usually enough to start a class giggling, so a complete book devoted to exposing and investigating royal underwear is bound to delight. The illustrations are deliberately child-like, the reason being revealed towards the end of the narrative which turns out to be the invention of a small girl who wonders what knickers the Queen would wear if she visited her school. JB

The Green Banana Hunt

Jenny Bent, Picture Hippo,
0 590 13159 1, £3.99

Kavita's mum is busy with the new baby so it's Mr Akiso's job to cook supper. For a change they agree on green banana soup and Kavita is sent to Mr Singh's stall to buy the bananas. Instead of bananas 'as green as apples and as hard as potatoes' all that's left are ripe yellow ones. Knowing they're not quite right she sets off home, meeting Mrs Mellows on the way, who swaps her melon for Kavita's bananas; Mr Williams exchanges his potatoes and carrots for the melon; Mary and her mum take the vegetables in return for grapes and, finally, next-door-neighbour Mrs Harris just happens to have – guess what – yes, six green bananas! The two swap bags and soon the family are enjoying bowls of rich, spicy soup tasting 'warm as the

bright Caribbean sea' and listening to Kavita's story of how she acquired the ingredients.

There's warmth in Kavita's local community, in the family relationships and in the glowing illustrations. A nicely rounded tale, with a broad age appeal, which focuses on caring and sharing. JB

Get Set, Georgette!

Alice Dumas, Macmillan,
0 333 63838 7, £3.99

Georgette is going to Rebecca's birthday party: the only problem is her ideas about suitable party attire are somewhat at odds with her mother's. However, when Mum has to go out, Georgette uses her creative talents to produce the perfect party garb, not to mention a more exciting replacement for Auntie Gladys' cake.

Much of the story is told in Mum's words to her daughter while she gets her ready for the party, and then (in italics) Georgette's own inner speech as she takes over the preparations. The humour in this tale is brought out by the quirky storytelling illustrations which perfectly match the mood. JB

The Disastrous Dog

Penelope Lively, ill. Robert
Bartelt, Macdonald Young
Books, 0 7500 1800 3, £3.99

Mick looks so appealing when Paul and his family go to choose a guard dog from the animal shelter. Only Paul knows the truth, however. This is one very clever pooch! Before long Mick has the whole family just where he wants them... until the day he goes too far.

An entertaining story, briskly written and attractively produced. It will appeal to young juniors who are reading independently. LW

Rhode Island Roy

1 85213 768 1

Welcome Home, Barney

1 85213 769 X

Pipe Down, Prudle!

1 85213 767 3

We Want William

1 85213 767 3

Rose Impey, ill. Shoo
Rayner, Orchard, £2.99 each

These four lively stories are, as one expects from Rose Impey, witty, unusual and entertaining. They're part of a series of well-produced 'Animal Crackers' books, each of which is based on real animal facts but which Rose Impey treats in her highly original style.

Special REVIEW

Margaret Mahy's Fairy Tale Universe

Nicholas Tucker

Fairy tales are a treasure trove of the human imagination, enriching each generation that turns to them. Contemporary writers have always borrowed here and there from this great power-house. This can mean re-writing fairy tales in a modern day setting, but another technique is to make use of key fairytale imagery and happenings. One of the very best children's authors doing this now is Margaret Mahy.

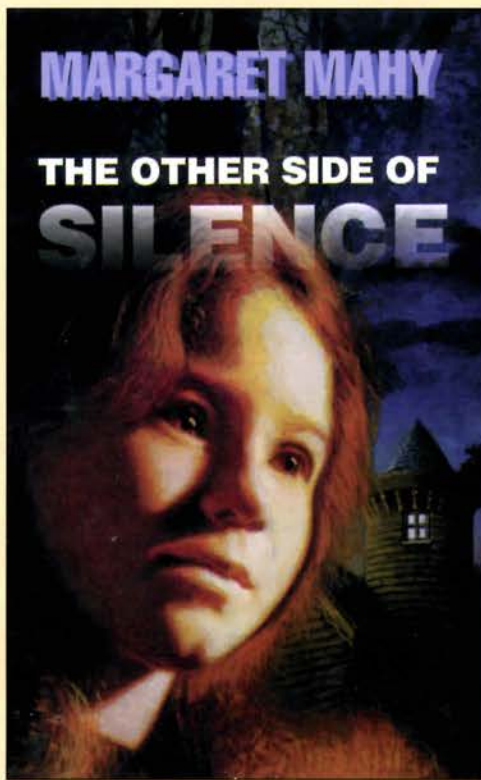
Many of her stories for older children employ magic, ghosts, spells and time-shifts. But this is no tired wheeling out of traditional story-book fantasy. Instead she shows how everyday childhood is always full of near-fairytale happenings. The result is a fusion of life as readers know it to be and as they sometimes imagine it to be. She writes about ordinary, lively children who quarrel, back-chat and go to school like everyone else. She also shows that behind every ordinary family there's a wealth of fantasy normally only known to the individuals involved.

Take the ghosts and spirits of fairylane. In most fantasy stories, these show themselves only on rare moments. Yet in real life many of us converse daily with the familiar and often highly articulate spirits living in our own consciousness. Most parents, for example, remain aware of the ghosts of themselves when young, or the ghosts of their adolescent children when they were infants. When people we love die, we think and dream about them for the rest of our lives. Sometimes we find we are actually talking to them in the privacy of our own minds. Adolescents in particular often carry around a large 'invisible audience' in their heads, cheering them on when they've done something good or jeering at the moments of perceived social failure.

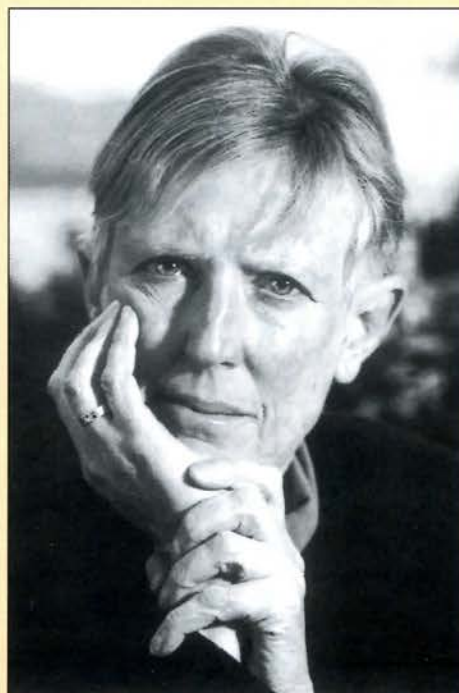
Novelists writing for adults usually represent such 'ghosts' in terms of a character's general introspection. But younger readers want more than imaginative abstractions in their stories, and it's here that Mahy is so skilful. She describes what children think about and feel while also sometimes giving these thoughts and feelings an imaginative existence of their own. The ghosts and spirits in her novels have a psychological reality and an actual existence at the same time. The time-shifts she describes correspond to the way we can all, on occasions, feel that we are also experiencing life at some moment in the past or during the future according to where memory or the imagination is taking us at that minute.

There are other parallels between imaginative experience and fictional realisation in Mahy's stories. In *The Haunting*, young Barney is harassed by the spirit of a missing great uncle, who begins to take over Barney's body and look out through his eyes. When Barney gazes into the mirror, it's not always himself he sees in return. His great-grandmother behaves like a witch, and occasionally Barney catches vivid glimpses of a land elsewhere that he has never seen before. His older sister, Troy, is revealed as a magician, capable of transforming herself into 'A flowering tree, a flying bird, a burning girl, a creature made of stars'.

Now think of the equivalent imaginative situations in young readers' own lives. As another great-uncle points out, "Barney is changing, like a caterpillar in its chrysalis. I think he's becoming a different sort of boy." Looking in the mirror and seeing someone else is not just a feature of ghost stories; it also relates to adolescents' occasional surprise about the rapidity of the changes in their physical appearance. Sometimes adolescents develop a strong resemblance to older members of the family at the same age; thus the impression of



someone familiar but not quite you looking back from the mirror. The imaginary countries Barney visits are reminiscent of those fantasy lands that children dream about. The magic that big sister Troy creates is a realisation of the enormous imaginary power children possess inside their own heads. The great-grandmother as witch stands for those old people who in real life sometimes appear to cast a malignant spell over others for whatever reason.



Margaret Tucker.

The theme of adolescent development is also found in *The Changeover*. In order to save her young brother's life, 14-year-old Laura agrees to go through a 'changeover' from ordinary child to witch. The images involved in this process symbolise the changes within puberty all girls must face. Thus Laura sheds blood before going through the gate from which there is no return. As a new woman, she feels unexpected power while also becoming aware for the first time of the sexual interest she attracts from others and which she now sometimes feels for others herself.

In *Dangerous Spaces*, 11-year-old Anthea has yet to arrive at adolescence. She encounters the ghost of a boy who becomes her companion. In this way a day-dream is externalised in the shape of a child both living and dead, with all the attractions and occasional dangers of a real boy friend at a time when most young readers will only be experimenting in their imaginations with such notions. More disturbingly, 17-year-old Harry (a girl) in *The Tricksters* wonders whether she's going mad when the characters she invents in her romantic novel seem actually to exist in her own life. Living too much inside one's own head has its perils at any age, and this novel explores some of the dangers that arise when fantasy threatens to become more vivid than reality. Habitual solitary readers may already know something about this situation from their own experiences with books.

In Mahy's latest novel, *The Other Side of Silence*, life imitates fairy tale rather than the other way round. 12-year-old Hero is an elective mute who knows that 'Real life is what you are supposed to watch out for, but an invented life, lived truly, can be just as dangerous'. Her invented life includes walking through the branches of the trees around her house, pretending to be a child of the wild woods fostered and fed by birds. One day she falls into the garden of Miss Credence, a solitary older lady who immediately christens her Jorinda. But Hero forgets that the Grimms' story of 'Jorinda and Jorinel' is a sinister one, and soon finds herself kidnapped by Mrs Credence now behaving like a wicked witch. Hero is locked up alongside another Jorinda, Miss Credence's previously unknown and silent 'closet child' who is perpetually chained to her bed. Both are finally rescued by a young male visitor. Hero and the closet child find their voices, with Miss Credence now taking on the silent Jorinda role after a bungled suicide attempt.

Hero states that 'Real is what everyone agrees about. True is what you somehow know inside yourself.' Mahy's novels fuse the real and the true. A fairy tale warns Hero against dangers in reality, but at other times her imagination transforms reality into its own fairy tale. Mahy herself writes stories where at some moment the magical becomes real while at others the real seems magical. She and her readers know that human fantasy can always create the extraordinary from the ordinary. Her skill is to merge one with the other so artfully that readers flick from reality to fantasy and then back to reality as effortlessly as they do in their own heads during everyday life. The stories she tells are also excellent in their own right: what a writer!

Details of the books mentioned:

The Haunting, Puffin, 0 14 036325 4, £3.50 pbk

The Changeover, Dent, 0 460 06097 X, £9.99; Puffin, 0 14 037295 4, £4.50 pbk

Dangerous Spaces, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13066 2, £8.99; Puffin, 0 14 034571 X, £3.50 pbk

The Tricksters, Dent, 0 460 06203 4, £8.99; Puffin, 0 14 037316 0, £4.99 pbk

The Other Side of Silence, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13551 6, £10.99

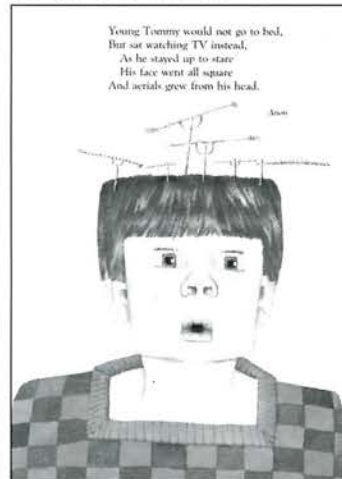
Rhode Island Roy is about a swaggering rooster who is perfectly cast as a cowboy desperado, but who is really lonely. Prudle is a parrot who beats the burglars, William is a saviour of his friends and Barney, the bat, learns that friends and home are worth more than he thought.

Each story has a nice twist, is cheerfully illustrated and will go down very well with both listeners and newly independent readers. **LW**

Starlight, Starbright!

Ed. Anne Harvey, ill. Jane Browne, Julia MacRae, 1 85681 523 4, £5.99

POETRY ORIGINAL



A delightful book, full of riches. This generous and wise collection of poetry, all with the theme of nighttime, offers humour, sadness, a touch of fear and a hint of magic. All the poems chosen are well within the

experience of primary age children and have much to offer adults, too. Clear, natural and sensitive illustrations complement the quality of the poems perfectly. Every child should have a copy – it's a real spine tingler. **LW**

Mouse Time

Rumer Godden, ill. Jane Pinkney, Macmillan, 0 330 33401 8, £2.99

How lovely it is to see two classic tales, 'The Mouse Wife' and 'Mouse House', reissued in this new edition! The former, in particular, is dear to me as it was the first story I ever read aloud to my very first class when I began teaching in 1968. It was a touching, humorous and subtle experience then and time has not changed it one whit.

The little mouse wife and her care for the imprisoned dove is told so quietly, but so interestingly, that the reader is caught and enchanted by it. The second story is less familiar, perhaps, but little Bonnie's search for shelter is just as memorable. Do introduce this book to a new generation of readers and listeners. They deserve it. **LW**

The Little Vampire Meets Count Dracula

Angela Sommer-Bodenburg, ill. Anthony Lewis, Macdonald Young Books, 0 7500 1542 X, £3.99

Yet another gloriously funny addition to the Little Vampire series – if you're hooked, this will delight you; if you don't know them, there are treasures in store.

With sympathetically short chapters for those new to reading, this is a

solid 'real' book that can be read alone or shared with equal pleasure. Masses of place names make everything sound true and there are coincidences everywhere. It makes you feel delightfully and safely scared. **LW**

The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig

Eugene Trivizas, ill. Helen Oxenbury, Mammoth, 0 7497 2505 2, £3.99

An excited chorus of 'It's the wrong way around' met my reading of the title and Year 2 children were immediately caught and intrigued by this very funny and fearfully unpredictable tale of bricks, concrete, iron bars, pneumatic drills, dynamite... and a beautifully tranquil, happy ending.

Undoubtedly, success does depend on knowing the traditional tale and familiarity with 'I'll huff and I'll puff...' but neither would it be such a success without a very cleverly crafted storyline, a sensitive message (that baddies don't necessarily have to stay bad) and Oxenbury's brilliant illustrations. As much – but not more – of a 'classic' as the traditional version. **GR**

Best Friends Forever

Kathryn Cave, ill. Derek Brazell, Puffin, 0 14 036658 X, £3.25

A superb exploration of friendships showing that we never know how strong things are until we test them. Kathryn Cave has written a very funny story where the boys are convinced they'll never quarrel until teacher intervenes and the new girl comes between them – literally.

