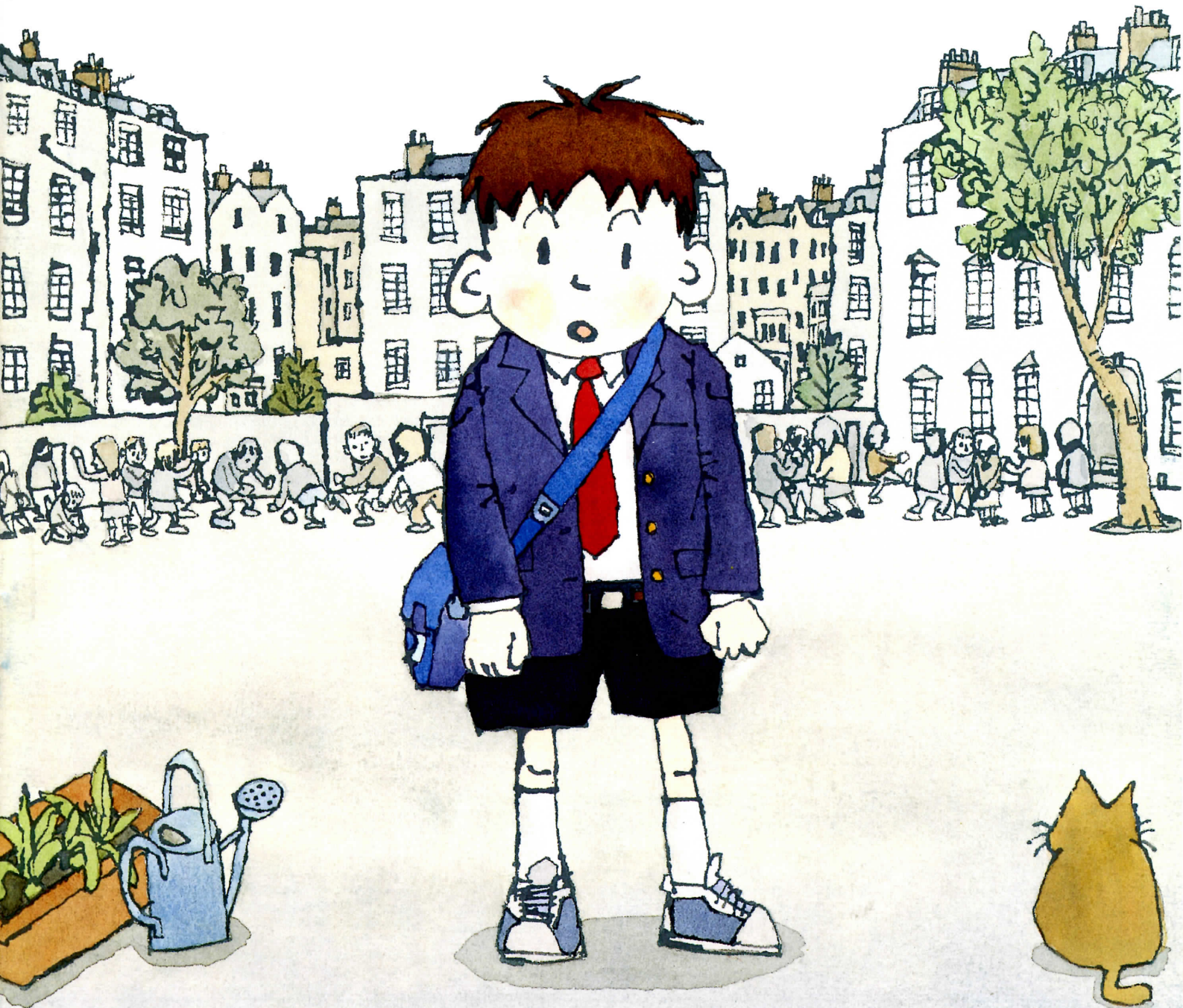


BOOKS FOR KEEPS

March 2004
No.145 UK Price £3.65

the children's book magazine



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CoverStory

This issue's cover illustration is from Satoshi Kitamura's *Once Upon an Ordinary School Day*. Satoshi Kitamura's work is discussed by Martin Salisbury on page 6. Thanks to Andersen Press for their help with this March cover.



EDITORIAL



Rosemary Stones

Concern about children's speaking skills is increasing. A Basic Skills Agency poll in 2003 reported that half of teachers said that children were now starting school unable to speak audibly, be understood by others, respond to simple instructions, recognise their own names or count to five. It is not the first time such concerns have been raised.

In 1995 a ground-breaking piece of social research was conducted in the US by Betty Hart and Todd R Risley into all the words a child would hear and speak in encounters with their parent or care-giver in their early years. The children thus monitored came from 'welfare' families, working class families and professional families. Hart and Risley's findings, published in their book *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children* revealed stark differences in the three groups' early experiences. By the age of four, the child of a professional family will have had 50 million words addressed to it as opposed to the 30 million words addressed to a working class child and the 12 million addressed to a child from a 'welfare' family. Astoundingly, by the age of three the child from a professional family has a bigger vocabulary than the parent of a 'welfare' family child.

Hart and Risley's research also addresses the nature of the verbal interactions with the children. At the age of three the child

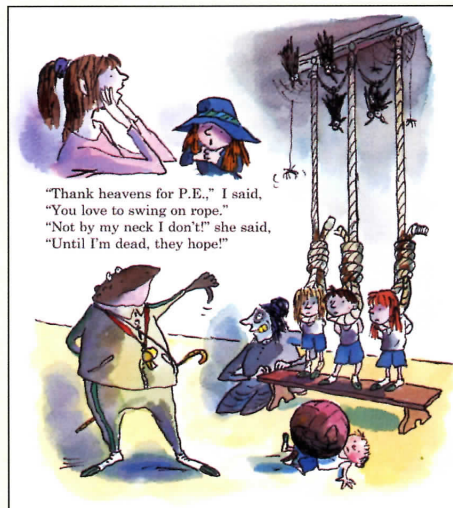
of a professional family has had 700,000 'encouragements' addressed to it and 80,000 'discouragements'. The child of a 'welfare' family will have had only 60,000 encouragements as opposed 160,000 discouragements. Class and poverty appear to be the determining factors in these discrepancies.

Interestingly, 'television' appears in the index of *Meaningful Differences* and is discussed as an influence while I looked in vain for 'books', 'reading', 'lullabies', 'bedtime story', 'nursery rhymes' and the like. Some of the verbatim material cited of exchanges between children and adults includes responses to picture books but the significant role books and being read to can play in children's development at all kinds of levels is not explored. Thank goodness then for The National Literacy Trust's Early Language Campaign's *Talk To Your Baby*, which is featured as this issue's Useful Organisation (see page 14).

Readers who have been following the way Roger and Jo Mills have been introducing their son Hal to books and his responses as described in 'Hal's Reading Diary' can be in no doubt of the child's early capacity, given a good enough environment, to engage eagerly with the processes of symbolisation. This leads, as Roger Mills puts it, 'to the possibility of words conjuring images and narratives in the mind... from a distance it seems such a normal little thing, that a child can start to take in stories told through words. But in terms of a mind's development it is a shift of huge importance. The beginning... of real thinking, and real imagination.'

Rosemary

Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children (Brookes Publishing, Maryland USA) can be ordered from www.amazon.com



"Thank heavens for P.E.," I said,
"You love to swing on rope."
"Not by my neck I don't!" she said,
"Until I'm dead, they hope!"

Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross's *I Hate School* is awarded five stars and reviewed on page 19.

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The Dog That Kept Barking

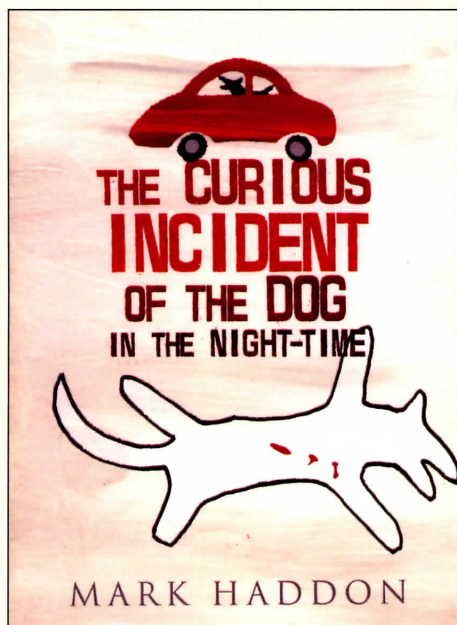
(and the other top titles of 2003)

Mark Haddon's 2003 novel, **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time**, has won the Whitbread Book of the Year Award (only the second time the overall prize has been won by a children's book) and appears set to become one of the top selling fiction titles of 2004. Since publication it has also won The Guardian Fiction Award and the Booktrust Teenage Prize. Haddon's success, following on from the paths blazed by J K Rowling and Philip Pullman, underlines the extraordinary quality and range of books currently being published for young readers. With such an *embarras de richesses*, which titles of 2003 should not be missed? BfK invited nominations from experts in the field.

Malorie Blackman, winner of the Young Telegraph Award and the WHSmith Mind Boggling Book Award,

Julia Eccleshare, Children's Books Editor of *The Guardian*, and

Elizabeth Hammill, Artistic Director, The Centre for the Children's Book, choose...



The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time by Mark Haddon

David Fickling Books, 0 385 60387 0, £10.99 hbk (Red Fox, 0 09 945676 1, £6.99 pbk, April 2004)

I'm all for hearing different voices in fiction and I got

my wish with this book. The story showed just how someone with Asperger's might view the world. Christopher finds a dead dog and sets about trying to find the dog's killer, but the book is much more than a mystery story. Social interactions and conventions, which most of us would take for granted, are beyond him. The complexities of 'the truth' and what people say and why they say it, are brilliantly observed. And I loved the way Christopher tries to bring order to his world by using Maths which he finds far easier to understand than people. **MB**

It is easy to pull at the heart strings of an audience especially when children are done down but my choice, **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time**, is so genuine that there is no doubt about the authenticity of the response. There are no false torments and no judgements about norms. This novel asks questions about how we see each other and ourselves. It is chillingly heartbreaking and passionately positive in equal measure. In addition to its many other claims, it is also the only book that can honestly be given the ridiculously overused phrase, crossover novel. **JE**

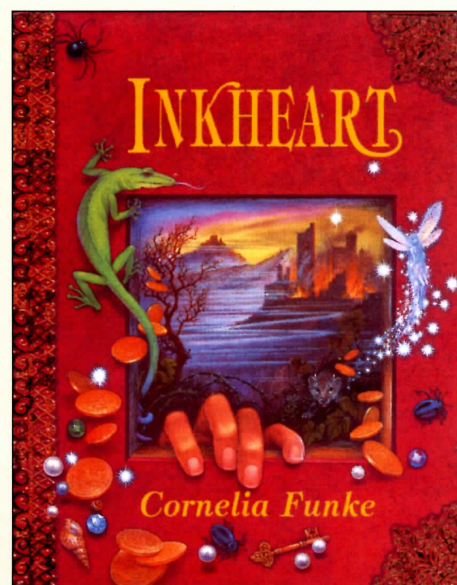
Of all the narrative voices I encountered in 2003, it is the flat emotionless voice of a 15-year-old with Asperger Syndrome that lingers. Living inside Christopher Boone's head is an extraordinary experience. Christopher reads the world without the lens of feeling. Facts, truth, order are what matter. Haddon's achievement lies in creating this dramatic layered perspective, allowing us to see what Christopher sees and what eludes him. **EH**

Doris Breitmoser, General Secretary of the German IBBY Section Arbeitskreis für Jugendliteratur in Munich and the editor of the German children's book review **JuLit**, chooses...

Tintenherz by Cornelia Funke

Cecilie Dressler Verlag, 3 7915 0465 7, 19.90 euros. The English language edition, **Inkheart**, trans. Anthea Bell, is published by The Chicken House, 1 904442 09 9, £12.99 hbk.

German children's literature is hardly ever translated or distributed in the English speaking countries. The more unusual is the story of the 2003 success, **Tintenherz** or **Inkheart**. Cornelia Funke's first book, **Herr der Diebe** (**The Thief Lord**) was only translated in English because the editor's daughter read it in German and was full of enthusiasm. After this acid test, also English readers waited eagerly for Funke's new book, **Inkheart**, which was published simultaneously in Germany, in the UK and the US. It is, of course, a fantasy story – an after-effect of the Potter phenomenon... Cornelia Funke is telling the story of 12-year-old bookworm Meggie who has to discover an astonishing family secret when, one evening, a stranger appears at her house. And here we are: the beginning of an adventurous, magical journey which thrills the reader from the first page on. At the end Meggie will find her mother again. A great reading pleasure, light fiction at its best. At the same time a homage to the charm of



reading and books! **Inkheart** has certainly paved the way for German children's literature abroad.

Clive Barnes, Principal Children's Librarian, Southampton City, chooses...



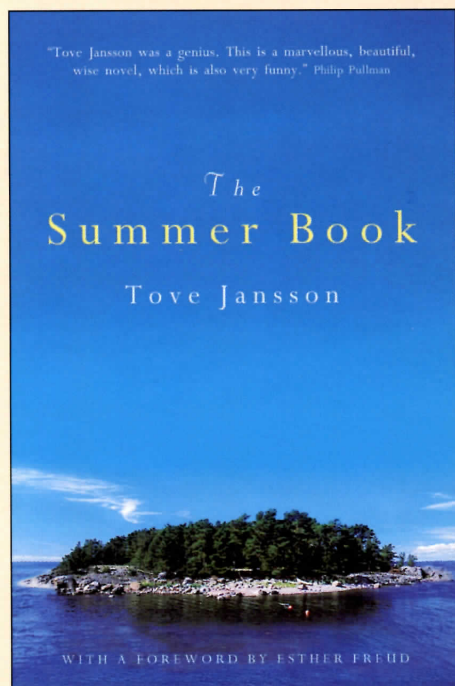
The Wolves in the Walls by Neil Gaiman, ill. Dave McKean

Bloomsbury, 0 7475 6953 3, £12.99 hbk

This is the first children's picture book from a partnership that already has several adult graphic novels to its credit. It's a stunning debut. Gaiman provides a quirky text in which the domestic and the bizarre are cleverly orchestrated in a pseudo folk-tale in which the heroine rallies her family against the wolves that have driven them from their home. Gaiman's story is compelling, but McKean's illustrations are a revelation. He paces the visual drama perfectly. His spiky pen and ink drawn wolves gorging themselves on jam and toast have exactly the right mixture of menace and absurdity. The text relies on the ambiguous relationship between fantasy and reality, and McKean plays brilliantly with the idea of layers and surfaces, changing

shapes, and different ways of recording reality and imagination. He uses distorted photography, silhouettes and collage. His pictures are at turns sombre and gleaming. The faces of the family are almost geometric, like masks made from folded paper. The walls themselves are ridged and crumpled like textured paper, visually matching the 'crumbling and crackling' noises that the wolves make behind them. Solid objects become elongated and hard edges blur. Not since the work of Charles Keeping have such powerful images appeared in a picture book.

Philip Pullman, winner of the Carnegie Medal and the Whitbread Book of the Year Award, chooses...



The Summer Book, by Tove Jansson

Sort of Books, 0 9542217 1 0, £6.99 pbk

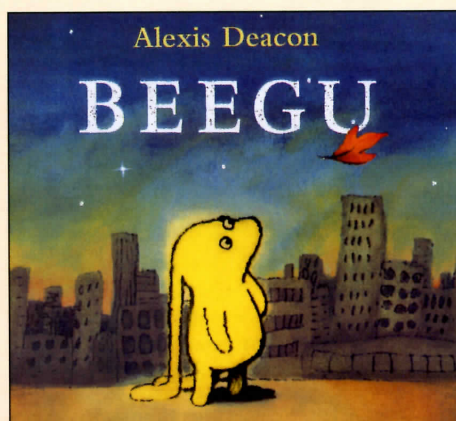
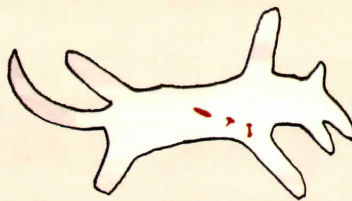
Whether or not this is a children's book seems to me neither here nor there. What it is, in my view, is a great book which is simple enough to be read and enjoyed by the young, and profound enough to be cherished and wondered at by the old. Six-year-old Sophia and her grandmother spend the summer alone on an island in the Gulf of Finland, exploring, talking, playing games, getting cross with each other, sulking, and thinking about life and death. Wisdom is the quality that shines out of this extraordinary, limpid, and utterly delightful book. As if inventing the Moomins was not enough! The woman was a genius. And, what's more, this edition is beautifully produced, illustrated with marvellous photographs, and printed on good paper.

Valerie Coghlan, Review Editor of **Inis: the Children's Books Ireland Magazine**, chooses...

Beegu by Alexis Deacon

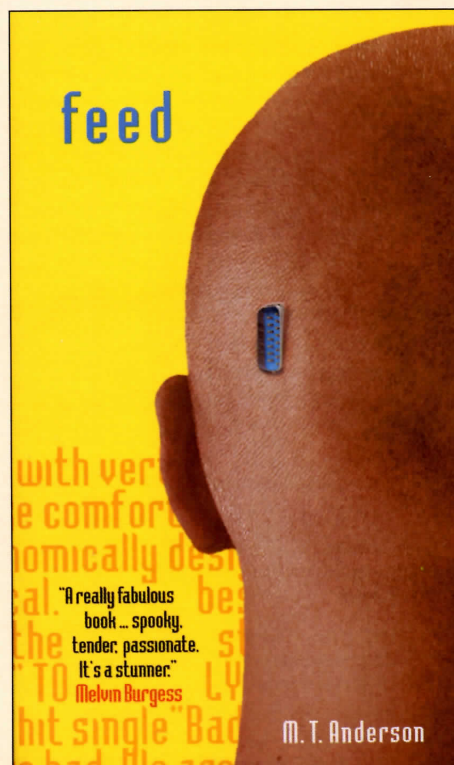
Hutchinson, 0 09 176829 2, £10.99 hbk

In a flat empty landscape rimmed by dark mountains a flying saucer lies partially embedded in the ground. In front lies a yellow figure, four-legged, with three eyes and thin dangly ears. This is Beegu, lost and unable to communicate. Deacon's figures are solid and darkly limned; colours are flat and sombre, bursting into brightness when Beegu finds companionship in a box of unwanted puppies outside a dogs' home and with a group of children. Beegu's loneliness is almost palpable:



she is an outsider, effulgent against an impenetrable forest of dark legs on a street where the proximity of a drain hints at how she may just sink away. And in the concluding pages when rescue does come for Beegu we find we can at last understand what she says as the ideographs in her speech bubbles are translated into identifiable symbols telling of her encounters on earth. Rich visual metaphor and striking artwork encourage many return readings of this delightful picture book.

