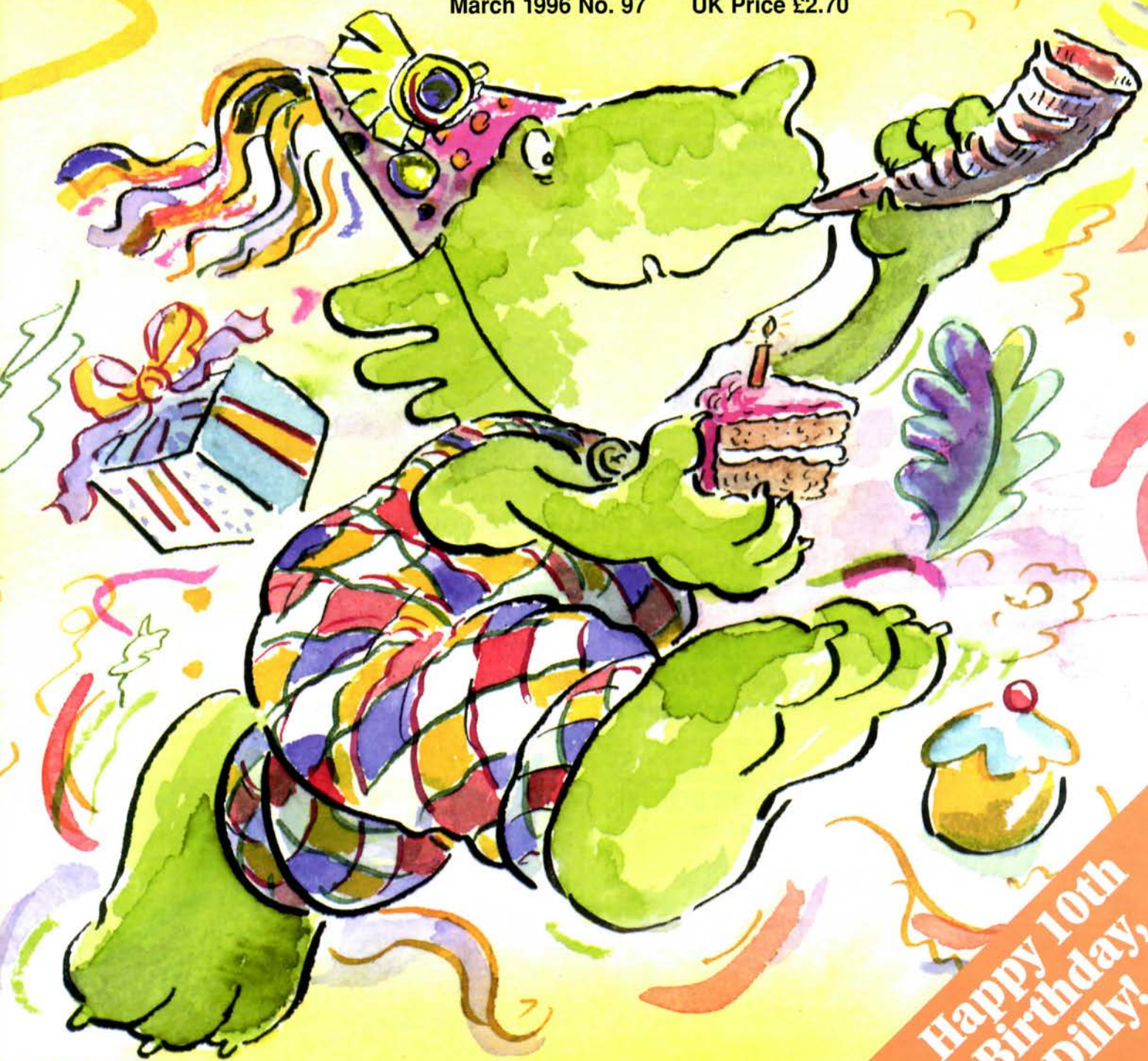


BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's
book magazine

March 1996 No. 97

UK Price £2.70



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Birthday,
Dilly!

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Put on your pads, pick up your bat and take to the crease this spring with the **Glory Gardens** - a fantastic new cricket series which will bowl you over for six!

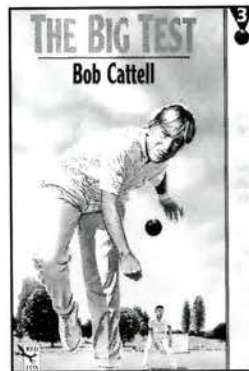
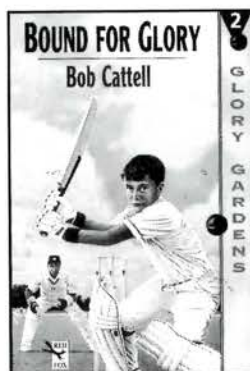
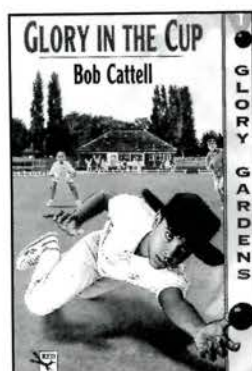
Along with the thrills and spills of the matches there are diagrams to explain shots, score sheets and a wealth of information on cricket terms to help

GLORY GARDENS is a must for all young cricket fans and is the perfect read to generate the seasons World Cup fever!

To miss this one is *just not cricket!*

*'I thoroughly enjoyed **Glory in the Cup** - the antics of the characters are sometimes a little too close to home!!'*

IAN BOTHAM



The **GLORY GARDENS** series by Bob Cattell. Published by Red Fox, price £2.99 each.



**GLORY
GARDENS**

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CoverSTORY

The March cover of BfK features Dilly the Dinosaur who is 10 years old this year. Her author, Tony Bradman, is the subject of our Authorgraph this month (see centre-spread). We are grateful to Reed Books for their help in reproducing this illustration from Susan Hellard's original artwork.

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

the children's book magazine

MARCH 1996 No. 97

ISSN 0143-909X © School Bookshop Assoc. 1996
Editor: Chris Powling
Managing Director: Richard Hill
Design and typeset: Rondale Ltd., Lydney, Glos.
Printed by: The Friary Press, Dorchester.

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

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

0181-852 4953

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

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



Editor's PAGE



CHRIS POWLING

Following the Fattest Puffin

Kaye Webb

26th January 1914 – 16th January 1996

An obituary in the *Guardian*, the *Telegraph*, *The Times*, the *Independent* – and even the *Daily Mail*? This is a rare accolade for someone whose work lay mainly in children's books. Add to this heartfelt tributes from within the trade by the likes of Michael Bond, Raymond Briggs and Alan Garner and the recipient begins to take on heroic, even legendary, proportions. Kaye Webb, who died just a few days short of her eighty-second birthday, richly deserved such attention and such status. She was, quite simply, larger than life . . . much, much more than 'the fattest Puffin', which is how she described herself.

By now the facts of her career are pretty well-known: the early years in journalism, following in her parents' footsteps; the three failed marriages – including the last, to Ronald Searle, from which she never fully

recovered; her dazzling success after she'd succeeded Eleanor Graham as editor of Britain's first children's paperback list; her crucial contributions to the Children's Book Circle and the Federation of Children's Book Groups. She won the Eleanor Farjeon Award in 1969, was made an MBE in 1974 and became one of the first women directors in British publishing. Between her first Puffin – *The Hobbit* in 1961 – and her last – *I Like This Poem* in 1979 – she presided over a quadrupling in Puffin sales, set up the redoubtable Puffin Club and enhanced the list's reputation with books like *A Dog So Small*, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Watership Down*. 'My business life has worked out beautifully, with perfect timing,' she once commented. Typically, however, she went on to remark, 'my private life has been the reverse'.

Kaye Webb, then . . . publisher extraordinary. That her success was brought about despite life-long pain from arthritis is not the least of her achievements. No wonder the *Daily Telegraph*, after a characteristic sideswipe at contemporary reading-habits, declared in a leading article, 'We need a new

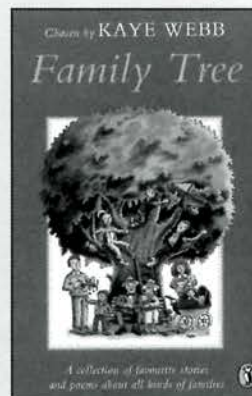
Kaye Webb, 50 years younger'.

Well, yes. The dynamism, the dedication, the ceaseless demand for excellence in all its forms is as desirable today as it always was . . . but it's hard to believe that Kaye herself would be entirely comfortable with the 'spin' the *Daily Telegraph* puts on the compliments it pays her. For a start, her business acumen notwithstanding, she was motivated by a love of books rather than sales-figures. 'In an ideal world,' she declared, 'no one would try to make money out of children's books. We are making literature human beings.' She had an unstuffy sense of fun, too – as many a Puffin Club member, or Puffin author, will testify. Also, she knew how fortunate she was to have been in just the right place at just the right time . . . a time of confidence, of expansion, of resources for reading which, if not limitless (when are they ever that?), were nonetheless available.

It's very different nowadays. A 32-year-old Kaye Webb would find herself in circumstances of diminishing public provision; of ever-increasing competition from a whole range of alternative attention-catchers; of a National Curriculum that's actually reduced the time assigned to Literacy; and of a market system, post NBA, of somewhat dubious efficacy. Altogether, contemporary Kayes-in-waiting will need to be the fittest and fleetest as well as fattest . . . so only giants need apply.

Enjoy the issue!

Chris



A tribute to Kaye Webb presented by Chris Powling will be broadcast on 'Treasure Islands', BBC Radio 4, Wednesday 27th March at 2.45 pm.

The following review was received at the BfK office the week before Kaye Webb died:

Family Tree

Edited by Kaye Webb, Puffin,
0 14 034833 6,
£4.99

An important anthology from someone who placed books at the centre of her life. Highly entertaining, this careful compilation also provides a unique glimpse at family portrayed in quality children's fiction by renowned authors – E Nesbit, Noel Streatfeild, Eve Garnett, Mrs Molesworth, Louisa May Alcott, Russell Hoban, Charlotte Brontë . . . et al. (Actually, had original publication dates of the stories been included it would have proved even more relevant and interesting.)

This will whet the appetite to read particular titles and authors in many nine-year-olds – though the print is a bit small. There's comfort, too, for older readers when childhood perfection has dimmed and the faults and quirks of one's own and associated families must be faced. Any sensitive adolescent, literature student, librarian or social historian will find this work invaluable. So will all childhood-celebrating adults who revel in re-reading snippets from long established favourites.

Thank you, Kaye Webb. ■

Gill Roberts

POETRY FOR CHILDREN -

Philippa Milnes-Smith

When BfK's Editor asked me to write an article about children's poetry in 1800 words I knew it would be impossible. With 18,000 words one might make a start but 1800? After several chewed pencils I decided instead to look at 10 questions about children's poetry worth considering. But first a job application:

Dear Sir or Madam
I wish to apply
For the post as Poetry Editor

At Viking Puffin.
I have been writing
Verse for many years
So far without suc-

cess. The position
Therefore would give me
A wonderful opportunity to

See myself in print.
I look forward to
An early reply.
Yours faithfully etc.

Sylvia Tendlall

Roger McGough from **Lucky**

The job at Penguin is filled. But there are few children's publishers today who don't publish poetry in some form.

QUESTION 1 - So where would children's books today be *without* poetry?

ANSWER: Much the poorer, of course! It's impossible, now, to imagine a world of children's books without poetry but the real rise in popularity (and the commercial boom) of children's poetry began only around the early 1980s. That's not to say good children's poetry hadn't existed before. Poets such as Charles Causley and Ted Hughes had been around for much longer; and Eleanor Graham's **A Puffin Quartet of Poets**, for example, had been in print since 1958. (And if you remember this was a Puffin original from the *first* Puffin editor. Original paperback poetry has a longer history than many might think.) Surprisingly, however, the numbers of poetry books published are still small, probably accounting for less than 5% of children's books published. Considering this, the impact has been, and remains, quite astonishing.

QUESTION 2 - Where would the success of children's poetry be without live performances by the poets themselves?

ANSWER: It's hard to avoid the correlation between children's poets who are successful as live performers and children's poets who are successful with their published work. Poets can bring their poetry alive in a way no-one else can and sell their work in a way nothing else can. Once you've heard Benjamin Zephaniah, for instance, the most unfamiliar words, inflections,

or rhythms make sense on the page. The poetry becomes irresistible to even the most reluctant non-rapper.

TALKING TURKEYS!!



Be nice to yu turkeys dis christmas
Cos turkeys jus wanna hav fun
Turkeys are cool, turkeys are wicked
An every turkey has a Mum.
Be nice to yu turkeys dis christmas,
Don't eat it, keep it alive,
It could be yu mate an not on yu plate
Say, Yo! Turkey I'm on your side.

Benjamin Zephaniah from **Talking Turkeys**

QUESTION 3 - Is the word 'Poetry' a turn-off for most people? Is 'Verse' better or would people rather have books that almost pretend not to be poetry at all?

ANSWER: Looking at it from a publisher's perspective you certainly can't rely on the word 'poetry' or the word 'verse' to sell a book. **Please Mrs Butler** by Allan Ahlberg, one of the most successful of Puffin's poetry books ever, has been a success (I think) not because it is a book of poetry but because it captures so perfectly the primary school world. Could so complete, so diverse and so rich a picture have been created in the same way by a novel? The staff and children of Mrs Butler's school spring to life on every page. Their voices speak directly to us:

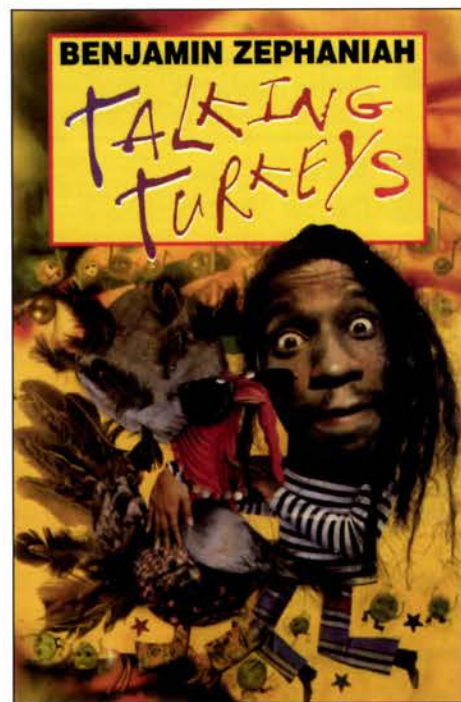
Slow Reader

I - am - in - the - slow
read - ers - group - my - broth
er - is - in - the - foot
ball - team - my - sis - ter
is - a - ser - ver - my
lit - tle - broth - er - was
a - wise - man - in - the
in - fants - christ - mas - play
I - am - in - the - slow
read - ers - group - that - is
all - I - am - in - I
hate - it.

*I...am...in...the
slow...readers*



Allan Ahlberg from **Please Mrs Butler**



QUESTION 4 - Should publishers be trying to find more of a balance between classic and contemporary poetry? And is there just *too much* light and humorous verse?

ANSWER: I think it's true (although some might well argue against this) that it's been the humorous, child-centred verse that has led a revival in children's poetry, but a greater awareness of what classic poetry can also offer children has followed. Certainly, the best of today's children's poets tend to bring together in their collections both serious and comic verse - and comic verse, in any case, often has a serious edge to it. The best anthologies, too, often draw from classic and contemporary verse. A good anthologist won't shirk from counterpointing Shakespeare with Shel Silverstein.

QUESTION 5 - Why do we get so many complaints about poetry books?

ANSWER: There is the feeling amongst some adults that poetry is a 'pure' art form that should be on a higher plane beyond the realities of life. Because people are rarely explicit about their reasoning - only their outrage - one can merely guess at the precise nature of their ideas about poetry and their expectations. I quote from a letter sent by an anonymous timber merchant (supplier of chipboard, ladders, wall boards, doors, plywood, steps etc) who wrote to Puffin about **You Tell Me** by Roger McGough and Michael Rosen:

'You cannot understand my complete disgust as I read through some of these so called poems. One called *The Lesson*, which is in very bad taste, and full of violence, the second, which is called *Nooligan*, is also full of violence, *Snipers*, is also very violent and in very bad taste, also political...'

Clearly, a poem that isn't a *nice* poem cannot be called a poem at all.

TEN QUESTIONS AND SOME ANSWERS

QUESTION 6 – Why do the poetry books people complain about the most usually sell the best?

ANSWER: That's probably because they're interesting, exciting, complex, engage thought and emotion and, as a result, children respond to them. In comic verse, too, children find a world of anarchy and irreverence they can't resist. One of my favourite press clippings on file is still: **MUM CALLS FOR BAN ON REVOLTING NOSE POEM.** The mother in question never understood how or why Brian Patten's **Gargling with Jelly**, with its famous poem 'Pick-a-Nose Pick', was a bestseller or indeed why it was ever published. It's certainly not to every adult's taste but realistically it's unlikely to cause nationwide rioting. And who, under the age of 10, hasn't picked their nose at some time after all...

Pick-a-Nose Pick

Pick-a-nose pick-a-nose pick-a-nose Pick
Picked his nose and made me sick.
Pick-a-nose pick-a-nose pick-a-nose Pick
Picks his nose very quick.
Pick-a-nose pick-a-nose pick-a-nose Pick
Gets rid of it with one fast flick.
Flick flick flick flick flick
Pick-a-nose pick-a-nose makes me sick.

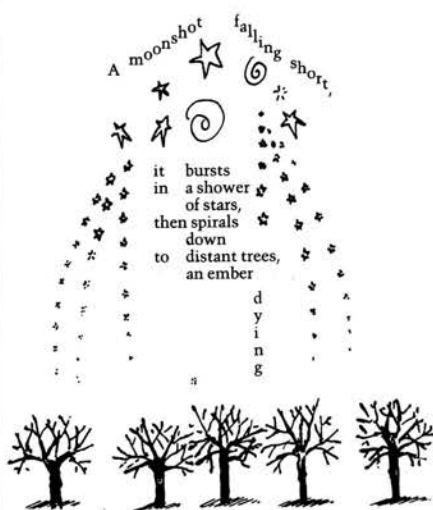


Brian Patten from **Gargling with Jelly**

QUESTION 7 – What could children's experience, knowledge and development of language be like if more of them shared the enjoyment and excitement of poetry?

ANSWER: Children learn, understand, and respond to the power of rhyme and rhythm from a very early age and to the power of words themselves. It's in nursery rhymes, it's in playground chants; it belongs to a world of soothing lullabies as well as to the bullies' taunts on the street; it's associated with pop songs as well as literature. And so the good foundations are laid from an early age only to be followed by the collective failure of the adult world to build further. The failure rests squarely on our shoulders. With a little more imagination, a little more experimentation, children could experience a very different world of oral and written language. Try, for instance, just having fun with some shape poems:

GIANT ROCKET



Wes Magee from **Madtail, Miniwhale**

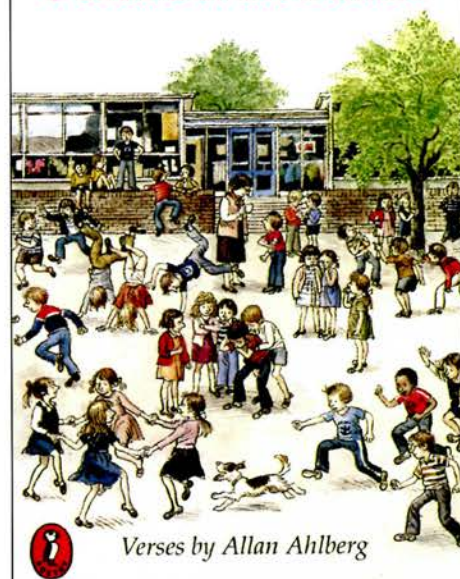
QUESTION 8 – Why is it so rarely recognised that poetry anthologies are better value than almost any story collection?

ANSWER: There cannot be anything more wonderful than a well-researched, well-constructed and well-presented poetry anthology. Every Christmas there are beautifully illustrated gift collections to be found in the shops but poetry anthologies don't have to be lavishly produced to be satisfying. A good anthology will be read, re-read, returned to and loved for years and it's worth remembering that one good anthology is worth 10 bad ones. Make sure you research what is available well. The only poetry book I had as a child was the **Oxford Book of Verse** which began, I think, with 'Sumer Is I-cumen In' and then ended with 'The Darkling Thrush'. It was the only poetry book we had on the family bookshelf but it kept me going from when I was 11 until I left for university. There aren't many collections of stories that provide such a complete library in one book.

QUESTION 9 – Why does poetry *never* get shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal when it is supposedly eligible?

ANSWER: That's really the question to ask all the librarians who choose the books to put forward for the award. When I've asked the question before, I've been given a number of different answers. The first is that librarians might feel far less confident about judging poetry than they do fiction. The second is that the Carnegie has become a fiction award whether or not, strictly speaking, it was first created as such. The third is that poetry is most used in schools – and used far less in the context of public libraries. These are all interesting points. But the net result is that every year, when this important and now high profile award comes round, children's poetry is disregarded and its significance is seemingly ignored by some of the most knowledgeable inhabitants of the world of children's books.

Please Mrs Butler



Verses by Allan Ahlberg

QUESTION 10 – How would I advise anyone to update their poetry bookshelves in time for the next millennium?