During their struggle they find out much about themselves and Emma, but only at the very end do we find out the real truth. **PH**

Swapper

Robert Leeson, ill. Anthony Lewis, Mammoth, 0 7497 2390 4, £2.99

Scott tries hard to be the best swapper in the school – he takes amazing risks including that of the friendship he has with Davie. This book provides a perceptive insight into the playground world which children successfully keep hidden from adults. While being carried along with the excitement of the swap, we're firmly given a reminder that there are some things in life too precious to exchange. **PH**

You'll Never Walk Alone

Comp. David Orme, ill. Marc Vyvyan-Jones, Macmillan, 0 330 33787 4, £2.99

I always thought the language of the football report in assembly was hilarious. This collection of poems is almost too funny for words. Every turning point of 'THE GAME' is seen from an improbable point of view. Have you ever thought about how the pitch worm population feel when there's a replay? Rita Ray's football wordbank sounded like every commentary you've ever heard – pity she missed out on 'All the boys 'ad to do wuz find the back of the net', though! As an avid match avoider (I go shopping on Cup Final day), I loved it. **PH**

Junior/Middle REVIEWS

The Daydreamer

Ian McEwan, ill. Anthony Browne, Red Fox, 0 09 947071 3, £3.50



Peter Fortune is a fairly normal child about 10 years old. There doesn't appear to be anything particularly special about him, just a quiet, indefinable oddness that causes people

to regard him as 'difficult'. Through seven stories written in radiantly straightforward prose, we step into Peter's rhapsodic reveries as he experiences a series of hallucinatory adventures. A half-dismembered doll comes to life and leads a rebellion against him; he swaps flesh with a cat, a baby and an adult; he tames the school bully by convincing him that he's a figment of the collective imagination... and so on. This is a delectable celebration of childhood's ability to fuse dream and reality into a magical unity. Indispensable reading for dreamers of all ages. **GH**

Flow

Pippa Goodhart, Mammoth, 0 7497 2395 5, £2.99

In a vivid and bitterly poignant opening chapter, the dyslexic hero of this book hurls his school dinner towards the jeering faces of the children who are mocking him as he struggles through a lunch hour of frustration with the work that everybody else has finished. He flees up onto the fells, where he seeks solace by fantasising about owning a dog 'who would love him loyally and uncritically'. But also roaming the fells is a feral, sheep-killing hound whom the child is eventually forced to confront.

This is a good, solid story about loneliness and comradeship, struggle and survival. Children in Years 5 and 6 and their parents and teachers, will probably find it particularly sympathetic. **GH**

Cautionary Verses

Hilaire Belloc, ill. Quentin Blake, Red Fox, 0 09 929531 8, £4.99

This outstandingly entertaining collection contains the complete cautionary verses, all of the original illustrations by 'B.T.B.' and new pictures by Quentin Blake, who also provides an illuminating introduction. Belloc's verses have an exhilarating ingenuity of rhythm and rhyme, counterpointed by ruthless social observation and a torrent of ludicrously garish images: note Jim's severed head when Ponto has finished with him, or Rebecca flattened by a bust of Abraham. As Blake points out, the poet revels in the 'wickedness' of his subjects as well as in the gruesome fates which he inflicts on them. Almost 100 years after the first publication of some of this material, this complex mixture retains its power to startle and delight. **GH**

Blitz

Robert Westall, ill. David Frankland, Lions, 0 00 675086 9, £2.99

Four more magical stories set in a background of the Second World War. Robert Westall manages to recreate the drama without either glorifying or sanitising the reality. These short tales prove yet again that it's the daily lives of ordinary people that record history most powerfully. This is almost as good as a story from Grandad about the 'olden' days. **PH**

School

Colin and Jacqui Hawkins, Picture Lions, 0 00 664567 4, £4.50



Teachers hate kids with coughs and colds, especially really dippy kids.

School just as it really is, in all its unspeakable horror. The smells, the scares and the unmentionable behaviour – and that's the teachers! All the truth that lies behind the policies, the schemes of work, the strategies and the Oscar-winning Ofsted week performances. I loved every zit-counting minute of it and will use the drawings in every management paper I write over the next six months, as long as you don't tell ... **PH**

The New Puffin Book of Funny Verse **POETRY**

Ed. Kit Wright, ill. Michael Foreman, Puffin, 0 14 034232 X, £4.50

A wide-ranging collection that manages to break away from the old faithfuls with some new findings. All are ordered into thematic sections like 'Animals Are Beasts!' and 'Queries and Theories', and most poems are approachably short. I suppose it's inevitable that rhymes rule but then this brings with it plenty of intriguing ingenuity and wonderful wordplay.

*'There once was a bard of Hong Kong,
Who thought limericks were too long.'*

Thanks, Gerard Benson. A fine example. **DB**

Jumble

Kathryn Cave, ill. Chris Riddell and David Mostyn, Puffin, 0 14 037507 4, £3.50

Tidy and untidy eight- and nine-year-olds loved jumble-crazy Andrew, his chaos and his no half-measures attitude when a full-sized crocodile must be accommodated. It's the rest of the family he can't please when he takes to tidying the whole house ...

And Andrew can't avoid taking 'the plunge' again in the second story as Mum becomes wise to his timely bouts of illness and verruca hobbling.

Truly hilarious predicaments comically recounted, and brought together in one volume for the first time, with great illustrations on every second or third page. However, there's a significant difference in print size and we preferred the larger format. **GR**

Fizzy Steals the Show

Michael Coleman, ill. Philippe Dupasquier, Orchard, 1 85213 823 8, £3.50

Good-natured Fizzy (Fiona) eventually feels the injustice of her actions being constantly misconstrued by teacher, Miss Grimm. As protests have failed, she finally and maturely ('everybody likes to know they're thought a lot of, don't they?') resorts to flowers and flattery to 'get back into Miss Grimm's good books'.

When, at Millington Multi-Mart, she's determined to deposit her request in Ricky Rix's Win Bin, hilarious mayhem is sparked off by 'helpful' Lucy Hardwick. It's only thanks to a security camera that Lucy and Fizzy get their just rewards. Apt illustrations aid the story on most pages. **GR**

Sophie is Seven

Dick King-Smith, ill. David Parkins, Walker, 0 7445 3698 7, £3.50



In this fifth book of the series, Sophie (still set on becoming a lady farmer) manages to educate the rest of the class without being totally precocious. She also accepts gracefully being a rat in the school play and acknowledges the expensiveness of horses as a hobby thus adding to her appeal. Finally, her delight in getting riding lessons, taking the star part and finding a simple alternative to years of saving to be a lady farmer is infectious.

A warmly entertaining story but malapropisms which add to the humour and characterisation may be missed. **GR**

The Minstrel and the Dragon Pup

Rosemary Sutcliff, ill. Emma Chichester Clark, Walker, 0 7445 4308 8, £5.99

A magical tale from a wonderful storyteller. This lovely book tells of a baby dragon who isn't fearsome, cruel or violent because he's only met friendship and kindness in his short life. 'Lost' by his mother when he fell out of the nest (she couldn't count and didn't know he'd gone) he hatches to the music of a poor, wandering minstrel and they travel together quite happily until he and his best friend become separated. Yes, of course, there's a happy ending – a deft and gentle reminder of how we should all treat each other. **PH**

Rumpus on the Roof **ORIGINAL**

Hazel Townson, ill. David McKee, Andersen, 0 86264 591 3, £2.99

Macho Mr Bunch doesn't necessarily breed a mini-macho. Not only does young Harry Bunch retain his resolve to follow very different interests from his dad but those interests, plus his skeletal stature, prove significant in saving others from hoaxers Norm and Dez.

Mrs Lathom and her predicament at being conned into making an advance payment for a needless, never-to-materialise roofing job is all too credible and makes Harry's disobedience to his dad more acceptable.

Racy, entertaining storylines typify

Townson and this paperback original with David McKee's 20+ illustrations can be read successfully by fluent readers. **GR**

The Boy and the Cloth of Dreams

Jenny Koralek, ill. James Mayhew, Walker, 0 7445 4322 3, £4.50



When 'a boy' was born, his grandmother made and laid over his cot the magical Cloth of Dreams, which eventually bears two holes. His grandmother knows this marks the end of early childhood and acknowledges the inevitability of his having to 'forge his own courage' and face nightmare experiences which steal in through the torn magic.

Tested, he must gather threads of golden sunshine and silver moonlight, before he can pass through this transition period. All this his grandmother witnesses with quiet wisdom and probable heartache.

Startling happenings, vivid language and inspired illustrations are married in this memorable tale for anyone over eight years of age. **GR**

Griffin's Castle

Jenny Nimmo, Mammoth, 0 7497 2602 4, £3.50

"This is my home now," she thought, "because I live here. And I will have an animal. It will be strong and fearless, and if anyone tries to take my home away, it will tear them to bits." For as long as she could remember, Dinah had lived in an assortment of rented rooms, or with a succession of relatives, sometimes losing her mother altogether. She can't believe her eyes when they move into the house built like a castle, all turrets, narrow lancet windows and a great oak door atop a flight of stone steps. She's to live in this place with her mother and Gomer Gwynne (mum's employer, friend and, hopefully soon, new husband). But still Dinah feels alone, hidden away in her attic, until she notices the wall carved with animals – a hyena, a wolf and a lioness. An engrossing story of a lonely child and the extraordinary events which take place under the watchful eye of the cat lurking in the shadows, who knows exactly what's going on. A wonderful blend of fantasy and reality. **VB**

The Foxbury Force

Graham Oakley, Macmillan, 0 333 62958 2, £3.99

A very funny book, based on the lovely idea that a firm of burglars are employed by the town council of Foxbury to rob a shop once a month in order to give the police some practice in catching robbers. They're supposed to be caught by tea time and give back the loot ... but one day the temptation to break the rules is just too much. Along the way there's a great deal of fun and several sly, little jokes which are as much in the pictures as in the text. The two, as always from Graham Oakley, work perfectly together.

I have to say, as well, that the refreshingly honest moral portrayed here is that crime does sometimes pay! An intelligent read for 8-10 year-olds. **LW**

Taller Than Before

Bernard Ashley, ill. Judith Lawton, Orchard, 1 85213 874 2, £3.50



Roberta's family move to a new house so she has to change schools. At Regent Primary she'd always been the one everyone liked and trusted – whatever would they do without her musical talents? So she wasn't prepared for the hostile reactions from the pupils at Clipper Primary, especially Slade Bendix and a new teacher who calls her 'madam'. However, Roberta's mother has some good advice which helps her find the inner strength to overcome the problems she's faced with.

A sensitively written story for solo readers from around eight. **JB**

Power and Glory

Emily Rodda, ill. Geoff Kelly, Allen & Unwin, 1 86373 677 8, £4.99

Every time the child narrator gets down to playing a new game she/he is interrupted by a relative who insists the game's over 'NOW!'. Each family member is uncannily like one of the characters – the witch, goblin, vulture, beast or ogre – from the Power and Glory game, but finally the narrator completes the sequence uninterrupted and WINS!

The first-person, present-tense telling builds cumulatively on each left-hand page as the game progresses. The text is punctuated by small computer graphic-like pictograms drawn from the game and the protagonists, both real and imagined, loom large from the opposite pages and are executed in somewhat surreal air-brush illustrations. This is an interesting attempt to translate the computer screen into book form and to woo addicts from the keyboard. **JB**

Middle/SecondaryREVIEWS

The Oxford Book of Scary Tales

Coll. and ill. by Dennis Potter, Oxford, 0 19 278110 3, £6.99

Expensive, but worth it. A refreshing collection of stories that are scary but not necessarily full of ghosts and ghouls. Forget the witches and wizards for a bit and read carefully. It's little odd happenings in life that really frighten us. In these stories, set in a variety of styles – letters, poems, accounts and tales – we confront the fears that exist in all our lives, unbidden, unspoken of and barely hidden. For older and more competent readers this is a superb dip-in. **PH**

Amazing Adventure Stories

0 552 52768 8

Fantastic Space Stories

0 552 5267 X

Coll. Tony Bradman, ill. Jon Riley, Corgi, £2.99 each

The covers of these books, with their banner headings and bristling weaponry, promise a feast of uncomplicated excitement, and, if one overlooks a dollop or two of lukewarm stodge, the reader will not be disappointed. The stories are all incisive, recent works by skilled writers (Robert Westall, Malorie Blackman, Mary Hoffman, Nicholas Fisk are all featured) with vivid illustrations and largely contemporary or futuristic settings.

In the first book, a couple of stories touch upon issues like hostage-taking, risking trivialisation but managing to avoid it. Brian Morse's deeply ambivalent story about a boy's brush with a terrorist while on a family holiday is excellent in this respect. In the second book, Helen Dunmore's 'Alien's Don't Eat Bacon Sandwiches' deserves an honourable mention for its enthralling blend of the mundane and the outlandish.

With ten sound to stunning stories in each book, neatly tailored to fit your average read-aloud session, these reasonably priced collections are an outstandingly valuable resource. **GH**

The Coming of the Surfman

Peter Collington, Red Fox, 0 09 950141 4, £4.50

The sea is two days' drive away from the gangland urban wilderness in which this story is set but this doesn't stop the Surfman from setting up his shop on a corner and painstakingly converting a derelict factory into a wave machine. For a while, a truce holds between the gangs, and the narrator, who wants to become the Surfman's apprentice, yearns for it to last.

This is a very haunting story. Full-page illustrations facing the lucid, conversational text radiate an atmosphere of grim sterility, fleetingly visited by surreal magic. The book's depiction of squandered redemption is one that might prove thought-provoking to readers much older than the picture book format would suggest. **GH**

True Ghost Stories

Terry Deary, ill. David Wyatt, Scholastic, 0 590 13245 8, £2.99

A superb collection of nine true stories that chill and challenge the mind. The stories thrill in themselves; 'The Flying Dutchman' and 'George's Dream' would terrify anyone as would 'The Spirit Stones'. I particularly liked the commentary at the end giving a totally 'rational' explanation of what might have happened – amazingly this didn't spoil the ghostliness at all. Perfect for reading on dark winter nights. **PH**

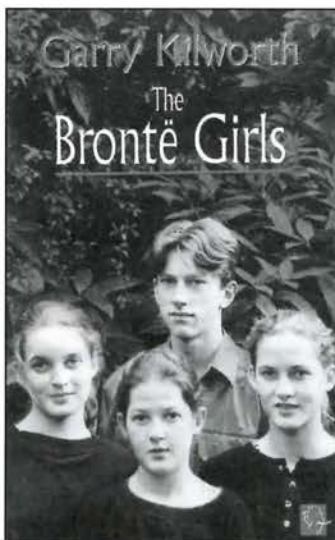
Weather Eye

Lesley Howarth, Walker, 0 7445 4305 3, £3.99

This – along with Hugh Scott's – is one of the most intriguing books I've ever read.

1999 is coming to an end and the weather is weird: storms, floods, earthquakes. Telly Craven is a Weather Eye, one of many children worldwide who monitor weather changes. After the death of a close friend and a blow to her head, which permits her to see beyond ordinary dimensions, she resolves to unite Weather Eyes to demonstrate that it's children who can effect change, and adults who cling onto outmoded security.

A slow start may deter some readers but Year 8 pupils and above should be encouraged to persevere with this superlatively well-written book. **VR**



The Brontë Girls

Garry Kilworth, Mammoth, 0 7497 2692 X, £3.99

Mammoth is developing a strong list: Garry Kilworth, winner of last year's Lancashire Library Book of the Year Award with *The Electric Kid* has created another thought-provoking reality.

The Brontë girls – Emily, Anne and Charlotte – live in the twentieth century but inhabit a farm which has severed its connections with contemporary society.

When Emily rebels, and past and present collide, there are decisions

for the reader to make: which of the two societies is best? Which of the people concerned are happiest?