Michael Thorn of the Achuka website chooses...



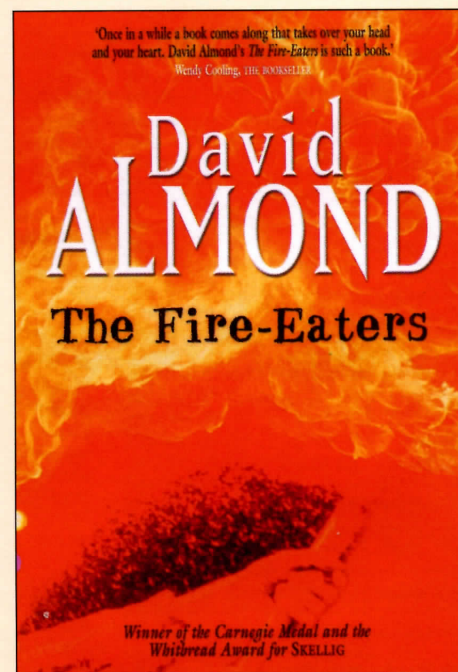
Feed by M T Anderson

Walker, 0 7445 9085 X, £4.99 pbk

There were some books of quite exceptional quality in 2003. By and large they received their just measure of praise. But the young adult novel that really blew me away did not get the exposure it merited. Feed is a freefall nightmare vision of a Western world in thrall to technology and consumerism, and a youth culture enervated by a febrile pursuit of the bizarre. 'We went to the moon to have fun, but the moon turned out to completely suck,' says Titus, opening the story. In this frighteningly believable future, babies are fitted with

hard disk receptors soon after birth for wireless downloads of entertainment and knowledge. Teenage characters show off ominous skin lesions in a masquerade of fashionable chic. Violet, a girl fitted with a faulty 'feed', attempts to steer Titus back towards an appreciation of simple pleasures. The permanently affronted voice of the main character is a narrative triumph which Anderson uses to lampoon, warn, and empathize in a novel of staggering vision and passion.

Geraldine McCaughrean, Carnegie Medal winner, chooses...



The Fire-Eaters by David Almond

Hodder, 0 340 77382 0, £10.99 hbk (0 340 77383 9, £5.99 pbk, April 2004)

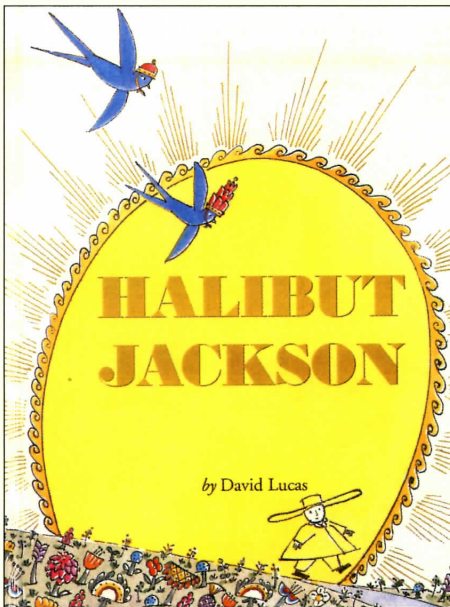
With themes as large as Armageddon and as small as a kiss, **The Fire-Eaters** scorches itself on the memory. I know I'll remember it all my days. The gentle, sensitive boy narrator is beset by problems — a vindictive teacher, sick father, jealous friend, first love and the very real threat of the Cuban Missile Crisis ending the world. All these rest with equal weight on his narrow, eleven-year-old shoulders. And all of them are somehow bound up with the scary, sad, marvellous, damned McNulty, who mortifies his flesh in public places for the price of a drink. Different readers, depending on their age and sex, will find themselves identifying with different subsidiary characters; Almond demands your sympathies like a highwayman demanding money. For years we've tried to woo boy readers with horror, poo, high-tech, monsters and violence. Why didn't we just speak to their souls, like this, about the things that matter?

Nick Sharratt, winner (with Kes Gray) of the overall Children's Book Award, chooses...

Halibut Jackson by David Lucas

Andersen, 1 84270 218 1, £10.99 hbk

Halibut Jackson is the tale of the acutely shy Mr Jackson who just can't bear to draw attention to himself so he wears a variety of special outfits that let him blend in completely with his surroundings. When he gets an invitation to a royal party he designs a particularly ingenious costume to camouflage himself nicely, only he doesn't realise that it's a garden party and of course he sticks out like a sore thumb. It all turns to his advantage however and the story is delightfully resolved. The beautifully coloured illustrations conjure up a



gently exotic world where there's lots to look at and they complement perfectly the charming text.

Françoise Ballanger, editor of *La Revue des Livres pour Enfants*, chooses...



tithe to the established Church) and wool-merchant's son Will (whose father is a product of the values that the Friends seek to overthrow). The texture of everyday life in a small market town in the 17th century is beautifully conveyed with the voices of Susanna's plain-speaking people and their social superiors kept distinct. Although the reader is likely to empathise most with Susanna as she strives for pacifism without passivity, even Will's father invites compassion as much as condemnation for his baffled frustration at the Quakers' apparently deliberate martyrdom, and his fear of losing his son.

Anne Marley, Head of Children's, Youth and Schools Service, Hampshire Library & Information Service, chooses...

The Tears of the Salamander by Peter Dickinson

Macmillan, 1 405 02051 2, £9.99 hbk, 0 330 41540 9, £5.99 pbk

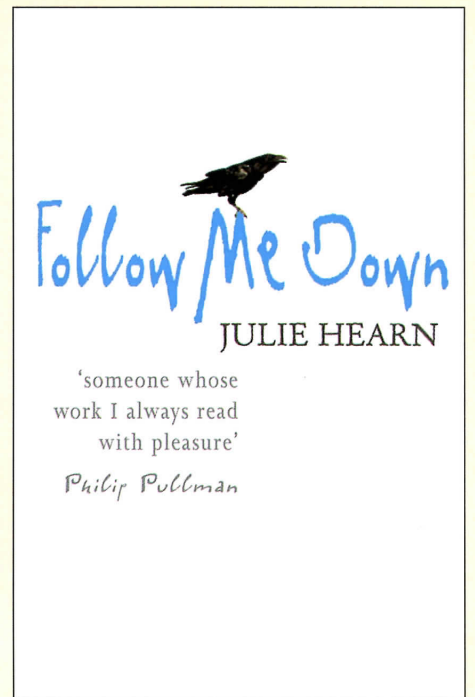
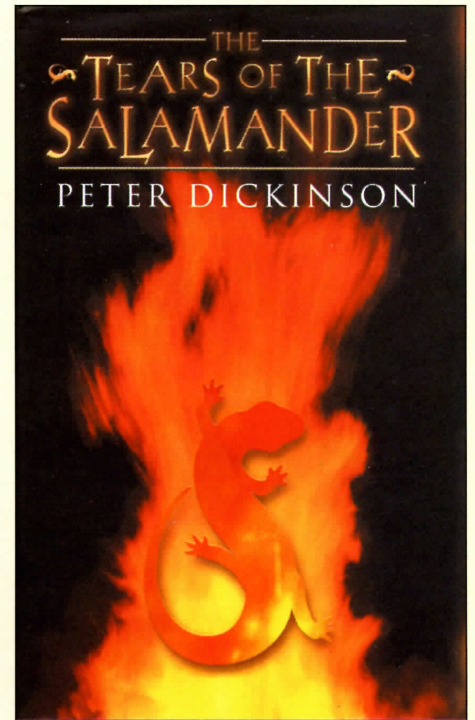
After the death of his family, Alfredo is adopted by his mysterious uncle who takes him to live in the family home on the smouldering slopes of Mount Etna. His uncle is Master of the Mountain, and far from being his saviour, he turns out to be a powerful magician and alchemist who is seeking the secret of eternal life and intends to use Alfredo and the salamander of the title to achieve it. This is a brilliant portrayal of the desire for power which corrupts, on the one hand, and the innocence and honour that will defeat it, on the other. Peter Dickinson effortlessly evokes a world of magic, music and fire, where salamanders swim in the molten veins of the volcano, and whose tears can cure all mortal ills. This is storytelling at its very best – exhilarating, compelling and immensely satisfying.

Anne Johnstone of The Herald, Glasgow, chooses...

Follow Me Down by Julie Hearn

OUP, 0 19 271927 0, £9.99 hbk

This is a breathtakingly accomplished first novel. Tom, a typically awkward young teenager, is staying at his



grandmother's house in East London with his mum, who is recovering from a mastectomy. Things aren't what they seem and leaping across a gap in the cellar floor, Tom lands in the eighteenth century. Here he meets new friends, including the entrancing Astra, a tiny 'changeling child' paraded as a freak at Bartholomew Fair. A worse fate threatens as the evil Rafferty Spune promises to deliver her body to anatomist Dr Flint for public dissection. Tom has to use some modern technology to foil the plan in a nail-chomping climax. The mix of love and physical distaste he feels for his vulnerable mother intensifies the normal emotional turmoil of adolescence. Hearn cleverly uses both strands of her narrative to show how Tom learns to look beyond appearances to discover what is truly important in life. She points up uncomfortably our continuing fascination with the grotesque and also shows how the work of men like Flint, though repulsive, has aided understanding of illnesses such as breast cancer. ■



On n'aime guère que la paix, edited by Jean-Marie Henry and Alain Serres, illustrated by Nathalie Novi, photos by Magnum

Rue du Monde, 2 912084 75 X, 17 euros, available from www.amazon.fr

This ambitious and well realised poetry anthology reduces the force of the poetic voice by constructing a resonant dialogue which takes in the very form of the book (with its flaps) and the languages of the images which illustrate it. The chosen poems (about thirty from such poets as Paul Eluard, Apollinaire, Prévert, Cocteau, Victor Hugo, Abdulah Sidran and Yehuda Amichai) sometimes speak of the horror of war and of hate and sometimes celebrate peace and the possibility of happiness – whether dreamt of, yearned for or savoured. The images which intensify this contrast alternate tellingly between black and white press photographs and luminous colour illustrations. Flaps open out wide panoramas or reveal hidden images intensifying the permanence of the confrontation between death and life, violence and gentleness, hatred and brotherhood, darkness and light.

Geraldine Brennan of The Times Educational Supplement chooses...

No Shame, No Fear by Ann Turnbull

Walker, 0 7445 9090 6, £5.99 pbk

This very strong novel about an apparently doomed relationship in post-Civil-War England crept up on me, with much to think about after love finds a way for Quaker Susanna (whose family is persecuted for refusing to know their place, doff their hats and pay



Satoshi Kitamura

Authorgraph No.145

interviewed by
Martin Salisbury

advertising artist back in Japan, rather than taking a formal art training, I wondered whether he had always had stories and ideas of his own. 'Yes, I think so. I always had a few stories. But I really learned how to structure a picture book through illustrating other writers' texts. I always wrote too long. I still do write too long. I'm getting better at it, getting more concise. Once the pictures come of course, much of the text needs cutting.'

A long and fruitful relationship with Andersen Press began when Klaus Flugge saw Satoshi's work in the early 1980s. Flugge came to an exhibition of the artist's drawings at the Neal Street Gallery in Covent Garden and showed him a text. It was for *Angry Arthur* by Hiawyn Oram. Satoshi took on the job of illustrating it and won the Mother Goose Award for the most exciting newcomer to children's book illustration. The book also won him the Japanese Picture Book Award. On the completion of that book he had returned to Japan to resume his work in advertising, not convinced that he could make a living entirely from book illustration. He returned for the award ceremony and, numerous books and further awards later, is still here. 'I've lived here for most of my adult life now so I think I must like it. My work is certainly better known here, though my books are published in Japan too.' Because of his origins in such a contrasting visual culture, Satoshi is well placed to observe the comparative attitudes of the English and Japanese to their respective graphic traditions. 'If Beatrix Potter or Edward Ardizzone had been born in Japan they would have galleries or museums devoted to them. It was the hundredth anniversary of the publication of the first Peter Rabbit book a couple of years ago and it passed very quietly here in England. A Lewis Carroll museum in Oxford would surely be big business. Did you know that Brian Wildsmith has a gallery in Japan? There is such a rich tradition here. I do sometimes think the English are a little bit embarrassed by pictures. Reading comic books for

'I don't think he knows about rulers, it's a Japan thing.' So says Seamus (aged 7) in *Children Reading Pictures**. Kathy (also 7) has another theory: '... he might wiggle a little bit 'cause he is worried about it, that he's going to do it wrong, so he's a bit shaky.' The children are referring to the distinctively hesitant and yet at the same time secure line of Satoshi Kitamura, a line that has become familiar to generations of such children since shortly after the artist first arrived in England back in 1979. He has been here pretty much ever since. Over coffee at the British Library Satoshi told me how tickled he had been to read the observations of those children, and how bemused he is by some of the more earnest adult interpretations of his work. 'It is very difficult to analyse children's responses because they are taking things in through the pictures that they are perhaps not ready to put into words. There is always a danger that children will say what they think an adult wants to hear.'

A good many children, though, share a devotion to Satoshi's books with their

wonderfully expressive line. It is a line that, along with perfectly applied watercolour washes, contains a strong hint of the Japanese graphic tradition while frequently describing quint-essentially English land and townscapes. A favourite of mine from the Kitamura gallery is a full page, full bleed image from *Sheep in Wolves' Clothing* (1995). It is an atmospheric overhead view of a corner of Victorian London, with a glimpse of a railway arch and passing train. The night scene is executed lovingly with every brick, chimneypot and architectural curiosity carefully placed under a warm grey darkening wash. I wanted to know how this kind of image was arrived at, how much direct observational drawing was involved. 'That was Southwark,' Satoshi told me. 'I would walk around with a sketchbook and record these details. I like to keep sketchbooks or notebooks of drawings, characters and ideas.' These ideas, he says, often lie around in half conceived, half written form for long periods of time. Sometimes a story idea will evolve from a scribbled doodle of a character, sometimes from a concept jotted down in words. Knowing that he served his apprenticeship as an

example is not considered to be something adults should do. Publishers over here seem to think that picture books are just for small children now.' These insights are delivered in a respectful manner, with genuine concern for our undervaluing of the image and of our abundant history of indigenous graphic artists. 'The classic English and American illustrated children's books are more evident in Japan too. For example, people like Charles Keeping are still in print.'

As a child in Japan, Kitamura grew up with comics, and these have been a significant influence on his work. Of the western comic artists with which he is familiar, the ones that he speaks of most highly are George Herriman (*Crazy Kat*) and the great Winsor McCay. This empathy with the comic book form is evident in many of his books. His understanding of the sequential framed image and its potential for expressing time, or changing pace, is used to great effect in many of his picture books. In *Comic Adventures of Boots* (2002), Satoshi goes the whole way and presents the book in picture strip form, little slapstick comedy cameos interspersed with highly inventive visual 'gags'.

There is a great sense of humanity in all of this work, in the drawing and in the essential good nature of the characters, and this is something I am conscious of in his company. I cannot detect an ounce of ego in Satoshi Kitamura, only a genuine love of drawing and of telling stories and a pleasure in the possibility that people might want to look at and read them. The esteem in which he is held by peers is illustrated by one of his most recent projects with Andersen. *Once Upon an Ordinary School Day* is a picture book published this month. It is written by fellow illustrator/author, Colin McNaughton, and is an uplifting tale of the effect that an inspired and unorthodox teacher can have on a small child. It's about dreaming, and the book should be made compulsory reading for all SATs supporters. I was intrigued to know the story behind this collaboration. 'I have known Colin a little bit for quite a time. We would meet now and again. Colin came to Andersen Press and said that he would like me to illustrate this. I think he felt that it was too personal for him to do. He was a little too close to it.' It is always a painful experience for an illustrator to give an idea over to another artist to visualise. I wondered whether Colin had expressed strong views about how his text should be handled. 'No, but he did insist that Mr Gee, the teacher, drive a Morris Traveller.' The book is a gem, revealing a more lyrical side to the artist's repertoire. It is an example of what can be achieved when two highly visual minds come together.

Animals with distinctively large and rather mournful eyes populate many of Kitamura's books. There have been dinosaurs (*A Boy Wants a Dinosaur*,



1990) and goldfish (*Goldfish Hide-and-Seek*, 1997), but what is it about cats and sheep that he likes so much? '*When Sheep Cannot Sleep* was the first book that I wrote myself, and of course it came from the whole idea of counting sheep. *Sheep in Wolves' Clothing* grew out of my having got carried away with the counting book, and introduced too many characters. The wolves arrived and the counting stopped and the story took over. So years later I remembered and adapted it.' These deceptively simply drawn sheep seem somehow as convincing when represented grazing in a meadow as they are when shown in the more improbable scenario of cruising in Gogol's open-top Bentley. The artist believes totally in them as characters so it is easy for us to. 'And cats are so independent that they just make great characters.'

Illustrating poetry requires a particular sensitivity and empathy with words. Listening to Satoshi Kitamura on this subject reveals why he is so good at it. He talks with passion about the writers' work. 'John Agard's poems give me ideas. It's something about the way he writes. He is interested in ideas – science, maths, equations – but he's also lyrical. Have you ever heard him read his poems? It's like listening to music at a concert.' He also enjoyed working with Roger McGough. They both, he says, 'invite you to think and play with words. Illustrating poetry inspires you to think around the text. In Japan two hundred years ago, there was a tradition where poets would get together and one would write a poem and another would write a response. It feels a bit like that.' With Agard's *Einstein, The Girl Who Hated Maths* (2002), Kitamura took over the whole design of the book to create a total word/image interplay. The artist's understanding of and respect for the

writer's words make this an extremely satisfying book.