ANSWER: If you feel you're out of touch or your family bookshelf or library bookshelf or school bookshelf needs updating, your best bet is to buy the forthcoming **Books for Keeps Guide to Children's Poetry: 0-13**. You won't find a better starting place. ■

Quotes are from the following Puffin books:

Lucky, ill. Sally Kindberg, 0 14 036172 3, £3.99

Talking Turkeys, 0 14 036330 0, £3.99

Please Mrs Butler, ill. Fritz Wegner, 0 14 031494 6, £3.99

Gargling with Jelly, ill. David Mostyn, 0 14 031904 2, £2.99

Madtail, Miniwhale and Other Shape Poems, ill. Caroline Crossland, 0 14 034031 9, £3.99

Philippa Milnes-Smith is Publisher, Penguin Children's Books. Penguin produce its own poetry list, edited by Anne Harvey, which is available free of charge through your normal book supplier or via the Puffin Schools line on 0500 807981.

The **BfK Poetry Guide** will be published in May this year. An order form comes with this issue of the magazine, or you can telephone **BfK's** London office (0181 852 4953) for more details.

REVIEWS

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

Nursery/Infant REVIEWS

Billy Bumps Builds a Palace

Korky Paul, Oxford,
0 19 272245 X, £3.99



This aptly named elephant has a tendency to bump and once he's bumped he's keen to rebuild to his own imaginative design. However, his laudable achievements are momentary and the bricks form a rumbling heap once more. It's all rather sad, but Billy Bumps's consistent optimism suggests he'll cope. Young children find this really funny, and enjoy the cropped pages and humorous illustrations. They also love Zoe Paul's (7¾ yrs) colourful elephants which march along the endpapers. Full of carefree chaos and destruction. **GR**

Ollie the Elephant

Burny Bos, ill. Hans de Beer, North-South,
1 55858 485 4, £4.99

The illustrations for this story are particularly charming and, if you know this artist's work in *The Little Polar Bear* stories, you'll know the range of expression he can employ on the faces of his animal characters. Ollie is a little elephant who longs for a baby brother and sets off to find one, encountering a wide range of other creatures along the way. They want to help him in various ways, especially once he gets lost, but their solutions are unsatisfactory until he reaches home and discovers there's a little brother (or sister) on the way, after all.

I found this story manages to stay just the right side of twee, but it's a close run thing. Decide for yourself before trying it on the children. **LW**

When I Grow Bigger

Trish Cooke, ill. John Bendall-Brunello, Walker,
0 7445 4327 4, £4.50

Baby Thomas, too young to talk, watches as three older children play in the garden. They want to grow bigger, but to Thomas, they ARE big;

they look down on him, in fact. At first he's an onlooker of their quarrelsome play which is only suspended when Thomas's dad intervenes. Then he's a victim of their efforts to make him grow. But Thomas is the one having fun when Dad lifts him onto his shoulders where he towers above his playmates.



The dialogue, actions and thoughts of infant, children and adults alike are so true to life and the artwork so utterly appealing, four- to six-year-old readers or listeners cannot fail to recognise themselves. **JB**

Beware Beware

Susan Hill, ill. Angela Barrett, Walker,
0 7445 3662 6, £4.50

A young child leaves the cosy warmth of her mother's kitchen and braves the shadows of a twilight wood. Then the shadows come to life and she flees back to the arms of her mother. That's all, but in a minimal, rhythmic, incantatory text and a few quietly crowded pages that pullulate with eerie imagery, the book tells a magnificent tale of courage, naughtiness, dread and redemption.



This is a wonderful picture book for all ages, and one that younger children might particularly enjoy sharing with each other. **GH**

Bears, Bears and More Bears

Jackie Morris, Piccadilly,
1 85340 315 6, £3.99

This is an almost perfect reference book for Nursery and Reception classes. All that's lacking are page numbers and a word index on the last, double-spread, glossary page in order to make it an excellent tool for teaching early reference skills. (Editors, please note for reprints.) These shortcomings don't detract from the book's many good qualities, though. The subject matter, the superb illustrations and the carefully chosen text make it a title which should be available in every Nursery book corner. **JS**

Teddy and Rabbit's Muddy Bicycle

0 00 664582 8



Teddy and Rabbit's Picnic Outing

0 00 664583 6

Mark Burgess, Collins
'Toddler', £3.99 each

These two are part of a set I reviewed a short while ago and, just as last time, I have had to wrest them from my toddler neighbour with considerable subterfuge in order to write these reviews. It's good to see that the standard hasn't dropped in any way. The books are in the same format as before – really sturdy, hard-wearing and not easily torn. They have appealing storylines that are easy to read aloud and can stand the necessary umpteen repetitions without too much adult cringing! The illustrations are readily accessible to a young child... in fact if you know any toddlers and want to raise your status, just buy them one of these. **JS**

Belinda's Balloon

Emilie Boon, Mammoth,
0 7497 2503 6, £3.99

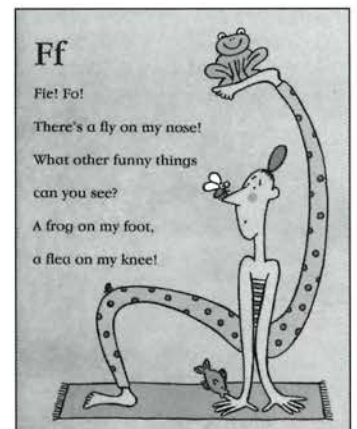
This book touches a universal chord of anxiety, for when Lucy begs her mother to be given the responsibility of looking after her younger sister, she then loses her as a magic balloon carries her soaring to the tree tops. Emilie Boon uses polar bears as the main characters and the fantastic as a means of losing and retrieving the younger sister, which works to



distance the situation from reality. Looking at the rapt faces of the listening reception children, I could see this was nail-biting stuff. Here's a book that's perhaps deceptive to the adult at first glance – don't dismiss it for it clearly meets a need. **JS**

One by One

0 7445 4331 2



Crazy ABC

0 7445 4328 2

Judy Hindley, ill. Nick Sharratt, Walker, £3.99 each

Judy Hindley and Nick Sharratt have created books which are sheer good fun. In *One by One* we have an accumulating counting book in which the rollicking rhythm of the text is reflected in Nick Sharratt's clever illustrations. In *Crazy ABC* the zappy text needs preparation to make it a good 'read-aloud', but the quirky illustrations lead anyone – child or adult – to pause and check, for Sharratt leaves puzzles strewn about enticingly for the reader. **JS**

Jamaica and Brianna

Juanita Havill, ill. Anne Sibley O'Brien, Mammoth, 0 7497 2504 4, £3.99

Jamaica hates having to wear her brother's 'passed down' grey boots.

"They're boy boots," she says, and what makes matters worse is that her friend Brianna tells her so, too. Jamaica is determined to get new boots somehow, but even when she proudly wears her new cowboy boots Brianna makes disparaging comments and the two girls are at

odds with each other. Then, at school on Monday, thanks to a remark from their teacher and an understanding approach from Jamaica, all becomes well between the friends again.

The author clearly has an under-

standing of the ups and downs of young children's relationships and her manner of telling – largely through dialogue – rings absolutely true. Anne Sibley O'Brien's warm illustrations are equally realistic and sensitive. All in all, a lovely book, rich in potential for discussion. **JB**

Infant/Junior REVIEWS

Sheep Out to Eat

Nancy Shaw, ill. Margot Apple, Hazar, 1 874371 29 6, £3.99

Everyone knows that, while it's perfectly all right for cats to eat in tea shops, sheep certainly shouldn't. This rather bizarre rhyme tells of five sheep who simply can't cope with the social demands of eating out at the Tiddley Wink Teashop and who end up perfectly happy once they return to their proper place – eating on the lawn outside. The pictures are jolly and the text, one line to a page, is full of alliteration and interesting words.

However, you'll have guessed that I'm not at all sure about the message – which seems to be that sheep should know their place and not try to get above themselves. Or perhaps it's more positive than that, and simply wants us to realise that grass eaters are as good as tea drinkers any day. An interesting debate for observers of animal social issues.

LW

A Walker Treasury of Animal Stories

Various authors and illustrators, Walker, 0 7445 4339 8, £3.99



This is a nicely produced, chunky collection of stories with a range of excellent authors, all linked by the theme of animals and all interesting and entertaining. Some, like 'Fox, Alligator and Rabbit' are traditional tales retold, others are contemporary, like Dick King-Smith's 'Puddle'. All would be nice to have read to you if you're not a fluent reader, or would be satisfying to read to yourself later on. Many are especially worth thinking and talking about as they illuminate aspects of our relationships with animals from a refreshingly unsentimental perspective. **LW**

I'm Scared

Bel Mooney, ill. Margaret Chamberlain, Mammoth, 0 7497 2330 0, £2.99

More stories about Bel Mooney's interesting child, Kitty. This time all seven have the theme of fear, in its widest sense – fear of the dark, of new things, of making a fool of yourself – and how each of us can find ways of dealing with it. This book is well written, thoughtful and lively. Young children would enjoy having it read to them and discussing the issues, whilst older children, reading for themselves, might well find their own less public worries mirrored in Kitty's. An excellent and intelligent collection. **LW**

Daisy-Head Mayzie

Dr Seuss, Collins, 0 00 172004 X, £3.50



Dr Seuss is either liked or loathed. I have colleagues who won't have his books in the room because they can't bear the burden of either reading him or hearing him read, whilst others (including me) find his silliness and reeling rhyme irresistible. Personally, I thoroughly enjoyed this unusual tale of Mayzie who suddenly sprouted a daisy out of her head, found it brought her fame and fortune, but missed her friends, finally finding them again after the daisy had performed the ultimate sacrifice. Well, yes, it is silly and long and all in doggerel. If you like Dr Seuss, you'll love it. Otherwise, leave it to the children, who'll probably adore it. **LW**

Stories by Firelight

Shirley Hughes, Red Fox, 0 09 918611 X, £5.99

Every child should have the opportunity to hear or read this miraculous collection of stories and poems with artwork for the season of winter. The quality of Shirley Hughes' writing can cope with short atmospheric poems about the weather and Christmas, a retelling of a folk tale about the Selkie wife, longer poems with a spooky feel and a moving story about a boy and his grandfather. There's also a spectacular

wordless story about a small child's dream on a winter night. The richness and thoughtfulness of all this variety is never beyond the reach of a four-year-old, nor beneath the notice of an adult. This book is a remarkable achievement. **LW**

Little Ted Lost

Mary Howard, 0 86201 966 4

Oliver and the Big Green Snake

Jan Godfrey, 0 86201 971 0

Scripture Union, £3.25 each

These books contain a selection of stories about two small children, both boys unfortunately, and their everyday adventures. The difference between these and many other books with a similar theme is that they're written with the overt purpose of teaching Christian religious ideas hence Jesus, God and praying feature very strongly. You may like this, either because you share the philosophy, or just because you welcome any resources to help with infant RE, in which case Oliver and Simon and their families will be just what you need. Alternatively, you may consider them to be potentially good stories spoilt by the intrusion of an almost Victorian emphasis on the Christian message. Either way, I find it interesting that, if you don't spot the publisher's name, you'd never know from the cover what the hidden agenda is. **LW**

Hamish and the Fairy Gifts

Moir Miller, Canongate 'Kelpie', 0 86241 565 9, £3.50

Ghosts, Boggles and Wee Folk are woven into six stories which are set in rural Scotland and feature Mirren, Hamish and their baby son, Torquil. Take a touch of trickery – of the supernatural kind – a dose of domestic detail and an armful of atmosphere, stir it together and the result is a collection of magical stories for sharing with sixes and overs. **JB**

Ahoy There, Little Polar Bear

Hans de Beer, North-South, 1 55858 389 0, £4.99

One minute Lars, the little polar bear, is happily floating in the sea enjoying snowy landscapes, the next he's trapped in a gigantic net crammed full of fish and emptied onto a ship's deck, bound for a distant port. On board he meets Nemo, the ship's friendly cat, who, once the vessel docks, introduces him to another ship's cat. The boat's destination is the North Pole.

The story itself is rather mundane but Hans de Beer's enchanting illustrations lift it above the ordinary; the

expressions of Lars and his feline friends are beguiling. **JB**

The Megamogs

Peter Haswell, Red Fox, 0 09 926661 X, £4.50

Miss Marbletop's mogs are no ordinary bunch; they're a magnificent, mindless, moronic mob – Megamogs, no less. So, when Miss Marbletop takes a few days' holiday, the meddlesome moggies, under the direction of Kevin Catflap, set about a massive transformation of their mistress's house; but they don't stop there...

Crazy cat capers (cartoon style) most likely to appeal to somewhat anarchic over-sevens. **JB**

Chinye

Obi Onyefulu, ill. Evie Safarewicz, Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 1052 7, £4.99

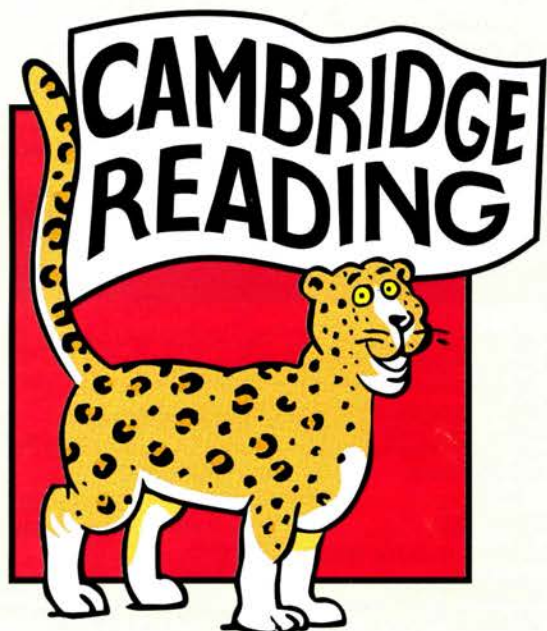
A West African folktale about greed and much more, with beautifully expressive illustrations. The sequence of events is related simply and effectively so that difficulty with some pronunciations is completely unimportant and appreciation of Chinye's innocence, goodness and selflessness, and the danger of her journey, is heightened. Examples of good and evil can be clearly classified – and resolved in a whirlwind of flashing light and clapping thunder. A magical and moral masterpiece. Year 2 children soaked this up with obvious understanding and delight. **GR**

Wet World

Norma Simon, ill. Alexi Natcher, Walker, 0 7445 4337 1, £4.50

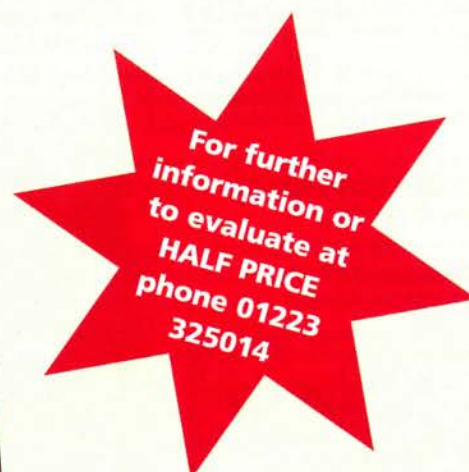
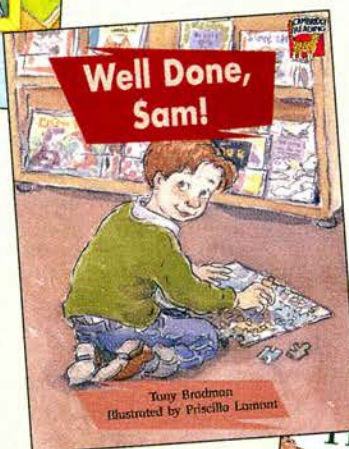
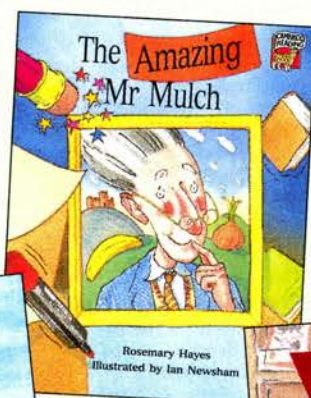
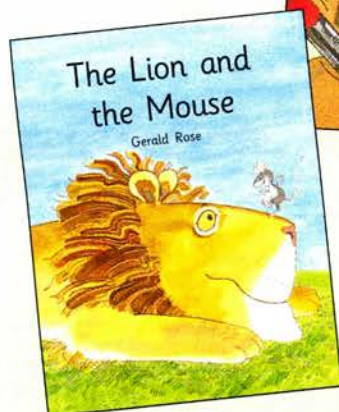


A simple book with a wealth of wonderful word use – nouns which wet; adjectives and verbs which are 'w'; clever use of 'sp' words; 'oppo-



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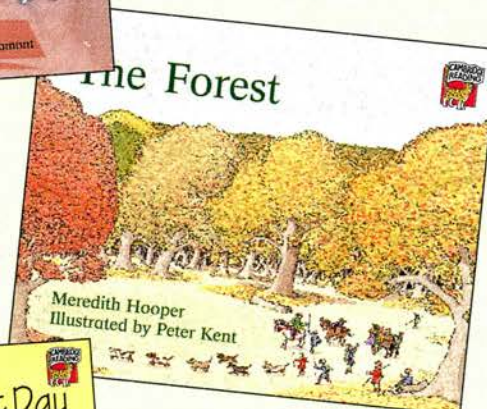
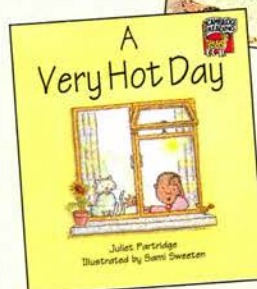


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site' adjectives; 'opposite' prepositions; past, present and future tenses; lots of repetition, alliteration and assonance and masses of observation – all the specifics young children may miss consciously but which 'make' the imaginative magic and wonder of the book.

Because of its quality and cleverness this could be used by teachers with many age levels so long as overuse or misuse doesn't bludgeon its fun and spontaneity. Get out there and run with the rain! **GR**

Lili at Ballet

Rachel Isadora, Mammoth,
0 7497 2501 X, £3.99



Thanks to Rachel Isadora's knowledge and experience of ballet and her enthusiasm for it, this information story both inspires and warns. It details special clothing, warm-up routines and first exercises, outlines further progression and puts into context snippets of information already acquired. It leaves us willing Lili to achieve her ambitions, grateful they've been shared with us and wondering if we, too, have what it takes...

A warmly-welcomed book with precise and lovely illustrations. After reading this, most of Year 2 practised their own style 'combinations' on the way out to play! **GR**

The Late Arrivals

0 00 664579 8

Rainy Weather

0 00 664578 X

Mark Burgess, Collins,
£4.50 each

These follow *Beside the Sea* and *Many Happy Returns* (both published in June '95) and Hannah Hedgehog is still coming to grips with the *Hotel Business*. She struggles to maintain high standards,



generally doing everything possible to make guests happy. It's a challenging and testing time. The weather affects business and property maintenance, there are problems of late arrivals, unexpected and large bookings, even temperamental and argumentative guests. All highly entertaining and charmingly illustrated. **GR**

Blackboard Bear

Martha Alexander, Walker,
0 7445 4324 X, £3.99

Anthony is never allowed to join in the games of his older brother's friends because he's too little – but then he finds an amazing new friend when a huge bear, which he's drawn on his blackboard, suddenly comes to life. The friendship is subtly depicted by Martha Alexander who builds a variety of needs and coping strategies into a very private, cleverly understated, little book. The comic-strip format is deliberately too small to share with more than two or three children at a time and this enhances the feeling she's trying to create. It's a book which explores not only Anthony's relationships but those of the reader, too. **JS**

The Ginger Ninja

0 340 61955 4



The Return of Tiddles

0 340 61956 2

Shoo Rayner, Hodder,
£2.99 each

These books are, as one of my young

reviewers put it, 'just right!'. They're ideal for children on the brink of coping with 'chapter books'. The amusing pictures support the reader and extend the well-paced text. Ginger is a happy kitten, his whiskers stand straight out, his nose glistens and his eyes shine but when Tiddles, the school bully, and his toadies, the Wilson twins, take over the playground, Ginger becomes a victim. His grandfather feels it's time to tell him the 'secret of gingeriness' that's been passed on from generation to generation in his family. This is exciting stuff which will carry along any child who might be faltering a little at this stage. **JS**

A Walker Treasury

Stories for Five-Year-Olds

0 7445 4342 8

Stories for Six-Year-Olds

0 7445 4343 6

Walker, £3.99 each

I have to admit to an irrational dislike of *treasuries*, originating from ghastly ones of my childhood. Having resisted opening these two for quite a while, I'm now bowled over – 'treasury' is a perfect description. The stories are well-chosen and well-placed in the book, they balance and complement each other in terms of subject matter, pace and style, and appeal to children in different ways at different times. As collections they are excellent, but... Walker Books, it would be nice to know who was the editor so we can look out for s/he again! **JS**

The Sea Horse

Anthony Masters, ill. James Mayhew, Macdonald

Young Books,
0 7500 1704 X, £3.50



Young Jamie nearly drowns in an early morning swim on his Cornish holiday. As he sinks for what surely will be the last time, he finds himself riding on the back of the Sea Horse who rushes in to the shore with a

host of other white horses forming the crest of a wave. The following night, when the Sea Horse crashes out of the sea during an enormous storm and fetches up in the stable of a particularly unpleasant local farmer, Jamie knows he must rescue him. A charming story with a mixture of colour and black-and-white illustrations. **SR**

The Salt and Pepper Boys

Jean Wills, Red Fox,
0 09 942761 3, £2.99

Cosy tale set in a 1920s' seaside boarding house. Michael's mum is Lorna Valetta, the singer, and their lives are spent on the road but when they check into The Seaview Guest House for the summer season, they find that it's kept by one of mum's friends from years ago and, would you believe, she has a son of Michael's age. The two boys spend the long hot summer having fun and getting into minor scrapes. In case you were wondering about the title, one of their jobs is to lay the tables every day. **SR**

The First Story Book Collection

0 7500 1784 8

The Second Story Book Collection

0 7500 1785 6

The Third Story Book Collection

0 7500 1786 4

The Fourth Story Book Collection

0 7500 1822 4

Macdonald Young Books,
£6.99 each

Four-books-in-one in each of these re-packaged collections of earlier Story Books. Included are stories by, amongst others, Dick King-Smith, Nick Warburton, Penelope Lively, Helen Muir and Leon Garfield. I'm not really sure what I think about the merits of this particular exercise. Publishing a collection means readers might try authors and genres they've ignored before and you are effectively getting the stories for half price as the individual books cost £3.50 each. Set against this is the fact that £7 still seems to me a lot to pay for a paperback.