This could possibly be a class reader for Year 9 and it's certainly a worthy addition to any school library or book box. **VR**

Point Crime: The Beat

David Belbin, Scholastic, 0 590 13317 9, £2.99

If this novel is anything to judge by, 'Point' have undergone an upgrading. Here is a standard, action-packed story with plenty of cliff-hangers, but the characters are fully realised and real messages are communicated.

The popularity of police dramas on television will ensure this story sells – as will the themes of racism, violence and relationships under stress. *The Beat* will make an absorbing read for mid-ability Year 9s. **VR**

Living Famously

Melissa Bell and Jason Herbison, Hodder, 0 340 64084 7, £3.50

This book is a study in dreadfulness from start to finish. The cover trumpets 'A Novel by a Star of Neighbours' to prepare the reader for the worst.

Here it comes... Melanie wins a teen beauty contest and is then unexpectedly propelled to fame as an actress in a soap opera. She dabbles with alcohol, a drug addict boyfriend, mates who reject her and a patient long-suffering family who are unbelievably pious and supportive.

If this is given to Year 9 girls I hope they will laugh it into oblivion: it certainly has no place on a bookshelf! **VR**

The Candle Man

Catherine Fisher, Red Fox, 0 09 930139 3, £2.99

Catherine Fisher is an accomplished writer who deserves much greater recognition. If you haven't yet made her acquaintance, begin with this book – it's as eerie a read as you'll find.

Returning to his home at the Sea Wall Inn one stormy night, Conor heard an earthly sound which rose to a shrill scream before turning into wild music. The music came from a fiddler who sat, tapping his foot, beside a small fire. From his hiding place, Conor noticed movement in the grass as a slither of water wound its way from the bank, travelling upwards, to form wet fingers which clutch at the man's ankles. They're the fingers of Hafren, the spirit of the waters who wants to take back the land which was reclaimed but is hers by right. The fiddler, Meurig, is faced with a terrible dilemma – accede to her wishes thus drowning the countryside, or have her devour his own soul. But with the help of Conor there may be a way out.

A wonderfully engrossing book which draws the reader into its terrifying, watery world. **VB**

Friends and Enemies

Ed. Bryan Newton, Collins, 0 00 675020 6, £3.50

A collection of short stories, all previously published, but nevertheless worth a second look. They centre on the theme of friendship – and hatred, as in George Layton's 'The Mile', with its horrors of parental reaction to a bad report and the problems of facing up to the class bully only to find that revenge doesn't always taste sweet. Jan Mark's hilarious 'How Anthony Made a Friend' (pity about the three typos in this story) is the tale of an unlikely 'friendship' between the truly horrible Jenny and the equally obnoxious Anthony. The repartee between the two is superb: "Mummy said that you're only peculiar because you're lonely. We're going to be friends." "We'll hell as like," said Anthony, but quietly because his mother was opening the door.

Other treats include contributions from Chris Powling, Bernard Ashley and a vintage tale from Roald Dahl – 'The Hitchhiker'. The book is ideal for dipping into and it'll provide a taster to encourage readers to explore longer novels. **VB**

Green Willow's Secret

Eileen Dunlop, Puffin, 0 14 030907 4, £3.75

Sibling jealousy, mystery, tragedy and a ghost are sure-fire ingredients for a good story, in this case smoothly accomplished by Eileen Dunlop. Kit's jealousy is tragically put into perspective when her sister dies in an accident and the family moves to a small Scottish village. On encountering the overgrown garden amidst the tangle of weeds and undergrowth, Kit discovers its Japanese theme is linked to a bad-tempered neighbour. With the arrival of ebullient student Daniel, the two join forces to investigate and unravel the garden and its long-dead creator. Engrossing stuff for 10s and upwards. **VB**

The Eye of the Horse

Jamila Gavin, Mammoth, 0 7497 2396 3, £4.99

Authors are sometimes treading a dangerous path when they produce a sequel to match a particularly fine book, but Jamila Gavin has triumphantly delivered a magnificent book in this follow-up to *The Wheel of Surya*. The story of Marvinder and Jaspal, separated from their mother when leaving India, continues their miserable life in London. Father, whom they'd hoped to find a wealthy man, is in prison, leaving them in the care of his girlfriend, Maevae, and her daughter. Turning to some friends, the Chadwicks (who shared their lives in India), they cling to the hope that life will get better if they can find out whether their mother is alive or dead.

Here is a rich tapestry of many strands which the author weaves together brilliantly, spanning continents and sweeping the reader along. A feast of a story. **VB**

Walk Two Moons

Sharon Creech, Macmillan,
0 330 33000 4, £3.99

This multiple award winner sees a 13-year-old girl journeying across America, telling her grandparents the story of her friend, Phoebe, whose mother once left home. As layer builds on layer the story takes on more and more significance for the travellers until the final, very moving denouement.

Here's a novel about growing up, love, separation, grief and, most importantly, about not judging a man until you've walked two moons in his moccasins.

I can't recommend it highly enough for youngsters who relish a read which challenges them to reflect. **DB**

Claire's Conquests

Bette Paul, Scholastic,
0 590 13202 4, £2.99

From the 'Point' series factory comes No. 2 off the 'Nurses' production line. Little Irish girl, Claire, is struggling with her St Ag's training and with the men who crave her ministrations. Bette Paul seems to have tilted the emphasis more on the males than emptying the bedpans but as an additional theme Claire is also coping with a maudlin Da who really wants his little colleen back at the family hotel.

A fast read that's likely to please even if little happens. **DB**

Snowbird Winter

Sue Welford, Mammoth,
0 7497 1881 1, £3.99

A townie named Brin and a local fenland lad discover an alien bird/girl encapsulated in a mysterious metal egg. Returning the alien to her rightful galaxy becomes the substance of this slowish, but readable, novel.

The theme of alienation is subtly handled, the suspense is well-controlled and the characterisation is realistic. All-in-all an acceptable read for youngsters who don't need a thrill on every page. **DB**

Night Fires

Joan Lingard, Puffin,
0 14 036654 7, £3.50

State brutality and corruption is rife but cannot suppress totally the spirit of the ordinary man and woman who will strive constantly for freedom. Nik and Lara, two orphans on the run, become involved with the underground movement in this fast, deftly plotted thriller set not a million miles away from the Eastern Block.

One of the most approachable political novels of recent years that's certain to provoke some deep discussion. **DB**

Deadly Dare

Malorie Blackman, Hippo
Mystery, 0 590 13162 1, £2.99

Thinking up dares for each other to do may seem harmless but Angela uses the game to help her find out what crime her older brother is involved in. She plants her dare on Theo who will have to go to an old warehouse in the middle of the night. But Theo develops the flu, he swaps dares with Ricky and the next thing he knows the police are asking about Ricky because he's disappeared.

Malorie Blackman has an instinct for what her readers love in stories and the talent to create unputdownable adventures. **AJ**

Wyvern Summer

Toby Forward, Puffin,
0 14 036562 1, £3.99

An exciting fantasy which starts slowly in the 'real' world but really takes wing when Franny discovers the past and another world where the Wyverns must be made to fly again.

Toby Forward has the subtlety to combine humour and humanity with the serious creation of outlandish fantasy and he enjoys playing with the reader's expectations. New to me, but the third in a trilogy which, once started, ought to have lots of fans. **AJ**

A Cageful of Butterflies

Lesley Beake, Red Fox,
0 09 929581 4, £2.99

Mponyane can't hear or speak but he determines to look after the white Saunderson family when they take him in, aware of the pressures they

are under, especially the timid and bullied 7-year-old Frank.

A beautifully constructed story, told alternately by Mponyane and Mrs Saunderson. It's both dramatic and thought-provoking, catching the delight of Mponyane's difference as well as the enormous frustrations he feels. **AJ**

Ghost Dance

Susan Price, Faber,
0 571 17183 4, £3.99

Shingebiss, not yet a shaman, decides to go to the Czar and use all her gifts to save the Northlands from development. Working on the unpredictable monarch, caught in a world where he is half mad from distrust and his god-like treatment, is tantalisingly difficult.

This third book of the sequence is still rich and deeply powerful. It's full of the physical awfulness of human existence and human fears and the magic of storytelling which veers between the safe and dangerous, the fascinating and the uncomfortable. **AJ**

Maniac Magee

Jerry Spinelli, Hippo,
0 590 13178 8, £3.50

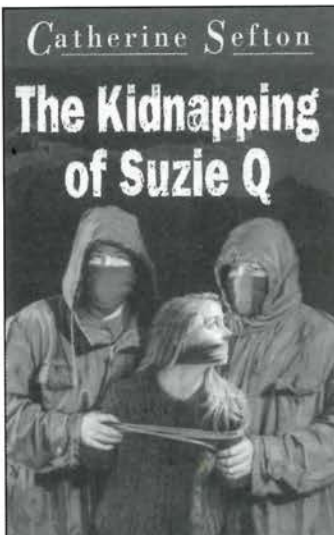
A marvellous and special book (a Newbery winner) – worth having as a set. It's the part mythic story of Maniac, always running, looking for a home, how he got his name and how he became a legend. In between the stories of his untying the legendary Cobble's Knot, the baseball game involving a frog, sleeping alongside the buffalo at the zoo and beating an ace sprinter by running backwards, is the racial divide of the town. Maniac runs between the two, fighting his own battles, but also battling to bring people together.

A wonderful read and read-aloud. **AJ**

The Kidnapping of Suzie Q

Catherine Sefton, Puffin,
0 14 036831 0, £4.50

A dramatic story yet, as ever with Catherine Sefton, written in a way which insists upon the complexity of judgement especially when violence erupts. Suzie is just in the wrong place at the wrong time when the



bungled robbery takes place. The would-be robbers kidnap her with no plan of what to do next. Recalled by Suzie, this becomes a tense psychological story (an interesting lead-in to Brian Keenan's book) where we can admire Suzie's own determination and despite the brutality and weakness of her captors whilst also fearing and even feeling for them. **AJ**

The Wonderful Story of Aladdin and the Enchanted Lamp

Philip Pullman, ill. David Wyatt, Picture Hippo,
0 590 13177 X, £4.99

An elegant picture book which manages to combine a powerful retelling of the story with richly detailed illustrations. For many the Disney version is the standard and this may seem similar, but it has its own special verbal and visual treats. This edition is both a pleasure to read aloud and a source for much careful reading of pictures. The large format and richness of the production make it a book for all ages, but especially those who often think reading's a chore and a bore. **AJ**

Older Readers **REVIEWS**

To Trust a Soldier

Nick Warburton, Walker,
0 7445 3692 8, £3.99

A provocative, uncomfortable read told in diary form by Mary, a teenage girl, and a group of soldiers. The action takes place in the future when six soldiers – five volunteers and the professional, unemotional Sergeant Hobbs – are travelling through the countryside to fight against invaders. Coming across Mary, they take her as their guide although few trust her. She forms a friendship with the youngest, Hobbs, and a fragile relationship develops between them. This isn't an easy narrative, but it gives the reader much food for thought about the ethics of war, its terrible cost in human tragedy and the toll on human lives and emotions. **VB**

Watchers at the Shrine

Jean Ure, Mammoth,
0 7497 2394 7, £3.50

This is the third of the trilogy which began with *Plague 99* and *After the Plague* and it provides a powerful conclusion to the series.

Hal is sent away from his community to avoid castration – considered to be the answer to male violence. He joins a community which watches at a sacred shrine. To his horror, he realises that the 'shrine' is the remains of a nuclear power plant and contact with it is mutating the very people who worship it.

The novel's resolution is quietly stunning: it's time GCSE boards added this trilogy to their recommended reading. **VR**

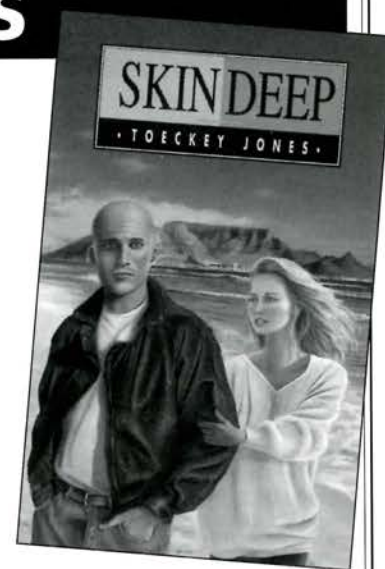
Skindeep

Toeckey Jones, Bodley
Head, 0 370 30507 8, £8.99

Personalise an issue and it achieves greater power to persuade. Apartheid is an emotive subject and through Toeckey Jones' creation of the relationship between Rhonda and Dave strikes a chord of commonality with the reader.

The sting in the tail is that Rhonda is white but Dave is Pass-White: a pale-skinned coloured. Rhonda's reaction to this discovery is conditioned by her upbringing: she and Dave polarise race and attitude in South Africa.

The book edges towards a movingly unexpected conclusion which shifts from the personal to the global with convincing clarity. This would be an ideal text for GCSE Open Study. **VR**



The Slayer of Shadows

Elana Bregin, Bodley Head, 0 370 32410 2, £8.99

Not one for the squeamish, because Elana Bregin doesn't spare us the details of the cruelties and bloodlettings on *The Veldt*. Here's a savage underbelly where the gangs, appropriately named The Jackals, spread horrendous fear and hardship amongst their own oppressed people and hold them in a sinister, superstitious thrall. Marinda, a child, and Zacj, an albino, stand out in this nightmare which is determined to crush them along with all else. Best kept for older students and worth promoting for the thinking it should provoke. **DB**

When She Hollers

Cynthia Voigt, Lions, 0 00 675059 1, £3.99

Tension and anxiety worm through the sophisticated style of this novel. Here a desperate, sexually abused 17-year-old is wrestling with the notion that the raft of lies on which her life is

currently built, and telling someone the awful truth, both possess a kind of freedom. But, for her, which will be the better of the two?

This is in-the-head plotting, which won't appeal to everyone, but then neither does it condescend with the 'social workers' guide to incest' formula which can be so characteristic in similar books on this issue. **DB**

Elfgift

Susan Price, Scholastic, 0 590 13157 5, £3.99

A feud-riven Ancient Britain, and a life of rags, shacks, gruel, smoke, cold, killing and rape, set the scene for this tale of dynastic strife. A dying king bequeaths his crown to Elfgift, a bastard spawned from his coupling with an elven mother. The three athelings immediately initiate a treacherous and serpentine espionage, each against the other and all against Elfgift. When the Valkyrie-like Jarnesaxa comes to the aid of Elfgift, and the youngest of the athelings embarks on a vengeance-seeking trance journey into the ghost world, the forces of the supernatural enter the fray.

This is a bleak, bloody and enthralling book in which harrowing violence and gloomy fatalism vie with glimpses of eerie beauty. Being a 'Point Fantasy' title, the indeterminate ending suggests that we'll be visiting the participants in this powerfully told tale again. **GH**

Falling into Glory

Robert Westall, Mammoth, 0 7497 1755 6, £4.99

This takes Westall's boyish heroes and his writing over into the adult world. 17-year-old Robbie, like an older Chas McGill, is at home in the boys' world of school, bullying and rugby. An affair with his much older teacher, Emma Harris, might seem like another masculine excitement, a catch to rival a machine-gun, except that Westall creates so well the delicate shades of feeling in the affair.