As for working routine, a matter much discussed between illustrators, he is decidedly a morning person. 'I get up very early. I used to get up late but now I start work by 6.00 am. Also, I need the daylight for colour work. In summer I follow the light and work much later, but at this time of the year, in the winter it's frustrating.' As far as working space is concerned, he tells me, 'I live in a flat and pretty much the whole place is arranged like a studio.'

As we draw our meeting to a close, I am privileged to be shown an album of examples of two less well known strands to this artist's work. The first of these is in the form of an interest in the illustrated letter and envelope, and he has amassed a collection of beautifully decorated correspondence between himself and other illustrators, in particular David McKee. The second unexpected treat was the discovery that Satoshi had recently held an exhibition of his experimental drawings and paintings at the Nirei Gallery in Yokohama. On show were a number of beautiful abstract works, complex patterns and shapes, unfamiliar and yet instantly recognisable. It's something about that line. ■

Martin Salisbury is Course Director for MA Children's Book Illustration at APU Cambridge.

Some of the many books

(published in hardback by Andersen Press and in paperback by Red Fox unless otherwise stated)

Angry Arthur, with Hiawyn Oram, 0 86264 017 2, £9.99 hbk, 0 09 919661 1, £4.99 pbk

A Boy Wants a Dinosaur, with Hiawyn Oram, 0 09 983490 1, £4.99 pbk

Comic Adventures of Boots, 1 84270 033 2, £9.99 hbk, 0 09 945623 0, £5.99 pbk

Einstein, The Girl Who Hated Maths, with John Agard, Hodder, 0 7502 4288 4, £4.99 pbk

Goldfish Hide-and-Seek, 0 86264 745 2, £9.99 hbk, 0 09 942307 3, £5.99 pbk

Hello H.O., with John Agard, Hodder, 0 7502 4289 2, £9.99 hbk

In the Attic, with Hiawyn Oram, Andersen Press, 1 84270 358 7, £4.99 pbk (May 2004)

Me and My Cat?, 0 86264 925 0, £9.99 hbk, 0 09 942307 3, £5.99 pbk

Once Upon an Ordinary School Day, with Colin McNaughton, 1 84270 309 9, £10.99 hbk

Sheep in Wolves' Clothing, 0 86264 585 9, £9.99 hbk, 0 09 961081 7, £5.99 pbk

What's Inside? The Alphabet Book, Andersen Press, 0 86264 756 8, £4.99 pbk

When Sheep Cannot Sleep, 0 09 950540 1, £4.99 pbk

As part of their 10th birthday celebrations this year, Happy Cat Books are bringing out new editions of classic picture books including Satoshi Kitamura's *Lily Takes a Walk* (1 903285 57 7 £4.99) and *Captain Toby* (1 899248 81 1, £4.99).

* Children Reading Pictures by Evelyn Arizpe and Morag Styles, RoutledgeFalmer 2003, 0 415 27577 6, £18.99 pbk.

Compelling Effects

Marcus Sedgwick is a writer to watch. Marking out his territory in the already highly competitive world of fantasy writing, he now has five novels to his credit in only four years and is getting better all the time. A clever storyteller, feeding readers just as much as they need to know while holding back on the bigger surprises to come, he is expert at creating dark, at times almost paranoid atmospheres. Often including his own wood engravings as illustrations, the overall effect of his books can be compelling.

His first novel, *Floodland*, won the Branford Boase Award for 2001, going into three editions. A taut story about a future Britain half-covered in water, it suffers from occasionally tired English and an over-explanatory technique, which means that the main story is told rather than revealed. The atmosphere of decay and hopelessness also makes it difficult to accept its more or less happy ending. But the main plot still remains gripping enough, and along with Julie Bertagna's somewhat similar *Exodus*, it makes a powerful case against global warming of the type that few young readers are likely to forget.

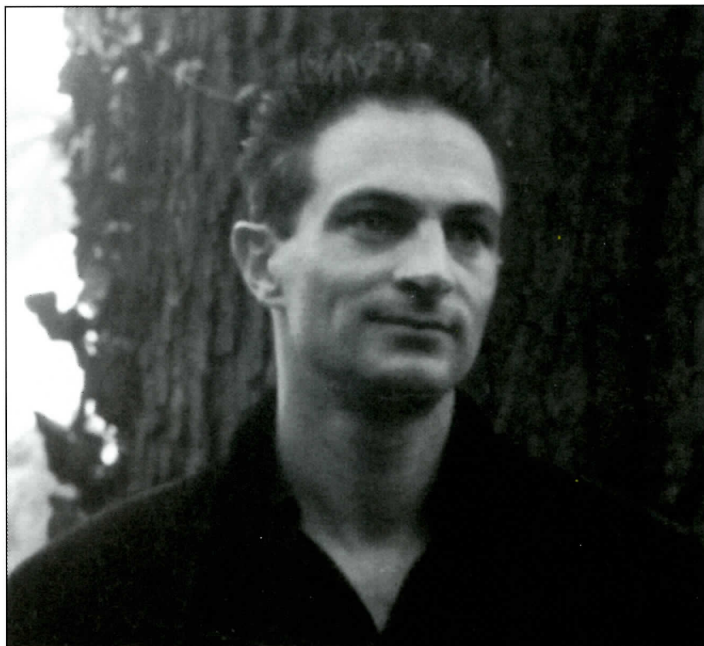
His second novel, *Witch Hill*, flits between past and present as it links a modern story set in a village with the bleak account of a young witch's persecution four hundred years ago. The overriding sense of darkness is well established, but once again

its climactic last chapter seems unconvincing, in the sense that too many problems get resolved too quickly. But there is also a moment when the writing really takes off after the hero Jamie enters an underground tunnel. This feeling for subterranean worlds is something of a hallmark in all Sedgwick's writing, particularly in the books still to come.

The Dark Horse is in a different league. Loosely based on long ago historical events in the far north and told in lean, spare prose, it invites comparison with the novels of Henry Treece, another fine writer, about ancient life in the frozen wastes. Ingeniously cutting between two viewpoints – a ploy found in most of his novels – it tells the story of a young girl found living in a cave with wolves who is then taken in by a primitive Scandinavian farming community ruled over by its thuggish leader Horn. The girl, nicknamed Mouse, has special powers that enable her to enter into the minds of animals. She is also a traitor, owing allegiance to a band of horsemen who finally come to rescue her, slaying any villagers in their way. Bloody, brooding but with a strong feeling of affection between the two main characters – something missing so far in his other work – this is an excellent novel.

So too is *The Book of Dead Days*, a wonderfully sinister story set in a land and time that never was featuring a fake and corrupt magician and his abused young servant known

Nicholas Tucker on a clever storyteller who may become a formidable novelist, **MARCUS SEDGWICK**

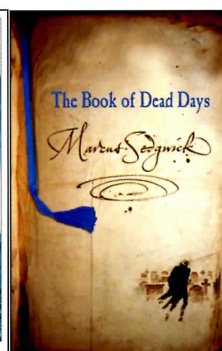
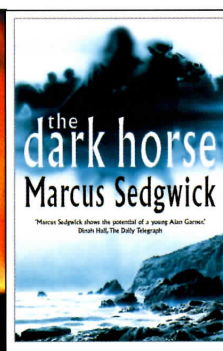
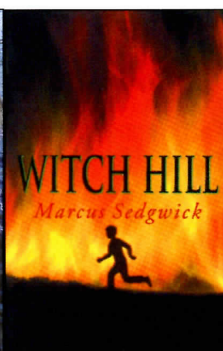
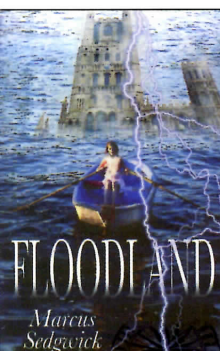


simply as Boy. Together they inhabit a world of astrolabes, hourglasses, sextants and reduction dishes where early science vies with the sort of dangerous magic only available to those in league with the darkest forces. Drawing variously on his knowledge of Victorian cemetery construction, Dr John Dee, eighteenth-century electrical experiments and Bologna's subterranean canals, Sedgwick creates a genuinely Gothic novel, at times recalling the late, great Leon Garfield, in particular his marvellous story *Devil-in-the Fog*. Boy and Willow, an orphanage girl he teams up with, have to survive all the terrors that are thrown at them, including another lengthy stay underground.

The concluding title to this sequence, *The Dark Flight Down*, is not due to be published till July this year. But a sneak preview reveals that Boy and Willow still have to survive more dangers in the befouled city where they live, with the action moving this time

from the back streets to a corrupt court ruled over by a vindictive and senile Emperor. Other adult characters remain brutal and untrustworthy, and there is also an additional Phantom to deal with, who lives up a dark staircase and feasts on human blood. Like one of those early black-and-white, silent horror films, the atmosphere is laid on both thick and fast to maximum effect.

Now that Sedgwick has the technical ability to tell such good tales, it would be nice to see him harnessing his skills to stories that are less depressed in tone. Unlike Philip Pullman's 'His Dark Materials', there is also little feeling for inter-textuality in his work, and no wider meanings beyond simple fables involving the necessity to trust. This is not to take away from what he has already done, which is often very good. But were he to move up yet another gear, mixing his Gothic imagination with a greater interest in ideas for their own sake, he could be a formidable novelist indeed. ■



Nicholas Tucker is honorary senior lecturer in Cultural and Community Studies at Sussex University.

Floodland (1 85881 763 3 pbk), *Witch Hill* (1 85881 883 4 pbk), *The Dark Horse* (1 85881 884 2 pbk), *The Book of Dead Days* (1 84255 217 1 hbk) and *The Dark Flight Down* (1 84255 218 X hbk, July 2004) are published by Orion at £8.99 hbk and £4.99 pbk.

Responding to Young Adult Fiction

Thirty years after publication, Judy Blume's **Deenie**, a novel about parental expectations which includes sensitive passages about a young girl masturbating, is embroiled in its umpteenth censorship campaign in the US. Blume's books are amongst the most widely read and loved in teenage fiction. They also cause outrage, because Blume writes about teenage experience – especially young female sexuality – with an honesty that can make adults flinch.

Until recently, there were much fewer true Young Adult novels published in the UK, and little attention paid to them, whereas in the US teenage fiction is long-established. As interest in Young Adult books has grown in the UK, a lengthening list of British writers for young people have found the 'appropriateness' of their subject matter challenged. As in the US, it is the writers who take on edgy subject matter in teen fiction, books that question the authority of adults and adult value systems, that are challenged. So I knew to have my flak jacket ready when I embarked on **The Opposite of Chocolate** – a novel about teenage pregnancy which ends with its young protagonist choosing a termination – especially when I couldn't find any other teenage novel in print in the UK that explored this difficult subject.

Fictional precedents?

A recent American study on Young Adult fiction found a dearth of books on this topic. The few that exist (such as Paul Zindel's **My Darling My Hamburger**, published almost thirty years ago) would seem hugely dated and sexist to today's teenagers. The attitudes in almost every book that does exist are overwhelming judgemental towards the character who has a termination – they are portrayed as bad girls, destroyed girls, guilty, punished, helpless and utterly hopeless. The resounding message is that there is no life or hope for a girl who has an abortion.

Despite (or because of) my own hugely complex feelings about this emotive and sensitive subject, I decided to explore a story that didn't shirk the trauma of a young girl facing one of the most difficult choices of her life, that showed the complexities and stark attitudes that surround it, but also asked, without judgement: is there *really* no hope for a young girl who has an abortion? To write a book for young adults that doesn't include an overtly anti-abortion message and leaves the reader to draw their own conclusions – also about the motivations of the adults in the story – is a risky endeavour. My refusal to judge my young character, to tell her story sympathetically, risked being denounced as pro-abortion rather than pro-choice, simply because I withheld judgement on *all* the choices.

Battles over the content of young adult reading material have raged in the US since the 1980s. By comparison, Britain has seemed a haven of tolerance. Is this changing? **Julie Bertagna** on the reactions to a controversial subject in her Young Adult novel, **The Opposite of Chocolate**.



The depiction of female sexuality

I also wanted to explore a young girl's feelings about her sexuality. Female sexuality appears to be the last taboo in YA fiction. If not, where are the books that really explore it? (Melvin Burgess only got away with writing **Lady: My Life as a Bitch** because his female character is, literally, a dog.)

Schools are more than happy for me to talk about my novel, **Exodus** (where global-warming has ended the world as we know it), but **The Opposite of Chocolate**'s story of a pregnant 14-year-old who feels her world has ended because she followed her sexual instincts is too hot for many schools, fearful of possible parental reaction, to handle. Is it this reluctance to allow teenagers to discuss sexuality that makes the UK the country with the highest teenage pregnancy rate in the developed world?

Teenagers seeking information

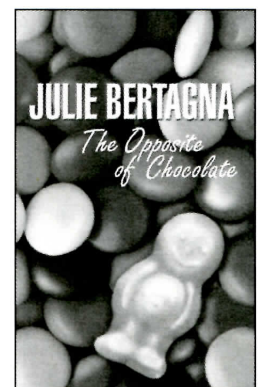
A recent readership survey by **J*17** magazine reports teenagers condemning the lack of information parents and schools give them on sexual matters and uncovers an overwhelming need to discuss sexual matters in the context of emotions, pressures and relationships. What better way to do this than through a novel? One girls' school followed up the talk I gave on **The Opposite of Chocolate** with open discussions in Personal and Social Education classes. There was a waiting list for the copies in the library and the letters I received afterwards showed just how valid this enlightened approach had been.

The guardians are at the gate

The urge to ban books is based in fear. If children don't read about difficult issues, maybe they won't know about them, and maybe nothing will happen? Unlikely, as they are bound to come across much more disturbing, much less thoughtful material on TV, DVD, in a magazine, in the street, playground, the internet or at a friend's house.

At a recent US National Book Awards ceremony, there was immediate post-award condemnation of the winning books as too difficult, too sexy, too serious, too laden with sorrow and pain for young minds and hearts. Writer Norma Fox Mazer, one of the award-winners, said: 'Those of us who write for young people are always aware that the guardians are at the gate ... vigilant to protect the innocence, as they think of it, of children, of young readers. These are the same young people who are bombarded daily by the cynicism, the din and lure of the commercial world. These are the same young people who face extreme problems of their own.'

A challenging book can be a powerful way to think about and discuss the difficult stuff of life. I find it impossible to write fiction that lacks hope. But the difficult journey – an epic struggle in a world of the future or a personal one in the here and now – fascinates me. My post bag tells me that so many young people want – *need* – to read about these difficult journeys, because it inspires them to think their way through their own lives and deepens their ability to experience the world – all its colours and shadows. I write for them. ■



The Opposite of Chocolate

(0 330 41345 7) is published by Young Picador at £9.99.

PULLMAN'S

The idea of the duality of an individual is not new, and has a history in philosophy, metaphysics, psychoanalysis and literature, but never has it been presented in a more compelling form, by turns playful and heart-rending, than in the creation of the daemons in Philip Pullman's 'His Dark Materials'. **Margaret Rustin** explores.

Philip Pullman has said that the idea of daemons was the best one he ever had, and I think most readers would emphatically agree. The impact on myself when I first grasped the relationship between Lyra and her daemon, Pantalaimon, in **Northern Lights**, volume 1 of 'His Dark Materials', was one of immense excitement and delight. It was simply thrilling to enter a world in which each character appeared in two manifestations, had two voices, a mind in continuous dialogue with itself, two vertices of experience. The brilliance of the invention resides in the passion and liveliness of the ongoing conversation and physical intimacy between self and daemon. The question I will try to explore is how we can understand the ideas about human beings which Pullman chooses to express through this device – or, to put it another way, why was it such a stroke of literary magic? To set the scene, we must remind ourselves of the basic facts about daemons. All the characters in **Northern Lights** possess one. This is one way in which its heroine Lyra's world differs from the contemporary world we are introduced to in volume 2, **The Subtle Knife** – the Oxford of Will, her travelling companion. A daemon has the form of an animal or bird, usually opposite in gender to its human counterpart. Lyra's daemon has his own name, Pantalaimon (meaning 'all merciful' in Greek as Nicholas Tucker has pointed out*) though others are referred to only in relation to their human partner. Person and daemon must stay close, and great anxiety and pain is occasioned when they are separated. Daemons have a quicksilver quality and can change their form at will, disguising themselves and evading any fixed shape and identity, and they take great pleasure in this aspect of their being.

The exploratory potential of the child

The plot of **Northern Lights** turns on another crucial fact about daemons. Their

malleable ever-changing character only persists while their human partner remains a child. At puberty, a person's daemon assumes a final form – the white leopard of Lyra's father Lord Asriel or the golden monkey of her mother Mrs Coulter, for example. So the daemon of an adult lacks the potential for playfulness and fluidity, and no longer represents the as yet undefined exploratory potential of the child. Pullman explains that the hugely powerful flow of energy linking child and daemon is related to the mysterious matter of 'Dust' which is of such interest to the scientists and theologians of Lyra's world. An imagined church hierarchy, hostile to the free expression of human sexuality and feeling, has conceived a plan

to free the world of 'original sin', to tame and order sexuality through solving the problem of 'Dust'. To this end, experiments to separate children from their daemons are in progress, thus eliminating a core element of individual consciousness. The horror this notion elicits in the story makes it evident that Pullman is describing something quasi-sacrilegious, and indeed the Bolvanger experimental station has powerful echoes of Nazi medical atrocities. A daemon is something like a child's soul, and without it, as the children subjected to 'incision' at Bolvanger reveal, one is less than human.