Incidentally, isn't it about time that publishers, along with many other manufacturers, started pricing in round pounds? Do they seriously believe anyone thinks £6.99 is significantly cheaper than £7? **SR**

Junior/Middle REVIEWS

Everything Happens on Mondays

ORIGINAL

Nichola Davies, Pont,
1 85902 298 7, £3.25

The seven short stories of this slim volume each comprise a stand-alone tale about the pupils in a Welsh

middle school. Making a monkey out of the supply teacher, the fakery of open day, half-crazed Headteachers and truly individual classmates all come under Nia's perceptive scrutiny to add up to an accessible collection that's ideal for fledgeling, independent readers. **DB**

McMummy

Betsy Byars, Red Fox,
0 09 942561 0, £2.99

I've never trusted plants, especially those that grow taller than me. This book suggests my mistrust is soundly based. A weird shaped seed pod which seems to have a beating heart (but then who wouldn't when

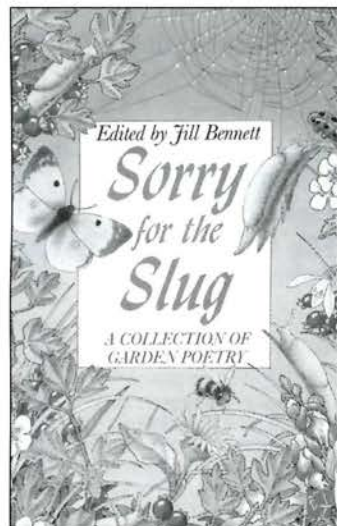
cuddled by the local beauty queen?) keeps on growing, especially when the beauty's lost necklace turns up. Apart from a rather wobbly ending this makes growing runner beans in the classroom seem a hazardous pursuit. **PH**

Voyage to Valhalla

Robert Swindells, ill. Victor Ambrus, Hodder, 0 340 59054 8, £3.50



A bitter curse on a viking burial howe exerts its potent and fatal influence on three youngsters, intrigued by the goings-on in the garden of an eerie, sinister house. Davy particularly appears open to long-laid powers that draw him apart from his friends into a good vs evil struggle. There's a briskness in the description and a tightness in the plotting which requires a sharp inner eye to grasp the whole. **DB**

**Sorry for the Slug**

Jill Bennett, ill. Alan Baker, Mammoth, 0 7497 2334 3, £2.99

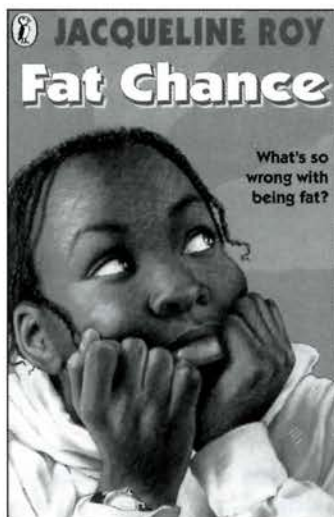
Thirty-two poets (many unfamiliar names) are represented in this collection of garden poems. Most pieces are short and approachable and seem to focus principally on creatures of the garden. The very evocative drawings by Alan Baker lift the whole book and make it excellent for browsing. **DB**

Fat Chance

Jacqueline Roy, Puffin, 0 14 03605 9, £4.99

Twelve-year-old Tessa is fat, isolated and teased at school because of her weight. Jasper is skinny and far too perceptively adult to be accepted by his peers. This is the basis of their relationship until Tessa decides that losing weight will solve all her problems, including her parents' impending divorce.

This book offers an accurate insight into a child's world and the school



scenes are particularly realistic. The dangers of dieting to excess are also honestly and graphically described. Tessa finds that being thin makes her one of the crowd she's despised for so long and the book ends on a note of cautious optimism, celebrating self - with all its flaws. **VR**

Muck and Magic Stories from the Countryside

Edited by Michael Morpurgo, Mammoth, 0 7497 1902 8, £3.99



A donation from each sale of this book will go to support the Farms for City Children project which enables children who may never have any first-hand experience of the countryside to have holidays and visits to working farms. It's a practical and unsentimental approach to environmental education and this book reflects that attitude. The wide variety of stories by some of the best of modern authors (each one with black-and-white line drawings from equally well-known illustrators) range from everyday life to the supernatural, from the practical to the imaginative, and at no time is there a cuddly lamb, free-range hen and straw-in-the-hair view of the countryside. A number of the stories will stay in the reader's mind well after the book is finished and all will stand re-reading.

Excellent for reading aloud to a younger junior class, it will nevertheless reward readers at the lower end of secondary school. **LW**

Darren the Sun God

Brough Girling, ill. Chris Smedley, Hodder, 0 340 63443 X, £3.99

A gloriously funny distortion of today - though set thousands of years ago. Things, it appears, haven't changed that much. The children still solve life's problems with effortless ease and the adults still bumble around making a lot of noise and getting nowhere. The primary school myths and mores are revealed in all their simplistic glory, including the 'Please Miss' tradition. Quite the most hilarious story I've read for some time and looking so deceptively easy to read. **PH**

Put a Sock in it, Percy!

Judy Corbalis, ill. David Parkins, Scholastic, 0 590 13271 7, £3.50



It would need two dotty inventors to have a talking cat with an attitude problem. Percy is just that - but he tries to be helpful when it suits him. He spends most of his day creating chaos and the rest of it trying to repair the damage. A zany book that bubbles and burbles along on the page. This is a fun read for everyone who loves cats and everyone who hates the little beggars. Mine sat on my lap watching me type this - I hope she can't read. **PH**

The Little Sea Horse

Helen Cresswell, ill. Jason Cockcroft, Hodder, 0 340 63461 8, £2.99

An enchanting story that paints a gentle watercolour of the magic in the sea. The tiny sea horse with its coat of pure white and hooves of shiny gold is treated like a circus novelty. It's only Molly who appreciates his real worth and tries to find a way to return him to the sea. A truly quality read for young, confident readers. **PH**

Trace in Space

Mary Hoffman, ill. Peter Kavanagh, Hodder, 0 340 62669 0, £3.99

Trace may be the daughter of the Commander-in-chief of ASP - Alliance Space Patrol - but she gets few privileges. Trace's spaceship is ancient and rickety and her crew have some very dubious skills - their greatest strength is that they're loyal. Staggering through the Universe, Trace is eager for her first important mission but all she seems to get is trouble. Only when investigating the Planet Megalon does she fly off into unknown danger. Even if you're not a SF enthusiast this will grab your

attention, not letting go till all is safe and secure. Or is it? **PH**

The Great Dinosaur Kidnap

Tessa Kraling, ill. Piers Sanford, Puffin, 0 14 037208 3, £3.50

An intelligent re-working of the not unfamiliar theme of the dinosaur egg that is found by a modern child and hatches out. Less jokey than some in this genre, the story raises a few interesting side issues of wild creature conservation and this beast has the added attraction of being able to talk and, apparently, transmit thoughts as well. Juniors from about 7 to 10 would find this absorbing and it could make a good read-aloud serial. (Just one small query... I wonder if Waterstones paid for the publicity in the text? Surely not.) **LW**

The Witch Repair

Marianne Macdonald, ill. Stephen Cox, Mammoth, 0 7497 2688 1, £2.99

If the sign says 'Witch Repair' then beware, for it should say 'Watch Repair' - or should it?

It's only Katie's growing acquaintance with Ms Smith in the repair shop that eases the hardship she experiences at being forced into new house, new school, new world. For Ms Smith prompts much thought, if only by her appearance - all twinkly pink one day and parrot bedecked the next. She gives sound advice, unintentionally it seems, and repairs quite remarkably.



This is a splendid concoction of adjustment to unwelcome change, amazing magic and real fun. A great class novel or for 8+s to read alone. **GR**

Nobody's Dog

Eleanor Watkins, ill. Beryl Sanders, Scripture Union, 0 86201 983 4, £3.25

Immediate focus is on the stray dog's fate. More subtly focused are the parallel, increasingly complex futures of Luke and his mother, who live high up in a block of flats, and of their lonely elderly and ailing neighbour, Mr Bronzovi - whose wise assurances about God affect both the practical situation and young Luke's code of life.

It's Luke's regular park visits and sightings of 'Bushy' which, with Mr Bronzovi's careful intervention, lead to a situation of developing trust. (Hardworking Mum represents commonsense practicality and has typical, understandable concerns.)

A poignant story, whatever your religion, which is more appropriate for

8-10s to read alone despite being designed for 6-8s. **GR**

Grandfather's Pencil and the Room of Stories

Michael Foreman, Red Fox, 0 09 950331 X, £4.50

As 'the boy' has finished his letter and is asleep, the pencil which lay on the paper comes to life and writes its own story. And this is the beginning of a series of stories tinged with truth, mixed with magic and related with real purpose yet ghostly fleet-
ingness.

To précis is to do this work an injustice for there is uniqueness of idea, construction and illustration here. Worthwhile though it is for information about manufacturing processes, it's far more valuable in its message about the value of stories and in its underlining of their magic. It signals also the unstoppable cyclical ways of the world.

Really for 7+. I found younger sharers did feel a sense of magic and wonder, but also some confusion. **GR**

Orson Cart and the Magic Maze

0 09 943881 X

Orson Cart and the Museum Mystery

0 09 943871 2

Steve Donald, Red Fox, £2.50 each

The further adventures of a maniacally gormless hero who was a normal child until tragically struck down by a radioactive lawn mower. This calamity has left Orson with the awesome ability to shuffle his own anatomy, dismembering and reassembling himself at will. Orson revives the career of a pathetically inept magician in the first of these books when he colludes in the most realistic feat of sawing-the-man-in-half ever seen. In the second book,

Orson and The Prof, his equally gormless sidekick, inadvertently revive an Egyptian mummy. Several self-shufflings have to be braved before the murderous cadaver is safely reinterred.

Steve Donald's comic book graphics bring hectic life to the ridiculous premise of these adventures, their crazy plots and the cast of bizarre characters. Like all the other titles in this series, the books had me shuddering with helpless mirth, and I anticipate they'd have the same effect on the most reluctant of readers. **GH**

The Cramp Twins

Brian Wood, Bloomsbury, 0 7475 2078 X, £4.99

Presented in a typographical scrawl that suggests the calligraphy of a drunkard wielding a burnt stick and illustrated with Art-of-the-Insane graphics executed in the stickier varieties of body fluid, not to mention relying for much of its mirth on puerile grunge-mongery, this is hardly the type of book that will make it to the National Curriculum suggesting reading lists. Still, this surreal tale of Jekyll and Hyde twins and their diabolically dysfunctional family in a city under the corporate tyranny of a soap factory has a paradoxical, rebarbative charm that clearly appealed to the upper juniors I showed it to. The tale of wicked Wayne and gentle Julian and their adventures at the Haz Chem annual Country and Western barbecue will certainly stimulate interest in any classroom it enters. It might even generate some interesting correspondence with parents. **GH**

The Oxford Book of Story Poems

Edited by Michael Harrison and Christopher Stuart-Clark, Oxford, 0 19 276103 X, £5.99

Stevie Smith's 10-line evocation of a fairy forest encounter during which

centuries pass in the time it takes to sing a song is an apt opener to this magically enthralling and handsomely presented volume. Classics like 'Jabberwocky', 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' and the 'Forsaken Merman' are interleaved with more recent tales by Patten, Rosen, Causley and McGough (PC Plod vs the Dale Street Dog Strangler) in a collection ranging from stately sagas to highly concentrated miniatures, all telling wonderful stories. The illustrations, contributed by 14 different artists, are similarly rich and varied, and include Charles Keeping's haunting drawings for 'The Lady of Shalott' and 'The Highwayman'. **GH**

The Winter Sleepwalker

Joan Aiken, ill. Quentin Blake, Red Fox, 0 09 949641 0, £2.50



A one-eyed healer enters a village in search of his father's dying words, a king mourns his departed queen in a room full of knots, the immortals play endless games of football in the sky. In eight stories ranging from the comically capricious to the thor-

oughly sinister, Joan Aiken treats the reader to a cornucopia of eerie images, narrative twists and hauntingly indeterminate endings. This is a feast of fecund invention, and a scintillating resource for storytime. **GH**



Thief!

Malorie Blackman, Corgi, 0 552 52808 0, £3.50

While fleeing from the victimisation that follows a false accusation of theft, Lydia enters a storm which flings her into the future, where she discovers that the consequences of her persecution have led to the corruption of an entire town. She struggles to return to her own time in order to put things right. This is a complex and ambitious novel, its huge improbabilities carried along on a powerful undercurrent of abrasive realism. The breathless pace and precipitate chapter endings make it a very promising candidate for reading aloud. **GH**

Middle/SecondaryREVIEWS

Scratch City

Philip Gross, Faber, 0 571 17535 X, £3.99

A delight to have poetry whose lightness of touch and snapshots of city life are achieved with words which tease, excite and frighten the reader into seeing the world afresh...

*'the long shot, all tee'd up.
Old man Autumn, the short-sighted golfer,
squints towards Spring's distant green
and blasts off... into the rough.'*

An acorn, this.

There's often an edginess, too; the awful heaven of the shopping mall; the mad -

*'maybe that's what keeps her crazy
carpet slippers shuffling'*

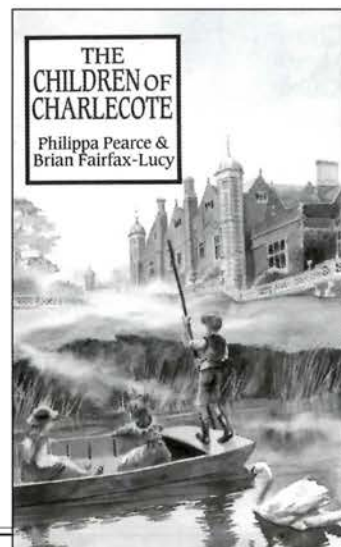
and the angry -

*'rattling
someone like a street-collector's tin*

POETRY

with only coppers in it.'

And there's playfulness and resilience in the nimbleness of this poet's mind and eye. A treat of a collection. **AJ**



The Children Of Charlecote

Philippa Pearce and Brian Fairfax-Lucy, Gollancz, 0 575 06205 3, £3.99

How do you entice readers into a book where the story seems slight but where the writing vividly recreates scenes of family life in a large mansion just before the First War? The story is coloured by the vividness of fond, poignant memories of the children's lives despite the harshness of their father and the constant hint of loss - a lost past, lost happiness, lost house, lost people. This is hauntingly sad. **AJ**

Fantasy Stories

Chosen by Diana Wynne Jones, ill. Robin Lawrie, Kingfisher, 1 85697 209 7, £4.99

One in an excellent series of books. This is packed with stories and extracts all having the quality of tried



and tested favourites. At this price, it's quite irresistible.

Diana Wynne Jones' choices are superb, wide-ranging, and often surprising. Most are not recent, but this is a classic collection where each story and each extract has the mark of being singled out by an experienced reader aware of what works when read aloud. **AJ**

Waterbound

Jane Stemp,
Hodder 'Signature',
0 340 63477 4, £3.99

A fascinating, troubling version of a future world which has cast out the disabled who have subsequently set up their own world in the maze of rivers which run under the city. Gem, risking the ever-watching eyes of the Admin, is taken down to the Waterbound and discovers relations who have been cast out. She witnesses the strength and courage they've needed to be survivors. This is a powerful story of these people's lives, their frustrations and the cruelties of a society unable to accept them, ending on a nicely triumphant note. **AJ**

Lockie Leonard, Human Torpedo

0 330 34067 0

Lockie Leonard, Scumbuster

0 330 34068 9

Tim Winton, Macmillan,
£3.99 each

We follow Lockie through the ups and downs of school life, falling in and out of love and battling with industrial pollution. It's all done in a high energy, witty way which doesn't prevent understanding of teenagers' worries and fascinations. There's great fun here (has TV picked these up yet?) and once introduced to readers these titles will never be out of their hands. **AJ**

Roadkill - The Alliance

Anthony Masters,
Bloomsbury,
0 7475 2275 8, £3.99

Anthony Masters unerringly focuses on the preoccupations of modern teenagers and in this second book of the Roadkill trilogy the world is controlled by an armed corporation determined to annihilate resistance.

The high-tech cover gives an accurate taster of the contents - futuristic, violent and stereotyped, but pacy enough to simulate the computer games so often beloved of teenage boys in particular. There's humour here too, though it's not always effective. This series will probably sell. **VR**

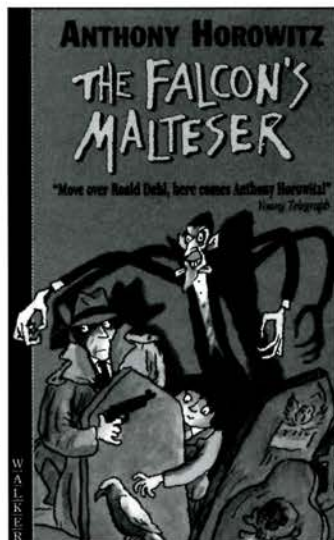
The Eden Mission

Anthony Wall, Robinswood Press, 1 869981 52 9, £4.99

With sharp ecological detail and statistics within an exciting story, this manages to bring important issues to life. A small group of teenagers share in the journey of the 'Sea Shepherd' on a conservation expedition travelling to Florida, Los Angeles, the Amazon and Antarctica. All the time they're pursued by a powerful organisation who envisage threats to their highly profitable, but illegal, trade in animals, and who have people on board the ship working against the Eden Mission. A dramatic story which builds to a dramatic climax. **AJ**

The Falcon's Malteser

Anthony Horowitz, Walker,
0 7445 4124 7, £3.99



Where's the diamond fortune of dead criminal boss called the Falcon and why is Johnny Naples murdered after entrusting private eye Tim Diamond with a packet of Maltesers? Why do all the leading criminals seem intent on killing the marvelously incompetent Tim? Fortunately, his wise-cracking younger brother Nick takes over, surviving a bomb blast and chase through Selfridges by mad gunmen. He cracks the mystery... but is deceived by the beautiful Lauren Bacardi. Awful puns and great fun. **AJ**

My Family and Other Natural Disasters

Josephine Feeney, Puffin,
0 14 036511 7, £3.99

Patrick Connolly's parents have separated and he feels unable to talk to them about their problems - or his. I read this marvellous book in one sitting and was entranced both by the format - part autobiography, part first-person narrative, part written correspondence - and the content.

There are many areas for thought and discussion woven through the narrative which shows adults as the very fallible people they really are. The most rewarding part of the story is Patrick's interaction with his Irish grandparents and relatives.

This novel will, sadly, raise familiar issues with many children but its sharp observation, sympathy and refusal to slide into stereotype or cliché make it one of the best I've read in recent times. **VR**

Cradlefasts

William Mayne, Hodder,
0 340 65126 1, £3.99

This is a sequel to the award-winning *Earthfasts*, which is tantalisingly referred to and explained as the new story gradually unfolds. Add to this the closely-honed quality of the text plus the unfamiliar dialogue, and a demanding read emerges - but nevertheless an intellectually satisfying one.

The death of his mother during childbirth with the loss of the baby girl as well, leaves David emotionally scarred and then, as if out of the same Time-war as John Cherry of *Earthfasts*, Clare enters his life, convinced she is his sister and carrying the cherished toy he thought had disappeared at his mother's death. **DB**

Escape from The Temple of Laughter

J Fletcher, Scholastic,
0 590 54207 9, £6.99

A collection of five extraordinary episodes from the life of J Rathbone Fish which demonstrates that there's still evidence of fun and the far-fetched in storytelling. Imaginative wordplay and original plots jostle with other creative thinking to construct an enthralling read-aloud or read-alone text that transports the reader into the 'anything's possible' world of brilliant storytelling.

DB**The Secret Line**

William Corlett, Red Fox,
0 09 937141 3, £3.50

Jo blurs the distinction between her real world (half-white, stepfather, bullied and not over-popular) and her inner dream world (Mit, a dusky, handsome friend who leads her on adventures and promises a brilliant future). The result is a touchy adolescent, positively not at one with herself or anybody else.

Corlett has charted Jo's journey to a kind of peace employing the London Underground system as a central symbol of where harsh reality (muggings and racism) meets fantastical dreams (jungle harmony and acceptance).

It's long and quite slow, so only a doughty reader will get through it. **DB**

Children of the Wheel

Pamela Scobie, Oxford,
0 19 271662 X, £6.99

This long, sprawling, imaginative yarn makes an intriguing allegorical read providing you stick with it. Action and ideas jostle for attention; bits of it were still falling into place with me days after I read it.

'I don't know whether the past and the future can ever really get away from one another. Maybe it's just another circle. Everything goes round and comes back to the same place.'

The book is imbued with circles, most significantly the wheels, cogs and their uses invented (again?) by Cyndra long after the land had become dead and the damage-born people lived in their fractured societies.