He is able, along with Robbie, to move beyond the laddish and explore with great tenderness the awful tensions of such a relationship, and the tightrope of love which Emma in particular is forced to walk. **AJ**

Cuckoo in the Nest

Michelle Magorian, Mammoth, 0 7497 1756 4, £3.99

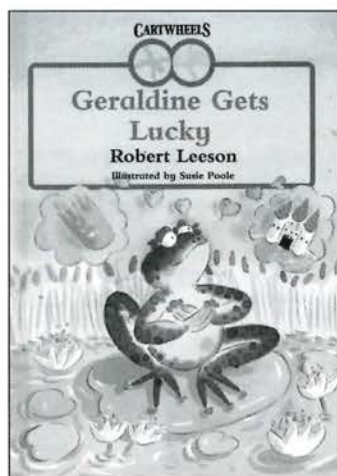
The eye-strainingly small print of this long book seems to be breaking new ground in testing the perseverance of readers in getting at a good story. This is the lovingly recreated tale of a theatre during the winter of 1946-7 with working-class Ralph struggling to get a break as an actor. It's very enjoyable and the lives of the family and the day-to-day work on the productions are finely detailed. It is, in many ways, its own play, full of drama, pathos and grand scenes, dominated by heroes threatened briefly by villains. **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.

Series TITLES

Some of the latest chosen by Steve Rosson

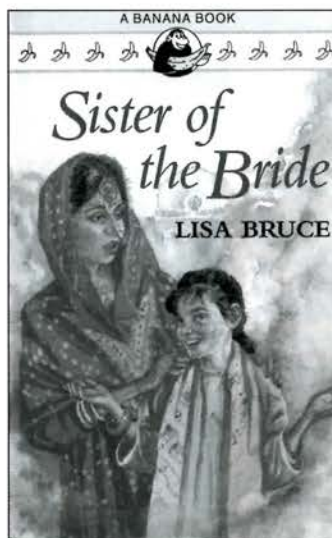


'Cartwheels' continue with their bright and breezy approach and in the latest batch Robert Leeson brings us a cautionary fairy tale called *Geraldine Gets Lucky* (Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 00234 6, £5.99, ill. Susie Poole). Our heroine is a frog who dreams of finding a handsome prince who will kiss her . . . etc. Despite the mockery of other frogs she sets off in pursuit, escapes the predatory intentions of a pike, a crow and a snake and duly finds her prince who is everything she imagined *mais malheureusement* the prince is French and we all know what Frenchmen like to do with frogs, don't we, boys and girls? With a hop she's off, back past the snake, the crow and the pike to the safety of the lily pad where she steadfastly refuses to be put down by the mockers. All good fun with lots of links to more traditional tales.

In the fullness of time Diana Hendry's *The Thing-in-a-Box* has grown up enough to become *The*

Thing-on-two-Legs (A & C Black 'Jets', 0 7136 4262 9, £5.50, ill. Sue Heap) and is still an object of some wonder to Mulligan, the family's dog. Seamus can now burble and gurgle, bounce in his baby bouncer and sometimes lay on the floor and wave his legs about. 'But that was all he did. It was quite beyond Mulligan to understand why Mr and Mrs Dembo thought Seamus was so very, very wonderful.' We follow Seamus through the crawling stage and onto his first few tottering steps. This is the end as far as Mulligan is concerned as the days of Proper Walks seem to be over forever. 'It could take an hour to get to the end of the road and by then Mulligan, who had also walked VERY VERY SLOWLY, was just about ready to burst with unspent energy. He wanted to run and race, spin and speed, pounce and bounce, scramble and ramble, rush and dash. Instead it was one paw two paws three paws four, VERY SLOWLY like that.' A happy ending is assured, though, as Mulligan makes the acquaintance of Mr Linden and Gary the Labrador. A delight from start to finish.

A Sikh wedding is the setting for *Sister of the Bride* by Lisa Bruce with illustrations by Duncan Smith (Heinemann 'Banana', 0 434 97211 8, £4.99). Jassy's house is knee-deep in relatives for sister Manjit's wedding day. Amid the hustle and bustle poor Jassy is saddled with looking after naughty little Rajinder and when the keys to the wedding car go astray she has to take the blame. It seems that nothing can go right until, sent out of the gurdwara ceremony with a bout of the hiccups, Jassy discovers a fire in the kitchen, raises the alarm and saves the day. It's encouraging to see another book featuring Asian family



life, but I feel it leans a little too heavily in the direction of presenting information about Sikh wedding customs rather in the style of some 'faction' books that are available; a feeling that grew stronger when I saw the glossary at the end.

Emma has been told to expect a prize in a competition so when a van arrives and deposits a large crate on her doorstep what is she to think? It's only after the delivery men have gone that she opens the crate to find *Emma's Emu* (Hamish Hamilton 'Gazelle', 0 241 13559 1, £4.99) by Kenneth Oppel, illustrated by Caroline Crossland. Of course there has been a big mistake, involving Emma's address being remarkably similar to that of the nearby Safari Park. None of the adults approached will listen so Emma and Howie next door have to take things into their own hands. A lively tale in which I

particularly enjoyed the havoc caused by the emu on its release from the crate, including the memorable sentence 'Then, with a flamboyant rustling of its feathers, it pooped enthusiastically on the carpet.'

There is a much more serious tone to *The Skeleton Club* (Hamish Hamilton 'Antelope', 0 241 13489 7, £5.99) by Catherine Sefton, illustrated by Maureen Bradley. This is a tale of bullying and protection rackets in an Irish village school. Jerome, the biggest kid in the school, rules the roost with the aid of a couple of henchmen and a couple of hangers-on, one of whom, Conor Doran, tells the story. The arrival of a new kid is yet another opportunity for the club to show its muscle. This time, though, the other kids have had enough and, led by Conor's cousin Big Annie, the silent majority stand up for the oppressed. Here's one for more mature readers both in terms of its subject matter and its Irish idioms and speech patterns.

Finally, 'Chillers' from A & C Black seem to have been an opportunity lost. Claiming to be 'a series of thrillers, ghost stories and mysteries for young readers' they don't appear to have been able to get away from the humorous approach that proved so successful in 'Jets'. Of their new set, one which does at least try to chill, and has nicely atmospheric and realistic illustrations, is *Ghost from the Sea* (0 7136 4090 1, £5.50) by Eleanor Allen, illustrated by Leanna Franson. Only Clare can smell the awful stench in the bedroom of their Cornish holiday cottage, only Clare can see the old sea-dog asleep on the bed, but a visit to the local lifeboat station helps explain his presence and gives her the chance to free his spirit. **■**

Authorgraph No.96

PHILIPPE DUPASQUIER Interviewed by Chris Powling

'I don't really draw for children or with children in mind at all,' says Philippe Dupasquier. 'This is a book for families. A lot of my books are inspired by families.'

He's talking about *I Can't Sleep* which is a personal favourite of mine. Harder-edged than Jan Ormerod's *Moonlight* and with a greater range of mood than Martin Waddell and Barbara Firth's *Can't You Sleep, Little Bear?*, which both occupy similar territory, *I Can't Sleep* is also much funnier than either.

Of course, its pages are full of his own family. For a start, the illustrator at the centre of the wordless plot has more than a passing resemblance to Philippe himself. Also, clearly, the children are modelled on his children Timothy and Sophie, then aged ten and six respectively; and the wonderful Mum-figure, a benign umpire of all the small hours shenanigans can't be a million miles from his wife Sylvie – whose importance to Philippe's life and career he acknowledges with a warmth and openness that's tempered with genuine self-doubt about his own ability to do artistic justice to people who mean so much to him. 'Look at this picture,' he says, shaking his head. 'It's awful.'

He's referring to a splendid vignette of Mum, arms folded in a doorway, sleepily investigating what's going on. The crook of her hip beneath the dressing gown looks just right to me, as does her quizzical expression. Not to Philippe, though, for whom the posture isn't quite definitive... which is when I notice the small mirror propped at the back of his work-table (so he can catch the exact turn of a head or slump of a shoulder) or the much longer one against his studio wall (to help him depict the precise angle of a body). Behind the bold, easily-assimilated images of an illustrator for whom accessibility and lack of pretension are watchwords, lies an integrity which shines through everything he does.

Admittedly, Art was probably in his bones when he was born. He grew up in Dijon, Burgundy, the son of an electronics salesman who travelled a great deal so it was Philippe's mother who brought up Renaud, now a forester in Switzerland, and Beatrice, an executive in Paris, with Philippe the classic kid-in-the-middle. 'Academically,' he claims, 'I wasn't very bright – let's face it, I'm still not very bright! – and I really suffered at school. Drawing was a way to escape, to enjoy myself.'

His grandfather, though, was a well-known impressionist painter and all the family read the sort of comic books widely celebrated in

France. From an early age, Philippe's idols were Hergé, Uderzo and Franquin and when, at the age of 17, he opted for Art school, he was given full family support. 'From the day I went to Art school my life changed,' he smiles. 'I suddenly met people like me... people who were dedicated to the same things I was.'

For two years he studied at Beaune, a local college, before – interrupted by a year of National service – he transferred for three years to Lyon, with its emphasis at the time on abstract painting. One of the school's most distinguished teachers was the illustrator Jean Claverie, however, acknowledged by Philippe as a great influence. So, too, during



his exchange-studentship to Hornsey College of Art in London, was George Hardy whose advice was simple but transforming. 'Nothing comes if you don't think,' Hardy insisted. 'Relax, look hard and think.'

It was good advice. Already Philippe's mind was half made up... about the opportunities offered in England by the picture book, as opposed to the comic book and about the greater openness of approach that was tolerated on this side of the channel. 'For instance, in France in those days if you wanted to do a wash for a sky background it had to be air-brushed perfectly – there was a strict set of expectations. What was so fantastic for me in England was that the sky could be just a bit of blue with the pen, with the colour so free. I liked that freedom very much.'

His Anglophilia was clinched by a final-year trip to Bologna to show his portfolio. The English publishers were much more enthusiastic than the French. 'Whenever you're in England come and see us,' they said. So I decided I would.'

To England he returned, then, with what few possessions he could muster, already grateful for the support of the indefatigable Sylvie whose job teaching Maths at the French Lycée in Kensington kept them afloat financially while Philippe looked for work.

Thanks to Klaus Flugge, at Andersen, it came quickly – first book jackets, then the chance to work on Martin Waddell's debut as a picture book writer with *The Great Green Mouse Disaster*. 'Straightaway, I had a contract, and an advance as well. Suddenly, Klaus said, "you must really meet Martin to do this book," so he paid for me and Sylvie to fly to Northern Ireland to spend a week working together. It was amazing! But then Klaus is renowned for this kind of generosity.' After this came *Going West*, which was featured on the front cover of BFK 24 (January 1984) followed quickly by *My Dad and Dear Daddy*... for which Philippe supplied both the words and the pictures. By now, in professional terms, he was trucking – with books like his own favourites *Our House on the Hill* and *Paul's Present* further enhancing his reputation as a master of the British picture-book who could bring a European flair and perspective to the form. Who could deny the wonderful energy and inventiveness of *The Great Escape* or *Follow That Chimp* rooted as they are in a comic-strip tradition, with due deference to the silent movie, which Philippe exploits with magnificent insouciance?

Nor was that all. Alongside books like *The Sandal*, with Tony Bradman, and *A Country Far Away*, with Nigel Gray, came line-drawings for longer texts – notably Anne Fine's *Bill's New Frock* and *A Country Pancake*, not to mention a whole string of books with Hazel Townson. It says a great deal for the Dupasquier professionalism, never mind his shy, unassuming modesty, that when I asked him to indicate what he felt was an especially successful combination of Dupasquier drawings with someone else's words, he opted for Sam McBratney's *Henry's Seamouse*, published as part of the Longman's Book Project. Whatever the assignment, he can always be relied upon to give it his closest attention.

This, he emphasises, calls for regular hours and sustained concentration – a working day which begins as soon as the children are out of the house and continues after they've arrived home across a week that tends to spill over into Saturday. 'I'm not actually a workaholic,' he says, 'though I am a bit of a loner. At the club where I play tennis, it's the sport I go for not the social life.'



The artist from *I Can't Sleep*, below, has a somewhat familiar look and studio!



His studio is neat, orderly and set up to catch the best of the light. So, too, is his house – a prize-winning sixties design at the end of a long, leafy country lane in West Sussex. In its spacious, family feel it could be the home of any successful professional . . . if you ignore the quality of the artwork on the walls and the unobtrusive signs throughout of occupants who care deeply about how things look.

His approach to his work is disciplined and unfussy – usually a scribbled rough in pencil, followed by line-drawing in pen with water-proof ink (sometimes tracing over earlier work with the help of the light-table he built for himself as a student) and a colour wash to finish. It takes him at least two to three months to produce a book of his own depending on the urgency of ongoing bread-and-butter assignments. 'Though the work itself is always a pleasure,' he says, 'the inspiration that's needed to constantly surprise yourself isn't so easy!' Sometimes, though, he'll admit to a sudden adrenalin surge – more about confidence than competence – when everything seems to click.

That, certainly, is the feeling given by his latest book *No More Television!* which provides the front cover of this issue of BfK. Fittingly, it comes from Klaus Flugge's Andersen Press and offers quintessential Dupasquier-shrewd, domestic observation laced with a wry humour as Dad's to-and-fro-ing with the obtrusive box, in an attempt to broaden his family's activities, reaches Ayckbournian levels of farce. 'Half of it actually happened,' Philippe laughs. 'In my family, as with most families, television is incredibly important – and we've had the usual problems with it. It seemed to me the children, especially my son, was addicted to it

and really didn't do much else but watch. Also it seemed to make them so bad tempered and aggressive so I made the decision to get rid of it for a while . . . I put it upstairs in a cupboard for a weekend.' Did this work? 'Well, yes . . . for a time. The trouble was we have a very big old-fashioned receiver and it's very heavy to carry backwards and forwards. I even wondered if we shouldn't sell it. But the problem there is that I like to watch it myself!' Thereby providentially, Dupasquier the Dad provides Dupasquier the illustrator with a neat ironic ending.

While working on this book, Philippe was uneasily aware that the match between his real family and his fictional one was no longer as exact as it had once been. 'My son is almost grown up now . . . nearly as tall as I am. And my daughter will soon be a teenager. I felt I was using them rather in the way Hollywood sometimes casts middle-aged actors in an action movie. So I'm in a transition period, I feel, especially as I've just turned 40. *No More Television!* may be the last of this kind of story because I can't look to my family any more for subject-matter.'

Where will he look, then? 'Well, when I first started I was drawing on my particular childhood, I think – this only changed when my own family arrived. So will I go back to personal experience? Or observe other children, other people's children, from the outside? Something very important is happening to me at the moment and I can't be sure where it will take me. Recently I've done work that's nothing to do with children which I've wanted to do for a long time . . . paintings and pastels which I'd like very much to link with children's books in some

way. What's so exciting is that it's something new.'

Also, it must be added, something that's founded on the proven technique and vision of an illustrator who's never allowed success to prohibit his taste for experiment. Maybe we should all get a little excited about what's to come. ■

Photographs by Richard Mewton.