The relationship between self and daemon is represented as essential to being alive. Certainly one can be sure that if the

link is destroyed, spiritual death ensues. In this sense, we are presented with an understanding of human personality in which there is an absolutely necessary dynamic relationship between many parts of the self. The changing

form of the child's daemon allows us to imagine the enormous range of feelings, perspectives and values which add up to the mind of one individual. Pantalaimon can be Lyra's protector, her baby, her spy, her conscience, her memory, and is always her beloved friend with an absolute loyalty of commitment to her above all else. We might suggest that the origin of a

relationship of such total reliability lies in the human infant's earliest relationship

with mother. A child's belief in a completely trustworthy source of

inner support is achieved in ordinary development through

the internalisation of a relationship to a loving and

reliable parental figure. In Pullman's hands, this conception

has been turned into the living form of a daemon, a part of the

self that can be trusted to be present and loyal to the child's

best interests at all times. It is

pertinent to note that the story is full of very intense

relationships between its characters – Ma Costa's

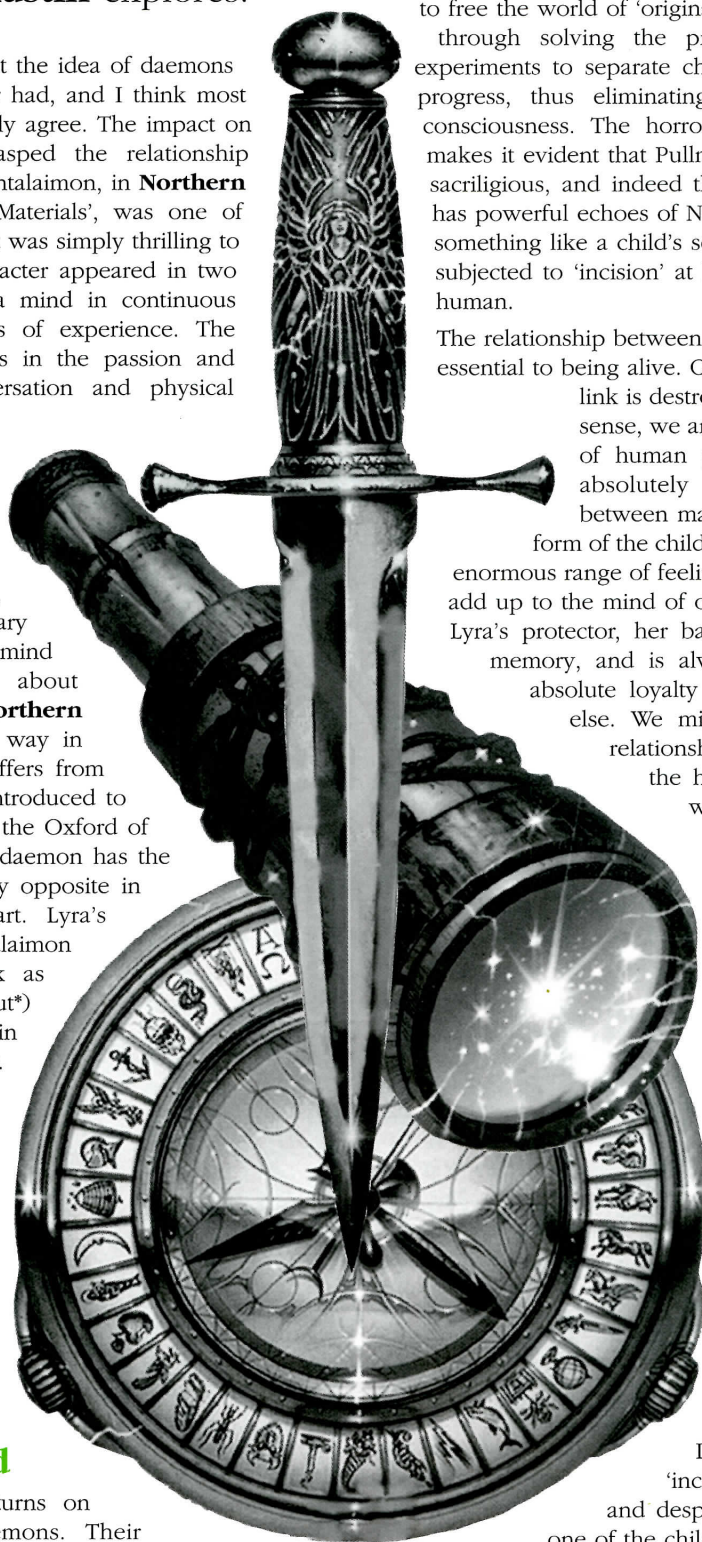
distress at the loss of her son Billy, Lyra's passionate

involvement with Roger, Mrs Coulter's horror when she

realises it is her own daughter Lyra who is about to be subjected to

'incision'. The evocation of the lost and desperate condition of Tony Makarios,

one of the children who has been separated from



DAEMONS

his daemon, is one of the most poignant images of **Northern Lights**. He is wandering, searching for his lost daemon, clutching a piece of dried fish as a pathetic source of comfort. His kindly rescuers take this from him, and without this last vestige of attachment to the source of life, he dies.

Living with the contradictions of your nature

However, Pullman is also interested in the idea that the parts of the human personality are not just many and various but are also in a necessarily dynamic relationship, which includes conflict. I think we can understand the interesting fact that person and daemon are of opposite genders as not only being a neat representation of human bisexuality – the mix of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ elements which is in each of us, as Freud described, an idea revolutionary 100 years ago, but now something of a commonplace – but also a way of heightening our awareness that a complete person will be one able to live with the contradictions of his or her own nature. None of us is all good or all bad, all kind or all cruel, all brave or all cowardly. Pullman embraces with enthusiasm the recognition of the complex human condition. His hostility to the Church as it features in the trilogy is very much based on the Church’s false belief in the absolutes of good and evil.

Lyra is a great story-spinner, indeed a great liar, as the terrifying harpies of the underworld she visits in **The Amber Spyglass** don’t let her forget. Much of the time it is Pantalaimon, therefore, who keeps her in touch with the truth she is so keen to embroider, evade, or otherwise put to one side. The truth-seeking potential of the mind is dependent on the self’s relationship to its daemon, because the two voices ensure that all claims and observations are open to question. A splendid scepticism about what is really true is kept in place by the knowledgeable comments of the daemon who knows all the secrets of the heart.

Here there is another of Pullman’s good inventions to take account of, the alethiometer, the instrument which helps Lyra to resolve crucial problems. Consulting this magical source of true knowledge (aletheia = truth in Greek) is a vital resource during her adventures. We might see this as representing Lyra’s need to depend on resources outside herself and thus to become aware of the limits of her omnipotence, just as Will has to rely on the ‘subtle knife’ he is given. Pullman is clear that one’s daemon is limited in the precise respect that it can only give one access to one’s own qualities. It can contain elements of oneself one is out of touch with and in that way help in re-integrating temporarily lost aspects of the self, but the alethiometer and the subtle knife offer something to Lyra and Will beyond their own capacities.

Perhaps this is related to another fact about daemons – you can’t make them, they are created, as we are, by the intercourse of parents and the creation of new life. Lyra understands this fact quite well and is able to exploit the foolish grandiosity and ambition of the impostor bear-king by promising to give him a daemon, as if it were a possession he could acquire. Her insightful trick leads to his downfall – it is only the Bear who can inhabit to the full his Bear-

nature (Lyra’s great friend Iorek Byrnison) who is fit to be king.

However, not all human beings are aware of the presence of their daemon. We learn how surprised Will’s father was to meet up with his daemon for the first time – to become capable of recognising her after his journey to the North.

‘Can you imagine my astonishment at learning that part of my nature was female, and bird-formed and beautiful?’ he tells Lee Scoresby, the balloonist. Indeed Will is to meet his own daemon towards the end of the third volume, but that does not happen until after the momentous climax of the visit to the underworld in search of Roger, the child Lyra feels she betrayed. To cross into the underworld, she has to leave Pantalaimon behind. This

is a mutually excruciating separation with the possibility of never finding each other again, and it exposes Lyra to most terrible discoveries about herself. Without Pantalaimon’s wise counsel, she is carried away by her story-weaving and provokes by her fantastic tales the cruel wrath of the Harpies. What she comes to understand (without either alethiometer or Pantalaimon to help her at this point) is that the stories she could tell to hearten the thousands of dead she encounters are not going to be any use unless they are true. When the stories are true, they can magically enliven and free the burdened spirits of the dead.

Of course this is Pullman’s credo. He speaks of himself as a realist, not a writer of fantasy, and I think this is a well-based claim if we see it as his aspiration to write about psychological reality, and to tell the truth about growing up through his stories. His concept of ‘the republic of heaven’ (his rewriting of **Paradise Lost**) is that it

is constituted by the way we live our lives in the present, because a daemon ‘can only live its full life in the world in which it is born’. That, of course, is why the children cannot stay together at the end of the story, because their full lives have to be lived in the two different real worlds from which they come, worlds that got mixed up because of the disasters brought about by mistaken human ambition. A person in touch with his daemon is at home with himself, and finding the way home is one of the tasks achieved at the conclusion of their adventures. ■



Margaret Rustin is a child psychotherapist at the Tavistock Clinic, London, and the author (with Michael Rustin) of **Narratives of Love and Loss: Studies in Modern Children’s Fiction** (Karnac Books) and **Mirror to Nature: Drama, Psychoanalysis and Society** (Tavistock/Karnac Series, 2002). Michael and Margaret Rustin have written three essays on the volumes of Pullman’s trilogy, published in the **Journal of Child Psychotherapy**, Vol. 29, nos. 1, 2 and 3, 2003.

* **Darkness Visible: Inside the World of Philip Pullman**, Nicholas Tucker, Wizard Books 2003, 1 84046 482 8, £6.99 pbk

Northern Lights (0 590 66054 3), **The Subtle Knife** (0 590 11289 9) and **The Amber Spyglass** (0 439 99358 X) are published by Scholastic at £6.99 each.

Maple Ridge School Book Trail

Liz Taylor, Assistant Area Schools Librarian with Hampshire School Library Service, got together with Pam Robinson, Teacher Library Coordinator at Basingstoke's Maple Ridge school, a day special school for children aged four to eleven, to launch a book trail to coincide with the School's Book Week. Geared closely to the needs and abilities of all 62 children, including pupils with moderate learning difficulties and some with autism, the aim was to promote enjoyment of books and access to libraries. **Liz Taylor** explains.

The forward planning for this book event started towards the end of the Summer Term when I arranged an appointment to visit Maple Ridge school to meet the Teacher Library Coordinator, Liz Boulton, to view the types of resources which were already successfully in use, and to discuss how the School Library Service could best serve the needs of the school. An outcome of the discussion was that it was felt that many of the pupils at the school did not have regular access to the public library. This was partly due to the fact that many children travel long distances to the school and by the time they get home a further trip to the local library may be difficult to fit in.

I then suggested that the children could be offered the chance to participate in an in-house book trail with the support of the School Library Service and the County Library and Information Service. There was an enthusiastic response to this idea and it was agreed that I should visit the school again to meet the new teacher in charge of the library, Pam Robinson, at the beginning of the Autumn Term to progress it. Maple Ridge had already made some initial plans for a Book Week at the end of October and it was felt a book trail would fit in very well with activities already planned.

Book trail packages

Meanwhile I viewed various book trail packages available from the County Library and Information Service and collected samples to show the school. Children's Specialists Linda Evans at Basingstoke Library and Nesta Perkins at Chineham Library were contacted to find out how they could help.

At the first meeting with Pam at the start of the Autumn Term it was decided to use the eye-catching Great Balloon Chase Book Trail materials, featuring a colourful hot air balloon. It was agreed that each child would be given a Great Balloon Chase 'passport' and there would be six achievable challenges for each child to complete in order to earn a certificate. For every task achieved the children would be given a balloon sticker to put in their passport. The aim would be to collect six

stickers. This would obviate the need for the children to have to write much on their passports, which would be difficult for some of them.

Challenges

After discussion it was decided that the challenges for Year R to Year 3 (5–8 year olds) would be as follows:

- Listen to a story with the School Library Service Librarian.
- Visit the Public Library (either Chineham or Basingstoke).
- Look at a pop-up or other novelty book.
- Look at a picture book.
- Look at a nursery rhyme or poetry book.
- Listen to a book/cassette pack.

For these Key Stage 1 children the phrase 'look at a book' was felt to be more appropriate than 'read a book' as some of the children would only just be starting to read. For the very youngest children in Class 1 the visit to the Public Library would be replaced with a visit to the School Library as all these children were still very new to the school.

The challenges agreed for Year 4 to Year 6 (8–11 year olds) were:

- Listen to a story with the School Library Service Librarian.
- Visit the Public Library (either Chineham or Basingstoke).
- Read a picture book.
- Read a poetry book.
- Read a finding out book.
- Listen to a book/cassette pack.

I took the advice of the school that it would be best if all the children could aim to complete the Great Balloon Chase challenges during the Book Week. This was because of the need for these children to have tightly focused activities; a book trail lasting several weeks would probably lose direction and impetus.

Consultation then took place with the County Library Children's Specialists to arrange class visits to either Basingstoke or Chineham Libraries. A regular slot was already in place at Basingstoke for one of the classes but other times had to be arranged for the class visits to fit in with availability of the School's minibus. It proved difficult to plan all these visits to fit in with the Book Week and in the end one class had to be timetabled to come to the library a week early.

The final planning meeting involved consulting with Pam about which books would be used for the storytime sessions in school to ensure they would be appropriate to the needs of each class. A number of carefully preselected books were taken along which I felt might be suitable. Pam advised using just one book per class for the storytime and suggested keeping the session to 15 minutes at the most to reflect

the attention span of the children. Together we then chose a book to use with each class and Pam said she would work with the other teachers in the school to come up with some activities to tie in with the stories.

Brightly coloured posters featuring a hot air balloon were provided for the school to display in advance of the Book Week along with sufficient Great Balloon Chase Passports and balloon stickers for each class. The School Library Service also loaned a large number of novelty books, picture books, information books and book/cassette packs to support the event, which could be borrowed by the children in addition to the collection of resources already available in Maple Ridge's own library.

Launching the book trail

On the first day of Book Week I went to the school's Assembly to launch the Book Trail. I briefly explained to the pupils what they would be doing and showed them the Passports and stickers they would be collecting. The children seemed very interested and some asked questions or made comments. It turned out to have been useful that one of the classes had already had their visit to the public library the previous week as some of the children mentioned the trip and the teacher in charge of the class said how much they had enjoyed it.

After Assembly, Liz visited each class, read them the agreed story and then stayed in some of the classes to talk to the children and watch them doing the activities pre-prepared by the school to link in with the stories told. She also helped them fill in their names or draw a picture of themselves on their individual passports.

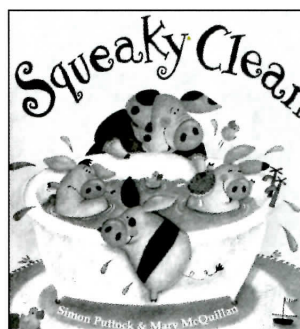
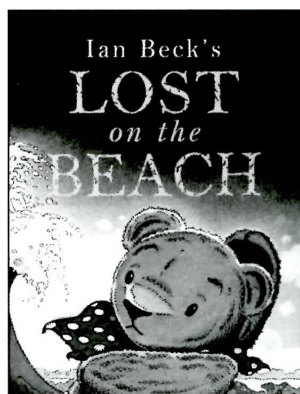
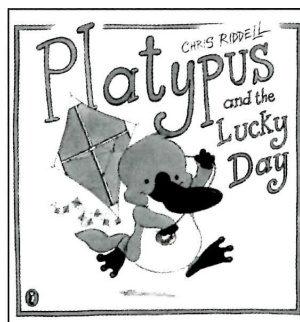
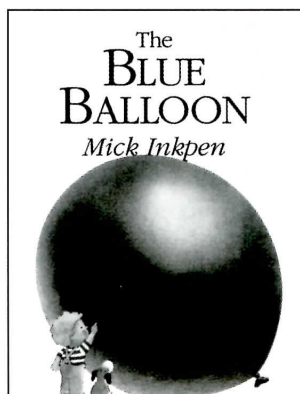
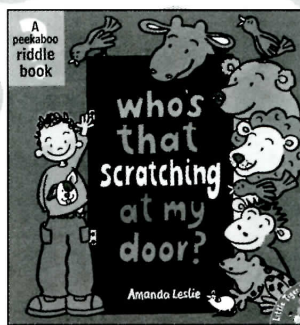
Library visit

At the visits to the Public Libraries the children were shown around and given the opportunity to borrow a book on a group ticket. They really enjoyed doing this, especially those who had never borrowed a book from a public library before. They also had storytime with the Children's Librarians.

As well as being fun, these visits to the local libraries were seen as important for social inclusion and developing the children's personal and social skills.

During the Book Week the children engaged in a number of book related activities to enhance the Book Trail. Activities devised by the school to tie in with the storytime sessions included kite making, making collages, colouring pictures, measuring the weather and discussion. Each class teacher was responsible for dealing with the Great Balloon Chase Passports and organising the collection of the balloon stickers to go in them. A successful idea introduced by the school was the pairing up of some of the youngest children with the older ones to share a book.

At the end of the week the Book Trail was considered to have been great fun with every child completing the challenges and receiving colourful Great Balloon Chase Certificates to take home to show their families. Some of the posters created during book week were displayed at Chineham Library and visits to the local libraries continued for some of the classes. Equally important, it was a great opportunity for joint working between the Public and School Library Services to enable children who otherwise would not have been involved in a Reading Challenge to take part. ■



Stories chosen for the class story times

CLASS 1 (Year R/1; 5/6 yr olds)

Who's That Scratching at My Door?, Amanda Leslie, Little Tiger Press (1 85430 713 4, £4.99 pbk)

This was chosen because of the bold, colourful pictures and the opportunity for the children to guess which animal would be at the door next before turning a flap. The very simple story was also suitable for joining in with by making animal sounds.

CLASS 2 (Year 1/2; 6/7 yr olds)

The Blue Balloon, Mick Inkpen, Hodder (0 340 75738 8, £5.99 pbk)

This title was selected to tie in with the theme of the Book Trail and because it was felt that this class, having only been in school about a year, would enjoy hearing a story they had already come across. The children would be able to predict what would happen next and enjoy the novelty fold-outs.