Try it out on able readers. **DB**

True Stories

Chosen by Anthony Masters, ill. Chris Molan, Kingfisher,
1 85697 210 0, £4.99

Twenty-three tales of heroism which encompass a vast range of human experience from Clare Francis and Christy Brown to Mary Seacole and Nelson Mandela. The book's strength derives from the conscious variety of story styles, characters and experiences which Masters has assembled. I'd recommend it for consideration as a non-fiction text at KS4 or as a dip-in book for reluctant readers who aren't too seduced by fiction.

Shame about the cover and rather flat, limp illustrations. **DB**

The Phantom Piper

Garry Kilworth, Mammoth,
0 7497 2387 4, £3.99

An upside down *Lord of the Flies*. Here the courageous children from Canlish Glen, deep in the Highlands of Scotland, struggle against the weather and some very evil adult forces to keep life going when their parents disappear. A powerful story that captures the imagination - who hasn't fantasized about a world without adults? It proves a lot more frightening and harder work than the children ever imagined.

There are some lovely character sketches and revealing reveries of children who are a little scared of their parents. A powerful story which incidentally reminds adult readers that children have feelings, too. **PH**

Story of the Year

Michael Cox and others, ill. Julie Anderson and others, Scholastic,
0 590 54245 1, £5.99

The ten winning stories from the Independent/Scholastic Story of the Year Competition. Selected from over 2,000 manuscripts, they throw a fresh, dynamic light into the world of children's books. Superb for reading aloud, but more proficient readers will enjoy reading them alone. I loved the weirdness of 'The Man Who Had Frogs Inside Him' and had lots of fun trying out the Glaswegian in 'Bikes Can Git Ye Intae Truble' - fantastic fun once you get the hang of it. I liked, too, the gentle irony of the progression of mankind in 'The Long Friendship' - it's not often you read a story that spans millions of years. **PH**

Baseball Saved Us

Ken Mochizuki, ill. Dom Lee, Lee and Low Books,
1 880000 19 9, \$5.95 (dollars)

One of the desert concentration camps in which Japanese Americans were interned during the Second World War provides an unfamiliar setting for the familiar theme of how sport can spiritually liberate the oppressed. The prisoners create a baseball pitch inside the wire, and in the course of their games a young boy is given a sense of self-esteem which endures when he has to face the racism awaiting him after he's freed. The picture book format and plain, understated prose of this story powerfully depict a troubled and neglected aspect of American history. **GH**

The Alpha Box

Annie Dalton, Mammoth,
0 7497 1178 7, £3.50

Joss's life is in turmoil as he, Mum and sister Martha try to set up a new home. Asha lives a life of demure order with two maiden aunts until her absent parents neglect to send her a birthday present. Each aching in their own way, they are drawn inexorably to a strange shop in a run-down part of town. Asha parts with all she has in order to buy an ugly box which she *knows* she must own. Joss gets an incredible blue, electric guitar. They meet at school and their growing relationship is set against Asha's steady realisation, through talking to the goddesses of the Box,

that she has a mission which is to defeat The Hoarsemen, a rock band who exercise a frighteningly malign influence over their Followers. Plenty of strong female characters and, at times, something of a celebration of female intuition, compassion and solidarity though the males in the story are just not tuned in. It never quite grips as it might and there's an awful lot of pseudo-religious teaching from the goddesses. Try it with keen readers from Year 9 up. **AJ**

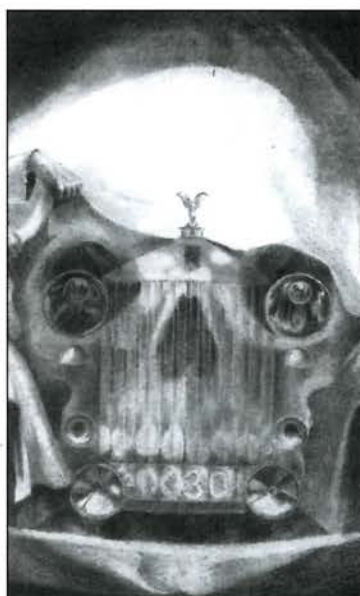
Classic Ghost Stories

Edited by Molly Cooper,
Lowell House Juvenile,
1 56565 279 7, \$5.95 (dollars)

Ghostly Haunts

Edited by Michael
Morpurgo, Collins,
0 00 675116 4, £3.99

A complementary pair of books well worth selecting from an over-crowded shelf. The first collection is aptly named, gathering tales by O Henry, Bram Stoker, Dickens, Wilde, Kipling and a harrowingly poignant yarn about a vagrant ghost child by



New England writer, Mary Wilkins Freeman. These stories lack the gore of much that passes for horror nowadays but they're very much for the

older children in this age range, or those with uncommonly strong nerves to match their advanced reading skills. Wilde's 'Canterville Ghost' provides some light relief, but Kipling's 'Phantom Rickshaw', a tale of adultery and infernal retribution, is strictly X Certificate.

The second collection, a fund-raising enterprise to celebrate the centenary of the National Trust, contains the responses of 10 'grown-up children' to a request by the editor to write a ghost story around some Trust property they had visited. The results are very enjoyable, ranging from Ted Hughes' neo-pagan encounter with a vulpine familiar to Dick King-Smith's clever squib about the vengeance of a slaughtered fowl. The best of the bunch is a macabre and jocular gothic by Terence Blacker, suggesting that a diet of blood might be sustaining some of our most venerable institutions. **GH**

The Sherwood Hero

Alison Prince, Macmillan,
0 330 33724 6, £3.99

'The time's coming when we'll need

to take the law into our own hands. . . . Get some decency back. These poor folk livin' in the streets as if they were rats. Rob the rich and feed the poor, aye, so we should.'

Kelly's hero is Robin Hood, and in contemporary Glasgow she is painfully aware of the need for a modern counterpart. Her attempt to assume this role herself leads to a shameful catastrophe that she struggles to forget, but when her best friend suggests writing a novel around the incident, Kelly is forced to re-visit the moral and emotional problems she's been trying to suppress.

I can't praise this book highly enough. It explores tough political and personal issues in a voice that's authentically childlike, thoughtful and completely uncondescending. At the same time, it's a gripping adventure story whose retrospective viewpoint allows for a wealth of reflection on unfolding events. Strongly recommended for fluent readers to enjoy alone, and as a very thought-provoking story to share with the class. **GH**

Older Readers **REVIEWS**

Deliver Us From Evie

M E Kerr, Viking,
0 670 86570 2, £8.99

Evie refuses to match her mother's version of femininity, continuing to play a key part in running the family farm. When she falls in love with a girl, she forces family and community (as well as the reader) to square their sense of her as a person with their views on lesbianism. Narrated through her brother's eyes, this has the feel of a larger novel, a larger slice of life, told with a light touch, yet creating the density of people's lives without simplifying and cheapening. It's a splendid example of what fiction can do, and the insight and understanding it can bring. **AJ**

The Shouting Wind

Linda Newbery, Collins,
0 00 674764 7, £3.99



Framed within Tamsin's visit to an airfield, this offers her grandmother's own story of experience as a WAAF there during the war. What's so fresh is the range of perspectives on war which include a great many women, and the practicality of their lives at the airfield. While shaping a really strong story of relationships against this background, the author doesn't allow the expected happy ending of children's books to distort the harshness. It's a strong begin-

ning to a trilogy about the women in these three generations. **AJ**

Great! You've Just Ruined the Rest of My Life

Yvonne Coppard, Piccadilly,
1 85340 336 9, £5.99

The eagerly awaited follow-up to *Everybody Else Does! Why Can't I?* shows no sign of the successful mother/daughter diary format wearing thin. This time, Jenny's parents take the family to Canada for four months, separating Jenny from her friend, her A-level studies and her beloved George.

Consolation presents itself in the form of improbably hunky Dirk - who, predictably, proves himself thoroughly unworthy. This third book in the Coppard trilogy depicts a Jenny more concerned with adult issues but it's just as readable and relevant to young adults as the other two. **VR**

The First Time

Nicholas Allan, Red Fox,
0 09 926511 7, £3.50

Jake is a shy 15-year-old whose move to a new school gives him the opportunity to re-invent his image as Mr Cool. He does this with a vengeance and there's plenty of convincing action and dialogue to prove it!

Ella is his downfall. He cares about her but treats her badly and she rejects him only to return to him at the end of the book. A happy ending? No, Jake realises he can still behave badly and get what he wants.

The air of worldly-wise cynicism from an inexperienced central character is often well-observed and amusing. However, the danger is that readers may interpret the story as a modern morality tale - it's acceptable to operate double standards in relationships if you can get away with it. **VR**

Hauntings

Susan Price, Hodder,
0 340 62655 0, £3.99

Supernatural Stories

Chosen by William Mayne, Kingfisher,
1 85697 211 9, £4.99

Ostensibly about the same subject, these two collections are very different. Price's ten tales are all written by her, in a pleasing and accessible style. However, too many endings are predictable and, though characters and plots are entertaining, this is a flaw in stories of this type.

Mayne's collection is altogether more wide-ranging. Twenty-nine stories offer pre-twentieth-century literature and many contributions from other cultures. As a National Curriculum text, if nothing else, it represents the better deal.

Both collections are well worth owning, but if variety, value and unexpected twists are what you want, go for Mayne! **VR**

Spirit of the Place

Dennis Hamley, Scholastic
'Adlib', 0 590 54195 1, £7.99

Shades of Peter Ackroyd in this time slip novel. Eighteenth-century poet and scientist, Nicholas Fowler, believes that Man's destiny is to perfect Nature. He commissions large scale landscaping, builds a grotto and experiments with electricity at his country estate, Coswold. Modern-day Literature undergrad, Lindsey Lovelock, chooses Fowler as the subject of her major study while boyfriend, Rod, is more interested in the genetic research that's taking place there. The historical scenes as Fowler incurs the fear and loathing of servants and neighbours are intercut with modern times - Lindsey, in a hospital bed suffering from amne-

sia, and Rod being questioned by the police about a break out from Coswold. Slowly the story is pieced together and, yes, Fowler, Lindsey and Rod *did* make contact across the centuries. It's all very cleverly done and with references to Pope, to a number of Fowler's Philosophical Odes (courtesy of the author), and much debate and discussion, this is one for potential A* Literature candidates I think. **SR**

The Good Book

Alan Durant, Bodley
Head, 0 370 31954 0, £8.99

An unrelentingly grim read. Fifteen-year-old Ross, the leader of a gang of thugs who follow their local non-league football team almost solely for the aggro, gains his inspiration and battle plans from intensive study of the Old Testament (and if you can believe that, you can believe anything). We get constant references to Jephthah and the Gileadites, the Israelites against the Benjamites and Samson smiting the Philistines. Along with this comes Ross's thoughts on the Gulf War and the ideas of Stormin' Norman Schwarzkopf. The arrival in town of a Youth Peace Mission seems an ideal opportunity for Ross and the Judges to have some more fun but Ross is strangely drawn to these people, particularly the quiet, calm, good-looking, Morgan. The love of a good woman seems to be having some effect as does a viewing of the film *Gandhi*, but the return of Ross's drunken, violent father undoes everything. The fights are described in graphic detail, there's much discussion of the relative values of revenge and forgiveness and Ross agonises over his motives and what has made him the person he is. Ultimately, though it's unconvincing. **SR**

REVIEWERS in this issue:

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

Authorgraph No.97



Tony Bradman interviewed by Stephanie Nettell

Tony Bradman was going down the King's Road on a bus towards the old Penguin offices, anxiously hoping they would take his little football story as a 'Kite'. Suddenly a childhood memory compelled him to add up the numbers on his ticket. Yes – 21! He tucked the lucky ticket carefully into the wallet where he kept such things. Sure enough, not only was **One Nil** accepted, but Liz Attenborough took it for Puffin. 'I was really, really excited. Me, a Puffin Author – it was a big moment!'

Two years ago he was clearing out the wallet and found the ticket. The numbers added up to 22.

He roars with laughter, but you know he would do the same today. The essence of Bradman is here – all the insecurity, but also the thrilled pride in success. Even the way **One Nil** came into being demonstrates his determined ambition, the freelance's eye for an opportunity, the mining of everyday life to unearth a plot.

Two years previously – 1982, still unpublished and with the big three-oh on the horizon – he made himself write half-a-dozen short stories. One of them recalled an incident from his schooldays, when a friend had skived off school to watch the England team train, only to be snapped by a *Daily Mail* photographer. When he turned up next day with a letter from his mum, he'd been already spotted on the back page of the Mail. 'I knew at the time those stories were good, that this one was publishable.' Later, with top-and-tailing chapters, **One Nil** became his earliest work to be published as a book.

A South Londoner through and through, by the time he was school age and his parents had divorced, Tony Bradman and his older sister were living with his mother in a flat in Anerley not far from his present Beckenham home. Emerging from the affluent fifties as part of a first generation of working class families to enter higher education, he puzzled his highly traditional grammar school by overcoming the horrendous handicap of being 'a child of a single-parent family before such things existed' to become a high-flier.

'I was very bright and very hard-working. I did classics and played rugby, while all my uncles were great football supporters. I'm not of the Angry Young Men generation, and I don't feel alienated, but I understand that sense of being cut off from one's roots.' His mother provided a secure background, but it's his absent father to whom his talk repeatedly turns, who looms over his thoughts, fills

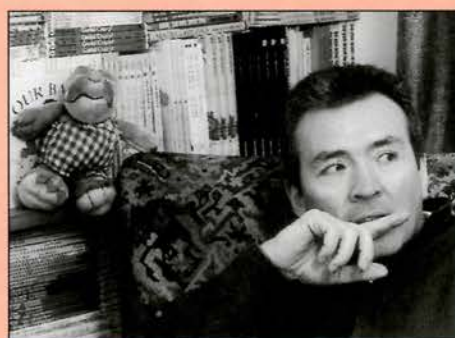


his memories with pain and regret, and whose influence ironically directed his life.

'I've interviewed and read about many children's writers, and I've noticed repeatedly how their childhood contains some kind of trauma – a period of illness, or a problem that focuses their attention on the family. My own experience, and stories of my parents' early lives, sensitised me to the feelings of childhood: my mum had a tough time during the 30s in north London, as one of six with a father wounded in the First War and unemployed. I've just read Westall's **The Night Mare** – that's my mother's childhood.

'My father himself had a difficult background, in an orphanage and with a mother who didn't want him back. I didn't see him for years – he loved me but we didn't ever communicate as father and son. He sacrificed his family life on the altar of worldly success: he started out as a south London lad with a south London accent, but by the time I knew him he had a BBC accent and read the *Telegraph*. I was a long-haired radical and wanted nothing of that. He sent me postcards from round the world (I have them still), but only really took notice when I went to grammar school and he could see I was an achiever too.

'He'd served on HMS Belfast, and his stories of torpedoes, the Arctic and the Scharnhorst fascinated me, but the pivotal experience for this interesting, articulate man was being turned down for officer training in spite of all his cleverness and charm. It was *class*.' So when Tony went to Queen's College, Cambridge, with a clutch of A grades, his father saw it not as an intellectual triumph but one of class.



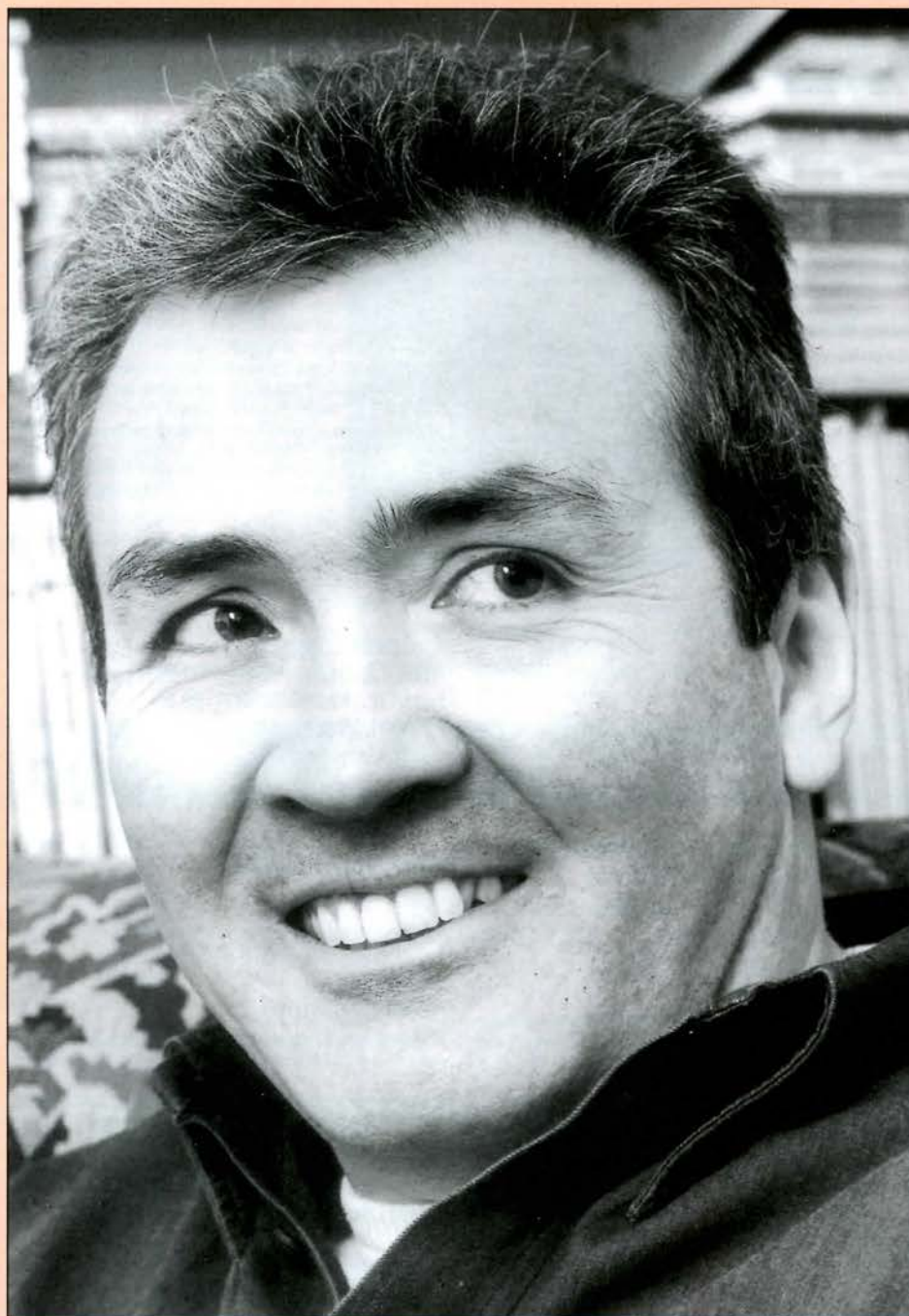
After being famous in his school community Tony felt unloved at Cambridge ('security's important for me – after all, I'm still living in the same place!'), and pastoral indifference left him floundering from Modern Languages through English to Philosophy, where he gave up lectures altogether. Cinema has played a constant role in his life, and he would go five times a week, while voracious reading piled up the bill at Heffer's. 'I regret it, but perhaps it helped me by killing off my original dream of being an academic.'

What Cambridge did was introduce him to Sally, the sixth-form girlfriend of a mate, whom he married when he was 23 and she just 20. For a while they lived with Tony's mother, then in a peeling, decrepit flat in Brockley. He'd always known he would be a writer by the time he was 30 – without any notion that he should therefore be *writing*. With hindsight, he wonders if he should have been a film director or musician or (given the thrill he gets from hamming it up in schools) an actor: **Look Out, He's Behind You!** turns a book into a pantomime, a crossing of barriers that intrigues him. 'Although I've always devoured literature, behind it all throbs a passion for popular culture.'

In practice he was jobless after graduating, then joined **Record Mirror and Sounds**, which, despite free concerts and records, he hated for its posers, its teeny-bop coverage, and the way it kept him from baby Emma. 'Being a father was a job I'd been waiting to do all my life.' They worked their way through stony-broke years, selling his record collection – 'selling everything, in fact' – and buying their present house as a wreck. It was a deliberate substitute for being with his child when he applied to 'a funny little magazine run by four people on a shoestring' called **Parents**, where from 1979 he was 'immersed in the world of young family life'. He learned to write and to rewrite others, then, discovering a pile of children's books, offered to review them. A life-changing moment.

Helen was born in 1981, Thomas two years later, and he read to them every night. He had, he feels, stumbled into a golden age. That very first parcel contained **Peepo!**, and still today 'Allan Ahlberg is the boss, the governor. One of my heroes is Orwell – "prose like a window-pane" – and that's Ahlberg. It was only when I had children that I realised what sort of writer I wanted to be.'

Everything happened at once. Because he was a journalist, a rare *male* journalist writing on family life, Julia MacRae commissioned a book about having children and Allen & Unwin one on fatherhood. A reviewer's lunch with Heinemann led to his offering the little rhymes that became **A Kiss on the Nose**. He met Janetta Otter-Barry, which led in time to a relationship with Methuen 'when they were publishing huge



amounts of things, really *huge* – it seemed as if all I had to do was suggest something and I'd get a contract' – that later extended with her to Frances Lincoln.

The genie was out of the bottle. Three contracts coincided, momentarily, with his father's last illness, just as he was getting to know him. The compulsive details of his memories betrays their weight. That final week he'd been able to say, 'Dad, I'm going to be an author,' but the man he longed to impress never saw his success.