Details of books mentioned:

- I Can't Sleep*, Walker, 0 7445 2061 4, £3.99 pbk
- The Great Green Mouse Disaster*, Martin Waddell, Andersen, 0 86264 626 X, £4.99 pbk
- Going West*, Martin Waddell, Andersen, 0 86264 052 0, £8.99; Puffin, 0 14 050473 7, £3.99 pbk
- My Dad*, Andersen, 0 86264 325 2, £7.99; Mammoth, 0 7497 0972 3, £3.50 pbk
- Dear Daddy*, Andersen, 0 86264 097 0, £8.99; Puffin, 0 14 050540 7, £3.99 pbk
- Our House on the Hill*, Andersen, 0 86264 167 5, £8.99
- Paul's Present*, Andersen, 0 86264 374 0, £7.99; Mammoth, 0 7497 1377 1, £3.99 pbk
- The Great Escape*, Walker, 0 7445 1365 0, £5.99
- Follow That Chimp*, Walker, 0 7445 2511 X, £3.99 pbk
- The Sandal*, Tony Bradman, Puffin, 0 14 054173 X, £3.50 pbk
- A Country Far Away*, Nigel Gray, Andersen, 0 86264 204 3, £8.99
- Bill's New Frock*, Anne Fine, Methuen, 0 416 12152 7, £7.99; Mammoth, 0 7497 0305 9, £2.99 pbk
- A Country Pancake*, Anne Fine, Mammoth, 0 7497 0567 1, £2.99 pbk
- Henry's Seamouse*, Longman, 0 582 12124 8, £2.75
- No More Television!*, Andersen, 0 86264 508 5, £8.99

Non Fiction REVIEWS

People can teach some animals to understand them.

A dog can tell by the sound of a person's voice when it's being told off.



16

From *Animals*.

Animals

0 7136 4242 4

Keeping in Touch

0 7136 4244 0

Nicola Edwards and Zul Mukhida, A & C Black (Messages series), £6.99 each

INFANT/JUNIOR

Communications – probably the world's most frequently requested project topic and the one that librarians most dread. To some it means trains and boats and planes, to others, music, morse and mime, but to everyone, surely, new light and new ideas are as welcome as rain in Yorkshire. And here are four to refresh and cheer us. Who'd have thought, for instance, of *Plants* as a 'communications' title? Well, it's amazing – flowers to welcome, congratulate and console, floral clocks and mottos, poppies and palms for remembrance, and the bee's come-hither spelt out by every blossom. *Animals* is less about wagging tails and cocked ears than about how we communicate with and through animals – ringing birds, marking sheep, whistling to and beware of dogs, animals symbolic and real in advertising and religion and as educators on film and in zoos. *Body* is more predictable – signs, costume, body language both conscious and unwitting, individual and massed. *Keeping in Touch* deals with the nature of messages, e.g. public/private, urgent/general, and how they're registered and delivered (from bullock cart to mobile 'phone in one photograph!).

This is a most satisfying and cohesive quartet, tightly bound by an author/photographer partnership whose own message is loud and clear. And so should ours be, for whosoever can devise a new angle on 'Communications' deserves to be cheered to the echo. TP

The Body

0 7136 4241 6

Plants

0 7136 4243 2

Measuring

0 431 07958 7

Numbers

0 431 07960 9

Shapes

0 431 07959 5

David Kirkby, Heinemann (Minimaths series), £7.50 each

INFANT/JUNIOR

Maths Curse

Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith, Viking, 0 670 86631 8, £12.99

JUNIOR UPWARDS

'Minimaths' aspires to bring basic kids and basic maths together, with one idea per spread and a 'Thing to do' as reinforcement. *Numbers* deals with counting itself, with sums, signs and fractions; *Sorting* ranges widely – from sets through pictographs and Venn diagrams to elementary taxonomy. *Measuring* considers relative size, mass, and capacity of substance and time and units of measurement (both standard and improvised) to show how you can have a long weight in a short while. *Patterns* is the most fertile of the six: sequences, periodicity, regularity and probability lead to prediction and design, gaining much from the information already gleaned in *Shapes*. *Number Play* brings together many elements from the other five for fun – I especially liked the triangular dominoes. There's nothing revolutionary or breathtaking here, and occasionally Kirkby's statements could be more precise, but sharing will overcome that, and the consistency of Chris Honeywell's photographs provides not only an admirable clarity but a friendly unity of style.

Maths Curse is the perfect antidote to all such well intentioned but essentially precious productions.

Number Play

0 431 07957 9

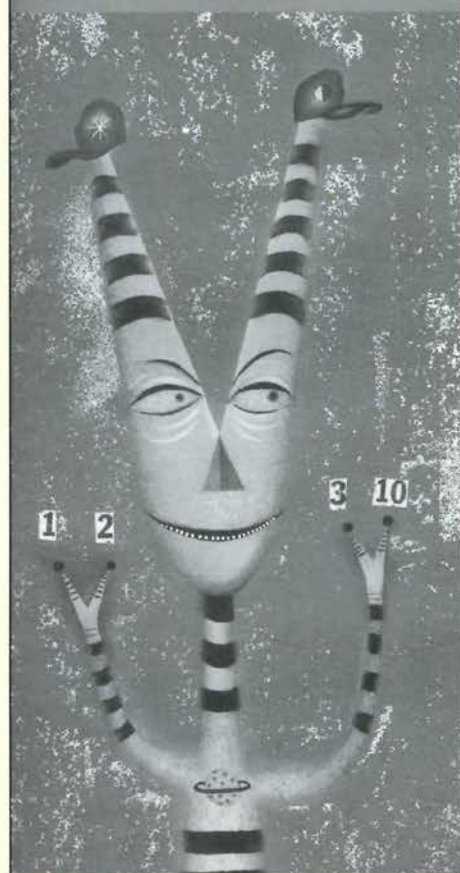
Patterns

0 431 07956 0

Sorting

0 431 07955 2

"But on the planet Tetra, kids have only 2 fingers on each hand. They count 1, 2, 3, 10..."



From *Maths Curse*.

Still, I hope, best remembered for the hatchet job they did with *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, Scieszka and Lane here present the '1066 and all that' of primary mathematics – healthy iconoclasm laced with memorable truths and good laughs. Utterly transatlantic, this offers as many sidelights on the American way of school as, say, a Judy Blume, as well as introducing many bizarre trains of thought. Now, every stop on a train of thought is a junction, so change here for an original view of the role of maths in life's rich pageant and, while you await your connection, ponder whether 'tunafish + tunafish = four-nafish'. TP

Night Creatures

Malcolm Penny, Wayland, 0 7502 1387 6, £9.99

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

There's an old African story which explains that hippos leave the water at night to eat grass so that God knows they're not eating his beloved fishes which, it being dark, he can't see. Actually, Penny tells us here, hippos are total vegetarians and would love to feed in the daytime but are martyrs to sunburn. That's just one of the reasons why animals come out at night; others include freedom from competition, abundance of food, and predator-avoidance.

Here is a fascinating array of night-creatures all of which display a particular aptitude for noctambulation. Penny examines this variety and shows how different creatures are adapted both physically and behaviourally to life in the dark. From the bat's sonar to the kiwi's supersensitive sense of smell (it's one of only three bird species that can smell at all), from the feely-fingers of the raccoon to the male vapourer moth's enslavement to the female pheromones, all demonstrate the precious principle of adaptation for successful survival.

This is an absorbingly entertaining, not to mention



'A huge pride of lions gather to feed on a buffalo in Maasai Mara, in Tanzania.' From **Night Creatures**.

instructive, read with a lot of good pictures – just what an information book should be. **TP**

Explorers of the Ancient World

Anthony Brierley, 0 7500 1466 0

Viking Explorers

Luigi Pruneti, 0 7500 1453 9

Macdonald (Voyages of Discovery series), £9.99 each

JUNIOR/MIDDLE

Explorers of the Ancient World describes the voyages made by the Ancient Egyptians, Phoenicians and Greeks in the first and second millennia B.C., whilst **Viking Explorers** recounts expeditions and journeys to Iceland, Greenland, Britain, Europe and the New World from the end of the 8th century onwards.

Each book contains a wealth of detail about the reasons for the voyages, the kind of ship used, the hazards involved and the discoveries that were made.

The bravery and ingenuity of these early explorers is awe-inspiring and their feats justly extolled. However, because 'all the surviving accounts of the Vikings' raids are written from the point of view of the victims' they are still popularly regarded merely as 'barbaric, ruthless pirates'. Many, of course, were not only skilful sailors but superb craftsmen, peaceful farmers and astute traders.

Both these titles cover ground that has been well-trodden in the past. But where they score over many of their rivals is in the way that lively texts, creative artwork and clear maps blend together in a cohesive whole calculated to enhance both our enjoyment and our understanding. **VH**

The Usborne Computer Dictionary for Beginners

Anna Claybourne, Usborne,
0 7460 1987 4, £7.99, 0 7460 1986 6,
£5.99 pbk

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

I well recall my first meeting with a computer when it took me half an hour to realise that when my instructor talked about 'booting it up' he meant 'switching it on'. Since then my knowledge of these awe-inspiring, fascinating yet infuriating machines has gone from A to C whilst the jargon, cyberspeak and technobabble has travelled from A to Z and back again. With the arrival of the Internet, who knows where it will end?

This book is a noble attempt to make sense of the vocabulary that has been spawned by the information revolution with over 1500 words and phrases explained. It's far from being a conventional dictionary as it takes a subject approach – so we have double-page spreads on Input and Output devices, Inside the Processing Unit, Printers, and so on. The key words are given in bold type and are defined in a continuous text and there's extensive use of cross-referencing.

Clear page design, judicious use of colour diagrams and illustrations, three glossaries and a comprehen-

sive index make this a very user-friendly resource. It's ideal for all aspiring members of the digital generation as well as those who suffer from the FUD (Fear, Uncertainty and Doubt) Factor. The jargon is catching, isn't it? **SR**

The Russian Revolution

Adrian Gilbert, 0 7502 1478 3

Revolution in Europe 1989

Patrick Burke, 0 7502 1477 5

Wayland, (Revolution! series),
£9.99 each

SECONDARY

In **The Russian Revolution** Adrian Gilbert steers a clear chronological course through those troubled times, ably charting the social, economic and political factors, the personalities and the build-up of events which eventually culminated in revolution. His account, which is augmented by a fascinating selection of photographs and quotations, concludes with a brief summary of what happened afterwards to communism both in Russia and beyond.

Patrick Burke has the task of explaining how, in equally dramatic fashion, communist rule in Eastern

Europe collapsed in 1989. After outlining the reasons why communism was failing and how Gorbachev's reforms were the catalyst for change, he examines every country in turn. He analyses the success of each revolution and explains why some regimes realized change was inevitable whilst others fought against it. Eyewitness statements provide a very personal and often poignant perspective on events. In his final chapter, the author assesses the state of Eastern Europe since 1989.

Each of these titles is well-written and very interesting in its own right, but together they form a compelling chronicle of the rise and fall of a political system which shaped the course of world affairs in the twentieth century. **VH**

The Young Oxford Book of Cinema

David Parkinson, O.U.P.,
0 19 910071 3, £12.99

SECONDARY

December 1995 saw the centenary of the Lumières' film show at the Grand Café – an event regarded as the dawn of the Cinema Age. The anniversary has been marked by a number of publications including this excellent **Young Oxford Book**. As well as summarising historical development, the book covers an analysis of genres, the life cycle of a movie and a factfile (most useful for its commendable glossary).

Hugely informative, the text explores the evolution of an art form. Films are shown as both a product of, and influence on, culture and society with examples from both Hollywood and Europe. Attempts to control the cinema are examined from the British quota act of the 1930s setting a 20% minimum quota for British films shown in our cinemas to the 1949 Italian act banning Neo-realism!

Discussion of the films themselves is inevitably more subjective – I can't agree that 'Top Hat is without doubt the best of the Ginger and Fred musicals' and to say that *Night Mail* has a 'poetic style' seems something of an understatement.

Overall, though, it's a superb effort at distilling a huge subject. The author warns that in order to provide 'the fullest possible account of film history and contemporary cinema' some 'adult' films are included. **GB**

Non Fiction REVIEWERS:

Geoff Brown, Vee Holliday, Ted Percy
and Steve Rosson.

Non Fiction Reviews Editor:
Eleanor von Schweinitz



'A terrifying moment from Alfred Hitchcock's disturbing classic, *The Birds* (1963)'. From **The Young Oxford Book of Cinema**.

Children's publishing being very much a 'people' business, movement amongst high level editorial staff has a significant effect on how lists look at the time of publication which in turn affects what books children in the future will be able to read. As the roll call of distinguished names leaving the profession grows, it becomes increasingly difficult to make predictions about a fast-altering market.

And this when times are openly acknowledged as being hard for children's books for the first time since the War...

From somewhat whimsical, and certainly amateur origins, at least in terms of financial rewards, children's books became the darling of the trade in the 1980s with low investment rewarded by strong sales. Children's books were big business for all concerned.

Balancing the Books

Companies such as Penguin and HarperCollins who'd long had successful hard and paperback lists found increasing competition from all quarters. Smaller hardback publishers such as Hamish Hamilton, Heinemann and Andre Deutsch increased their output dramatically. Even more significantly, new paperback lists – Magnet, which soon became Mammoth, Red Fox, Transworld, and, most recently both Scholastic and Hodder Children's Books – moved into the market which expanded with a vengeance.

Being big business has given children's books both a new profile and a new status. Inextricably bound up with education, children's books have always been subjected to a literary scrutiny which is applied to only a few adult books. The underlying assumption appeared to be that children should have a one course diet.

With the boom in the late seventies and early eighties, though, came a universal literature for children. The bridge between Blyton – the children's choice – and Sutcliffe – the adults' – was filled most notably by Dahl but also by scores of others who wrote because they wanted to entertain children in the widest possible ways.

For some adult critics the argument has been that the many mediocre titles have driven out the few quality ones but for most children the explosion in the number of books has been an immense boon, allowing them the opportunity to enter the world of print at a variety of levels. More may not mean better in the sense of every book being of potential classic status but it may well mean better in terms of the *kinds* of writing made available. While it's vital that books remain confident about what they do best and do not throw away everything in search of an audience, it's also essential that books and reading are a central plank in popular culture.

The very fact that publishers went on producing more and more titles showed that children's books of all kinds were selling. More books selling suggests, even if it doesn't prove, that more children are reading. Although it's widely believed that all children before around 1965 were highly literate and that in the absence of TV, CD-Rom, the computer and the rest they devoted their leisure time to the reading of great books, this can hardly be true. Adult illiteracy has only recently been much talked about but its existence is far from new. Also, even literate adults were often not reading.

Julia Eccleshare sums up the current climate in children's book publishing after a year of unprecedented change.

Publishing is not a charity. It's a risk business. The boom of the 1980s saw a number of initiatives in books for children. The ordered certainties of how books look were challenged by books which exploited the availability of current technology. Picture books that flapped, popped, squeaked, played tunes, lit up – all of these were widely available. In fiction, stories that were 'interactive' had their day while, in general, novels became shorter. Fashions for fantasy and the historical novel changed in favour of gritty realism which, most recently, has become a spate of depressingly bleak portraits of contemporary society. The book as social commentary is no innovation but when it becomes a forceful strand in children's books it immediately attracts heated, negative attention.

Through taking risks, children's books have lost the aura of purity that had historically been their hallmark. Just as in education there has been (until the recent introduction of the National Curriculum) a move away from a common cultural core into an education which, in part at least, related to the child it was meant to be instructing, so in children's books there has been a shift away from the notion of a core of books that must be read. Today's children have a different starting point from their parents. They still need the experiences which their parents found in books but they also need to be taken into other new worlds to explore their own time and place through stories.