CLASS 3 (Year 3; 7/8 yr olds)

Platypus and the Lucky Day, Chris Riddell, Puffin (0 14 056778 X, £4.99 pbk)

Chosen for the clear, amusing illustrations accompanied by a simple, yet humorous, story in an easy to read and familiar font.

CLASS 4 (Year 4; 8/9 yr olds)

Lost on the Beach, Ian Beck, Scholastic (0 439 97905 6, £5.99 hbk)

A story the children could identify with and talk about on the theme of getting lost but managing to find your way back safely.

CLASS 5 (Year 5; 9/10 yr olds)

Squeaky Clean, Simon Puttock and Mary McQuillan, Red Fox (0 09 941 349 3, £4.99 pbk)

A hilarious story with funny, appealing vocabulary which it was felt the older children would find amusing and relate to.

CLASS 6 (Year 6; 10/11 yr olds)

A Perfect Day For It, Jan Fearnley, Egmont (0 434 80786 9, £9.99 hbk, 1 4052 0176 2, £4.99 pbk)

A longer book than the others which the older children could cope with allowing the opportunity to join in with the predictable language.

Liz Taylor is Assistant Area Schools Librarian, Hampshire School Library Service.

NEWS

No Longer Sidelined...

Further evidence that children's fiction is now considered to be on a par with fiction for adults and that both children and adults consider themselves readers comes from the top ten titles voted for by the public in the BBC's Big Read. The search for 'the nation's best-loved novel' put Philip Pullman's 'His Dark Materials' in third place (after **Lord of the Rings** (yawn) and **Pride and Prejudice**) and J K Rowling's **Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire** in fifth place. A A Milne's **Winnie the Pooh** came in at no. 7 and C S Lewis's **The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe** at no. 9.

PEOPLE

Congratulations to Valerie Coghlan and Siobhán Parkinson (joint editors of **Inis**; Valerie is also a BfK reviewer) who have been appointed editors of IBBY's quarterly journal, **Bookbird**. Between them they read English, Irish, French, German and Danish fluently and can work in Spanish, Italian, Norwegian and Swedish.

REGIONAL PRIZE

Salford Children's Book Award

Georgia Byng's **Molly Moon's Incredible Book of Hypnotism** is the winner of the inaugural Salford Children's Book Award, chosen by young readers from Salford schools.

• OBITUARY •
William Steig
 1907–2003

Quentin Blake writes...

The American illustrator William Steig has died at the age of 95. Like a number of other children's book illustrators he began his professional life working for magazines, most notably for **The New Yorker**. Many of his drawings were of the working class in the Bronx, where the Steig family lived, and of the dreams and idiosyncracies of the Small Fry who were their children. Later **The New Yorker** enabled him, as it had Saul Steinberg, to leave jokes and explore a poetic fantasy world of clowns and moons and portly divas. It wasn't until the age of 60 that Steig turned his attention to children's books and, though in general this might seem like leaving things a bit late, he had before him a whole career of 35 years of writing and drawing, working continuously up to the time of his death. Steig's books might be as different as **Dr de Soto** and **Shrek** but they were all distinctive in words and pictures. If the stories were of a traditional kind that encompassed magic and folktale, nevertheless he treated them in ways that were unpredictable and unlike that of any other writer. With undue modesty he described himself as 'not really an illustrator' but the understated quality of his drawing had its own authority, and it will be a long time before the dry humour of Steig's work loses its savour. I am sure that his fellow illustrators will be well to the fore amongst those to salute the passing of a distinguished artist.

USEFUL
 ORGANISATIONS
 No.31 **Talk To
 Your Baby**

Talk To Your Baby
 The National Literacy Trust's
 Early Language Campaign

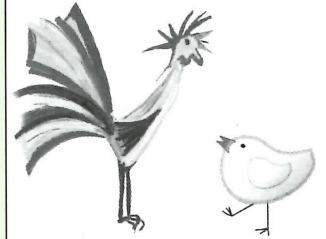
Campaign Co-ordinator:
 Liz Attenborough

**Swire House, 59 Buckingham
 Gate, London SW1E 6AJ**

www.literacytrust.org.uk/talk-toyourbaby

The National Literacy Trust believes that the key to helping young children to speak, listen, read, write and socialise better lies in encouraging parents and carers to talk to them more. Children with adequate speech and language skills in the first years of life are far less likely to experience learning and relationship problems at school compared to those who do not grow up in a

TALK TO YOUR BABY



National Literacy Trust

language-rich environment. The principal aim of **Talk To Your Baby** is to make all parents confident, skilled and motivated to nourish their children with the best possible start to their communication and language development. The campaign, funded by Sure Start, is bringing together a wide range of partners to promote the issues and create practical ways of sharing good practice, and is working through organisations central to people's daily lives, such as the health service, housing associations, public libraries and the media.

• OBITUARY •
Jeff Brown
 1926–2003

The author and creator of the highly popular **Flat Stanley** series died in New York City at the age of 77. Born and raised in New York, Brown seemed committed early to a theatrical career. An actor in his teens, he went on to Hollywood to become an associate of independent producer Samuel Goldwyn Jr, and later a story consultant for Pennebaker Productions. Brown then moved back to New York, where he served on the editorial staffs of **The New Yorker**, **Life**, **The Saturday Evening Post** and **Esquire**. His own stories were published in these and other magazines. In 1964, Brown created the classic children's book **Flat Stanley**, which was inspired by a chance bedtime conversation with his sons JC and Tony.

• OBITUARY •
Joan Aiken
 1924–2004

Encouraged to write both by her father (the poet Conrad Aiken) and her stepfather (the novelist Martin Armstrong), Joan Aiken soon abandoned an office job to become a full-time writer. She began by writing for children's radio and a story for Jackanory, **Arabel's Raven**, spawned a popular series about sensible Arabel and her unpredictable raven. **The Wolves of Willoughby Chase**, a dramatic 'historical' adventure, was the first Aiken novel set in an atmospheric invented past full of quirky characters. Other titles followed as well as her acclaimed short stories, poetry and plays.

NATIONAL PRIZES

The Whitbread Awards

The Whitbread Book of the Year has been won by Mark Haddon's **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time** (Cape/David Fickling) which also won the Whitbread Novel Award. This title had previously been longlisted for the Man Booker Prize. The Whitbread Children's Book Award was won by David Almond's **The Fire-Eaters** (Hodder).

The V & A Illustration Awards 2003

The overall winner of The V & A Illustration Awards is Nick Maland for **You've Got Dragons** by Kathryn Cave (Hodder). The 2nd Prize was won by Claudio Muñoz for **Nightwalk** by Jill Newsome (Andersen). Simon Bartram was Commended for **The Man on the Moon** (Templar). The awards were judged by Emma Chichester Clark, Nigel Suckling and Ingram Pinn.

V&A

Blue Peter Book of the Year Award

The Blue Peter Book of the Year Award has been won by Philip Reeve's **Mortal Engines** (Scholastic) which also won 'The Book I Couldn't Put Down' category. 'The Best Book with Facts' category was won by Richard Platt and Chris Riddell's **Pirate Diary** (Walker) and the 'Best Book to Read Aloud' was won by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler's **Room on the Broom** (Macmillan).

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor

Only today did I get round to reading your editorial on **A Little Piece of Ground** in detail (BfK No 143) and I do hope I am in time to correct a misunderstanding.

It reads as though Jews for Justice for Palestinians were involved in the requests for **A Little Piece of Ground** to be withdrawn – I can assure you that no member of our organisation would ever suggest that a book be censored – the destruction of books has bad conations in Jewish history! The view expressed in **The Guardian** that I thought that Liz Laird's book was biased, was a personal view but one, I suspect, Liz would agree with. Recently at the IBBY Conference Liz made a very spirited defence of the book, suggesting that by giving only one viewpoint in the book, it had an added impact and passion. Myself, I still regret that no background for the Israeli behaviour, appalling as it is, was given. As Michael Rosen says in his excellent review, that would have made more sense of the situations described. However, Liz has written a fiction and is not obligated to give a lesson in history or politics though I feel some passing mention of the brave and growing peace movement in Israel, would have given a glimmer of optimism to the book and some faint hope of a resolution.

Ann Jungman

Jews for Justice for Palestinians, 157 Fortis Green Road, London N10 3LH

Hal's Reading Diary

Hal is now three and has begun to follow a narrative without depending on illustrations for help. His father, **Roger Mills**, explains.

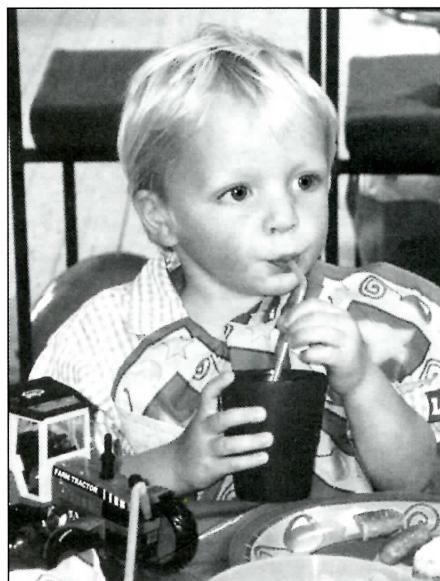
In my last diary entry I was describing Hal's Oedipal desire to have my wife Jo all to himself, and to get me out of the picture. Pushing me away had meant that I hadn't been able to read to Hal very much in the last few months of last year.

Over the Christmas holidays Jo and I started talking about the situation that was developing and we decided we must do something to change things. 'He hardly sees you apart from at weekends,' Jo argued. 'Spend some time on your own with him and see if that makes a difference.' The holidays presented us with the perfect opportunity to put this plan into action. I started taking Hal off swimming, or taking him to Drusilla's, a local children's zoo. Pretty quickly these 'boys only' outings brought about a change in Hal's attitude to me. Whereas before it had been 'Go away daddy, I don't want you,' now it was 'You're lovely daddy', or 'You're my best friend'. On one, admittedly isolated, occasion he woke in the night calling for me rather than his mummy.

This brief vignette of the shifting dynamics of my household is by way of explaining that now, after a hiatus of several months, I have been reading books with Hal again. And the break has thrown up an interesting discovery. Hal no longer depends on pictures to find a book interesting.

I noticed it first when he picked out a title called **Five Minute Monster Tales** for his bedtime book. I hadn't seen the book before and when I opened it my first thought was that his interest in it would not last beyond the first page. **Five Minute Monster Tales** has pictures, it is true, but there is only one, smallish one per page marooned in substantial amounts of text, and they don't really illustrate the most dramatic elements of the story either.

I asked Hal if he was sure that he really wanted to read this book. He insisted he did so we read through one of the tales. Hal sat,



listening carefully, looking at the pictures but not paying particular attention to them. It was obvious that he was attending to the narrative I was reading to him, and when I had finished he asked me to read him the next one.

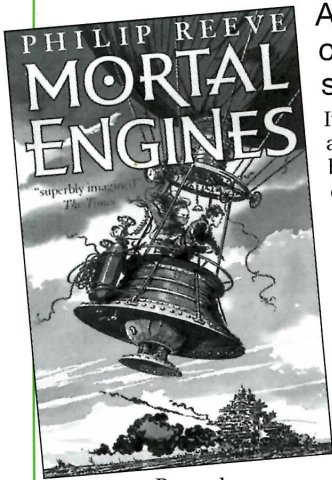
Before pressing on though, I was curious to find out how much he had taken in. Afterwards I felt mildly guilty about this reaction. But it was such a new idea for me to think that Hal could take in a story if it was told principally through words rather than with

a great deal of assistance from the images, that I couldn't help feeling sceptical about how much he had really understood. My doubts were completely misplaced. When I asked Hal a few questions about the story it was obvious he had understood exactly what had happened. It was me that had got things wrong.

This feels like such an important change. And it seems obvious that a deepening ability with language is the sine qua non for this development in Hal. A year ago, I would argue, many words were, for Hal, just sounds. As such they couldn't work as symbols of anything. As his grasp of language has developed, his store of symbols – word x equals thing y – becomes much bigger. And so the possibility of words conjuring images and narratives in his mind is born. From a distance it seems such a normal little thing, that a child can start to take in stories told through words. But in terms of a mind's development it is a shift of huge importance. The beginning, I would argue, of real thinking, and real imagination.

Roger Mills is a Psychodynamic Counsellor.

I wish I'd written...



Anthony Horowitz on an utterly compelling and child-friendly story...

It has taken me almost twenty years to make an impression in the world of children's books. Philip Reeve did it overnight, and deservedly, with this quite wonderful fantasy.

He imagines a world of the future, long after the chillingly-named 'Sixty Minute War', when London has been redesigned as a vast wedding cake on wheels, rumbling across the ruins of the mud flats below, preying on the smaller towns and villages that cross its path. He tells the story of Tom Natsworthy, a 14-year-old apprentice, who becomes involved in conspiracy, a search for a secret weapon – and murder. I suppose what I most envy about the book is the way that

Reeve has managed to marry the hugeness of his imagination with an utterly compelling and child-friendly story line. Nothing needs to be explained. Some of the storytelling has a pleasantly old-fashioned feel to it. Tom is an orphan. There's a bully called Herbert Melliphant and a

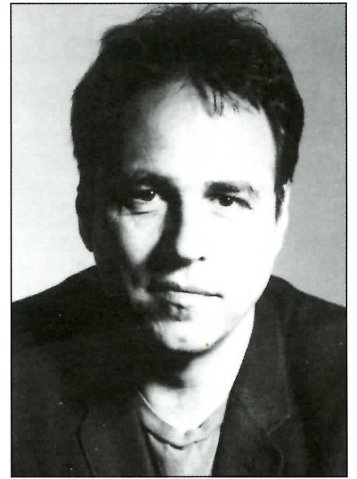
Lord Mayor 'as thin as an old crow, and twice as gloomy'. This is no criticism. It's precisely this familiarity that guides us through the swirl of original ideas.

And every chapter brings new surprises. A heroic father turns out to be a killer. A room for the night becomes an invitation to slavery. A hideous, metallic creature – Shrike – sets off into the night. You can feel the energy of the narrative as strongly as the engines that drive London forward.

My 12-year-old son was given this book for Christmas and we read it together ... the short chapters with their many unexpected twists make it perfect for bed-time reading. I cannot believe – after Pullman and Potter – that this will not make it to the big screen. I can imagine Terry Gilliam directing. And if anyone's looking for a screenwriter to adapt it, I'm certainly available.

Mortal Engines by Philip Reeve is published by Scholastic (0 439 97943 9, £5.99 pbk). Anthony Horowitz's latest book is *Scorpio* (Walker, 0 7445 8323 3, £5.99 pbk, April 2004).

Photograph of Anthony Horowitz by Des Willie.



Chosen by pupils from
Lanesborough School,
Guildford, Surrey

GOOD READS

Thanks to Stephen Loubser,
Head of English

Stray

A N Wilson, Walker, 0 7445 9062 0, £4.99 pbk

An autobiography with a difference! *Stray* is the autobiography of an alley cat called Pufftail. But don't let that put you off – this is a great book for cat-haters and cat-lovers alike.

I like this book because you get to see through the eyes of a moggy (cat) that is put through lots of different experiences, some of which are good but some are bad like when his wife is run over by an engine of murder (car).

Pufftail is given human characteristics and emotions by the author. These include sorrow, joy and anger but most of the time he is confused.

The book moves you as it makes you feel sad and angry about the way some people treat cats. It is also funny and adventurous because he has to go through tough times such as when he is separated from his family and when his brother is killed.

All in all this is an excellent book and I would recommend it to readers of eleven years old and above.

Richard Longdon, Year 6

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time

Mark Haddon, Red Fox, 0 09 945676 1, £6.99 pbk

'What's going on here, young man?'

'The dog's dead.'

'I got that far.'

'I think someone killed the dog.'

'How old are you?'

'Fifteen years, three months and two days.'

'Why were you holding the dog?'

'I like dogs.'

'Did you kill the dog?'

'I did not kill the dog.'



Left to right: Richard Longdon, Oliver Neville, William Davies and Ross Vinten.

Christopher Boone has Asperger's syndrome. This means he does not know when someone is showing emotion unless they are shouting or crying. Seeing certain colour cars on his way to school determines a good day or a BLACK day and he takes anything anyone says literally. This is his book.

I found this book highly entertaining and enthralling though it was a little bit sad at times. Because this was Christopher's book he does not edit out all the rude language so at times I found myself reading some rather colourful words.

This book starts with a mystery but it is not solved till the very last few chapters and even more mysteries are added during the course of the book.

At first I found the chapter numbering confusing: two, three, five, seven, eleven till I was told that the book was going up in Prime numbers because it made Christopher feel safe.

I found Christopher's character very amusing but very realistic, taking one thing at a time and not thinking what his actions may cause. He is very up-front and makes his feelings of people clear.

This to me was one of the greatest

books I have read. I advise you to buy two copies because you will not want to lend yours out.

Oliver Neville, Year 8

The Twelve Tasks of Flavia Gemina

Caroline Lawrence, Dolphin, 1 84255 025 X, £4.99 pbk

This is a book that teaches the lessons of love, loss, passion, and trust. The time the story is set in is perfect for these lessons, the early Roman period.

In the port town of Ostia, the Gemina family live a wealthy, happy, life... apparently. The family is in financial trouble and on top of that, a Roman widow has started to take a liking to the father. Flavia Gemina and her three friends must solve a mystery that could make their fears a reality.

I found the book well paced, not too complicated, and a glossary for all the Latin phrases definitely helped. I was a little frustrated with the ending, and it sometimes went off in unusual directions; but these two little complaints do not compare to the good points that make this a wonderful historical novel.

If you wish to read this book it is best to have some knowledge of the period and genre, but I recommend

it for people who enjoy this sort of story no matter what age.

William Davies, Year 8

The Sight

David Clement-Davies, Macmillan, 0 330 48385 4, £6.99 pbk

The Sight is a very moving, insightful novel which within it holds truths that reflect human life and the way we treat each other. I see the length of the book, 503 pages, not as a daunting challenge to claw one's way through it but a compliment to the thoughtfulness and intelligence of the points the author puts into the themes of the book.