'Two letters came that morning, one saying we were £1,000 overdrawn, one suggesting a contract for £1,000. He died at 4.21 on April 18, 1983, aged 57. My twenties had been terrible – no money, two kids, and that deadline for being a writer drawing closer. Then one week after he died, I was signing a contract for a book on *fatherhood* in offices right beside the British Museum where, in spite of hating it, he used to take me because I insisted. We'd just discovered Sally was expecting number three, and at that moment I absolutely *knew* it would be a boy – Thomas was born at the end of the year. Today I look at that book and it seems like a

disguised novel.' That day, too, he saw the sandal in the BM which reminded him of baby Helen's Mothercare one, an idea that marinated until he and Philippe Dupasquier conjured up their wonderfully cinematic book, *The Sandal*.

From a standing start, by mid-1986 he'd written nine books with another 10 in production. It was a bullish period in publishing, but it's also a tribute to his industry as an energetic freelance: 'I know too well from my upbringing about financial insecurity, and I've been obsessive about the business side.' He devised the Best Books for Babies Award on *Parents* partly as a calculated way of meeting interesting and useful judges, people like Cynthia Felgate of *Play School* who would later produce 13 animated Dilly stories for television.

But he's not the speedy worker his prolificacy suggests, and is slowing down as his skill increases. 'The first Dilly took a week, but the last book took four months.' He rewrites compulsively, managing at best 500 words a day, but he needs and enjoys work, while still enduring crises of confidence. Dilly has been a huge success, although not

abroad, and he reckons writing 60 stories about one family must surely have taught him his trade. Brenda Gardner of Piccadilly Press had remembered the popularity of *My Naughty Little Sister* but suggested a dinosaur family. 'Suddenly all my own experience that had been looking for an outlet – the guerilla warfare between parents and kids, the sibling rivalry and superiority of the older one, the lively curiosity of kids that is so *frustrated* – was funnelled into these books.' She taught him how to structure stories ('Plot, plot, plot, Tony – clues, mystery, theme'), and in his neat study there are piles of notebooks with the process of writing laid out in detail like an A-level essay. He aims at sophisticated early reading, snappy like American sit-coms and dense with visual events, but sparingly expressed.

'I'm very fond of Dilly. He's the eternal six-year-old, a megastar.



Dilly and the Goody-Goody is a new departure, probably the ultimate Dilly story, told objectively

rather than from sister Dora's viewpoint, so that we can see inside him for the first time.' Susan Hellard, quiet and professional, has contributed to Dilly's triumphs with her own Stone Age jokes although, like many author-artist partnerships, they rarely communicate.

There's no doubting now Tony Bradman's success, nor his awed revelling in it. Witness about 90 titles (he's lost count) – picture books with legendary artists (Tony Ross's *Michael* has 12 co-editions and is the most read), or 'The Bluebeards' pastiche of *Treasure Island* or the Marlowesque *Sam the Girl Detective*. Witness 20-odd anthologies. Witness the now comfortably renovated house. Witness three bonny kids.

If only his dad could see. ■

Photographs by Richard Mewton.

Details of books mentioned:

One Nil, Puffin, 0 14 031983 2, £3.25 pbk
Look Out, He's Behind You!, ill. Margaret Chamberlain, Mammoth, 0 7497 0024 6, £4.99 pbk
The Sandal, ill. Philippe Dupasquier, Puffin, 0 14 054173 X, £3.99 pbk
Michael, ill. Tony Ross, Andersen, 0 86262 271 X, £7.99; Red Fox, 0 09 984020 0, £3.99 pbk
Sam the Girl Detective, Yearling, 0 440 86241 8, £2.50 pbk
 There are 15 Dilly titles in print, illustrated by Susan Hellard, and published by Heinemann in hardback and Mammoth in paperback. The first was *Dilly the Dinosaur*, 0 7497 0366 0, £2.99 pbk, and the latest is *Dilly and the Vampire* which will be published in June at £7.99.
 Heinemann will publish *Dilly and the Goody-Goody* as one of their new 'Blue Bananas' in July this year.

Non Fiction REVIEWS

My 1930s Home

Karen Bryant-Mole, Watts Books
(Who Lived Here series),
0 7496 2029 3, £9.99

JUNIOR

The Kitchen



The Sunderjees' kitchen looks very streamlined. There is a long worksurface with an inset sink, a slot-in cooker and a built-under dishwasher.

The kitchen looked very different when the Masseys first moved into this house. There was a stone sink, with a wooden draining board, and a cupboard underneath. Mrs Massey had a gas cooker. It had a small grill pan and a rack where plates could be warmed. Many 1930s cookers were painted in cream and green enamel paint.

There was a pine table in the middle of the room. Mrs Massey did all the mixing and chopping for her cooking on this table.

Mrs Massey kept her food cool in a cold cupboard, called a larder. One of her friends had a fridge. In the early thirties, fridges were very expensive and few families owned one. Most of the fridges that were available were American.

The Thirties was a period of contrasting fortunes. The Depression brought misery to many, but paradoxically because the price of goods in the shops fell, people who had jobs could actually buy more. Lots of people decided to buy houses.

For this latest title in a series which looks at homes from a former time, but still lived in by families today, the author has chosen one of the most popular styles of the era, the mock-Tudor design.

Photographs and artwork contrast the changes that have taken place since the house was built and furnished in 1932. The text cleverly combines commentary on the very different lifestyles of past and present owners with additional background information thus providing a more rounded portrait of an era when a fridge cost more than twice the price of a suite of bedroom furniture. **VH**

The World's Top Ten Rivers

Neil Morris, ill. Vanessa Card, Belitha Press, 1 85561 384 0, £7.99

JUNIOR

Did you know that Siberia has three of the top ten? Of course you did. Can you name them? Of course you can. Any damn fool knows they are the Yenisei, the Ob and the Lena. Now how long is each, where is its source and where does it meet the sea? All this and more can be found in this odd but strangely compelling book.

After an introductory section on 'What is a River?' and a world map showing where they are, each of the ten rivers gets a double-page spread including a map, a fact box, a couple of photographs, perhaps a drawing and some brief text touching on its route and its importance to the local people. The maps and drawings are in a *faux-naïf* style – this does a particular disservice to the maps which end up being of almost no use at all. Definitely worth a look but the companion volume *Islands* is less successful. **SR**

Wild Technology: the amazing natural origins of human inventions

Phil Gates, Kingfisher, 1 85697 324 7, £12.99

JUNIOR/SECONDARY

You may not have realised that the word Velcro comes from the French for velvet (VELours) and hook (CROchet). I didn't either, though, like Phil

Gates, I did know that its Swiss inventor modelled it on the burrs that he found stuck to his alpen-socks. And Gates writes like a burr – hooking his reader early on and riding along happily for the whole journey in his latest 'Nature invents, science applies' book.

He presents a vivid cavalcade of techno-devices which have long had natural precedents. The Channel Tunnel's ventilation system mimics that used by prairie dogs in their underground villages, woodlice had armour before the crusaders, beavers' incisors still outperform the best steel chisels, the zips on birds' feathers never jam and bombardier beetles carry their own CS sprays. I could go on. Gates does at rewarding length, grouping his ingeniously chosen inventions according to scientific principle and clearly demonstrating the link between natural and artificial.

It's been done before, of course, but never with such elan, such fluency, such conviction or such sumptuous artwork. Gates is a natural informer, his enthusiasm is infectious and, like Velcro, this one's a winner. **TP**

Animal Rights

Miles Barton, Watts (Hot Topics series), 0 7496 2188 5, £8.99

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

The African Elephant

0 09 176504 8

Melissa Kim, ill. Ann Strugnel,

The Giant Panda

0 09 176763 6

Melissa Kim, ill. Shirley Felts Hutchinson (Wildlifers series), £8.99 each

JUNIOR/SECONDARY

We'd all agree that animals have rights up to a point – what causes tension, protest and debate is

BURR TO ZIP SECURE FASTENINGS

When we get dressed we use a variety of temporary fastenings to keep our clothes in place. Shoelaces and buckles, and buttons for clothes have been used for thousands of years, but two modern inventions – the zip-fastener and Velcro – have made dressing faster and easier. Both inventions depend on joining objects with small hooks and draw inspiration from the same processes in nature, where efficient flight in birds and the spreading of plant seeds both make use of the same technique.

▲ The flight feathers of birds generate lift when air flows over their smooth surface. Each feather is made up of thousands of fine branches, called barbs, arranged along a central shaft. Every barbule has tiny microscopic hooks which interlock so that the feather has a flat, rigid surface.

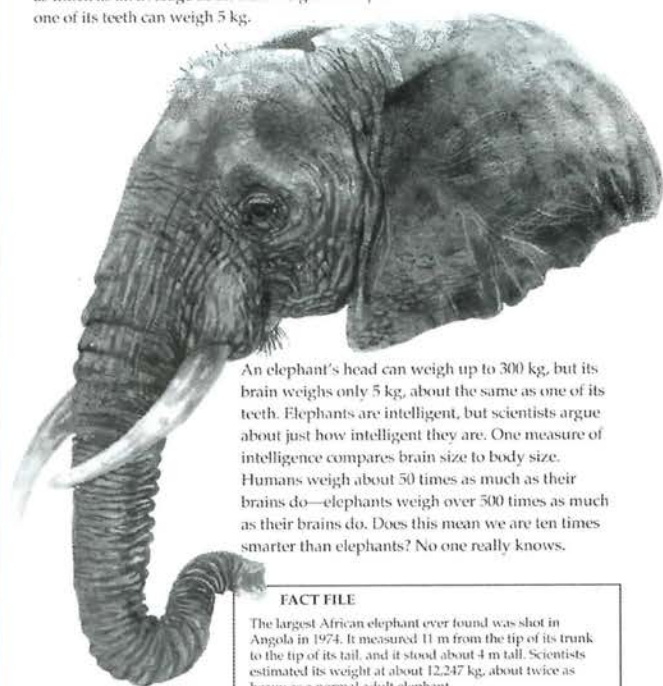
The barbs of a feather

a central shaft of feather

ZIP FASTENER

A zip uses a slide with wedges inside it to force the teeth apart, or back together. The teeth are hooked so that they interlock to fasten securely. Birds' feathers have hooked barbs which often separate during flight. Birds preen their feathers, pulling them through their beak, to join the hooks together again.

If the whole elephant is big and heavy, so are each of its body parts. The African elephant has a huge heart that weighs between 11 and 21 kg. Compare that to your own weight. An elephant's ear can weigh 80 kg, as much as an average adult man weighs. And just one of its teeth can weigh 5 kg.



An elephant's head can weigh up to 300 kg, but its brain weighs only 5 kg, about the same as one of its teeth. Elephants are intelligent, but scientists argue about just how intelligent they are. One measure of intelligence compares brain size to body size. Humans weigh about 50 times as much as their brains do—elephants weigh over 500 times as much as their brains do. Does this mean we are ten times smarter than elephants? No one really knows.

FACT FILE

The largest African elephant ever found was shot in Angola in 1974. It measured 11 m from the tip of its trunk to the tip of its tail, and it stood about 4 m tall. Scientists estimated its weight at about 12,247 kg, about twice as heavy as a normal adult elephant.

Left, a page from *Wild Technology* and above, from *The African Elephant*.

our inability to agree on where that point is. One could reasonably suppose, for instance, that for every calf-campaigner grabbing a quick bite at the Brightonsea chippie there's another who believes that fish have the right to swim free. 'A matter for individual conscience' is what the politicians usually say – be it fox-hunting or seal-culling – but the individual conscience needs informing, training perhaps, and here's a book that does quite well at it.

Starting from newpoints like the Calf Campaign and the Rwandan gorillas, Miles Barton looks at various ways in which animals seem to be exploited (and at varying attitudes to these ways), introduces the food/sport/entertainment/research dilemmas, and charts the progress of pro-rights campaigning. The book uses a tabloid-style approach to push home facts and questions but, unlike daily tabloids, leaves the answers to the now educated conscience of the reader.

Further conscience-training can be got from the two 'Wildlifers' which follow in the distinguished (Earthworm Award 1994) footprints of the author's **Blue Whale** – which fans will remember we spotted two years ago. These are gentle books providing a good long look at the nature of their subjects as well as examining the 'protection' that humankind affords them, and Strugnell's elephants are lovely. **TP**

Children Just Like Me

Barnabas and Anabel Kindersley,
Dorling Kindersley,
0 7513 5327 2, £9.99

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

The DK style of vibrant colour photographs on a stark white background is now unmistakable. This large-format book, produced in association with UNICEF, looks at the lives of 36 children around the world, from Nicole who lives in Los Angeles with a swimming pool in the garden, a housekeeper and parents who work in the film industry, to Meena and her family living in a temporary structure with no water or electricity on a construction site in New Delhi; from Levi, an Inuit from Northern Canada, to Suchart, a novice Buddhist monk from Thailand. We learn about their families, their schools, their favourite food, the clothes they like to wear and their hopes for the future. As a cross section of the world's children it works wonderfully; any user though would need to realise that within each country there is a range of children in terms of socio-economic background, racial origin and way of life. What comes shining through, of course, is the importance to all these children of the bedrocks of family, friends and school.

Additional features include an introduction to each continent, some excerpts from the Kindersleys' travel diary, and an index.

This is a valuable addition to any library both for general interest and as a model for children's writing about themselves. Readers also get a chance to join a penpal club sponsored by Royal Mail International. **SR**

Let's Talk About Sex – growing up, changing bodies, sex and sexual health

Robie H Harris, ill. Michael
Emberley, Walker Books,
0 7445 3674 X, £7.99 pbk

MIDDLE/SECONDARY

You might remember Val Randall's enthusiastic reception for this excellently objective and unself-conscious primer, amplified by Stephanie Nettell's interview with Robie Harris (both in BFK January 1995). If you bought the original (£12.99 but worth it), well done, but it's probably worn out by now, so a paperback for a fiver less looks like a really useful bargain. And if you missed it first time, now's your chance. **TP**

Understanding Your Brain

Rebecca Treays, ill. Christyan Fox,
Usborne (Science for Beginners
series), 0 7460 2014 7, £4.50 pbk

MIDDLE UPWARDS

The thing about your brain is that it's the only one

you've got or ever will have, and you need to use it to examine itself. Navel-gazing is simple by comparison so any book that's not hopelessly trivial or frantically technical is bound to be worth inspection. Inspection is well rewarded here, for although trivia abound – this is Usborne, after all – their purpose is serious and effective as they characterise facts and thereby enhance their memorability.

After a brief introduction to cerebral and neural anatomy, we get onto brain function, the acquisition of learning, the nature of intelligence and perception, memory processes and how to develop them, and the hypothalamic homeostat. A look at altered brain function starts with mental illness (a really helpful synopsis of schizophrenia here) and goes on to psychotropic drugs, psychokinesis and hypnosis.

The whole thing is presented with an authoritative lightness of touch which will at once satisfy immediate curiosity and stimulate further inquiry. Far from soporific, this should fill a yawning gap on library shelves. **TP**

A Young Person's Guide to Music

Neil Ardley, music by Poul Ruders,
Dorling Kindersley, 0 7513 5320 5, £16.99

MIDDLE UPWARDS

You need a good CD player to get the best out of this one, for, stuck in the front cover is a 65-track

birdsong, as one of its many bonuses. This is a fine and appropriate way to celebrate 50 years of Britten's original 'Young Person's Guide'.

TP

Tourism

Roy Woodcock, Wayland (Britain
Today series), 0 7502 1535 6, £9.99

SECONDARY

Anyone who has had to find support material for – or, God forbid, had to teach – GNVQ Part 1 Leisure and Tourism will fall upon this book with open arms. Plenty of clear maps and colour photographs illustrate a manageable text, though some better proof-reading is in order with one map of seaside resorts listing Infracombe (sic) and Barnstable (sic).

A particular feature are the fact boxes which provide straightforward statistics such as the country of origin of visitors to Britain, top ten buildings in numbers of visitors and top ten leisure parks – with most of the figures coming from 1993.

Chapters include Tourism in Towns, The Countryside, Transport and Tourism, and The Future. There are also 'Case Studies' of the Cumbria Tourist Board, Blackpool, and Center Parc – though, to my mind, 130 words of text and a half page photo scarcely deserve such a grand title. **SR**

Henry Ford and Ford

Michael Pollard,
Exley (Great Business
Stories series),
1 85015 493 7, £7.99

SECONDARY

If he really believed history was bunk, Henry Ford would probably be astounded that, almost 50 years after his death, books were still being written about him; yet this self-educated engineer almost single-handedly determined the shape of things to come in the twentieth century. His Model T automobile, launched in 1908, proved to be 'a car that would change the world'. For the first time millions of people could afford cheap reliable transport.

Michael Pollard's book provides a fascinating profile of a man with a vision and the determination to realise his ambition. Already middle-aged when the first Model Ts were built, he went on to instigate many production and marketing innovations. He was the first car manufacturer to employ assembly line mass production methods. Also, shrewdly, he realised the value of a network of dealers selling only Ford cars.

Ford could be a hard and sometimes insensitive employer. Some of his working practices did not meet with universal approval and his refusal to allow unions into his factories ended in violent confrontation. From these sometimes shaky foundations, however, the company has since grown into a multinational enterprise. **VH**



The bass clarinet

The bass clarinet produces deep notes with a dark, haunting tone. It has the same keywork as the clarinet, and many clarinetists also play the bass clarinet.

PLAY TRACK 27

"The bass clarinet sounds like the way a giant rubber snail! Here, it fills out the sound of the bassoon, cello, and double bass as they all play the opening of the final fugue."

The upper part of the tube is curved downwards to bring the mouthpiece within easy reach of the player's mouth

The clarinet

This is the B-flat clarinet, the standard kind of clarinet. Many clarinetists also play the A clarinet, which is slightly longer. Both kinds of clarinet have exactly the same keywork. Most clarinets are made of wood, and all have single reeds.

PLAY TRACK 21

"The clarinet plays in the low register, where its hollow, throaty sound blends with the low notes of the harp."

The metal bell curves upwards to project the sound of the low notes forward

The cylindrical shape of the clarinet's tube gives it a smooth tone

A spike supports the weight of the instrument

disc round about which the book revolves. It's an anatomised performance of Poul Ruders' 'Concerto in Pieces', first played straight through by the BBCSO and then dissected with friendly comments by Andrew Davis. Later there is a musical index showing the sound of each instrument solo. Throughout the rest of the book, which is a competent exposure of mainstream 'serious' music making, its structure and history, the text refers to relevant sections of the recording – most useful when dealing with individual instruments. I found the history bit particularly good, for it shows that music has always developed in parallel rather than in series. The A-Z of composers is a help, too, with a delightful picture of Olivier Messiaen, complete with bebop beret, notating

Non Fiction REVIEWERS:

Vee Holliday, Ted Percy and
Steve Rosson.

Non Fiction Reviews Editor:
Eleanor von Schweinitz

Author-ising Your School

Liz Fincham on making the most of a visiting writer

No More Lucky Dip!

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a school in possession of good sense must be in want of a writer. But whom to choose? Aye, there's the rub. If there's one thing in even shorter supply than pay rises, for most teachers it's time. Negotiations with writers are likely to be carried out during the lunch-hour in tiny cupboards off the staffroom. These are called telephone kiosks but they actually house lost property, back issues of the **TES** and the bran tub for the Christmas Fair. Reader, I've been there. To avoid the Lucky Dip Approach so the whole exercise is as valuable as possible for the pupils, teachers, school and writer, serious planning is called for. In fact, if we look in turn at the six elements of every good piece of journalism and think of who, why, what, when, where and how, it will simplify the issue greatly.

Who?

Who shall we choose? Ideally, someone somewhere in the school will have read a superb novel, been inspired by a newly discovered poet, become interested in script-writing or some other variant of English teaching. The enthusiasms will have been shared in snatched conversations over cups of coffee or in planning meetings. A brave soul suggests getting in touch with the writer to see if they ever do school visits. Believe me, many of them do, as starving in garrets is a much over-rated occupation. Writers need schools as much as we teachers need writers.

Why?

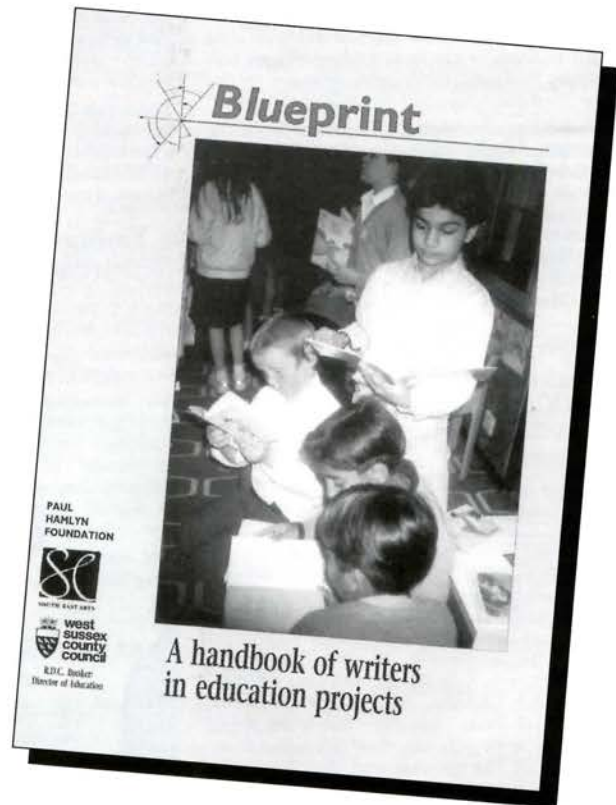
Why do we want writers in schools anyway? Surely much of what they do with the pupils is similar to the work already done by dedicated teachers. Yes and No. The main difference between writers and teachers is that writers spend the chief part of their energy on developing writing. For us, it is only part of what we do. In other words, writers are professionals because that's how they earn their living. Isn't it strange how if this was a visit by a professional cricketer or a musician the question wouldn't even be asked? Our specific reason for wanting a visit by a particular writer could be quite simple. We may want to encourage pupils to tackle his or her works more fully or wish them to develop their own creativity through writing workshops. Isn't either, or both, motive enough?