So new books were published for a new audience and the new audience was found through new markets. The traditional bookshop outlet has been threatened on all sides by home bookclubs, school bookclubs, school book fairs and supermarkets. As with the increase in the number of titles, the increase in the number of outlets has meant that different kinds of books have begun to dominate. Books do not really lend themselves to a pile-them-high, sell-them-cheap style of trading and the specialist bookseller still has a vital role to play in making sure that children, parents, teachers and librarians know what they are buying. But children's books do now sell in shops of all kinds which suggests that they're reaching a new audience who are liking what they find.

Publishers were thinking creatively about making books compete in all markets. For this purpose they were publishing books to snack off as well as books that offer a hearty meal. The assumption and hope is that children will both snack and feed well. They will learn to discriminate

between different kinds of books just as adults do. Surely not reading at all because the books available are too weighty cannot be a better way of reading?

The increase in the output of children's books has permanently changed the nature of children's publishing. We now have children's books instead of highly selective, high quality children's *literature*. And, yes, with that change there have been some casualties. But, as long as a substantial proportion of the classic titles remain in print, the balance can be held. As with their predecessors, the best of the new books will survive ensuring that in a snappy, consumerist world, permanence, which has so long been a key feature of children books, will survive, too.

Now, however, the bubble which changed the look of children's books has burst. 1994 seems to be being taken as a watershed but nothing is ever so clear cut. Indications for the Books and Consumer Survey show that sales slowed in 1994 and have declined in 1995. In reality, the growth of sales slowed sometime before that caused by the harsh economics of the outside world. Library budgets have been slashed. School funding is at an all time low and with the introduction of LMS there's no earmarked money for books. And it's not just in the institutional markets that things are bad. The retail trade is down in *all* areas with books affected alongside everything else.

With less money around, fewer books will be published. While popularisation has been criticised for causing adulteration, the consequences of retrenchment may be even more significant. The surviving titles will simply be the best selling ones, unless publishers can persuade their accountants to keep their nerve. And, yet, who can predict the best sellers? When Gollancz published *The Sheep Pig*, the sixth novel by Dick King-Smith, a retired farmer turned teacher, they can hardly have guessed that it would go on to be grossing over \$50 million as a Hollywood blockbuster. Books of all kinds need to be given a chance so that greatness of all kinds can be thrust upon them.

Luckily, publishers remain optimistic about their future business. Phrases such as 'child-centred publishing' and 'clear branding' are being banded about as the solution to the current malaise. Basically, publishers must strive to balance their responsibilities to their child readers with their need to be a successful business. Different houses are adopting different strategies to make the best of what they have.

The bigger companies with strong backlists, especially if they contain a money-spinning property or two, are exploiting them to the full. Old titles rejacketed are the stuff of the Macmillan list who have a new gener-

ation of William readers to serve and who are aiming to do something of the same for Willard Price. The Chalet School stories are reappearing on the Red Fox list looking like new school stories. Puffin is giving two bites to their best selling and best established classic titles by publishing them in Puffin Modern Classic editions alongside the standard Puffin ones.

Smaller and more recent arrivals on the scene are fortifying themselves by focusing on what they know they do best. Orchard Books publish the most attractive gift books. Good themes, good authors and outstanding illustrators make them sure-fire sellers. Piccadilly Press has cornered the market in teenage advice books hitting just the right combination of jokey and serious. Barefoot Books promote wider understanding of world causes through their books and are producing titles which have a small but committed readership.

With all of these, there's a danger that publishing could stagnate along these already well defined lines, or alternatively, that everyone will play safe by going for formulae which have worked before.

There's also the danger, evident even when the market was growing, that the big companies will swallow up the smaller companies with the net result that the crucial individuality of editors and their lists will be lost. And which books would go then? Approaches to list cutting are by definition financially rather than creatively driven.

Despite such fears, Philippa Milnes Smith, recently appointed Director of Penguin Children's Books, is enthusiastic about the future, not only for large companies like Penguin but also for the many smaller companies which make such a significant contribution to children's books.

'Writing is serendipitous and so is publishing because it is about risk. The bigger risks are the important ones and if the times are harder you have to take *even bigger* risks and have ambitious ideas. You have to publish your way out of the recession with high aspirations.'

High aspirations are certainly needed. Publishers must think about the things books do especially well and capitalise on them. Good books are needed for all readers. Providing them should be the ambition of everyone involved with the trade. ■

Julia Eccleshare has been a Fiction Editor for Puffin and Hamish Hamilton, selector of *Children's Books of the Year* and Children's Books Editor for *The Times Literary Supplement*. She currently edits the children's books section of the *Bookseller*, reviews regularly on BBC radio and was chair of the Smarties Award for 1995.



BEVERLEY

NAIDOO...



In April 1994, television screens around the world captured the spirit of those few nervous, heady days when millions of South Africans, in tortuously long queues, lined up together for the first time... waiting to vote. The images bore witness to momentous historical change. Shortly afterwards I received a batch of letters from a group of Year 7 students in Nottingham who'd been reading my novel, *Journey to Jo'burg* (Longman, 0 582 25402 7, £3.99). Their letters included strong statements revealing their feelings about characters and events in the book, about apartheid and racism. Most of them referred to apartheid as finished and past. 'The apartheid is over, it has come to an End! And WE FEEL REALLY HAPPY!' wrote one; '... all that has changed now thanks to Nelson Mandela,' wrote another.

Their sentiments reflected what I'd begun to sense earlier during writer-in-school workshops on my South African fiction... the belief that once Nelson Mandela was 'in charge', everything would be fine. Replying to the Nottingham children, I wrote that I too was delighted about the elections but added: 'It is going to be very difficult however for all the damage done by apartheid to be wiped out and for all South Africans to have equal chances in life. President Mandela doesn't have a magic wand. I only wish he did!'

My reply was, of course, inadequate. I was still in the process then of writing a new novel to explore just what that damage might be for one young boy who inherits his personal legacy of apartheid at the same time as he inherits the hopes of a 'new' South Africa. *No Turning Back* (Viking, 0 670 85996 6, £10.99) will probably raise as many questions as it answers.

Its genesis was quite different from my previous South African work written under conditions of exile. *Chain of Fire* (Longman, 0 582 25403 5, £3.99) had been undertaken in the late 1980s like a work of historical fiction, despite the contemporary nature of its themes of 'ethnic cleansing' and youth resistance to apartheid. I had immersed myself in material collected by others who were inside the country – journalists, researchers, photographers – working frequently in secret and always at some risk.

In August 1991, the year *Journey to Jo'burg* was unbanned, I was able to return to South Africa for the first time freely after 26 years. I visited schools and projects, listening to the voices of young South Africans. I needed to gauge their sense of the past, the present, and their hopes for the future. I could now include these young people as potential future readers. Furthermore, I would be free to collect my own material.

The opportunity came in August 1993 when the British Council sponsored travel to South Africa for myself and theatre director-writer Olusola Oyeleye. In the UK we'd often worked together on drama and

writing workshops, exploring issues of identity, diversity and equality with both children and teachers. Offering free workshops in South African schools, projects and teachers' centres, we shared our active methodology and exchanged ideas. Using poems written by British children and photographs as stimuli, we listened closely to the responding voices.

This was Olusola's first visit to South Africa and we arrived at a time of terrible pre-election violence with massacres on the trains and shootings in the black townships. Together we tried to make sense of what young people in particular were experiencing. There was also a group of children in whom I was especially interested: those living on the streets. What had led them to run away? How were they surviving? What were attitudes towards them? I had many questions. Perhaps most centrally, what would the 'new' South Africa mean to them?

Street-Wise, a non-governmental organisation working with street children, welcomed our interest. We ran workshops in their shelter in Hillbrow – a high-rise, high-density, high-crime area of Johannesburg which is a focal point for many young runaway boys. Runaways girls are not nearly so visible, quickly absorbed into a network of prostitution and cheap hotels. The dramas developed from our stimulus photographs revealed telling aspects of the children's lives. As happened with our workshops in schools, some children stayed afterwards for individual interviews.

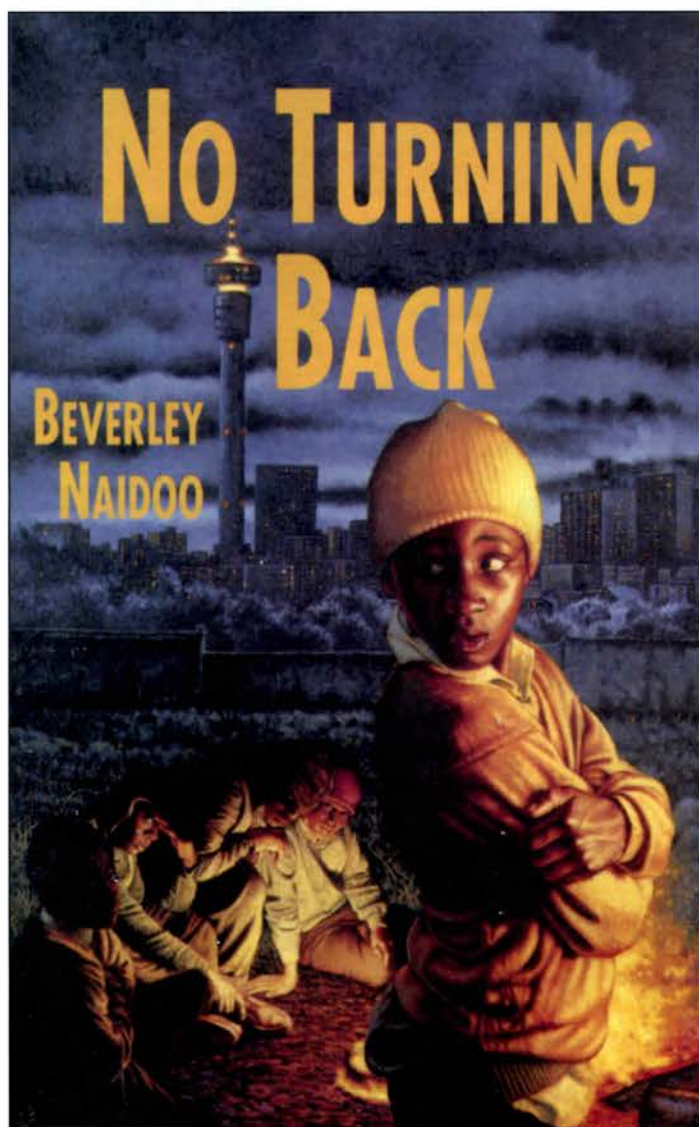
Other stories, reflecting the tensions in adult-child relations, emerged among the young adults on the Barefoot Teacher Training programme in Alexandra, on the outskirts of Johannesburg. Their director, Martha Mokgoko, also shifted our focus to the pain of many mothers in this deeply pressurised society.

I came away with the sense that many young people felt that adults had let them down. The immensely sad eyes and angry voice of 11-year-old Shireen haunted me: 'Why do they have children if they're going to throw them away?' Others conveyed their sense that the adults they loved were as powerless as themselves in the face of senseless violence. Yet still, those same children found room for hope. Shireen and her friends from Orange Grove Primary School came to a Youth Peace Rally in Johannesburg, wearing their badges 'I'M COMMITTED TO PEACE, ARE YOU?'

Returning 6,000 miles back to Britain brought me both the problems and the challenge of 'long distance writing'. I had to get to know 12-year-old Sipho who, at the beginning of my story, runs away from an abusive step-father onto Hillbrow's dangerous streets. Streetchildren belong to cities across the world and while I wanted my story to be rooted in South Africa, I wanted its questions to resonate far more widely.

One year later, in August 1994, I revisited South Africa to gather responses to the final draft of my novel. It was four months after the elections and the country still seemed to be breathing sighs of relief. I approached young people and adults with whom Olusola and I had

**I'M
COMMITTED
TO PEACE,
ARE YOU?**



worked. Would my imaginative exploration of characters and situations ring true to those who were close to such experiences? The enquiry was daunting but necessary. I braced myself. Thankfully, responses were positive and I came back knowing just where I should do some more work.

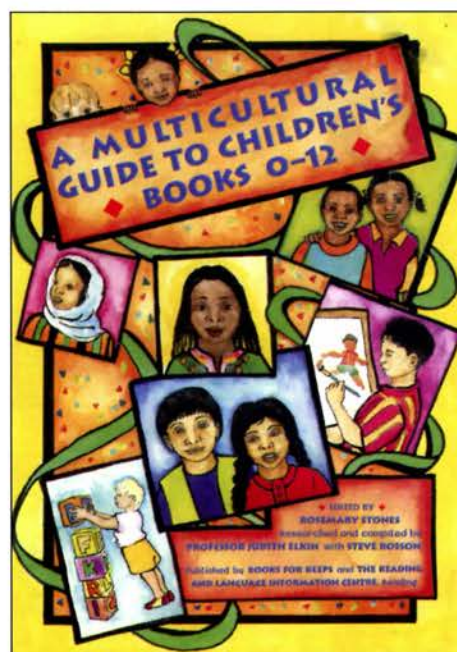
Germinated during the horror of the pre-election violence and finalised during the fragile post-election peace, *No Turning Back* spins along the slippery twin axes of violence and peace. While the official ending of apartheid represents an historical milestone, the search for personal peace by young Sipho and many others is far from ended. ■

Beverley Naidoo works as an Adviser for Cultural Diversity and English in Dorset.

'Discrimination on the basis of "race" is still deeply prevalent throughout Britain. But unlike my own childhood (living in South Africa), there are more possibilities today of young people hearing other voices which challenge racism and which value diversity and equality. This Guide is a testament to that.'

BEVERLEY NAIDOO

from her article in:



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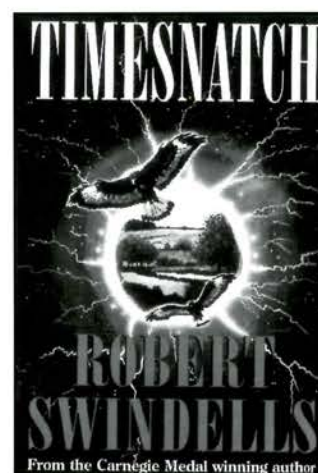
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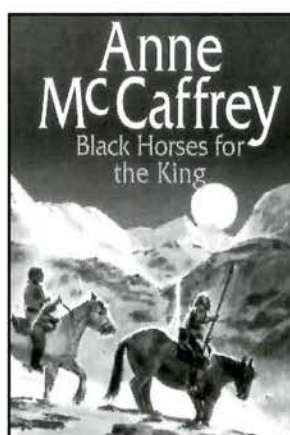
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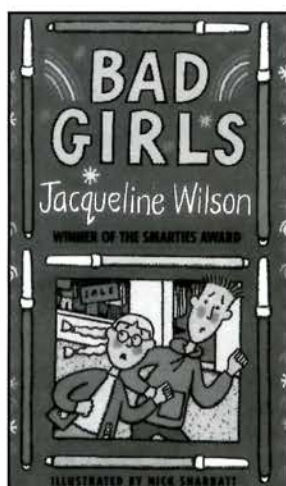
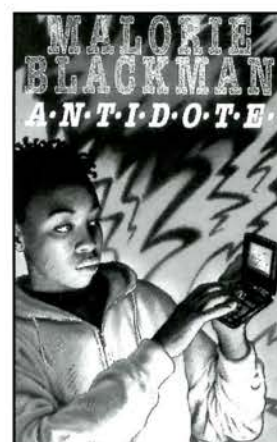
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After the Net Book Agreement . . .