The author structures the plot to great effect as this adds suspense to the book. The author immediately sets the scene in the first sentence with a pack of wolves fleeing across harsh tundra. However, as throughout the book, the characters know something you don't, in this case *why* they are fleeing, and this compulsively draws the reader in.

The grim, icy settings emphasise the fear and destruction their world faces as their pack is broken apart, one by one. For example: 'all around the sky was draining of colour, the air growing pale and bloodless.'

The characters in this book are well developed and unpredictable. One does not see them as black and white but some undergo significant changes to their personality as they endure through an unforgiving time.

This book holds more than the cover suggests and once discovering the inner meanings of the book one must surely acknowledge it as a classic. I recommend this book to those who want to venture away from the stereotypical aspects of some books and I guarantee you will enjoy it as much as I did.

Ross Vinten, Year 8

BfK REVIEWS

Reviews (of both hardback and paperback fiction and non-fiction) are grouped for convenience into both age categories and under teaching range. Within each section, you will find reviews for younger children at the beginning. Books and children being varied and adaptable, we suggest that you look either side of your area. More detailed recommendations for use can often be found within the review.

RATING

Audio books are rated for the quality of the reading, not the book.

Unmissable
Very Good
Good
Fair
Poor



REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

Brian Alderson is children's book consultant for *The Times*. **Nick Attwood** teaches English at the Dragon School, Oxford.

Gwynneth Bailey is Language Coordinator at Aldborough County Primary School, Norwich.

Clive Barnes is Principal Children's Librarian, Southampton City.

Jill Bennett is the author of *Learning to Read with Picture Books*. She was Early Years Coordinator and teacher at an infant school but is currently doing freelance and consultancy work.

David Bennett was Senior Teacher and Head of an English Faculty in Nottinghamshire. He now works as an English consultant and supply teacher.

Urmi Chana previously worked as a researcher and lecturer on bilingual issues in primary education. She now teaches part-time in the primary sector.

Valerie Coghlan is Librarian at the Church of Ireland College of Education, Dublin.

Olivia Dickinson works for Children's BBC (CBBC and CBeebies Online).

Robert Dunbar lectures in English and children's literature at the Church of Ireland College of Education, Dublin.

Tania Earnshaw is Community Librarian – Early Years, Chatham Library, Kent.

Sheila Ebbutt is director of BEAM Education, a former LEA mathematics advisor, and a member of the Early Childhood Mathematics Group.

Geoff Fox edits the journal, *Children's Literature in Education*, and is an honorary Research Fellow at Exeter University School of Education.

Annabel Gibb lives in York and is a Learning Support Tutor.

Peter Hollindale, formerly at the University of York, is now a freelance writer and teacher.

George Hunt is lecturer in Education at the University of Edinburgh.

Adrian Jackson is General Adviser – English, West Sussex.

Andrew Kidd is Headteacher at Duke Street Primary School in Chorley, Lancashire.

Rudolf Loewenstein is a Dominican friar working in a London parish. He also teaches part time in a primary school.

Margaret Mallett is Visiting Tutor in Primary English, Goldsmiths' College, University of London.

Shereen Pandit is a writer and teacher.

Ted Percy, until he retired, was Divisional Children's Librarian with Buckinghamshire County Library.

Felix Pirani is Emeritus Professor of Rational Mechanics in the University of London.

Val Randall is Head of English and Literacy Co-ordinator at a Pupil Referral Unit in Blackburn, Lancashire.

Carole Redford is a part-time lecturer in English and children's literature at St Patrick's College of Education, Dublin.

Andrea Reece worked for children's publishers for 16 years and is now a freelance marketing consultant.

Martin Salisbury is Course Director for MA Children's Book Illustration at APU Cambridge.

Elizabeth Schlenker is Editor, English children's books for gwales.com, The Welsh Books Council's website.

Rosemary Stones is Editor of *Books for Keeps*.

Helen Taylor teaches at Homerton College, Cambridge and is the director of The Voices Project – a literature in the community project and festival in Cambridgeshire.

Nicholas Tucker is honorary senior lecturer in Cultural and Community Studies at Sussex University.

Sue Unstead was a publisher of children's non-fiction for 25 years and is now a freelance editorial consultant and writer.

Verna Wilkins is a writer and publisher of *Tamarind Books*.

Jessica Yates is a school librarian working in the London Borough of Haringey.

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Alphabet Room, The	★★★ 18	Legend of the Fish, The	★★★ 21
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Fundamentalism	★★★ 26	Tales of The Dead: Ancient Egypt	★★★ 25
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Knife Edge	★★★ 26		
Last Resort, The	★★★ 23		

REVIEWS Books About Children's Books

You're a Brick, Angela!

★★★★

Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig, *Girls Gone By* Publishers, 466pp, 1 904417 12 4, £13.99 pbk inc. p&p (available from GGBP, tel. 01373 812705, ggbp@rock terrace.demon.co.uk)

No brickbats here for *Girls Gone By* Publishers for republishing Cadogan's and Craig's commentary on girls' stories. The 1986 edition contained an addendum bringing the book up to 1985 from the mid-1970s where the first edition stopped. This reissue of the 1986 text contains an additional short preface and, best of all, many more illustrations. These have been selected with a sure, and sometimes sly, touch adding enormously to the reader's enjoyment. The only pity is that they don't all appear on the same page as the incidents which they depict, such as the pinning of a notice advertising a kiss for three pence on the rear of a grim-faced



and astringent teacher. It is necessary to turn the page before seeing Miss Trumpinshaw warding off one over-enthusiastic customer.

The sweep is wide, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century with Charlotte M Yonge, Mrs Gatty, Mrs

Ewing and others of that period. The works of American authors are discussed including Martha Farquharson Finley, L M Alcott, Susan Coolidge and later Kate Douglas Wiggin, L M Montgomery, Gene Stratton Porter and Eleanor H Porter whose *Pollyanna* is given short shrift. Interesting comparisons are drawn between the societies out of which British and American authors were writing. Pioneering days had bequeathed American women a legacy of self-reliance and principles of equality; yet the 1849 Tennessee Legislature denied women both the right to own property and that they had souls – a telling pairing.

In 1849 also *The Lily* appeared. Despite its name, it was a magazine that spoke up strongly for a more assertive and equal role for women. Treatment of popular magazines and their influences is one of the meatiest sections of the book and a useful listing of their publication dates is given in an appendix.

Cadogan and Craig are strong on social commentary and their lightly

sketched historical background to the books and periodicals discussed is entertaining and informative. They interrogate the way in which books and magazines either supported society's expectations of how young women should comport themselves at certain periods or else nudged them forward into a more liberated way of living. Their style is brisk and incisive and they show no hesitation in debunking some of the affectations of certain authors.

The end chapters come as rather an anti-climax and one feels that the authors' interest lies more in the pre-1960s period. The slight amount of attention paid to Antonia Forest in comparison with that given to Malcolm Saville is unexpected and there are other discrepancies. These, however, are minor cavils when put in the context of the whole book. The marvellous thing about it is the enthusiasm shown by Cadogan and Craig, making it indispensable reading for anyone interested in the topic, and even those who are not initially attracted to the girls' story will revel in *You're a Brick, Angela!* VC

REVIEWS Under 5s Pre-School/Nursery/Infant

Cluck, Cluck Who's There?

★★

James Mayhew, ill. Caroline Jayne Church, *Chicken House*, 20pp, 1 903434 94 7, £5.99 novelty hbk

A sweet book about Hattie the Hen laying eggs, and it's always nice to flip a flap for the surprise underneath. This is safe territory: an old-fashioned hen in a neat henhouse, cute chicks, and a friendly mouse, painted bright, bold and big, cartoon-like. It's a counting book, but somewhat muddled. Hattie lays three eggs, but we only see two of them together. Hattie clucks once for the first egg, twice for the second egg, and three times for the third. There's a muddle here with cardinal and positional numbers: two clucks and the second egg are not logically connected. In spite of the flaps, I'm not sure it would sustain a second viewing. SE

The Alphabet Room

★★★★

Sara Pinto, Bloomsbury, 56pp, 0 7475 6459 0, £9.99 novelty board

The Alphabet Room comes with a sturdy, bright cover and durable card pages. On the left-hand page, we meet the letter (A-apples). The right-hand page contains a 'hinged' door set into the page. On the outside there might be three large apples and, when we open the door, we find a bare room with three little apples on the floor. As we go on through B-bowls, C-cat, D-dog through to, yes, X-xylophone, Y-yarn and Z-zebra, the accumulating contents of the room shift about to accommodate the newly arrived letter. J-jester tends to orchestrate this energetic foetry and it is little surprise that by the time Z-zebra gets into the room

most of the other letters have fallen into exhausted slumber and O-owl has flown out of W-window into the night. There's some surreal playfulness for infant eyes to keep track of within the room – the contents of P-painting change from one visit to the next, developing a rather modest narrative involving a horse, a cart, its driver and a small sack of something. The artwork has a stylised childlike quality so that C-cat, D-dog and the rest are two-dimensional. Sadly, the gutter created by the opening hinge is fairly deep, which leaves any image unfortunate enough to find itself on the crack, as it were, in danger of distortion where the two pages do not exactly connect. Perhaps the artist, or the designer, might have taken that into account. Poor O-owl – on his debut appearance at that – peers out of my copy with three eyes and one and a bit heads. GF

Jingle Jangle Jungle

★★★★

Illustrated by Axel Scheffler, Campbell Books, 12pp, 1 405 02044 X, £9.99 novelty board

This is a new one on me. A jigsaw puzzle incorporated in a book. It's in the jungle, so you get 1 hippo, 2 giraffes, 3 elephants... and because it's jingle jangle, there's dancing and prancing, twirling and flouncing. The illustrated storyline is on the left-hand page in rhyming couplets: 'Ten frisky frogs, croaking in a tree, jump down from the branches and join the jamboree!' and the jigsaw is on the right-hand page, so you get to count the animals twice. There are two two-piece jigsaws on each page, which you flick out and assemble. Then you place them neatly back into the inset. You match a picture of three elephants with '3' and 'Three elephants'. It all feels very nice, and the jigsaws fit together well,

although it might all fall apart on the shelf. The pictures are jolly, and the language is nicely onomatopoeic. SE

Little Yellow Dog Says Look at Me

1 84255 287 2



Little Yellow Dog Gets a Shock

1 84255 286 4

★★★★

Francesca Simon, ill. James Lucas, Orion, 32pp, £8.99 each hbk

Little Yellow Dog is a breath of sunshine, attacking life with exuberant energy. In *L.Y.D. Says Look at Me* we see him sniffing at something unknown and deciding it must be a giant bone. He tries to pick it up. He fails, but the 'bone' begins to move, and as *Little Yellow Dog* chases it, he pounces and the 'bone' skids away. The reader, and the observing cat and birds in the illustrations, can see the dog struggling to stay on the bone (skateboard!) and the pictures are brilliant as the dog discovers he *can do it...* for a short time, anyway! The

font size varies for the action in key spots, making the text accessible to early readers. In *L.Y.D. Gets a Shock*, L.Y.D. battles with Ginger Cat for possession of the favourite armchair. They chase each other right out of the house, on and on, until they are exhausted. Agreeing to share the chair, they return home amicably. But here comes the shock, their chair is occupied! The sub-text, told in the pictures, is wonderful in both books. GB

Blue Rabbit

★★

Angela McAllister, ill. Jason Cockcroft, Bloomsbury, 32pp, 0 7475 5921 X, £9.99 hbk

A story of parting, pining and reconciliation as experienced by a toy whose boy owner goes away on holiday. *Blue Rabbit* searches high and low for his missing companion, helped by Old Brown Dog, Monkey, and the others, but it soon becomes clear that he is nowhere to be found. Long faces abound in the toy box until the inevitable return of sun-tanned boy to ensuing all round glee.

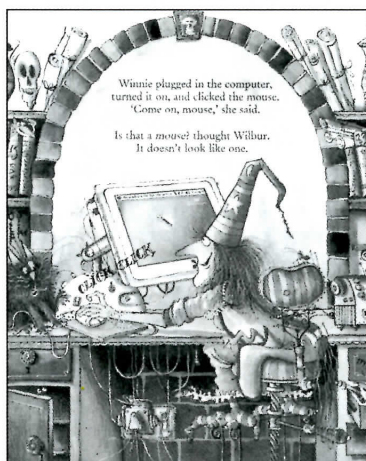
This inversion of the usual child/toy story is sure to be popular with children, though some may find the photographically posed pointillist illustrations a little on the cloying, sentimental side. There is sometimes a problem with readability (in the pictorial sense) where single page, full bleed images seem to have been designed independently of each other, making it difficult to know whether or not we are looking at a double page spread or two singles. MS

Winnie's New Computer

★★★★

Valerie Thomas, ill. Korky Paul, Oxford, 32pp, 0 19 279129 X, £10.99 hbk

In this latest *Winnie the Witch* title,



Winnie is delighted when her new computer, Pumpkin XIII, arrives. She confidently scans in her books of spells and orders a wand from www.wands.r.us.com, putting her old wand and spell book in the rubbish bin. Inevitably technology falls short of expectations, helped along by Wilbur who thinks a computer mouse is something to be seen off.

Winnie's computer, washing machine and signs of modern-day life like her cafetière, juxtaposed with her arcane and very traditional calling, create the tension which makes this book so entertaining. The visual detail is rich and riotous with Heath Robinsonesque gadgetry all around. There are also Hitchcockian glimpses of a Korzy Paul-like figure here and there to tantalise, and, as usual, the mice pop up everywhere to provide a visual commentary on proceedings.

Left-handed children will be pleased to see that Winnie is left-handed too. The children who helped with the endpapers deserve congratulations for adding to the fun in another glorious Winnie the Witch escapade. VC

Frog is Sad

★★★★

Max Velthuijs, Andersen, 32pp, 1 84270 289 0, £9.99 hbk



One morning Frog wakes up sad. He doesn't know why; there isn't a reason. Rat tries his best to help: he dances about, walks on his hands, even plays the violin – which reduces Frog to tears! Then, suddenly, Frog is smiling and laughing, his mood dispersed. This is the twelfth story about Frog and his friends, all of

them dealing with emotions small and large with a lightness and sureness of touch that is a joy to children and adults alike. Sadness that comes and goes is something everyone experiences, and the unpretentious, guileless pictures with Frog in his striped shorts and Rat playing the fool to cheer him up should comfort the moodiest of children – their parents too! ES

Rastamouse and the Crucial Plan

★★★★

Michael De Souza, ill. Genevieve Webster, Little Roots, 32pp, 0 9546098 0 8, £10.00 hbk

Rastamouse is the leader of the Easy Crew team of crime-fighting special agent mice. Scratchy, the female agent, does a tough job alongside her male colleagues. When the President needs help, he calls in the Easy Crew to solve the mystery of the disappearing cheese. A ruthless thief is stealing all the cheese from the entire city. He even robs some 'poor little orphan mice'.

The Easy Crew abandon their music making and race to the rescue. They devise a cunning, daring plan to catch the thief. Bandulu the cheese thief gives up without a struggle, makes recompense, and they all live happily ever after. Although the storyline is not very convincing, the rhyming style rolls it along and is entertaining. This book can work well read by an adult, as the use of language and concepts will be difficult for the very young reader. The sprinkling of dialect is easy to manage because it is phonetic. With the clear, well-defined simple illustrations, this first title from a new publisher will work well as a shared read with the early years. VW

Milet Mini Picture Dictionary

DUAL LANGUAGE ★★★★★

Sedat Turhan, ill. Sally Hagin, Bengali translation by Dorbesh Choudhury, Milet, 28pp, English/Bengali, 1 84059 370 9, £5.99 board

You immediately want to pick this book up. The cover grabs attention, the size and look of the book invite handling. It is superbly illustrated in warm, bright colours, each page showing familiar objects under headings such as house, fruit, body, animals, play, numbers, colours and so on. I particularly like the balance of pictures and text on each spread – not overcrowded as picture dictionaries can sometimes be, but just right for the size of pictures and text to sit well on the page. The result is a clear and accessible dual language text for young readers to enjoy. Much of the appeal comes from Hagin's lovely drawings – immediately recognisable as whatever they depict. The only photograph is one of a little girl

running and it's used to label parts of the body; it's clearly and cleverly done, the photograph being superimposed onto a simple illustrated background. This beautifully produced board book is a lovely addition to help reinforce and build vocabulary and is one that will withstand lots of handling by young readers. (Also available in English only and in Albanian, Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Somali, Spanish, Turkish, Urdu and Vietnamese dual language editions.) UC

Woolly Jumper: The Story of Wool

INFORMATION PICTURE BOOK ★★★★★

Meredith Hooper, ill. Katharine McEwen, Walker, 32pp, 0 7445 8300 4, £4.99 pbk

Very occasionally a reviewer takes up an early information book and finds near perfection. This was my experience with *Woolly Jumper*. With great flair and imagination author and illustrator take very young children, under fives, on the journey wool makes from being a sheep's coat to becoming a woolly garment. The text has the rhythmical energy of a nursery rhyme; the repetition of 'That came from the sheep, That stood in the field, And ate the grass' helps children keep constantly in mind the connection between creature and product. The colourful, dynamic illustrations combine with the text to interest and inform. Workers are shown shearing, classifying, pressing and carrying the wool. Then we see the machine processes at the mill – scouring, carding and combing. Double spread pictures are large and clear and the animals are delightfully realised.