What?

What will you ask them to do? Closely linked with your choice of writer and motive for choosing one in particular is your chance to customise the visit. Most writers are not so



Pupils from Chesworth Junior School at work at The National History Museum with Robin Mellor.



grand they'll reject your ideas for the Poetry Day, Book Week, or sequence of visits, but they do like to know exactly what is expected of them. Some understand the terminology we use in schools such as 'process and product' or 'aims and outcomes'. Others will need these to be clarified a little. Many writers are happy to work on something quite specific for your school, perhaps the first draft of a play to celebrate a centenary or a series of poetry workshops. A few prefer to talk in more general terms about their work. It's essential to establish this framework at the outset; failure to do so makes the visit disappointing for both writer and school.

When?

The favourite weeks tend to be Book Weeks and National Poetry Days in the Autumn Term and Summer Activity Weeks. If you choose a very popular author, book a long time in advance. How about the first week back to school in January? Writers have just as much need to beat mid-winter blues and post-Christmas poverty as the rest of us. If you want to ensure that all of your pupils meet the writer, check whether your chosen dates clash with school trips to France, the geography expedition to central Bolivia, or rehearsals for the school concert or play.

Where?

The venue will alter the nature of the experience. School halls, classrooms, local museums and art galleries are all possible locations for visits by writers. Some writers are willing to talk to casts of thousands in the school hall, others prefer small groups of 30 children in classrooms. The work of some writers lends itself to outside venues. For example, poets often work happily in art galleries because they deal, as painters do, in visual images, symbols and myth. A crime writer might love the ruined castle or spooky wood which overlooks your school playing fields. Remember visits off-site will need the usual letters of consent and ratio of accompanying adults to be arranged well in advance!

How?

Aha, the administrative bit...

Q: How long should the visit be?



Gillian Clarke with pupils from Wisborough Green School.

A: A *single visit* can be appropriate for a school when time and money are in short supply . . . A single visit can help a school unused to working with writers make a step into that dimension.

A *sequence of visits* might take the form of a planning meeting, a full-day in class and a follow-up session to look at second drafts, plan an anthology, poster display or short performance of work.

In a *residency* there's time for the work to be developed over days, weeks or even longer. It's vital that schemes of work allow pupils the opportunity of developing work with a writer over this period of time.

Q: What does it cost and who pays?

A: 1. The Regional Arts Boards – Refer to the Literature Officer of your particular Board and the Literature Development Worker where such a post exists. Money is devolved from the Arts Council of England to these RABs and each uses funding in a slightly different way.

2. W H Smith Poets in Schools Fund – The contact for this scheme (to whom application must be made two terms in advance of the proposed visit) is the Education Officer, The Poetry Society, 22 Betterton Street, London WC2H 9BU (tel. 0171 240 4810).

3. Sponsorship

4. The school itself . . . after all there are usually *some* funds available via an accommodating headteacher or PTA. Author visits are, after all, amply justifiable in terms of the National Curriculum in English.

Other questions to consider

Q: How do you find out about your local writers?

Q: Which writers are willing to travel further afield?

Q: What about insurance?

Q: What type and scale of publicity will you want?

Blueprint for Success

In **Blueprint**, the above are just some of the aspects I've considered. There are details of over 30 writers with their contact telephone numbers/addresses and preferred methods of work. During my two years as Literature Development Consultant for West Sussex Schools, I was able to visit dozens of schools and observe exactly what goes on in the classroom with a visiting writer. There were poets, novelists, illustrators and script-writers, children aged six and students of 17 involved in the work. John Agard, Roy Appes, James Berry, Simon Brett, Gillian Clarke, Carol Ann Duffy, Vicki Feaver, Jenny Fontana, Nigel Hinton, Jackie Kay, Anthony Masters, Brian Moses, Hilda Offen, Morag Styles, Jean Ure . . . they were all there. In all cases the visits enhanced the delivery of the English curriculum, through speaking and listening, reading and writing. Pupils learned that in order to be a good writer it was necessary to give the writing energy, time and status. Teachers were encouraged and supported in their own work with pupils. So, though the visits were always enjoyable they were never frivolous. The emphasis was always on the seriousness of the task in hand whether it was writing a poem, analysing a sequence of poems, listening to a raconteur or trying out short stories using the framework suggested by an expert. The tasks developed from work which was already happening in classrooms and led right back into it. There was a real enriching process going on. However tight funds are in schools, the value of such initiatives is incalculable. Visits by writers need to be fought for: once they are in our schools the writers need to be nurtured. They are a valuable resource.

It might be winter, but there is no discontent

If every writer were to be treated in the way we'd treat Shakespeare if he popped in for a visit to our schools that would be a good rule of thumb. We'd make sure the school orchestra wasn't practising madrigals in the room next door. There'd be no interruptions half way through Shakespeare's declamation of Sonnet Twenty-nine by someone looking for Christopher Marlowe due to play in a match against Cheapside Grammar. No self-respecting English teacher would want to miss a minute of his interpretation of **King Lear** and would have swapped breaktime supervision duty with colleagues in order to listen to his wit over coffee. All the students would have read some of his work

in advance so they could ask original questions, not obvious ones like 'Why did you decide to be a writer?' Facile questions breed facile answers. Shakespeare might just answer 'Poaching didn't seem to pay!' A spot of braised venison would have been arranged for lunch and there'd be plenty of eager teachers on hand to share a cup of sack with him at the end of the day. He'd be paid promptly and not asked to judge the school poetry competition as an extra unless that had been arranged in advance. We'd know it might interfere with other commitments he had like getting **The Winter's Tale** finished. The pupil with the best copperplate writing might even volunteer to write a letter of thanks after the visit. All right, I concede that last bit is far-fetched, but I think you catch my drift . . .

July 1st 1596

Dear William Shakespeare,

I am writing to confirm the details arranged during our earlier conversation when we spoke on Mid Summer's Day.

The dates for the five sessions are as follows

September 17th 1596

September 24th 1596

October 1st 1596

October 8th 1596

October 15th 1596

From nine-thirty until eleven a.m. each day you will be working with thirty pupils aged fourteen on the writing of poetry with particular reference to the sonnet form. It is hoped that a collection of sonnets will be prepared in book form by the end of the Autumn Term to be sold at the Christmas Fair.

Then from eleven thirty until one o'clock you will be working with a group of twelve pupils who are interested in putting together a play-script. They have seen a performance of your latest play and are eagerly anticipating working with you. The age range for this group is from fourteen to seventeen. Two of them hope to become actors themselves.

After lunch, which will be provided for you, we should like you to work with twenty of our older pupils, aged seventeen, on one of your plays, *Romeo and Juliet*. Arrangements will be made so that each student will have a copy of the play. The afternoon class runs from one-thirty until three p.m. and there is opportunity for working in a rehearsal space towards the end of the residency.

We look forward to hearing from you and hope that these arrangements are satisfactory. Fees will be paid in two blocks, at the end of week two and then on completion of the work. I understand that you are very busy at present putting on a new production but I should be most grateful if you could confirm these arrangements by July 10 th.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely

The zeal of the early converted

I have to confess I was an early zealot to the power of the professional writer. First, in Wales, I shivered in terror and admiration in seminar classes run by Vernon Watkins, friend of Dylan Thomas. Next came the pleasures of hearing Seamus Heaney and Michael Longley read in a draughty hall in Belfast. Then there was Mick Imlah, Oxford poet, working at Oathall Community College in Haywards Heath. This was followed by Gillian Clarke working at the same school in her focused and inspirational way with pupils and teachers. It is the reason I want to support even more teachers and writers as they go about this work. It's why I wrote **Blueprint** – to share all I learned during my two years engaged in this work within the Advisory Service in West Sussex. Good Luck! I'm sure you'll enjoy working alongside professional writers as much as I do. And don't forget to share your good news; teachers are like magpies – on the look-out for little gems! ■

Blueprint: A Handbook of Writers in Education Projects priced £5 (cheques payable to West Sussex County Council) is obtainable from Dot Slattery, NEAPC, Furnace Drive, Furnace Green, Crawley, West Sussex RH10 6JB.

Illustrations on these pages are from **Blueprint**.

Liz Fincham is currently teaching 11-18 year-old girls at a school in Brighton, as well as writing poems and articles for various journals.

Library Logorrhoea

Anne Fine, survivor of many an author visit, impersonates her least favourite host or hostess. Any resemblance to an actual person, living or dead, is *entirely* coincidental.

Who? Oh, of course! Welcome, Miss Bitafiction. Come in. Ignore the piles of paper. This place gets into such a mess. In fact, I was just looking for the cheque our finance officer made out for you, but it's vanished. Completely vanished. Still, never mind.

Now, Miss Bitafiction – Raita, then. And you must call me Iris. Raita Bitafiction. Such an unusual name. Is your husband foreign? Oh, it's your *own* name. Of course. And how was your journey? I'm sorry I didn't think to phone and tell you not to bother to catch the early train, because as it happens the school rang up yesterday to say they can't possibly get the children down to us before 11.30 after all. But never mind. Did Miss Holiday find you at the station with no trouble?

Oh, I see. Well, I think some young librarians are a bit embarrassed to go up to perfect strangers and ask if they just happen to be the visiting writer. Though I do agree it was a little strange that she simply stood there staring into that enormous bag of books you're carrying for fully ten minutes without trying to make eye contact. Still, never mind. You're here now.

Nearly weren't? Nasty moment on the bypass? Well, yes, I agree that Miss Holiday does drive a wee bit too fast. Between you and me, I don't think that, as yet, she has perfect control of her pedals. She's only just passed her test, you know. And I expect she was trying to make up for lost time because she gets her break about now and likes to get off to meet her boyfriend at the Cycling Proficiency Centre. Apparently he doesn't like standing around waiting. Yes, well, I expect you do feel you'd rather he was five minutes longer hanging around outside the centre than that you were 40 years longer hanging about in your coffin, but personally I think these old Ford Cortinas are a lot sturdier than they look, and lorry drivers are quite experienced at noticing cars coming up alongside in the inner lane. So let's just be grateful that you're here, shall we? Let me get you a cup of coffee. How do you like it? Milk with no sugar. Fine.

Oh, dear. Bit of a problem with the milk, I'm afraid. Joy doesn't seem to have brought any this morning. There's a tiny bit in this carton – no, you'd better not have that. It's gone niffy. What a shame. But I'm sure you won't mind it black just this once. I can't send Phil out because he's on the desk. It's pension day, so they all pop in this morning. In fact, you might find that a tiny bit of a problem while you're speaking because so many of our senior citizens are a little bit audially challenged and –

What does that mean? Well, how embarrassing! You're supposed to be the wordsmith, Miss Bitafiction, not me! Fancy *me* ending up telling *you* what something means. It means deaf. Phil will be shouting a lot because our old folk are *deaf*.

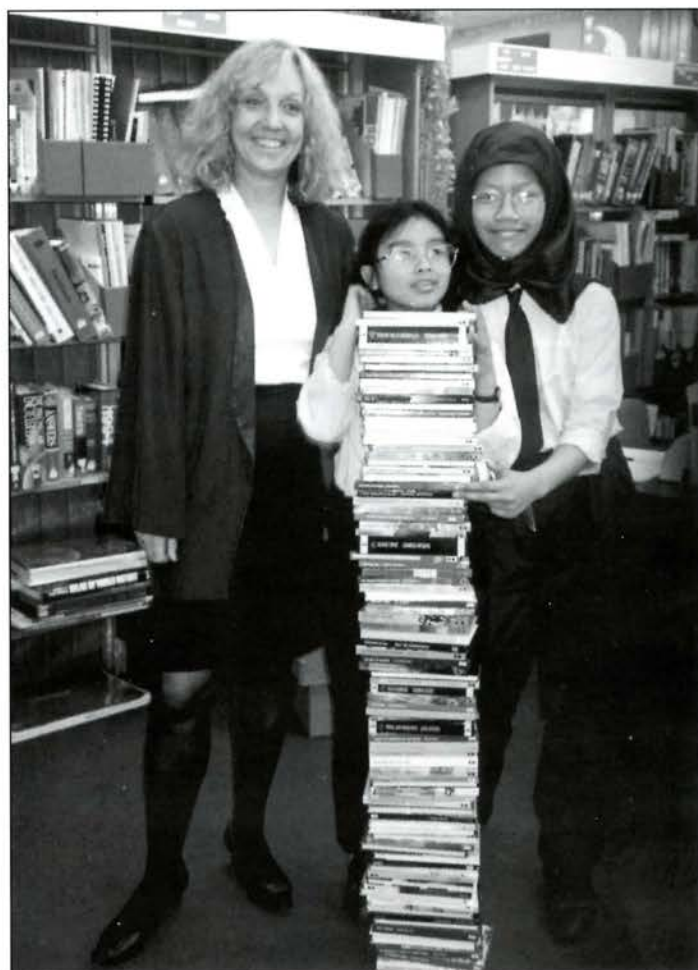
Now, do you need anything for this talk? A table? A chair?

A *lavatory*? Well, how extraordinary!

Oh, silly me. I see what you mean! For a moment I thought . . . No, of course. No, honestly! Oh, how funny!

Where's what? Oh, yes. Sorry. Let me explain. No problem. You go through that door over there and turn left between the stacks. Now, is it between the fifth and sixth stacks, or between the sixth and seventh? Well, never mind. You can't miss it. If you overshoot, you'll only fetch up in Returns for Rebinding and have to backtrack a bit. Then it's up the stairs, first left, second right, then round as far as you can go, and though it's not actually marked, it's the door actually facing you. Don't open the door beside it whatever you do. You'll have an avalanche. You see, we're going issue-led, so we've taken an awful lot of boring stuff that never goes out off the shelves. What sort of things? Well, things with no date stamps since October last year. **The King James Bible. The Koran. The Oxford Companion to English Literature. Great European Paintings. Lives of the Composers.** Just stuff people nowadays simply don't want to take home. It makes space, you see, and we're so short of space. We have twenty more metres of Mills and Boon this year.

Yes, *isn't* it a shame that so much junk gets published? Mind you, we can buy 10 paperbacks for the price of one hardback. That's why we don't have any of your last three books in this particular branch. I did try to fish a copy or two out of one of the other libraries, but they were all checked out. You must be very popular!



Idayu Ramli (11) gets to grips with some New Windmills, with the help of author Anne Fine and a classmate.

Buy more? I don't think so. Not till they're in paperback anyway. And presumably that will depend on your hardback sales. Yes. Bit of a Catch-22. Silly, really.

Where will you be giving your talk? Well, right here. We're open plan, you see. Yes, you're right, there was a nice big soundproof room with lovely marble pillars in the old library, but that place was all so old-fashioned, it had to go. We're all modern now. You won't mind if a few people rifle quietly through the shelves while you're talking to the children. I'll try and remember to turn the video down a bit, of course, so you won't have to compete with that, but I don't want to turn it off completely because the school refusers so enjoy it. But I will try and keep all the young mums with their pushchairs out for the hour-and-a-half you'll be talking, because you'll actually be standing next to the picture book boxes. Yes, I agree it is a shame if they've paid for a bus or struggled a long way with their prams in this weather. But it can't be helped. You see, we're a *community* library now, and they're open-plan. It's so much better.

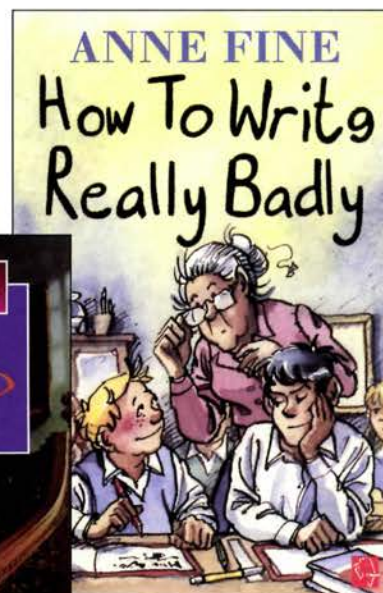
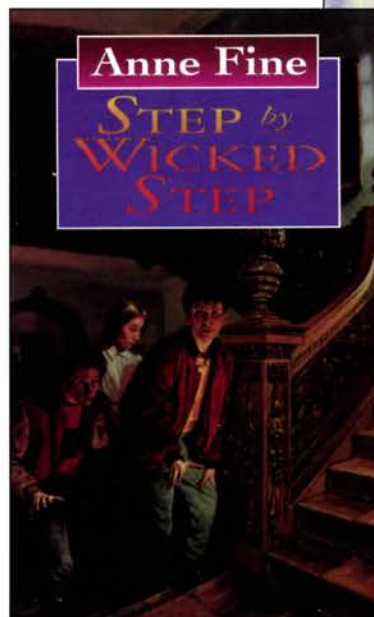
Can you shriek over the noise of the fans? It gets a bit hot in here. Yes, the old library was quite good in that respect, I suppose. Cool in summer, warm in winter. But those dreadful Victorian buildings! Our architect thought a glass ceiling and walls would be so much more interesting or those with a more visual or spatial cognitive approach – Non-readers. Miss Bitafiction. It means non-readers.

Speaking of which . . . Here they come! Swarming over the hill. Is that one dead? Oh, no. Thank God for that. She's just rolling. Oh, no. Now they're *all* rolling. I certainly hope there's not as much dog dirt on that hill as there was yesterday, or we're going to have a very whiffy morning. Yes, I suppose it does look a bit like Culloiden. They don't seem to have a teacher with them. Now that is naughty! I most particularly asked the headmaster to send enough teachers, especially after he insisted that we'd agreed on your taking 80 children, and not just 40. Mind you, I think he was a little put out that you wanted them all the same age. He thought that was a bit – how did he put it? – *discriminatory*. Anyhow, he's sending all his primary sixes and sevens, but he says he's just sending a couple of infant classes along as well. He knows they won't be able to keep up with what you're telling the others and they might fidget and fuss a bit, but they do so love books, and he's sure they'd get a kick out of seeing a real live author. He was quite sure you wouldn't mind. That's all right, isn't it, Miss Bitafiction?

Miss Bitafiction? Miss Bitafiction? ■



Anne Fine at the Wessex Children's Book Fair.



Anne Fine is a hugely popular writer for all ages. She's won numerous awards and her two latest books are *Step By Wicked Step* (Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 00161 7, £9.99) and *How to Write Really Badly*, illustrated by Philippe Dupasquier (Methuen, 0 416 19254 8, £8.99; Mammoth, 0 7497 2023 9, £2.99 pbk).

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Daily Telegraph

"Simple and direct ... informed with zestful humour"

TES



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A Treasury of Christmas Stories, Funny Stories, Ghost Stories, Pony Stories, Old Testament Stories, Witches and Wizards, Irish Stories

Stories from Around the World, Stories for Five Year Olds, Stories for Six Year Olds

Stories from the Brothers Grimm, Stories for Seven Year Olds, Stories for Eight Year Olds

Red Letter Days

David Bennett gives a personal account of making a short story collection

I'm as excited by receiving post now as I was when I was a kid. Not for me leaving mail unopened for days. The second time our crazed cur lets out her pretence of fierce rage each morning, I know there's a letter on the mat and I'm driven to discover what it is. (The first time is the milkman and I don't find much allure in his delivery.)

My pigeon-hole at the day job gives me a second crack at anticipation, heightened all the more by any letter which looks unfamiliar and not in the usual line of catalogues, invoices and details of forthcoming attractions. 22nd October 1994 saw such a day.

It brought an invitation to compile an anthology of short stories, with two themes to choose from, all wrapped up in compliments about my articles and reviews and my fitness for the task. Here was heady post indeed . . . and before 8.30am!

After that moment of surprised elation came a busy working day where I didn't have space to do much except smile a flattered smile from time to time. That evening I rang a few friends-in-the-know and was persuaded I'd enjoy the challenge and knew enough to do the job.

'But I don't teach 5- to 10-year-olds - I don't know what they're like. I don't know any. I teach great big kids with facial hair, acne and mostly addicted to Point Horror.'

'Don't worry,' soothed Powling. 'Your sons were in that age group once weren't they? You've read and reviewed enough short story books to know your stuff. Aah, now I come to think of it I might have recommended you ages ago when I was chatting to the publishers. Don't let BfK down, just enjoy the time spent rummaging in libraries and so on and so fifth. Get on to your Schools' Library Service.'

'I won't have time.'

'Of course you will. It's the winter and you can't be out in your garden.'

That clinched it.

I frightened myself into inaction re-re-reading the general brief I'd been sent and so it took two more days before I responded to the 'Associate Publisher/Fiction', who seemed to be slightly unsure of who I was when I 'phoned. Perhaps it's just that my questions seemed inane to her. Anyway, we established that I'd take on *Witches and Wizards*, an editor would be assigned to me and make contact soon, and I'd be sent a contract in due course.

A month later, from the 'Publishing Manager', said document arrived. This ran to seven sides of intricate legal-speak and in part seemed to alter things I'd understood from the brief. I could just about cope with

that, but the Publicity Questionnaire fazed me with its presupposition that I was a real writer or something. Still, I doubt that my responses are the most bizarre they have on file.

I signed on the dotted line, tucked my tender plants up from the frost, locked the summer house and prepared for a winter passed in haunting libraries across two counties.