Children's Books in a Free Pricing Market

Louis Baum

Those of us who supported the Net Book Agreement before it bit the dust three months ago are in an uncomfortable position. We supported it because we believed that books were more widely available at generally lower prices while the agreement was in operation, and that, because booksellers did not compete on price, they competed instead on the things that really mattered to the book buying public: a wide range of stock, and the provision of service – principally bibliographic information to access the vast number of in-print titles available in this market, and a willingness to order books for customers that were not in stock. If price competition were allowed, we argued, booksellers would become less able and willing to provide these essential services.

And we reasoned that these services were far more necessary to the book trade than they were to any other retail sector, because of the vast size of the inventory, more than 600,000 titles in print, each a different product line, available to the UK reading public. Or, to put it another way, a large supermarket would rarely have more than 15,000 product lines on its shelves; a decently stocked bookshop would offer more than 60,000.

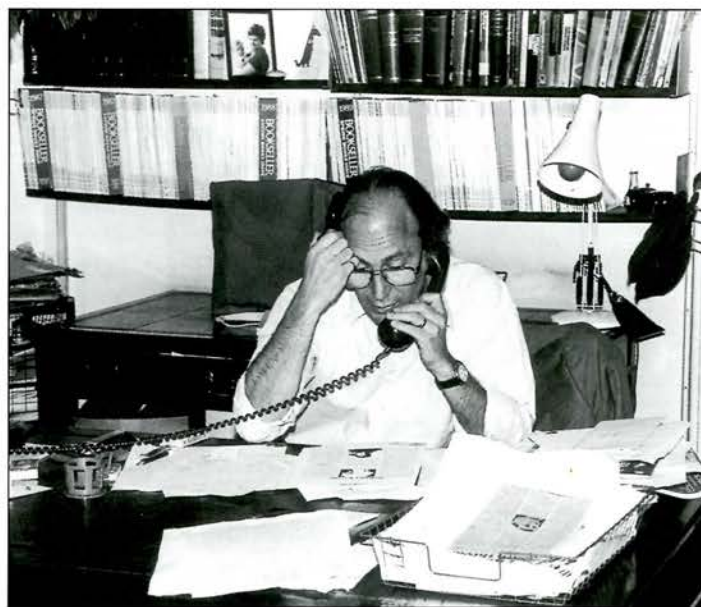
Price competition, we insisted, would take place on only a very small proportion of that inventory – the top 10 or 20 or 30 bestsellers perhaps – and to compensate for the loss of margin suffered by publishers and retailers in the price competition on those bestsellers, the prices of other books would have to go up, because any increase in sales could never be sufficient to compensate for that loss of margin. Moreover, free pricing would bring the supermarkets into the picture: they would heavily discount the bestseller list – cream, in other words – and push many smaller stockholding bookshops into bankruptcy.

As to the institutional world, we feared that libraries and schools would feel compelled to squeeze their suppliers, and that these would inevitably suffer along with service and range.

Those hostile to the NBA found us quaint, elitist and needlessly pessimistic. Price competition, they argued, would bring more people into bookshops, more people would get the reading habit, and smaller stockholding bookshops would learn to box smart to stay in the game. Now that the NBA has gone, we who supported it have to hope that the abolitionists will be proved right. The sceptics among us probably expect that the future will bring a mixture of the abolitionists' hopes and the pro-NBA lobbyists' fears.

The NBA had been in place in various forms since the start of the century – with the exception of proprietary medicines, it was the last vestige of resale price maintenance, swept away by Ted Heath's economic reforms of the 1960s. It was always unpopular among politicians with free-market proclivities, and also, more recently, with the Office of Fair Trading. The OFT referred the NBA to the Restrictive Practices Court last year, but long before it got a first hearing there the NBA collapsed, destroyed from within.

Why? The first reason was a stagnant market, stagnant in particular in



Louis Baum at work.

the stockholding retail book sector. Over the years publishers – and in particular children's book publishers – were increasingly looking for a larger and larger proportion of their sales through outlets outside the stockholding sector – through supermarkets, book clubs, book fairs, door-to-door operations and the like. And these were precisely the kinds of outlets that demanded from publishers deals not permitted under the NBA. First Reed and then Hodder Headline withdrew from the NBA, and then, in October, W H Smith, until last year the strongest supporter of the NBA, but now facing a critical City after poor results, approached Random House and HarperCollins with a deal they could only accept if they too withdrew from the Agreement. They found it an offer they could not refuse. Within hours the 95-year-old NBA had collapsed.

It's still early days, and too soon to predict what the results of this development will be. But as far as children's books are concerned, even the staunchest supporters of the NBA could not argue that the old regime was a wholly good one. It is significant, I think, that children's book publishers were at the vanguard of those consumer book publishers seeking sales outlets beyond the stockholding bookshops – which, with a few honourable exceptions, proved to be no more than mediocre children's booksellers.

Those hostile to the NBA found us quaint, elitist and needlessly pessimistic.

A number of reasons for this disappointing performance suggest themselves. One is that children's books are on average cheaper than adult ones, so every copy sold contributed less to the bookseller's financial performance. Second, they require specialist knowledge, and that again costs time and money. Third: the general view that children and those who deal with them are intrinsically less important than adults and those who deal with them. Sad, but it remains undeniably a part of our national life.

Whether this remains the case or whether some healthier attitude can be nurtured probably has little to do with whether books are sold under resale price maintenance or not. But we have to hope that, following the end of the NBA, books generally and children's books in particular, will find a higher profile in the marketplace. We have to hope, too, that this will not occur at the expense of stockholding bookshops, and we have to hope that they – the big chains like Waterstones and Dillons, as well as the independents – will find ways to sell children's books more effectively than they have up to now. Keen prices may be one way to draw the punters in, but I hardly need to persuade readers of **Books for Keeps** that books have a value beyond their price. ■

As well as being Editor of **The Bookseller**, Louis Baum is also author of several books for children.



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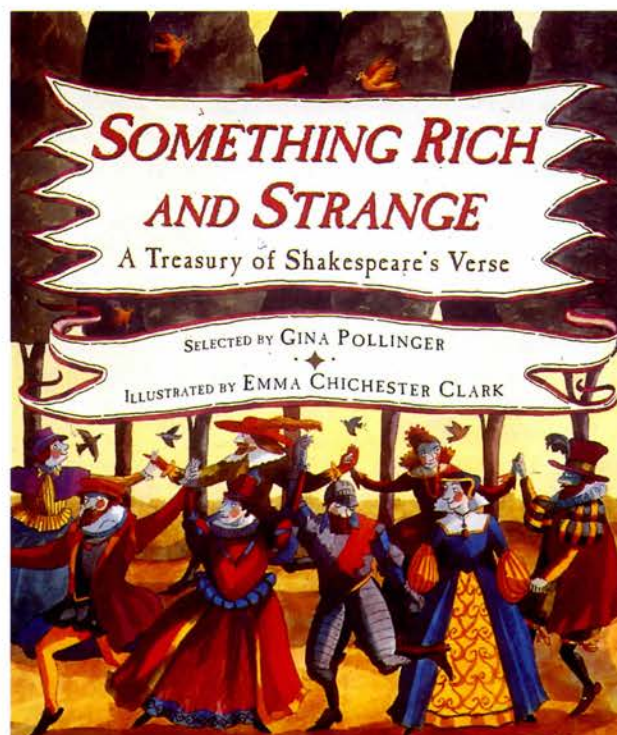
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Expresses a passion for poetry and proves that Shakespeare need not be out of reach for young readers *The Sunday Times*



David Morton describes the work of GINA POLLINGER



Colour illustrations on this page from *Something Rich and Strange*.

A NEW SERIES ON LITERARY
PROFESSIONALS WHOSE
NAMES RARELY APPEAR ON
A TITLE PAGE

Gina Pollinger has been a literary agent for over 25 years, and has gained a reputation as tough yet tactful, conscientious yet charming, but above all as a committed champion of children's books. Her list contains many of the best-loved and most respected authors and illustrators for children – including Peter Collington, Berlie Doherty, Anne Fine, Penelope Lively, Jan Mark, Geraldine McCaughrean, Chris Powling, Martin Waddell and Jacqueline Wilson. Yet she still makes time to read every unsolicited manuscript she receives because, as she says, 'One of them might just have that *je ne sais quoi* . . .'

After coming down from Oxford with a degree in English, Gina joined Chatto & Windus as a junior editor, spending two years there before leaving for New York to work at Simon & Schuster under the legendary Bob Gottlieb. Her stay there was the 'pivotal publishing experience' of her editorial career and it was with Gottlieb that she learnt the skills which were to help her become one of the foremost agents in publishing today.

It wasn't, however, until several years later that her career as an agent began. Her husband, Murray Pollinger, resigned from his father's long-established agency, Laurence Pollinger Ltd, to set up on his own, taking three of his father's most illustrious clients with him – Roald Dahl, Rosemary Sutcliff and Clive King. As a result, this new agency gained a reputation for children's books and soon the manuscripts began to arrive. Gina, then mother to their two small children, offered to help out 'sorting the wheat from the chaff', and the rest, as they say, is history. She clearly remembers the first unsolicited children's writer they took on – Penelope Lively – and still has a copy of her report about the script, *Astercote*, which commented 'Mrs Lively certainly lives up to her name . . .'

These days it's a big job being an agent. First and foremost, there are one's authors – and much of Gina's day is spent talking to them – nurturing, reassuring, encouraging them to write to the best of their abilities. Then there are the editors – and Gina firmly believes she can only give the best service to her authors if she has a good relationship with editors: 'It's a two-way thing between editor and agent and it's essential I keep abreast of the new developments within the company, so that when I declare I've found something which is right up an editor's particular street, he or she knows I'm on to something worth immediate attention.' Often an editor with an idea for a particular book will come to Gina to see if she has anyone to write it. This often works with series



fiction and Gina is very keen to offer this opportunity to her 'up and comings' – it's a great chance to develop writing skills, increasing the likelihood of writing profitably and professionally for a living. 'I genuinely do cherish my up and comings as much as I do my established authors,' she says, confirming her belief that part of an agent's job is to talent spot and get that talent up and away – 'and I love seeing people develop; when they're still recognisably the same but are different and now irresistibly appealing.'

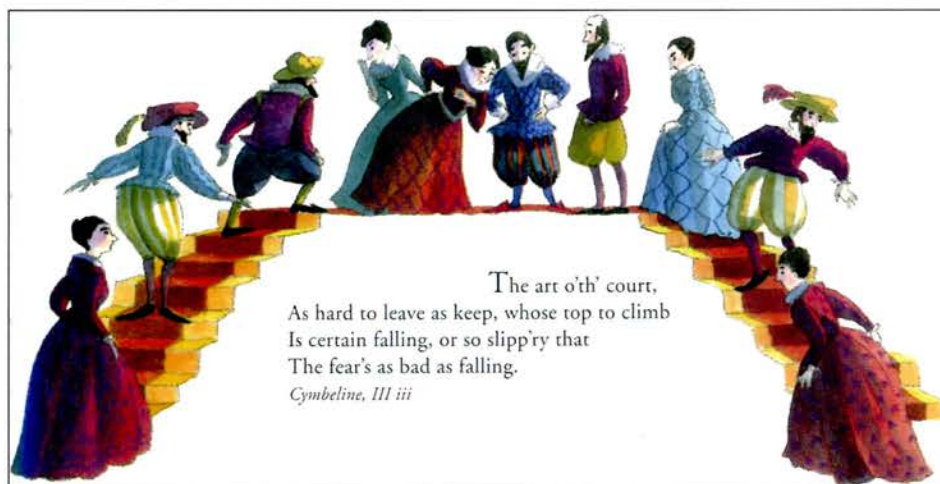
Not least, for an agent, there are the rights to take care of – foreign and US, serial, drama and TV, broadcasting and movie, audio, large print, animation, merchandising, and now electronic rights. It's a growing list and increasingly complex and although Gina does have staff to help with it all she nevertheless takes a pride

in doing plenty of the work herself, whether at book fairs or on one of her many regular trips to the US and foreign publishing houses.

With the publication of *Something Rich and Strange* (Kingfisher, 1 85697 387 5, £12.99), Gina has crossed a boundary. Exasperated by comments condemning Shakespeare as marginal to modern life, Gina set about compiling an anthology which would make the great Bard's verse accessible to young people and show that 'he still reaches out to us today'. It's a beautifully produced thematic 'orchestration' of Shakespeare's verse, with splendid illustrations by Emma Chichester Clark, and is obviously the fruit of years of study and a great, great passion. The desire to be an author, however, seems not too pressing – she's quick to point out that the only words not Shakespeare's own are those in her introduction: 'the author is Shakespeare, not Gina Pollinger'.

It seems a busy life being Gina Pollinger, but one which she obviously finds hugely rewarding, and there's delight in her voice as she talks about her job – a role she sees as a 'midwife who has the greatest possible respect for the mother and the child'. She positively glows with pride at the mention of one of her authors – whether they be amongst her established, award-winners or whether it's her latest find from the unsolicited pile. 'I love what I do and I love all their babies and I love the feeling that I am instrumental, albeit a hidden and unrecognised instrument, in bringing to children whose lives are possibly very drab, something wonderful and exciting which may make their world a much more agreeable place.' ■

David Morton was until recently Marketing Manager for children's publishing at Random House. Now he's a freelance journalist and writer specialising in children's books.



The art o'th' court,
As hard to leave as keep, whose top to climb
Is certain falling, or so slipp'ry that
The fear's as bad as falling.
Cymbeline, III iii

BfK News

• AWARDS •

Smarties Book Prize

0-5 Winner

The Last Noo Noo, Jill Murphy, Walker, 0 7445 3228 0, £8.99

6-8 Winner

Thomas and the Tinnies, Jill Paton Walsh, ill. Alan Marks, Macdonald Young Books, 0 7500 1532 2, £8.50; 0 7500 1533 0, £3.50 pbk

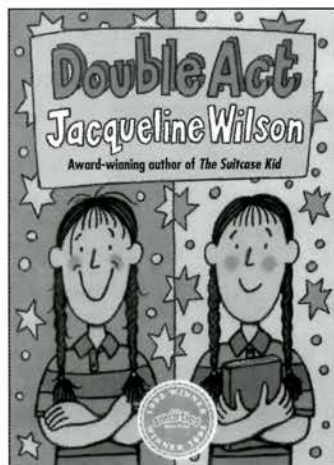
9-11 Joint Winners

Double Act, Jacqueline Wilson, ill. Nick Sharratt, Doubleday, 0 385 405375, £8.99

Weather Eye, Lesley Howarth, Walker, 0 7445 2488 1, £8.99; 0 7445 4305 3, £3.99 pbk

The Overall Winner of the 1995 Prize was **Double Act**.

Schoolchildren from Burscough Primary School in Lancashire made the announcement at a presentation at London Zoo.



The Kurt Maschler Award

This year's Emil went to **The Little Boat** by Kathy Henderson with illustrations by Patrick Benson. The book is published by Walker Books (0 7445 2181 5, £8.99).