There is carefully thought out use of environmental print: trade names on vehicles, notices on the woolshop door and 'AAAM' to signify a fleece is Triple A merino wool. The excellent, detailed notes will help adults to answer the questions such an exciting book is bound to inspire. MM

Precious Water: A Book of Thanks

0 7358 1513 5 hbk,
0 7358 1869 X pbk

Little Apple: A Book of Thanks

0 7358 1426 0 hbk,
0 7358 1781 2 pbk

Good Bread: A Book of Thanks

0 7358 1517 8 hbk

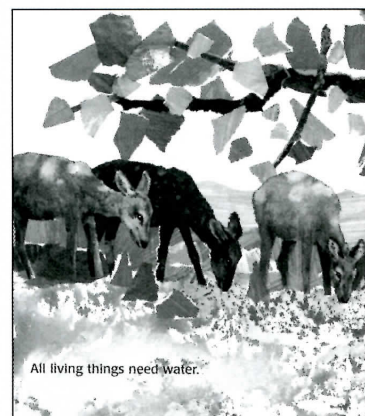
NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Brigitte Weninger, ill. Anne Möller, North-South Books, 32pp, £7.99 each hbk, £3.99 each pbk

These books celebrate the aesthetic

beauty and value of three natural resources: water, fruit and bread. The written text is lucid but quite spare so it is the detail in the illustrations which is likely to encourage curiosity and thus to give rise to talk. *Little Apple* and *Good Bread* are strong visual narratives which show how the plant develops, growing root systems below ground and shoots above ground. Children's wonder at the magnificence and complexity of natural resources is encouraged by the richness of the pictures – for example we are shown skilfully drawn predators of the maturing plants.

In *Little Apple* we discover 'a secret': there is a star at the centre of the fruit if you cut it in half. A close-up shows the brown apple pips inside. I would be reaching for an apple to show the child or children the star! *Good Bread* presents an historic, romantic view of the agricultural process; it is splendid to see the playful fieldmice and the beautiful field flowers, but it would be difficult to find such a field on a present day farm to show a child on a country walk. We see a child grinding flour from grains of wheat and baking bread and then an affecting image of the hands of children from many countries reaching out towards a loaf of bread. This picture and the accompanying text – 'I hope that other children have bread like this to eat' – could lead to profound talk about why some people do not have enough food.



Precious Water shows landscapes with and without water: we see scenes of verdant pastures and cascading rivers contrasting with terrains of bare rock and barren earth with stark animal skeletons. The author and illustrator move skilfully from generalisations – some water is salt, some water becomes ice and snow – to one child's use of water to quench the thirst of her pet cat and to keep her plants alive. It is such imaginative leaps from the particular to the general and back again which help make these richly illustrated books so appealing and so likely to help children to think and learn, especially if there is a sensitive adult to help make their wonderings and reflections explicit. MM

REVIEWS 5–8 Infant/Junior

I Hate School

★★★★★

Jeanne Willis, ill. Tony Ross, Andersen, 32pp,

1 84270 220 3, £9.99 hbk

Another winning picture book from this highly successful author/artist partnership. This is a perfect text for Ross, giving him full reign to create

all manner of ghastly characters and scenarios alongside Willis' ghoulish and hilarious text, as related by Honor Brown, a schoolgirl who is a little inclined toward exaggeration in

expressing her hatred of school. They say the Devil gets all the best tunes, and Willis certainly gives little Honor (with her red horns and tail) some pretty good laugh-aloud lines.

I hate School

Jeanne Willis / Tony Ross



Children will love Honor's version of the horrors of school, and Ross's version of the warty toad teacher is an absolute hoot. Ross also demonstrates how well illustration can work when the artist feels able to add his own little asides and visual jokes, something that he does liberally and to great effect in these pages. Author and artist are on top form here, interacting to great effect – one of their finest collaborations to date. MS

Lemmy was a Diver

★★

Colin McNaughton, Andersen, 32pp, 1 84270 301 3, £9.99 hbk

Six-year-old Lemmy's flights of fancy take him deep-sea diving for treasure, piloting a single propeller plane around the world in a record-breaking race and blasting off into the cosmos in a rocket. In all these adventures Lemmy has to fend off his rival, 'bully-boy' McCoy, a corpulent fellow twice his size.

I can imagine this picture book's appeal to the more belligerent listeners and readers but as a pacifist I'm none too keen on the notion of punching one's adversaries (even bullies) on the nose. Neither the words nor the illustrations live up to McNaughton's usual very high standard. The rhythm is difficult to sustain when reading it aloud and the illustrations fail to lift the storyline out of the ordinary. JB

Who is Mrs Green?

★★★★

David McKee, Andersen, 32pp, 1 84270 092 8, £9.99 hbk

Henry's long drawn out explanation of how it was all Mrs Green's fault that her mum shouted at Jennifer is recounted as the two young friends play with a hula-hoop. His words are



an invitation to the reader to track down the various characters and to find other possible stories in the wonderfully detailed illustrations of hectic city life spread out in the quirky and intriguing perspectives on the right hand pages. The final spread reveals a small, enclosed courtyard that provided an oasis of calm for the pair to play in, away from the hustle and bustle outside. The perfect spot for a timely apology and an ice-cream cone from mum.

A picture book that could do much to help develop both visual literacy and the imagination. Just 'how does Henry know what happened?' one wonders. JB

Cinderlily: A Floral Fairy Tale

★★★★

Christine Tagg, ill. David Ellwand, Walker, 32pp, 1 84428 721 1, £12.99 hbk

Designed and produced for Walker Books by the packager Templar, this lavish and voluptuous production combines Ellwand's 'floromorphic' photography with, as he puts it, 'the marvels of modern computer technology'. The book is presented as a sort of illustrated opera programme, Acts I, II and III told in rhyming couplets through mock Victorian typography with decorative fleurons and patterned borders. This book is certainly a beautiful adornment for the coffee table; whether it works as well as a children's book is less clear, breaking as it does many of those set-in-stone publishers' rules. The characters have no facial features, being digital compositions from photographs of flowers. These figures emerge from a black background to twirl and soar and take their bows in a blaze of colour and elegant shapes.

The book perhaps belongs in the same genre as Alan Aldridge's influential tour de force, *Butterfly Ball*, the 1960s infatuation with the glossy graphic effects of the airbrush being here replaced by an early 21st-century love affair with computer software. The dust wrapper is printed with a thin haze of gold inks flecked into the stage curtain design, giving the book an unusual but attractive finish. MS

The Bee-man of Orn

★★

Frank R Stockton, ill. P J Lynch, Walker, 48pp, 0 7445 9612 2, £12.99 hbk

It will be charitable to assume that Mr Lynch encountered this delicious story in some anthology, or even in an early printing. (Frank Stockton was an American humorist and his story first appeared there in book-form in 1887.) The bee-man hero is persuaded by a Junior Sorcerer to go into the world to seek his True Identity for he had surely been the victim of some unknown transformation and the tale tells of his comic quest after selfhood. There is a kindly mockery behind the story which reads beautifully as a fireside folktale (I know, I've done it) but its peaceable good humour is sadly disrupted under Mr Lynch's vulgar attack. His whacking great square album sports the predictable over-emphatic, heavily detailed artwork (Michael Hague out of Arthur Rackham) which beats Stockton's text into submission and corrals it off

higgledy-piggledy alongside fancy designer-borders.

There is however a horrid possibility that Mr Lynch was not moved to his painterly effusions by finding his text in a story collection but by seeing it in the picture-book edition that was made by Maurice Sendak in 1964 and has often been reprinted since. If that is so then it is hard to see how an illustrator of Mr Lynch's distinction could have dared even to think of giving the story a makeover – and certainly not an over-dramatic one like this. For Sendak's Bee-man is, quite simply Illustrative Perfection. We require no other. BA

The Bogey Man

★★★

Shoo Rayner, Orchard 'Little Horrors', 48pp, 1 84362 011 1, £3.99 pbk

One in a series of eight 'Little Horrors' books, *The Bogey Man* is a light-hearted tale about a brother and sister's trip to a third-rate funfair. Taunted by some school friends for being frightened of the rides, Sam and Kim agree to go on the dilapidated Ghost Train which is far from horrific. However, on returning to the fair that night, the Ghost Train proves to be an altogether scariest experience with some strange happenings on the ride, with the model of the Bogey Man going missing. And what about the sinister attendant's sudden disappearance?



Comically scary illustrations match the cartoon style story very well. Other books in the same series include *The Swamp Man*, *The Sand Man* and *The Pumpkin Man*. The author has created his own highly entertaining website which is well worth a visit: www.shoo-rayner.co.uk AK

Jason and the Golden Fleece

★★★★

James Riordan, ill. Jason Cockcroft, Frances Lincoln, 64p, 0 7112 2081 6, £14.99 hbk

The exploits of Jason and his Argonauts have served over the centuries as the basis for numerous translations and re-tellings, a fact which testifies to the permanent and universal appeal of this group of warriors who, in Riordan's concluding words, 'braved perils beyond imagination to bring the Golden Fleece back home to Greece'.

In this particular version, Jason's heroic quest is set within a narrative which focuses on the Argonauts' muscular masculinity and their apparently endless confrontations with apparently invincible opposition. The raw passions of an ancient, mythic world and its threatening seascapes are well caught in a prose which succeeds in moving, as appropriate, between the gutsy and the poetic. Cockcroft's full-colour artwork, dominated by richly bronzed male torsos and equally at ease with mortal and supernatural details, provides a distinct and distinguished visual accompaniment. RD

Rocky

Rebecca Lisle, ill. Tim Archbold, 0 552 54875 8

Chicken in a Basket

Debbie White, ill. Jonathan Allen, 0 552 54906 1

★★★★

Corgi Pups, 64pp, £3.99 each pbk

Short, straightforward stories in clear, large print well broken up by illustrations give these books their 'perfect for new readers' tag.

In *Rocky*, Ruby, jealous of her sister's new kitten, takes on the care of a friendly-looking rock from the garden, her invention proving a match for her sister's challenging superiority. Naturally both 'pets' win prizes in the Pet Show, but far from bringing the sisters together, this becomes part of Ruby's plan to win the kitten's affections. A more imaginative story than usual in this genre, then, the point-scoring plotting of the two sisters giving it a sharp edge. 'They're both selfish' said my reader – so, could be useful in discussions of motivation and sibling rivalry.

Chicken is based, apparently, on a true episode – the first ever balloon flight was made by three farmyard animals in the Montgolfier brothers' balloon. There we depart from historical fact: in this version they are talking animals who also figure out how to prevent the balloon from crashing. A dotty but highly enjoyable read for the novice reader. AG

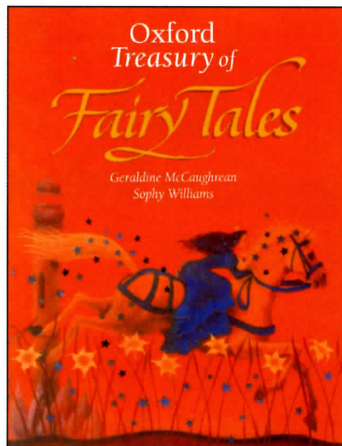
The Orchard Book of Swords, Sorcerers and Superheroes

★★★★

Tony Bradman, ill. Tony Ross, Orchard, 128pp, 1 84121 777 8, £12.99 hbk

Bradman and Ross combine their talents to present new and engaging retellings of some of the more familiar traditional stories from Europe and the Middle East. The Greek myths and the Arabian Nights are represented, alongside Robin Hood, William Tell, King Arthur and St George. The text and illustrations are as accomplished as you would expect from this partnership, which continues Orchard's work in presenting handsome, high quality anthologies and collections as 'gift books' created by outstanding authors and artists working in collaboration. My only disappointment is that, given such a team and such a promisingly expansive title, the story selectors have presented us with the usual suspects

again. All of the heroes are male (what of Boudicca, Angara of Baikal, Nzingha of Matamba?) and the stories originate in traditions which are already well-exploited (what about the Kalevala, the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Secret History of the Mongols?). The world is so rich with good stories, and the field of children's literature so well populated with excellent storytellers and illustrators, that Orchard could well have afforded to be more adventurous. GH



Oxford Treasury of Fairy Tales

★★★★★

Geraldine McCaughrean, ill. Sophy Williams, Oxford, 240pp, 0 19 278128 6, £20.00 hbk

A collection of twenty stories drawn from the European tradition that includes classic favourites such as Cinderella, Rumpelstiltskin, Snow White and Hansel and Gretel, Andersen's The Tinderbox, The Little Mermaid and The Princess and the Pea, and a Baba Yaga tale from Russia. There are also some lesser-

Editor's Choice

All Kinds of Beliefs

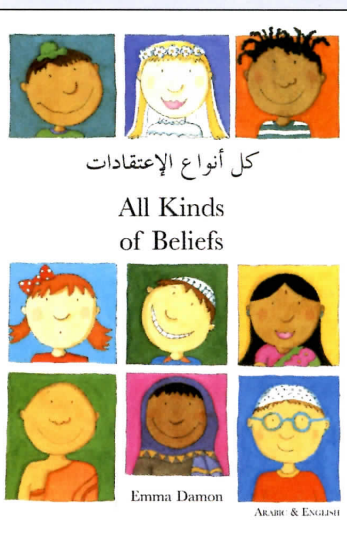
NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Emma Damon, paper engineering by Richard Ferguson, Mantra, 16pp, English/Arabic, 1 84444 160 1, £9.99 novelty hbk

The republication of this charming introduction for young readers to the major religions in a dual language edition appears timely. Even-handedly reflecting difference both within particular religious communities ('Some Sikh boys wear a patka over their hair. Some Sikh boys have their hair short') and between the faiths (Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism and Hinduism), the book uses lively pop-ups, flaps and pull-out tags to cover religious symbols and rituals in the home and the wat/church/mosque/synagogue/gurdwara/mandir while a poster folds out to illustrate the major religious festivals. Damon's lively pen and

known offerings: Cap-of-Rushes (a Cinderella variant), the Scottish Tamlin and a new to me version of the suitor contest tale, The Three Oranges.

McCaughrean's lively renditions are a real delight to read aloud. Books of fairy tales have largely replaced the age-old oral tradition though one greatly hopes that the narrative art is still alive and well in twenty-first century Great Britain. Respectful of that oral art, McCaughrean is a true storyteller as well as a highly skilled crafter of the written word moving from such language as '... Quick-Eye saw the princess. "Easy-peasy,



wash illustrations make good use of the bright pages with their novelty engineering. As France struggles with legislation to ban the wearing of religious symbols in schools, what would Jacques Chirac make of it? (Also available in Bengali, Chinese, Somali and Urdu dual language editions.) RS

master." ... "No prob," said Long. "I'll just go and fetch her back." And so he did, his long legs covering the ground faster than thought' ('The Four Friends') to 'Down on the sea bed, the bells of drowned ships rang a knell for the wreck of another, and the mermaids were stirred from their sleep by the flicker of lightning on the roof of their ocean world' (The Little Mermaid).

Sophy Williams, in the tradition of the medieval illuminator, embellishes each story with misty, magical illustrations, leaving her mark on every page. There is a calligraphic title page for each tale,

full and half page illustrations as well as smaller paintings of the characters, objects, animals and plants drawn from the story, punctuating the text or decorating the head, foot or margins of the page. The overall effect is never to distract but to transport the reader or listener into the heart of the story. Altogether a beautiful book for 5-8 year-olds and upwards: a collection one would like to see in every home and school. JB

The Blue Whale

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Christine Corning Malloy, ill. Aaron Leighton, Chronicle, 28pp, 0 8118 3489 1, £7.99 novelty hbk

Cries of delight greet this book as we pull it from its slipcase, open it up and keep on pulling so that the panels click-clack into place to reveal a yard-long portrait of the blue whale. Created in association with the American Museum of Natural History in New York and inspired by the huge fibreglass model that hangs from the ceiling of the museum's restaurant, it comes with American spelling and terminology. But don't be put off, for it's packed with useful statistics about the size, weight and speed of this gentle giant as well as intriguing information about the unique patterning of each whale, or why the northern and southern hemisphere populations never mix. More detailed information is given in a booklet attached to the inside back cover, and we learn that these majestic animals, hunted almost to extinction by the mid-1960s, have now increased their numbers to around 10,000. One hopes that books such as this will help safeguard their future, and meanwhile the sturdy production of this volume should ensure it withstands repeated handling. SU

REVIEWS 8-10 Junior/Middle

Erika's Story

★★★

Ruth Vander Zee, ill. Roberto Innocenti, Cape, 24pp, 0 224 07015 0, £10.99 hbk

Erika is a woman who falls into conversation with the author and her husband when they are returning from a trip to Jerusalem. She tells the tale of how she, as an infant, was rounded up with her family from an unnamed Jewish ghetto during the war and packed into a train bound for a concentration camp. Alone of her family, she is saved by acts of desperation and compassion.

No other events occur in the story, which is told in double spaced lines of spare prose over ten pages of print, punctuated with emblematic stars of David. The minimalist storytelling and text layout are accompanied by Innocenti's grim, photo-realistic depictions of pre-massacre transportation scenes. These are in stark black and white, but the story is framed by colour pictures of contemporary life, emphasising Erika's gratitude for her survival. This is a physically striking

and distinctive book, its text and pictures blending to tell a story of the utmost simplicity and significance. GH

The Legend of the Fish

★★★★

Gita Wolf, Sirish Rao and Emanuele Scanziani, Tara Publishing, 40pp, 81 86211 77 2, £12.99 hbk

Tara Publishing is a small independent publisher based in Chennai in Northern India. The company was founded and is run by writers, with a mission to publish what they believe in and are inspired by.

There is a keen commitment to the hand-crafted book as part of their output and *The Legend of the Fish* is produced using letterpress-printed text and silk-screened illustrations printed onto coarse papers. The book tells of Brahma the creator's dissatisfaction with the earth that he has designed. He calls upon the God Vishnu to solve the problem by introducing the ageing process into this world. Vishnu transforms himself into a fish and entrusts a wise man, Satyavrata, to carry him to

the river as he grows too large for his pot. Thus begins a long journey.