Notes to myself - shopping list for Anthology

1. Relevant to age-group and reading level.
2. Suitable both for reading alone and for reading aloud by parents.
3. Balance of well-known authors and unfamiliar writers.
4. Intercultural content.
5. Balanced content in terms of male and female characters.
6. Equal numbers of witches and wizards if at all possible.
7. No extracts from longer stories.
8. Remember that this collection also intended for US audience.
9. As wide a range of subject-matter as possible - domestic, fantasy, fable, animals, people, historical, contemporary.
10. Try to get some new material or at least generally unfamiliar material.
11. A well-balanced list in terms of length comprising 15-20 tales.

Making and thinking about this list was a good delaying tactic to put off the actual work . . . and, anyway, there always seemed to be some attention needed to those plants in the conservatory!

Then Abigail arrived on my telephone - I had an Editor. I was to meet her just before Christmas, for lunch, so I'd better have something to offer for starters.

I'd never liked libraries all that much as places. I can never get comfortable in them. I was the only adult lying full-length on the floor of Derby City Library (Children's Section) and I can tell you a pretty unyielding floor it is, too. Nottingham's Angel Row isn't much better and Ilkeston could do with a thicker carpet. I liked the after-hours floor and carpet of the Junior School Library opposite my house. I tend to conform to conventional standing or sitting in my own school library, mainly because pupils get a bit wobbly when they have to step over elderly teachers slumped in their way.

Also, I discovered, an adult male in the Children's Section on a Saturday morning with no bratkins in tow does get some sideways glances. Should I wear a badge?

HARMLESS
SHORT STORY
COLLECTOR

The mac should be left off, definitely!

The fortunate thing about my theme was that the books wherein I'd find my material pretty easily identified themselves at once by cover illustration or title. I can't estimate how many tales I meandered through, starting at A and scouring to the end of the alphabet before I'd allow myself to seek a comfortable catering location elsewhere. En route I also plundered the sections on Picture Books, Parentcraft and stories in Urdu and other unfamiliar languages. Friends' bookshelves also came under scrutiny as the whole business became more and more compulsive.

I went to each library at least three times to catch up on any books that might have been out on loan during my other visits. Times without number I came across perfect stories on GHOSTS, which had been my alternative choice of theme. In fact, I composed some knock 'em dead anthologies on numerous *other* themes, yet all this time I was ticking items off my shopping list for suitable witches alarmingly slowly. Furthermore, promising wizards appeared to be in desperately short supply.

Four days before Christmas my notebook had 22 possible stories plus five unpublished ones I'd persuaded friends to write. Fortunately for me I'd realised very early on that scrupulous record-keeping was vital if I



From 'The Not-Very-Nice Prince,' in *A Treasury of Witches and Wizards*.



David Bennett with pupils.

was to be efficient and not waste valuable time. I made photocopies of possible stories including the printing histories and, as a belt and braces job, kept a separate list in case anything got lost in the post or the house caught fire. I forgot all these precautions only once and it was no fun trying to backtrack for the information I wanted.

I found that I needed pretty full notes on why I'd been attracted to a story. When you're on your 52nd tale about a witch it's a bit like The Miss World Contest: you can't quite recall number one! Well, almost the same! Perhaps the Eurovision Song Contest would be a better comparison.

Lunch was a healthy Italian repast in ambient surroundings, although the table was a little small for the story collector's clutter as well as diners' dinners. We managed nevertheless and I came out with 12 stories less to worry about, a manuscript deadline and a train to catch in a hurry. Abigail had 10 stories in the bag to send to the US editors for starters, a seasonal token from me and the bill.

After Christmas, armed with Abigail's comments, I persevered with my writer friends to get their stories into the running. Busy people all, we didn't quite make it. At least five more stories had to be found so it was back to the library floors in the hope I'd missed something, or they'd unearthed some other stock. I say 'other' because I had a conviction that nobody would want to buy a collection of stories that were already widely available or very recently published. The library at the publishers must be terminally ancient because Abigail passed on some truly unusual material for my consideration. So, by fair means and foul I unearthed 11 more witcherly/wizardly tales and postal moderation (lots of big heavy envelopes on the mat) saw us down to a long list of 20.

Here's where the fun started – with the gardening season not that far off.

Letters: Editor to Collector

17th January 1995

* A few problems. The first is the simplest but also the most problematic in that a number of stories are sadly just too long for this collection.

* There's something rather adult about the style, and some of the language might prove difficult in story 4.

* In story 8 the dialect of the narrative, although not difficult here, might be a problem in the States.

2nd February 1995

The Scottish story made me laugh and I think we'll get away with the odd 'Och-Aye' – it's not quite Burns so I think our readers in Iowa will get the hang of it.

10th February 1995

Even with the latest wizard I still feel we're short of wizards so I'm enclosing something I found from an American collection.

7th March 1995

As I said on the 'phone, I still prefer the first Anancy tale you chose. Please come up with an order of stories by March 17th.

9th March 1995

I've just discovered that the Baba Yaga story is in one of our previous collections. We'll have to find another. Because the manuscript is now being typed, we'd need to find something in the next couple of weeks.



4th April 1995

Here's my new suggested order of stories. Can you let me know as soon as possible if it's OK, as the designer will start laying out the book in the next few days?

23rd May 1995

I'm afraid I've got some bad news on the second wizard story. The author rang me and said he wouldn't agree to it being re-illustrated. Since the book has now been laid out and our illustrator has started work, we need a wizard story of about 1,000 words to fill the gap. Could you let me know what you think soon?

29th June 1995

Our publishing director has read through the collection and thinks it is 'wonderful' but is rather worried about story 9. She thinks it's too dark and gruesome for the age group and wondered if we could replace it with something more benign.

6th July 1995

Sorry to be so dense about your replacement suggestion. I've checked since we talked on the 'phone and found it in another of our collections after all.

9th October 1995

What you'll find here is the complete book, pictures and all, plus a proof of the cover. You'll find a couple of stories have changed places. Our US editor pointed out that we had a character called Prince Ferdinand in two consecutive stories... oops!

In Naomi Lewis's words, following Baudelaire, 'an anthology is never finished – simply abandoned'. I've since found four stories I would have liked to have shared with readers of *A Treasury of Witches and Wizards* and my antennae now spot a potential source at a hundred hops of frog or toad.

As collector, I'm obviously grateful to the writers of the material; it's their book just as much as mine and Abigail's, but one page I must claim as all my own. In the year of my Silver Wedding Anniversary I was able to give my wife the present of a dedication in a book.

I've been advised of two more publishing dates so far – one before and one after you read this, so by now you'll either have made your own mind up whether I would have better spent my time in the garden, or else you'll have that decision yet to make. Don't phone, just send your communications by post please. I'll no doubt read them in the summer house. ■

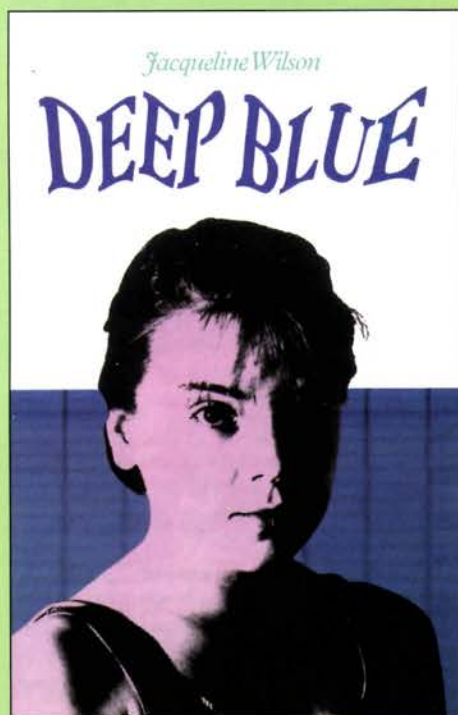
David Bennett's day job is at a Nottinghamshire school where he's Senior Teacher responsible for the English Faculty and resources management.

A Treasury of Witches and Wizards, with illustrations by Jacqui Thomas, is published by Kingfisher, 1 85697 435 9, £4.50.

'Today I forgot to unload the airgun before I carried it into the house, and Jack left the shed gate open, so that the cows got into the vegetables and ate all my mother's cabbages and lettuce, and then made steaming heaps in the kitchen yard. This meant cleaning up the heaps, and then two hours of tennis straight after lunch when it was boiling hot.'

This sharply actual diary entry is a moment in the tennis-player Gordon Forbes' classic autobiography. Tennis as punishment – and on to Wimbledon. It shouldn't make sense, but it does.

That uninventable image came to mind reading amongst the sports literature currently available for children. Such narrative concreteness, though it exists in the better fiction, seems mostly to be edited out of the sporting worlds that children inhabit in their reading. The sports book for children all too frequently offers a thinned version of the reality of the games and sport they encounter. This version does not include the stabbed tennis stars, eye-gouging in the scrum, the horror on the face of the child surrounded by the mayhem at the abandoned England-Republic of Ireland football match last year in Dublin. Are too many writers of fiction unfamiliar with their worlds, or ill at ease on the field? Don't they want children to encounter the real world?



Some writers, fortunately, do turn their gaze towards reality. Jacqueline Wilson's novel, *Deep Blue* (Oxford, 0 19 271711 1, £9.99), about a teenager's ambition to dive for Britain in the Olympics, is a serious look at one fundamental unpleasantness – manipulative

GAME, SET . . . AND LITERATURE

Robert Hull, a keen sportsman himself, casts a wary eye over the current crop of sports writing for children in verse, stories and information books.

pressure. The book recognises a truth not scented in the cheerier fictions, namely that sport is a classic context for adult exploitation of young ambitions and desires, and that the perversion of play into militarised medal-mania is usually accomplished through parents, coaches and teachers.

The ruin being visited on the growing girl's sensibility is well caught; Barbara could be an East German athlete under Honecker. Though Dad's iron-spirited blindness and creepy solicitedness – he even sends her Valentines – are rather over-played, the story is a serious look at relationships as they shift and buckle under pressure, and then survive.

But encounters with actuality are not, it seems, the stuff of most fiction. Michael Hardcastle's *Advantage, Miss Jackson* (Mammoth, 0 7497 1022 5, £2.99) clearly aims at something less problematically concrete. It is about becoming 'a champion', and the story's particulars are organised round that firmly presented fantasy. Much of the story is running commentary on actual games: *'Slow it down, slow it down, Catrina told herself as she stood up and folded her towel with exaggerated care.'* (Curious to note a high tolerance of juvenile gamesmanship in several writers.)

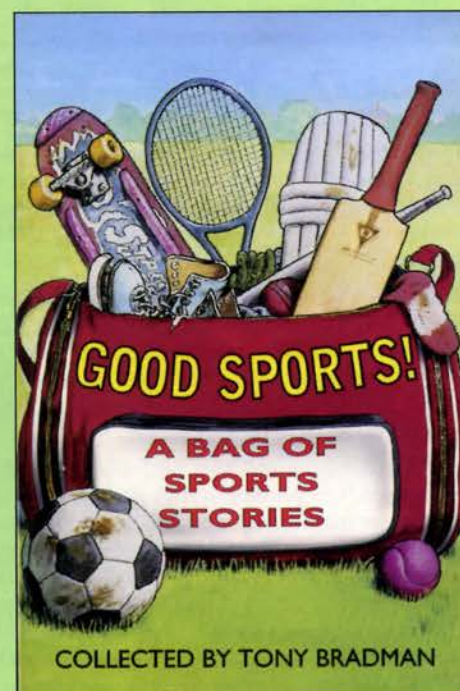
Earnest fantasy matches similarly take up much of Rob Child's stories. In *The Big Hit* (Corgi, 0 552 52662 2, £2.25), moreover, as in other 'The Big . . .' books in a 'By Myself' series, he aims at 'beginner readers'. The claim is puzzling; here is a sentence more or less at random: *'Andrew watched as the worried batsman hesitated slightly before playing at the final ball, waiting to see which way it would move, but the split-second delay proved fatal.'* The inspiration is journalistic cliché: *'Rakesh kept his nerve and coolly slid the ball past him into the unguarded net.'*

Perhaps what drives the publication and purchase of much sports fiction of that kind – which is incidentally overwhelmingly about football – is the sense that 'at least they're reading something'. Fine, as far as it goes; we have all felt that particular sense of relief. But the highly formulaic, cliché-bound tales that dominate games literature are in no interesting sense literary. Not only do they confront nothing, but in describing children's games in (unwitting?) parodies of the kind of journalism that itself sounds like parody, they perform a kind of double occlusion of child reality. The child's own world fades. Success shrinks to triumph; other human successes – participation, physical self-expression, pleasure in others' skills – go unacknowledged.

Does it matter? Perhaps only to the extent that fiction matters. But fiction can offer children a sporting world that's not quasi-religious and cemented by vows of self-absorption. It can give them back their own playing, playful selves.

As Hannah Cole's *Kick-Off* (Walker, 0 7445 1749 4, £2.99) does. Here children

inhabit their own wider, more amusing world, and perceive it alertly. Thus, Mr Crendon gives the team some advice about passing: *'Paula thought it was good advice, but not the sort of advice that Mr Crendon would take himself.'*



Good Sports! (Doubleday, 0 385 402325, £8.99; Corgi, 0 552 542962, £2.99), a book of sports stories collected by Tony Bradman, also steps out from the claustrophobic confines of the point-by-point changing room account of how I won, lost, threw it away, clawed my way back, achieved my ambition, proved myself to the selectors, and so on. In Michelle Magorian's 'Dan', as in most stories in the collection, the world of games is woven with concerns deriving from the larger social world. Dan's introduction to trampolining – described with a felt physical immediacy that isn't over-narrated – is part of a nicely shaped tale about coping with divorced parents and their conflicts: Rugby League versus Yoga. Dialogue is taught, detail agreeably telling, as when a girl trampolinist's long hair is tied back with the lace of a trainer. The story has humour and wit. At the end Dan, sat with dad and dad's friend Trev, *'drew up his legs and watched Rugby League in the lotus position'*.

Since sport tends towards solemnity, there's a good deal of pleasure to be had from books that are subversive – of gravitas not games themselves. Michael Rosen and the illustrator John Rogan have executed some neat one-twos in *Even Stevens F.C.* (A & C Black, 0 7136 4187 8, £6.50; Collins, 0 00 675084 2, £3.99 pbk), assisted by Eddie Rosen – technical advice? I don't normally read the team notes before a game, but here I'd make an

exception: 'Rodney Travis: 38, Wayne's dad. Bad back, bad right knee, bad shoulder. Part-time postman.' The dialogue is tough and realistic: 'That fractured eye-lash was a set-up.' A wikkid book.

Sport seems not well served by poetry. Neither of the two small collections of football poems from Macmillan, edited by David Orme, 'Ere We Go (0 330 32986 3, £2.99) and You'll Never Walk Alone (0 330 33787 4, £2.99), has more than a subs-bench number of real poems. Pam Gidney's genuinely witty 'A Perfect Match' is one of them:

*'We sat down on a Meadowbank
And of my love I spoke.
Queen of the South, I said to her,
My fires of love you Stoke.'*

But in most of both books there's a fatal sense of fandom feigned.

Due for publication in May this year, **Over the Moon** (Hutchinson, 0 09 176597 8, £9.99), a football compilation in the It's-not-the-words-but-who-writes-them-that-counts mode (see Budgie the Helicopter), celebrates the truth that children want to read non-poems by Jimmy Hill, Rob Jones, Paul Gascoigne, and even – I like this bit – Peter Osgood 'with his agent'. Is it what the National Curriculum means by 'poems from a range of cultures'? A red card for this wild lunge, possibly a charge of bringing the genre into disrepute.

Worth noting, too, is the fact that sports fiction and poetry seem in general not truly to reflect this 'range of cultures'. I couldn't find a cricket story set in the West Indies, India or Pakistan, or any acknowledgement that in Africa or India or China youngsters have games to play. No stories or poems about North American Indian youngsters canoeing, running, climbing, riding.

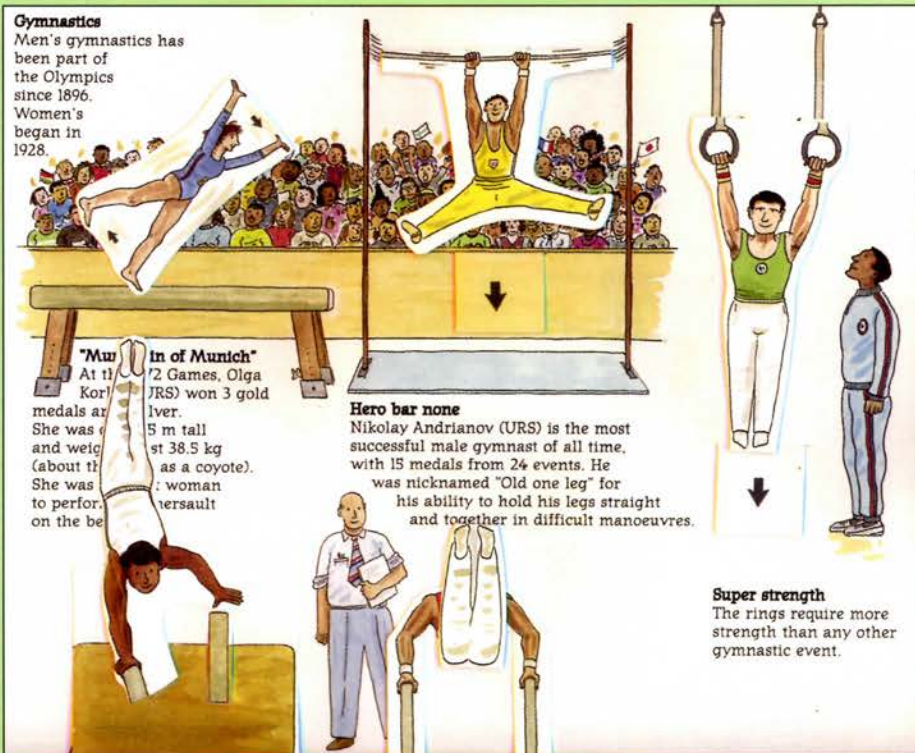
This broader world is left for non-fiction to try to acknowledge. It seems to do so very fitfully, but one fine book that makes the attempt is Peter Hick's **Sports and Entertainment** (Wayland, 0 7502 1273 X, £9.99), from a series about legacies of the ancient world. Handsome and well-written, it informatively compares past and present, with telling juxtapositions of image: for instance, a Minoan boxer and bull-leaper with contemporary equivalents.

Much sports non-fiction goes in a different direction, towards useful, if bland instruction. A & C Black's well illustrated 'Know The Game' series seems ideal for coaching and checking rules. Will children read them? Probably, but only to find out something quite particular.

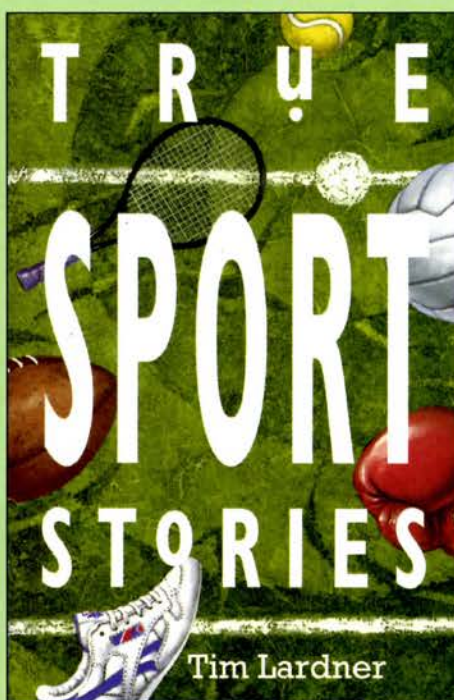
More lavish is **The Young Athlete** (Dorling Kindersley, 0 7513 5370 1, £8.99), which seems to be by Colin Jackson, who 'explores basic athletic techniques'. The photographs are nearly all of children, and the training instructions are clearly laid out and unfussy. Jackson's relation to the book looks ambiguous. Is the writer the writer? And his – or 'his' – text resembles much DK text, wholly unambitious and a plod to read. Other books in the series are by – or 'by' – the articulate Gary Lineker and Arantxa Sanchez Vicario. With such books why not either take on a writer or make clear where the text comes from?

It's good to see humour beginning to trespass on the hallowed tediums of non-fiction. Michael Wale's **No Sweat! A Guide to 50 TV Sports** (Macmillan, 0 330 34281 9, £3.99) has some nice anecdotes: for instance, an ice-hockey match cancelled because the car-park was dangerously icy.

True Sport Stories by Tim Lardner (Scholastic, 0 590 55792 0, £2.99), works



From **Pop-Up Olympics**.



from the welcome notion that non-fiction can mean stories. It has some uselessly agreeable – i.e. essential – nuggets of information. For instance, in the annual Marathon des Sables 'Competitors risk . . . heat exhaustion, dehydration, and exposure to sandstorms'; Molesworth would recognise the last item.

In Robert Crowther's **Pop-Up Olympics** (Walker, 0 7445 3734 7, £12.99) there's an actual medal for the first to finish. This is an all-action book to pull on and lever about; canoes glide, hammer-throwers whirl, bikes overtake. Nice, funny facts pop up. A judge once gave 13.2 out of 10 to a gymnast; in 1896 a competitor who crashed his bike borrowed one from a spectator, set off again, and won. In those days in the Olympics fun won. 13.2 out of 10 to this one.

It's also refreshing to find good books about sport as science. Ian Graham's **Science Spotlight – Sport** (Evans, 0 237 51433 8,

£9.99) has good, clear text, though the illustrations don't always make the best of the opportunities that sets up. The curl of a free kick in football is shown with the ball in one place; the swerve itself isn't illustrated. Close by, though, is a very informative diagram of the relation of spin to air-pressure during the flight in a tennis ball.