Runners-up were:

The Magical Bicycle by Berlie Doherty and Christian Birmingham (Collins, 0 00 193740 5, £8.99)

Song of the Earth by Mary Hoffman and Jane Ray (Orion, 1 85881 119 8, £12.99)

Tattybogle by Sandra Horn and Ken Brown (Andersen, 0 86264 596 4, £8.99)

Myths and Legends of the World: The Golden Hoard by Geraldine McCaughrean and Bee Willey (Orion, 1 85881 201 1, £14.99)



Friends of the Earth's 1995 Earthworm Award

This year's winner was an interactive title from Kingfisher's Kaleidoscope series - **The Living Forests**, 1 85697 283 6, £12.99.

Wirral Schools Paperback of the Year

Chosen by Year 7, 8 and 9 pupils from Wirral Secondary Schools this new Award was received by Ian Strachan for **Throwaways** (Mammoth, 0 7497 1294 5, £3.50 pbk).

Ian Strachan with two young pupils from Wirral schools.



BOOKS OF THEIR OWN

Published in November, too late to be picked up in our last issue, is **A book of my own** - a report on a book-buying and supported reading project involving children in the care of Hampshire and Manchester Social Services:

'Almost 100 children, aged between 5 and 16, volunteered to take part in the project. Each child was given £25 to spend on books of their choice, and was paired with an adult who supported them in choosing and reading their books. The books were theirs to keep, even if they had to move to another home. At the end of the project, the majority of children showed improved levels of reading, said they were getting on better at school and expressed an enthusiasm for books.'

Since, as the report points out, of the 52,000 children and young people in residential and foster care in England and Wales, something like 75% will complete their schooling with no qualifications (compared with 6% of young people living with their families), the significance of this project can hardly be exaggerated:

'The project demonstrated the value of providing consistent adult support for those separated from their families. There is also an indication that such a project enhances self-confidence and can help to raise aspirations amongst young people in care.'

'... it made work at school much easier.' (Boy, 12)

'I liked the attention.' (Girl, 8)

'I never used to read, now I read quite regularly.' Boy, 15)

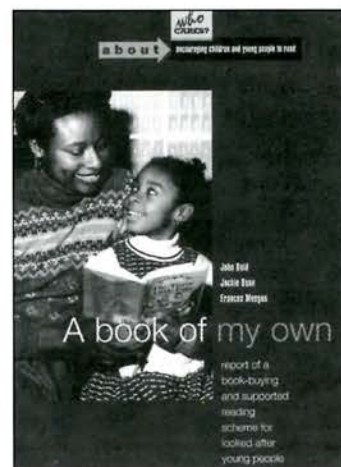
'I do not wish to return to school but I am now considering college.' (Girl, 16)

The report is published by the Who Cares? Trust which was established as an educational charity in 1992 to promote the needs of young people in the care system while also offering information and practical support. In response to the project's findings, the Trust calls on local authorities and voluntary organisations to -

- take active steps to promote literacy and encourage reading;
- provide carers with training and guidance in providing support for reading, whilst also setting aside time for reading;
- establish libraries in residential children's homes, with the involvement of the young people living there;
- ensure that children in their care have the opportunity to choose, on a regular basis, books of their own for leisure and educational purposes.

Admirable advice, of course. Let's hope it gets the attention it deserves.

Please contact Caroline Gilchrist on 0171 251 3117 for more information or to obtain, price £6.00, a copy of the report itself.



THREE MORE GOODBYES...

Oh dear. When we announced in our last issue the farewell of Liz Attenborough from Puffin, we were uneasily aware that we should also, earlier in the year, have mentioned the departure of the redoubtable Ingrid Selberg from Reed Books. Now, as if to pay us out for our omission, comes news that Julia MacRae, no less, is retiring... not to mention, albeit temporarily perhaps, Diana Hickman from Hamish Hamilton. That the children's book world can scarcely afford the loss of such talent goes without... so we won't. Suffice it to remark that should any other crucial figure, operating backstage in children's books, think they can worm their way into these pages by taking such drastic action, forget it. All exits from now on will be resolutely *ignored*. In the meantime, though, all honour and good wishes to Ingrid, Julia and Diana.

...AND TWO HELLOS

A warm welcome to a pair of debuts on the children's books scene: to **Carousel**, a re-vamped version of Anne Wood's **Books For Your Children**, edited by Jenny and David Blanch (for details contact them on 0121 643 6411) which concentrates on a young-parent, Federation-based readership, and also to **BOOX**, focusing on that volatile teenage market (contact Miranda McKearney on 01962 865102). Good to have them alongside in the battle to keep alive the rumour of reading pleasure.

NOEL STREATFIELD

Christmas Eve 1995 marked Noel Streatfield's centenary. This miserable birth date, overshadowed by Christmas, caused her endless annoyance, but she always was a rebel, kicking against such apparent handicaps as a devout Vicarage home, markedly attractive sisters, and handed-down clothes. At 14, she was expelled from school. Yet while she was suffering, she was storing impressions too, in what she called her blotting paper memory.

So when, after 10 years as an actress, she began to write, she easily thought herself back into the skins of both problematic children like herself, and the sparky, successful children she'd longed to be. The books were daydreams come true, and *Ballet Shoes*, her first (1936), caused a sensation. Theatre and ballet were still undiscovered fields in children's literature; children with professional careers, unheard of. Noel built her reputation on lively tales of children striving for the top in dancing, acting, tennis, skating... the children she wished she'd been. Her best characters are cocky, argumentative, and egotistical. They are Noel!

Family relationships formed another theme. Despite her stressful childhood, she filled her books with attractive families, their cosy nannies, their indomitable Cockney maids. Written in an easy, flowing style, Noel's 37 children's stories present life as warm, colourful and dramatic. She campaigned for quality in children's books. She sparkled at Puffin Club parties. She adored celebrity status. Finally, she was awarded an OBE. She died in 1986, but her book live on.

Angela Bull



This portrait of Noel Streatfield is in the National Portrait Gallery and was painted by Lewis Baumer.

1996 DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

10th February – "I Like Books" Children's Reading and Literature in the Primary School

Anthony Brown, Aidan Chambers and Gervase Phinn are the speakers for this one day conference to be held at Liverpool Hope University College. £45 includes lunch and refreshments. Details from Ruth Whitfield on 0151 737 3383.

14th March – Cliff Moon Conference: Making Books With Children

Paul Johnson leads an all-day conference based on the proposition that 'Children Learn to write in order to make books. They do not make books in order to learn to write.' Cost (inc. VAT, all materials and lunch) is £50. Apply to Lucy Clarke on 01926 314366 or write to Books for Students, Bird Road, Heathcote, Warwick CV34 6TB.

23rd March – All-day Conference at Birmingham University: Babies Into Books

Speakers include Wendy Cooling, Barrie Wade, Maggie Moore, Ann Scott and Trevor Dickinson. The cost is £46 including lunch and drinks. Apply to Wyn Mills on 0121 414 4844 or write to Dr Barrie Wade, School of Education, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT with a cheque payable to 'University of Birmingham'.

29th-31st March – SERENDIPITY

The 28th annual conference of the

Federation of Children's Book Groups is to be held at Ashridge Management College, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire. The programme includes a broadcast of Radio 4's *Treasure Islands – Any Questions* and an array of speakers who include Adele Geras, David Lloyd, Colin McNaughton, Tony Bradman, Michael Hardcastle, Jacqueline Wilson, David Bennett and Terry Deary – plus a 'Puffin Panel' featuring Berlie Doherty, Philip Ridley and Bernard Ashley.

The cost of the full residential weekend is £200 for non-members of the Federation and £140 for members. Daily rates are also available. For more details contact Mrs J Ashley, 49 Lea Road, Harpenden AL5 4PQ or Harpenden Children's Book Group on 01582 713150 or 01582 767812.

16th May – Cliff Moon Conference: Books for the Under Fives

Guest speakers Angela Redfern of the University of Reading and Shirley Hughes – to be confirmed. Details as for 14th March, above. ■

March BfK offers

- Liz Fincham on Author Visits
- Ann Fine on... well, Author Visits
- June Counsel on the Need for Book Ownership
- David Bennett on Becoming an Anthologist
- Robert Hull's Round-Up of Books on a Sporting Theme
- Tony Bradman in Authorgraph... plus Reviews, News and more Reviews

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Writing from the Heart

Margaret Clark chooses some of the latest hardbacks

Just before I retired seven years ago, I negotiated a contract with an author of some reputation. The money was negligible by today's standards but, significantly, the only obligation laid on the author (and agreed by her agent) was to write a novel 'from the heart'. Remembering this, I realise what freedom we had when children's books were still the Cinderella of the trade, ignored, looked down on, yet unfettered by the high overheads and superstructures of separate divisions or companies. We complained at sharing (and minimally, at that) the production and marketing of our books with the high-profile adults but this focused the mind wonderfully on the books, which had to speak for themselves. Today editors seem to work under the constant, relentless pressure for more and more 'product' simply to make its financial target quickly. But truly creative writing, like satisfying reading, cannot be done in a hurry. Similarly, in the more comfortable economic climate of a decade ago, it was accepted that a new book would take time to find its readers, because it must be assessed by its adult intermediaries and only later achieve a sales pattern that might guarantee its staying in print for several generations.

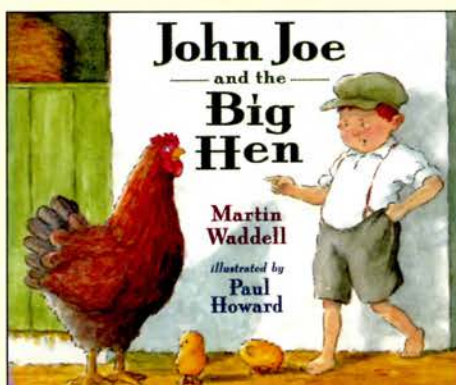
In selecting a few books to recommend from the pile your editor sent me, I realise the criterion I've used may now be considered an elitist luxury. I have read and listened for the distinctive voice that speaks to me with conviction from the heart – whether on a light or serious note.

Paradoxically, my favourite is a wordless book with a voiceless hero. Quentin Blake's *Clown* (Cape, 0 224 04510 5, £8.99) is an astonishing *tour de force*, inspired by the mime of that classic film, *Les Enfants du Paradis*. The story of Clown's quest to rescue his companions abandoned in a dustbin is 'told' with an intensity that engrosses the reader completely. What intrigues and enchants about Quentin Blake's art is how the tiny, two-dimensional rag-doll leaps miraculously off the page. He comes alive, juggling and pirouetting, cajoling, begging and working to get what he wants – a bed for his homeless friends. A book to lose yourself in, and (surely) 'for all ages'.

John Joe and the Big Hen (Walker, 0 7445 2570 5, £8.99) is the simplest of stories by a master of the picture-book text, Martin Waddell. A tale of little boy lost and found, it is realistically illustrated by Paul Howard in the colours of a summer's day: the perfect bedtime book for the very young.



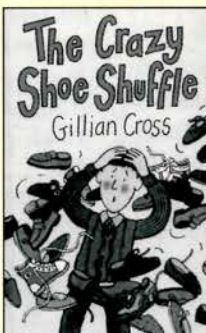
Definitely not for the end of the day is Colin McNaughton's *Here Come the Aliens!* (Walker, 0 7445 3758 4, £9.99), a picture book guaranteed to excite the most reluctant of readers or listeners. The insistent beat of the verse text accompanies ever more frenzied pictures of the monstrous aliens slobbering, dribbling, grunt-



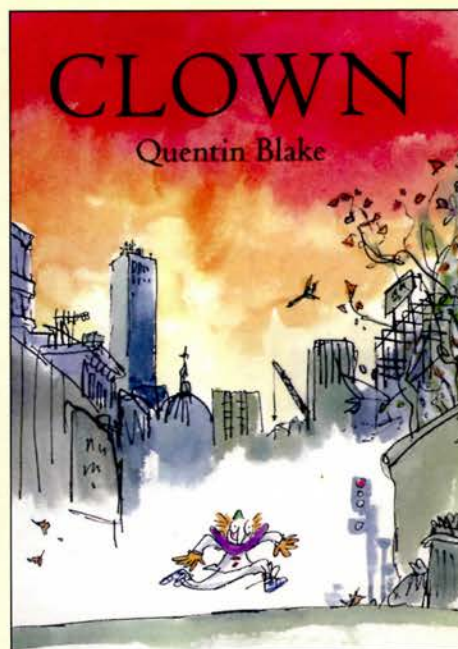
ing and burping, who keep on coming until stopped in their galactic tracks by the faces of a class of four-year-olds. A book that may alienate adults because it will arouse much chanting, jumping and shrieking at the final joke, it also inspires a relish for words.



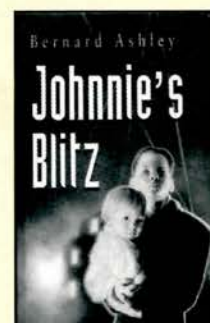
Told with the same vibrating energy is Peter Carey's first children's book, *The Big Bazoohley* (ill. Abira Ali, Faber, 0 571 17483 3, £9.99). Inevitably, it will be compared with Roald Dahl's stories, because the adults in this fantastic adventure are seen through the eyes of the boy narrator as petty crooks who behave both stupidly and wickedly. Yet Sam Kellow loves his parents and knows it's his responsibility to get them out of trouble when they check into a most expensive hotel with only a few dollars to their name. Peter Carey, who of course knows exactly how to keep his readers spellbound, explains that the book grew out of his own son Sam's sleepwalking, but that it's 'scarier, happier and funnier than the real adventure'. It's a social satire, too, and I think well within the understanding of eight to nine-year-old readers, so why muddle them with American spelling? Or doesn't that matter any more?



The Crazy Shoe Shuffle (ill. Nick Sharratt, Methuen, 0 416 19126 6, £9.99) by Gillian Cross is based on a good and very funny idea. 'Know what's wrong with teachers like them?' asks the



dirtiest old woman Lee's ever seen. 'They've forgotten what it's like. Oughter spend a day or two in your shoes, didn't they?' And that's what happens. Clear thinking and concentrated reading are needed to appreciate the subtle jokes of teachers being treated like children, but the story is worth the effort and has a most satisfying end when sour Mr Merton, remembering what it was like to be 11, mends his ways and starts to smile. (Very quietly I must point out that misprints do show up badly when the type-size is large, as here . . .)



For much older readers, Bernard Ashley's *Johnnie's Blitz* (ill. Paul Hunt, Viking, 0 670 86378 5, £10.99) is a novel that needs some introduction or more clues to its nature than can be guessed from its appearance. The blurb does not, and cannot, hint at the depth or strength of the story, although readers familiar with Bernard Ashley's work will not be surprised that he makes no concessions to the age of his readers in this tale of the London blitz. The dropping of the bomb that triggers the plot is described bleakly in authentic detail with no lightening of the horror and grief of its aftermath. I found this hard reading, in that I felt a detached pity, rather than warm sympathy for the characters. But then suddenly, as Johnnie, escapee from an 'approved' school, determines to carry Shirley, a toddler assumed to have died in the bomb blast, back to her parents, the narrative takes off and moves at great speed. The feeling of the teenage boy for the plight of the little girl gives the story such a strong emotional pull that the reader becomes desperately involved in wanting them to make it home before Shirley's parents have given up hope.

When I think of the flood of children's books pouring onto an already saturated market, I wonder how many of these will find their deserved readership, but I hope they do! ■

Margaret Clark retired in 1988 from The Bodley Head where she had been in charge of Children's Books.