It would be nice to move on to biographies and autobiographies, if there were any. They seem not to exist (though Penguin Puffin will be publishing one by Linford Christie in June). Nor do documentary or fictive accounts of clubs, leagues or codes. In times of enormous change and upheaval, what's more, the shift to professionalism in rugby, the loss of major televised events to satellite channels, and so on is ignored. In the three poetry books no poem celebrates an individual sportsman or woman.

In fact, the most striking feature about the range of sports books I've seen is their curious non-contemporaneity. In Britain, there must be thousands of youngsters with nowhere to play and nothing to play with, and thousands more directly affected by the collapse of a school games culture in the late 80s, or by the sale of a Rugby League team, or by injury caused by technology – rackets with no give for the arm, courts with no give for the joints.

Perhaps the answer is in how sport is defined. Children play games; adults turn them into sport. Administrators organise sports into rotten boroughs and sell them to media emperors to be welded into industrial fiefs. Much publishing seems rather readily to work with, and assume, those industrialised definitions of sport which, scrutinised for more than a moment, are seen to represent the gradual tearing up of the roots of games in leisured play, schools, local cultures. The story of the wrestling of games from their owners and inventors – a clearance, no less – as it now goes on apace, would be a tale worth hearing. But for the moment, game, set and culture to Mr Murdoch. ■

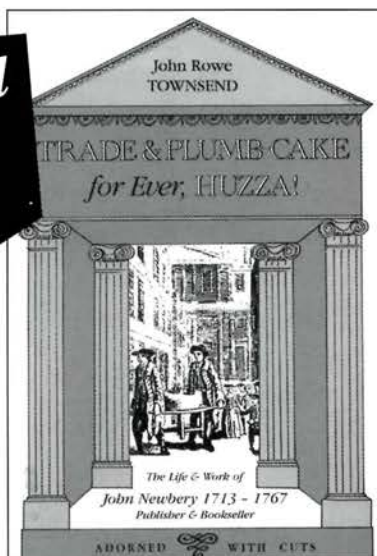
Robert Hull taught for 25 years and is now a freelance writer and lecturer. Also, he's a former player in the Wimbledon tennis championships and holds a current season ticket for a Premier League football club.

BfK News

Special Deal for BfK Readers

Following our January editorial (BfK 96) which featured John Rowe Townsend's celebration of the life and work of John Newbery, **Trade & Plumb-Cake Forever, Huzzal!** Colt Books Ltd are making a SPECIAL OFFER to BfK readers:

Until 30th June 1996, **Trade & Plumb-Cake for Ever, Huzzal!** will cost £15.00 plus £1.50 p&p (UK only) – a saving of over £9.00. Send payment to Colt Books Ltd, PO Box 443, Cambridge CB2 2HL or ring 01223 357047 with credit card details.



DILLY ON TOUR



Dilly the Dinosaur (see this month's Authorgraph on Tony Bradman) will be on a nationwide tour in September this year. His itinerary is still to be decided, but if you want further information, contact Emma Cairns-Smith at Reed Books, Michelin House, 81 Fulham Road, London SW3 6RB.

Anybody interested in Slovak Fairy Tales?

For some months now we've been in correspondence with Peter Schmitz who lives in Bratislava and who has been telling us about the rich Slovak tradition of fairy tales, sagas, myths and legends. Peter is determined this wonderful tradition should have a wider audience. Can BfK help, he asks?

'Just tell your readers about me and perhaps a few will be interested enough to make contact.'

Peter is a passionate aficionado of his country's literary heritage and a witty and wholly engaging correspondent to boot. If you're interested, especially if you are a publisher or bookseller, write to: Peter Schmitz, Jurigovo nam 1, 841 05, Bratislava, Slovakia.

Have Some Maths With Your Story

... is the title of a new publication by Janet Evans. It's a book of 20 activities and games, all linked to children's books, all classroom tested and all backed up with a reference section, a selection of suitable titles for further development and a handy summary of the pedagogical principles involved.

Available from Janet Evans at Liverpool Hope University College, St Katherine's Campus, Standpark Road, Childwall, Liverpool, it costs £6.50 (inc. p&p).

GRACE HOGARTH

5th November 1905 – 11th December 1995

According to Barbara Ker Wilson, Consulting Editor at the University of Queensland Press, Grace Hogarth was 'one of the most significant and seminal influences on the development of children's books ever since the 1930s.' The founder of Constable Young Books and, many would say, the careers of a whole generation of authors, illustrators and distinguished book editors, Grace Hogarth was something of a role model for the children's book people of her time ... also, as editor-turned-author, she produced **Sneeze on Sunday**, a crime novel (co-written with Andre Norton) and **The Funny Guy**, a children's book.

Shortly before her 90th birthday, Grace Hogarth's professional and personal gifts were celebrated by Elaine Moss, Delia Huddy, Philippa Pearce, Julia MacRae and Nancy Chambers in a special feature in **Signal 78** (September '95), which we're happy to commend to BfK readers. According to Philippa Pearce 'there has been no better children's editor than Grace Hogarth; nor can I imagine a better one'. It's hard to imagine a more fitting tribute. CP

Signal is published by Thimble Press, Lockwood, Station Road, Stroud, Glos GL5 5EQ (tel. 01453 873716).

POETRY POSTERS

A new batch of Poetry Posters from The Poetry Society is now available for sale. Each measures 350mm x 500mm (just under A2) and is in full colour. The set of eight posters caters for children aged 10-16, costs £8.50 (including free teachers' lesson plans) from The Poetry Society, 22 Betterton Street, London, WC2H 9BU (tel. 0171 240 4810).

This series concentrates on different poetic forms – from sonnets to rap. The featured poems are:

Seamus Heaney – 'Digging'
Elizabeth Barrett Browning – 'How do I love thee?'
John Agard – 'Poetry Jump Up'
William Shakespeare – 'Our revels now are ended ...' (extract from **The Tempest**)
Carol Ann Duffy – 'Valentine'
Lewis Carroll – 'Jabberwocky'
Dylan Thomas – 'Do not go gentle into that good night'

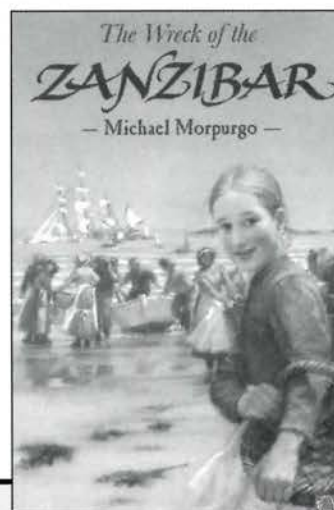
Selection of haiku by Basho, Issa, James Berry, Eric Finney, John Cooper Clarke.



From 'Digging' by Seamus Heaney

WHITBREAD AWARD – Children's Section

The winning book in this section for 1995 was **The Wreck of the Zanzibar** by Michael Morpurgo, published by Heinemann (0 434 96487 5, £8.99) and Mammoth (0 7497 2620 2, £2.99 pbk).



Poetry 0-13

- a new BfK Guide coming in May 1996

Published by **Books for Keeps** and **The Reading and Language Information Centre**, Reading

Edited by Chris Powling and Morag Styles

Price: £5.50 (UK), £7.50 (Airmail)

Poetry 0-13 is a complete revision and update of **BfK's Poetry 0-16**, published in 1988, which sold more than 10,000 copies. The new guide, in a condensed format of 52 pages, incorporates the most successful features of its predecessor while taking account of the wealth of new verse for children published in the intervening eight years.

For further details or to place an advance order please write or phone **Books for Keeps**, 6 Brightfield Road, Lee, London SE12 8QF. Telephone: 0181-852 4953

CHARITY PUBLICATIONS ... with a children's book angle

THE NATIONAL TRUST - *Saving Places*, an anthology, featuring 55 winning poems from the Trust's Centenary children's poetry competition. Published on 28th March at £1.99, from The National Trust, 36 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AS.

SAVE THE CHILDREN - Michael Rosen, Jacqueline Wilson, Beverley Naidoo, Verna Wilkins, Jane Ray and Colin West were among those who joined 150 image makers from publishing, TV and the theatre, at the **Invisible Children Conference** in London last March.

The Conference report, now available, contains the text of all talks; summaries of workshops; a wealth of associated materials, including checklists for writers, editors and book reviewers who wish to avoid Handicappist stereotypes, and a selection of children's books. *Invisible Children Conference Report* costs £6 (inc p&p) from Save The Children, 17 Grove Lane, London SE5 8RD.

FEED THE MINDS - School pupils and college students are being invited to share their favourite pieces of writing, as part of **WORD FEAST** - a national celebration of literature organised by



this charity. Feed the Minds is hoping to encourage reading for pleasure and to raise money for literacy projects in Africa and Asia. They offer a resource pack, free of charge, to interested groups - contact Richard Fernandez on 01483 577877.

HOWLERS

FELLED BY STREATFEILD

Er ... somewhat embarrassing this, Patricia Duke-Cox, School Librarian of Banovallum School, Horncastle, Lincolnshire, writes:

'I noticed a mistake in **BfK 96**, often made by those who do not know the correct spelling, concerning the piece about Noel Streatfeild. The surname was incorrectly spelled three times.'

Alas, it's also a mistake that crops up with people who *do* know the correct spelling but who have it 'corrected' - from Streatfeild to Streatfield - by parties who shall be nameless after we've reached proof-stage ... Angela Turnbull who wrote the item (correctly spelled throughout) just before we went to press, laughed uproariously when we reported back to her with abject apologies.

A crisp fiver to Patricia Duke-Cox for compounding our blushes.

Apologies, too, for the wrongly captioned photograph on page 8 in the same issue - the photo is, of course, Margaret Mahy ... *not* Margaret Tucker.

And also ... to Dennis Pepper, the collector of *The Oxford Book of Scary Tales*, for listing him as Dennis Potter.

May BfK is our annual Picture Book issue

with articles by Brian Alderson, Korky Paul and Ted Percy, Stephanie Nettell's Picture Book Round-Up, Jan Pieńkowski's *Haunted House* on CD-ROM and Sarah Garland in *Authorgraph*. Plus more ... along with our pages of News and Reviews

BfK News

Correspondence

Brian Lux writes:

Congratulations on the Editor of **BfK's** excellent conversation with Brian Hayes on Radio 2 recently about the 'Budgie' books.

As a writer now concentrating on children's stories, I find the new breed of 'personality' writers exasperating (to say the least). No doubt some would say it is 'sour grapes' for me to criticise the Duchess of York and her Budgie the Helicopter books. But I do wonder if they had been written by an ordinary citizen if they would have even been read by a hassled editor. Certainly, there must be hundreds of would-be authors who can, and have, written far better stories than Fergie ...

As we writers strive to improve our technique, pay hard earned money to attend many courses, the situation seems to be akin to the old chicken and egg syndrome. Become a personality first, *then* publishing success is assured.

David Hill writes:

I only began reading children's fiction about 18 months ago, partly to be better able to choose books for me to read to my children (aged 8 and 6) or for them to read to themselves and partly to recommend titles to schools and colleges overseas where students have progressed in a systematic reading programme through graded readers written for learners of English as a foreign language and are ready for unsimplified fiction.

My reading has made me ask, 'Must children's fiction necessarily have children as protagonists?' *Blitzcat* by Robert Westall shows that it need not. My own memory of the thrill of graduating from Enid Blyton and Hugh Lofting to John Buchan, Rider Haggard and Dickens, and my small son's enthusiasm for Old Testament stories read aloud from the **Dorling Kindersley Children's Bible** confirm to me that it need not. So why are there not more children's books with adult protagonists, free from explicit sex and horror but presenting the adult world in terms which children can understand?

Ann Jungman writes:

I'm deeply concerned that such a large number of publishers are so drastically pruning their backlists. Quite arbitrarily the number of any title that has to be sold in a year to stay in print has doubled, thus consigning many excellent and popular books to oblivion. Many teachers, parents and booksellers have complained to me about this but the process seems to have a momentum of its own despite having no real logic or justification. As we know children's books sell through word of mouth rather than reviews and publicity; this takes time. Books are no longer being given this time. The unique aspects of children's publishing are being ignored. Until now one of the advantages of writing for children was the long shelf life of a book but no longer and the new system seems to benefit no one.

Secondly, this cult of the new is depriving children of access to many of the recent, much loved series. Recently I was talking to a well-informed and committed publisher, who told me that the sixth book in a very popular American series had just come out. However, as the children who had read the first five books of the series, were now too old for book six, they didn't expect big sales and were not putting much energy into selling the book. 'More fun to promote something new,' I was told.

Is there some way that those concerned at the current trends in children's publishing - parents, teachers, librarians, authors, illustrators, critics, publishers, etc. - could get together to try to redress the balance between profit and the access to good books?

ED'S NOTE: Three different topics, three individual views. Comment, clarification, contradiction is invited ... or remarks on other topics to do with children and their books. Please write to Books for Keeps, The Old Chapel, Easton, Nr Winchester, Hampshire SO21 1EG, preferably at least a month before our next issue. Do keep your letter as brief as possible, though, to avoid the blue editorial pencil. ■

Verse Trails

BfK's Poetry 0-13, updating our bestselling Guide of eight years ago, is published in May this year. You'll find full details on our News page and on the flyer which comes with this issue. Here, though, to give a flavour of what's on offer, is a selection of notices from the Guide's reviewing team.

I Saw Esau

Edited by Iona and Peter Opie, ill. Maurice Sendak, Walker, 0 7445 2151 3, £9.99

This version of the Opies' first book (originally published in 1947) is illustrated with great comic verve by Maurice Sendak, and is full of 'rhymes that belong to schoolchildren'. As Iona Opie says in the Introduction 'they pack a punch'. Indeed they do:

*'Oh the grey cat piddled in the white cat's eye,
The white cat said, "Cor Blimey!"
"I'm sorry, Sir, to piddle in your eye
I didn't know you was behind me."*



It seems appropriate that such verse should have headings like 'Insults', 'Teasing', 'Nonsense', 'Reality'. Child reality? 'Mother made a seedy cake - / Gave us all the belly ache.' And it's revealing to hear how, amongst riotous rudeness, serious lyric can ring more hauntingly:

*'Truth, Truth, nobody's daughter,
Took off her clothes
And jumped into the water.'*

The notes offer some fascinating information, as when the Opies read in the *New Yorker* a variant of a Warwickshire rhyme they thought obsolete. *I Saw Esau* is a lovely, funny book. **Robert Hull**

Orchard Book of Funny Poems

Compiled by Wendy Cope, ill. Amanda Vesey, Orchard, 1 85213 395 3, £9.99

This anthology contains contemporary poets alongside Keats, Thackeray and Kipling, as well as anonymous poems, all accompanied by colourful and amusing pictures. It displays different types of humour - laughs from nonsense, silly characters, accidents, Kit Wright's headteacher hiding in the dustbin, Eeyore's attempt at writing a poem to Christopher Robin that rhymes, and the editor's own 'attempt' at writing one that doesn't:

*'Writing verse is so much fun,
Cheering as the Summer weather,
Makes you feel alert and bright,
'Specially when you get it more or less the way
you want it.'* **John Lynch**

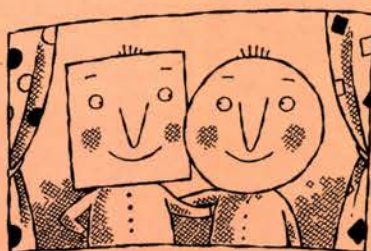
One in a Million

Chosen by Moira Andrew, Viking, 0 670 84208 7, £7.99; Puffin, 0 14 034936 7, £3.50 pbk

Square

I F I W A S
S Q U A R E
W O U L D Y
O U C O M E
R O U N D T
O S E E M E

John Coldwell



Maths can often seem remote from the real world, but Moira Andrew's collection brings the subject to life with poems about number, shape and pattern, money and shopping, size and comparison, time, days and dates, height, weight and measurement.

Teachers are familiar with using counting rhymes in the classroom and these poems encourage children to think of mathematics as part of both our daily reality and our dreams. An essential for the poetry shelf. **Susanna Steele**

Collected Poems for Children

Charles Causley, ill. John Lawrence, Macmillan, 0 333 62588 9, £15.99

This collection confirms Charles Causley's place in the canon of children's poetry. The favourites are all here: 'I saw a jolly hunter', 'What has happened to Lulu?' 'Timothy Winters':

*'comes to school
With eyes as wide as a football pool,
Ears like bombs and teeth like splinters:
A blitz of a boy is Timothy Winters.'*

There are riddles, charms, songs, ballads, stories and spells. Causley interweaves fantasy and reality, traditional and modern themes and is one of the few poets who can create contemporary myths and ballads. These poems demand to be read aloud, to be read quietly to oneself, and to be memorised for pure enjoyment. A book that will delight and absorb children and adults.

Helen Taylor

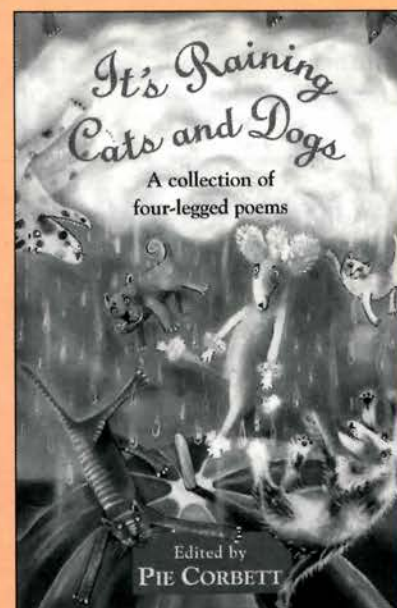
James Reeves - Complete Poems for Children

Ill. Edward Ardizzone, Heinemann, 0 434 96917 6, £11.99

James Reeves's reputation is less than two-thirds of its way through the thirty-year slump which tends to follow the death of a writer, so his verse is easy to underestimate. Often he's low-key, mannerly and a touch fey with poems like 'The Grasses', dating from 1950, reaching back to Stevenson by way of Milne and de la Mare. Consider 'Little Fan', though, from the same period:

*'I don't like the look of little Fan, mother,
I don't like her looks a little bit.
Her face - well, it's not exactly different,
But there's something wrong with it.'*

The authentic note of Causley? Later, in his Prefabulous Animale mode, Reeves has a hint of Hughes about him, too - not to mention Dahl and Milligan. Invest in this writer, then. In a decade or so his stock may well rise... not least owing to his association with the glorious line-drawings of Edward Ardizzone. **Chris Powling**



It's Raining Cats and Dogs

Edited by Pie Corbett, Blackie, 0 216 94103 2, £8.99; Puffin, 0 14 037180 X, £3.99 pbk

This is great fun - an exuberant celebration of man's oldest and best friends, combining poems which are funny with poems which are serious, mysterious, inventive and strange, plus one or two longer pieces to add variety. And the index of authors reads like a roll-call of talented writers for children -

Armitage, Berry, Dunmore and Gross, Sweeney and Harvey and Hurley; O'Callaghan, Milligan, Gallagher, Mole Simpson and Rosen and Gurney.

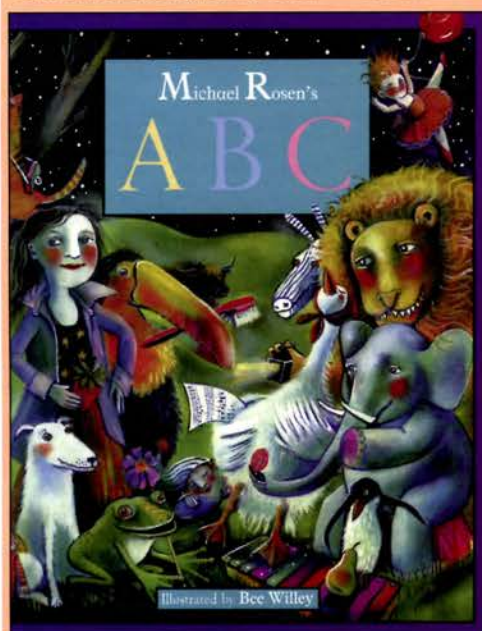
A sure-fire winner with children in junior schools. **Jack Ousbey**

Singing Down the Breadfruit

Pauline Stewart, ill. Duncan Smith, Red Fox, 0 09 928821 4, £3.50

*'Duppy live in de sun?
Ghost de a Englan'?
Me no believe ina
neither one a dem'*

Pauline Stewart is a welcome, new voice for children who combines 'the tropical heat of the Caribbean [with] the fresh spring of an English garden.' Using free verse and rhyme, writing mostly in standard English, but with a nice line in dialect too, Pauline Stewart provides a delightful mix of everyday life, low key amusements and thoughtful moments. The themes are those of childhood - night terrors, saying goodbye to granny, having a bath, animals, cricket and a sequence of poems reflecting life in the Caribbean. Duncan Smith's illustrations accompany the poetry well, but I found the cover too full of predictable, almost stereotyped, Caribbean images. A must for every junior classroom. **Morag Styles**



Michael Rosen's ABC

Michael Rosen, ill. Bee Willey, Macdonald Young Books, 0 7500 1687 6, £10.99

Charlie Chaplin, Goldilocks, the Gingerbread Man, Humpty Dumpty (who had a headache), Ivan the Terrible, King Kong, the Lady of the Lake, Miss Muffet, Mother Goose, Red Riding Hood and even Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer - an unlikely mix if ever there was one - are gathered together in this glorious glut of alliterative nonsense. There are tongue-twisting, very variations on original verses such as Yankee Doodle and Jack and Jill. Few will find fault with this fun-packed phantasmagoria which fixes phonology firmly in the forefront of the mind.

Every page is peppered with wondrous words and exciting images whose inspiration is the initial letter featured on each double spread. **Jill Bennett**