The book has very much a handmade, rustic quality, in keeping with the 'alternative' feel throughout. The detailed line illustrations are printed onto a silver base colour with blue backing. This is a spirited and spiritual production from an enthusiastic and committed little company. MS

The Tempest: A Shakespeare Story

1 84121 346 2

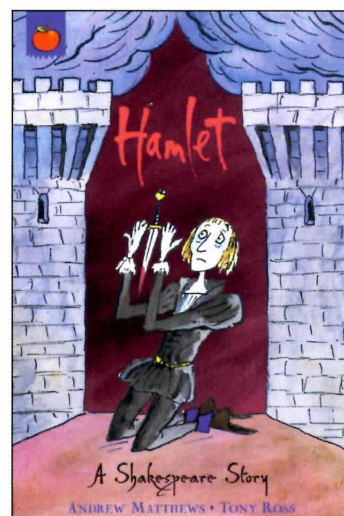
Hamlet: A Shakespeare Story

1 84121 340 3

★★★★★

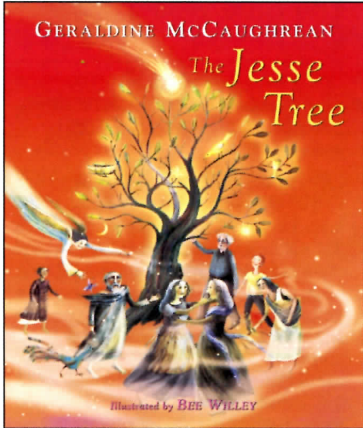
Retold by Andrew Matthews, ill. Tony Ross, Orchard, 64pp, £3.99 each pbk

These neat, concise retellings were first published in the collection, *The Orchard Book of Shakespeare Stories*, and now reappear in single volumes, liberally embellished with Tony Ross's sharp and witty illustrations. Shakespeare purists



will naturally find plenty to grumble about. Hamlet, whose virtues and faults alike are trademarks of a true Renaissance prince, is very oddly assigned to the thirteenth century, and it is cheeky opportunism to reassign Miranda's 'brave new world' speech to the newly-reformed Alonso. But all the essentials of the

original plots are retained, with deft avoidance of some awkward bits, and the result is short, brisk, highly readable retellings which make good sense as stories in their own right. As such, they will readily persuade the junior school age-group that Shakespeare himself has lively stories to tell. Four pages of information at the end seem designed for rather older readers, or for teachers. These little books can be warmly recommended as a first introduction to Shakespeare. PH



The Jesse Tree

★★★★★

Geraldine McCaughrean, ill. Bee Willey, Lion, 96pp, 0 7459 4577 5, £12.99 hbk

A Jesse tree is a picture of the lineage from Jesse, the father of King David, to Christ. In medieval renderings, still to be seen in stone and stained glass in places such as Dorchester Abbey, the genealogy was represented as a vine or a tree whose branches bore as fruit images or symbols of the ancestors of Christ and the prophets who proclaimed his coming.

McCaughrean uses this icon to grow a tree of stories linking the old and new testaments. She plants her tree in a seaside resort where a testy old carpenter is carving a new Jesse tree into a panel of oak in the local church. His work is constantly interrupted by a chatty boy who demands to know the significance of the pictures. The carpenter gradually gets to tolerate and like the child, and the stories unfold as the tree nears completion.

This book is an outstandingly successful demonstration of McCaughrean's skill at retelling traditional stories for contemporary audiences. Bee Willey's bright illustrations bring out both the vividness of the stories and the poignancy of the developing bond between the old man and the child, a poignancy sharpened by visual and textual motifs of childhood and childlessness. The book provides a delightful refresher course on salient points of Bible history for anybody who wants one; the religious element is clearly emphasised but it does not attempt to preach. Highly recommended for readers of all ages. GH

Dog Days

★★★

Geraldine McCaughrean, Hodder, 128pp, 0 340 85215 1, £10.99 hbk

The scene is England in 1753 when a dog tax of two shillings was

introduced. Although it was of little concern to the rich, many less well-off people were obliged to abandon or kill their dogs. Gloria, an enormous golden coloured hound, was one such animal. Thrown into the Thames by her master, she is rescued by Clay and Hal, but upon hearing of the new tax, their father refuses to keep this addition to the household.

The only course of action for the boys is to run away with Gloria and try to earn enough to pay the tax. After an episode with a swindling farmer, and many narrow escapes from the horrible Skinner Hackett who sells dog pelts for jackets and waistcoats, they end up back in London where Gloria's reward for bravery earns her a reprieve and enough to pay the dog tax. *Dog Days* is fast-moving and at times farcical but it will provide an entertaining read and some insights into old London for younger readers. VC

Free Lance and the Lake of Skulls

★★★

Paul Stewart, ill. Chris Riddell, Hodder, 128pp, 0 340 87408 2, £9.99 hbk

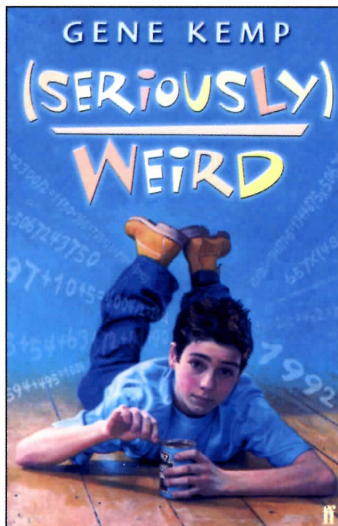
The latest collaboration between the creators of the popular 'Edge Chronicles' features Free Lance, a knight who earns his living as an itinerant tournament competitor. At the end of a thin jousting season, he is almost broke and his horse is lame, so when he receives an offer of wealth in return for recovering a magical crown from a heap of skulls, he accepts the commission against his better judgement. What follows owes a lot to Beowulf and more to pulp fiction: close scrapes with monsters and villains, wisecracks, double and triple crossings and plenty of Tarantinoid violence. The language has the easy clarity of a Paul Jennings story, with a similar wealth of episode, but perhaps a surfeit of similes.

The energy of Riddell's line drawings matches the hectic pace of the storytelling. One for the lads? All the females are villainous and most end up dead, so it should go down well amongst some of them at least. GH

Seriously Weird

★★★★★

Gene Kemp, Faber, 128pp, 0 571 21824 5, £5.99 pbk
With telling detail and sensitivity



NEW Talent

Millions

★★★★★

Frank Cottrell Boyce, Macmillan, 256pp, 1 405 04736 4, £9.99 hbk

Cottrell Boyce is an accomplished screenwriter (*Welcome to Sarajevo*, *Hilary and Jackie* etc as well as a stint on *Coronation Street*) so the confidence, vitality and wit of this ambitiously structured first novel astonish the reader less perhaps than his ability to pitch his story at a level that is accessible to young readers whilst also engaging, amusing and challenging older readers.

10-year-old Damian and his older brother Anthony are grieving for their mother. Their father still appears to be in shock. Events are narrated by Damian who takes things rather literally – if people at the hospice where his mother died are called saints, so they must be. Google is consulted in the course of his researches and he becomes an expert on the lives of saints in all their martyred glory. His father describes Damian as 'excellent' and excellent he must therefore try to be – with a touching tenacity and ferocious logic

Gene Kemp has explored the dilemmas and frustrations involved for parents and siblings when living with an autistic child.

Claire the middle child is the storyteller, completely overshadowed in the brains and beauty stakes by an older sister and in everything else by the antics of her brother, Troy, who may be an obsessive Maths genius, but is hell to coexist alongside.

As we might expect from this author there is nothing formulaic about her pacy treatment of the subject and a comic lightness of touch pervades the tale to keep the pages turning. This is such a delightful exploration of autism that all kids should have the opportunity to experience it and gain essential knowledge about what some of their peers are going through. DB

Running Wilde

0 340 87320 5

Wilde Child

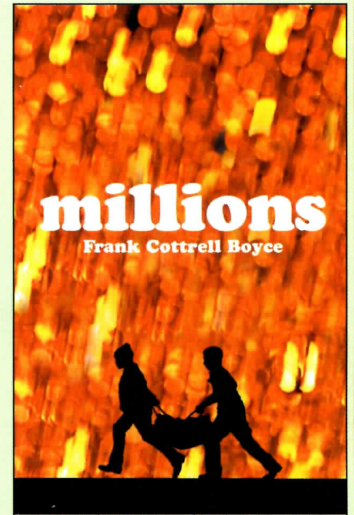
0 340 87321 3

★★★

Jenny Oldfield, ill. Sarah Naylor, Hodder 'The Wilde Family', 128pp, £3.99 each pbk

These new titles in the hilarious 'Wilde Family' series certainly live up to their expectations. The humour is fast and furious from start to finish, and Oldfield's witty and apt dialogue (that does not talk down to its readers) is apparent the whole time. The line drawings match the text well.

In *Running Wilde*, there is the little matter of a fun run to raise funds for an extension to the playgroup building. Jade and Gran sign up to do it with initial misgivings, and readers will be amused and surprised by who eventually appears on the starting



that take him into extreme situations. Fortunately, the saints about whom he knows so much, appear to be looking out for him.

When Damian finds a satchel full of money (over a quarter of a million sterling) by a railway track, it seems that his prayers for something good have been answered. The ensuing difficulties at home and at school as the boys try to dispose of the lucre are both funny and poignant. What, after all, is money for? Cottrell Boyce is a writer who can engage young readers in such questions whilst also making them weep with laughter. RS

line for the run. Oldfield's familiarity with the whole idea of training semi-willing or at times downright unwilling volunteers will strike a chord of recognition with any adult who reads the book.

In *Wilde Child*, the five sisters are getting increasingly fed up with their baby brother, who seems to manage to sabotage almost any activity going on. Various ruses are employed to deal with the matter, which include non co-operation and trying to sell him. Throw in a snowball fight, and one or two trips to the supermarket and you will begin to appreciate the mayhem that will keep children cheerfully turning pages in this story. What happens when Kyle falls unexpectedly ill proves to be a turning point – some may find what happens too predictable, but Oldfield makes a useful point about the sisters' reaction that other children may identify with and learn from. RL

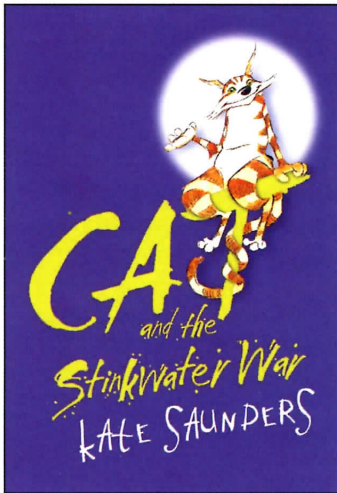
When Mum Threw out the Telly

★★★

E F Smith, Orchard, 176pp, 1 84121 810 3, £4.99 pbk

When Jeff's well-read mum decides that too much telly is a bad thing, he has to cope with the incredulity of his school-mates, while also finding other things to do. He tries every ruse in the book to catch up with the new cult game-show and maintain his street cred, but ends up instead with two new friends and a raft of new skills which culminate in his winning said game-show before either he – or we – really know what it is about. By this time, though conscious that he might be 'outside common culture', he has realised that at least he's not hypnotised by TV as his old friends seem to be.

The message is clear – TV is OK 'but there's lots of other good stuff to do'. A well-paced story in which we experience Jeff's changing feelings as he faces what might seem a fundamental challenge to modern children. AG



Cat and the Stinkwater War

★★★★

Kate Saunders, ill. Adam Stower, Macmillan, 224pp, 0 333 99771 9, £9.99 hbk

Saunders' first novel for children is a fast-paced, entertaining body-slip adventure. A mysterious package arrives at the home of 10-year-old Cat for her archaeologist father. It's from his former mentor and friend Professor Katzenberg, who died two years earlier. Inside is a white stone with magic powers and within a few pages Cat has inadvertently transformed herself into a cat.

Her new cat's-eye view of the world is

lovingly described as is the cats' way of life. The cats have a royal family, organised religion and belief in an after-life. Cat's own cat Eric, cat name General Nigmo Biffy, explains how a feud is raging between two opposing clans over the whereabouts of the cats' totem, the Blessed Sardine. Darson Stinkwater, aka Muffin, pet of Cat's arch enemy, commands the opposition. High drama develops encompassing tragedy, comedy and a final happy ending for all. Great fun for everyone who has wondered what it's like to be a cat. AR

Survivor's Science in the Desert

0 7502 4236 1

Survivor's Science on an Island

0 7502 4237 X

Survivor's Science in the Rainforest

0 7502 4235 3

Survivor's Science at Sea

0 7502 4239 6

NON-FICTION ★

Peter D Riley, Hodder Wayland, 48pp, £11.99 each hbk

Just the job if you find yourself stranded on a desert island or contemplating a journey through the rainforest, you might think. The premise for this activity-based series is that you can learn science and geography by exploring the skills you would need to survive in different environments. But before you set sail with the volume on the Sea tucked into your oilskins, take heed. There are so many annoying errors and half-truths that it's hard to trust

the science content. Sextants do *not* measure the height of the sun, and astronavigation is now so rarely used it has become something of an arcane science preserved only by the oldest salts. There is no mention here of radar or EPIRBs (emergency position indicating rescue beacons), only a laughably outdated photo of a GPS receiver (the equivalent of an early 1990s clunky mobile phone). Manufacturers of such equipment would happily have provided free photos for reproduction or for reference, which would certainly have helped in the case of the bizarre artwork of foul-weather clothing by an illustrator who has clearly never seen a self-inflating lifejacket or known that attaching a flare gun to clothing is about as safe as strapping a firework to your arm. So much for survival skills. The practical activities are outputting in the extreme, with grey tupperware containers photographed against white backgrounds and crumpled cardboard boxes. They range from infant-level projects using modelling clay to complex circuits requiring electric motors, switches and mini crocodile clips. A good idea appallingly executed. SU

Ancient Rome

Peter Chrisp, 0 7513 6820 2

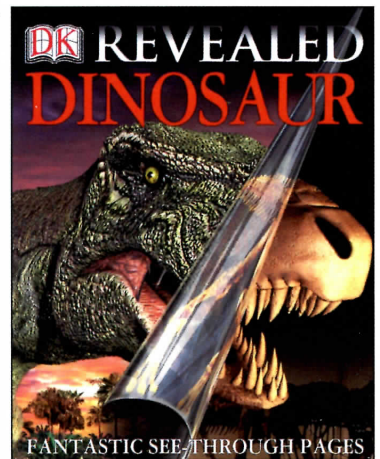
Dinosaur

Dougal Dixon, 0 7513 6821 0

NON-FICTION ★★★★★

Dorling Kindersley 'Revealed', 40pp, £7.99 each hbk

Two new titles in DK's 'Revealed' series which combine peel-back acetate pages with computer-generated images. These are bold and colourful information books in their own right, written by authors with strong track records, backed by



consultants with the right credentials. The four acetate leaves in each volume certainly provide an extra dimension, revealing the Pompeii street buried beneath the volcanic ash, or populating the ruined Coliseum with gladiators and spectators. The special photography of re-enactment scenes combined with computer-imaging is painstakingly stitched together to provide a kind of photorealism for a visually sophisticated audience brought up on the films of Spielberg and BBC's 'Walking with Dinosaurs'. It works most successfully in *Dinosaur*, especially when used to show how palaeontologists put flesh on the bones of a fossil skeleton, recreating skin markings and body movements, though personally I find there is something unsettling about the human figures hovering spookily above the mosaic floors in *Ancient Rome*. Children however will love the novelty element, which is put to good use in both these titles. Great value at £7.99, look out for other titles in the series on Egypt, Greece, the human body and oceans. SU

REVIEWS 10–14 Middle/Secondary

The Last Resort

★★★★

J Patrick Lewis, ill. Roberto Innocenti, Jonathan Cape, 48pp, 0 224 07016 9, £12.99 hbk

This is an unusual book, not quite an illustrated story book or picture book (boundaries that are often so rigidly observed by publishers). The format combines sequences of quarter page images with full page and double page spread illustrations and lengthy chunks of text. Purporting to be Innocenti's journey to find his lost creative urge, the book gradually reveals itself to be a highly theatrical weaving of a number of characters from literature and film, brought together in a seaside hotel for no apparent reason. The book is primarily a vehicle for Innocenti's enigmatic, superbly rendered illustrations. His assured technique combines softly graded washes with delicate line work and ambitious, painstakingly constructed perspectives. In a stunning early double page spread illustration we see the artist himself arriving at The Last Resort Auberge, the lights of his little red Renault 4 glowing against the subtle range of muted greys in the wet, stormy landscape. One by one we are

introduced to the players; Huckleberry Finn masquerading as a fisher boy, Long John Silver, the invalid girl who is really Hans Christian Andersen's Little Mermaid, and 1940s Hollywood baddie, Peter Lorre. Italo Calvino's Cosimo pops up perched in a tree and Melville's Moby Dick is washed up on the nearby beach. As the book's 'afterword' tells us, '... perhaps you can think of others who might fit these pictures and words just as well.' MS

Dead Teachers Don't Talk

★★★★

David Belbin, Five Leaves Young Adult, 184pp, 0 907123 69 4, £5.99 pbk

Originally a 'Point Crime', *Shoot the Teacher* (1993) has been re-packaged and re-titled in a new imprint.

The plot had proved difficult to promote in the wake of Dunblane and other school shootings, since teachers and pupils do get shot in it. However, to be fair, Belbin does state in his afterword that he in no way advocates massacring teachers!

In a private school, not a million miles away from the famous

Summerhill, Adam gets caught up in a far-fetched grudge/revenge situation, with plenty of red herrings and blind alleys to go down. Characterisation is rather 2D and plotting rather obvious. Readers who don't require a difficult language challenge and just want to get the pages turned will no doubt find it satisfies them. But experienced readers will feel that the whole thing creaks too much for enjoyment. DB

Hope was Here

★★★★

Joan Bauer, Corgi, 208pp, 0 552 54972 X, £4.99 pbk

It's a miracle how this story of ordinary folks against political chicanery avoids a stomach turning descent into the homespun and the maudlin. Orphan girl, Hope, and her spiky Aunt Addie arrive to help out at a diner in a small town in the American mid-west, just in time to help its cancer-suffering owner challenge the corrupt mayor. Yes, the good guy wins. Yes, he marries Aunt Addie. And yes, he dies, having dispensed much wisdom about life on the way. We've seen this kind of miracle before. Frank Capra, Jimmy Stewart and cast did it in *It's a Wonderful Life*. It's a triumph of conviction, wit, and style over social

and political naivety. Bauer's heart is in the right place. Who wouldn't warm to a writer who can celebrate the hard work and skill that goes into a thankless job like waitressing? In the age of spin, the Florida recount and electoral apathy and cynicism, who wouldn't like to see young people organising and marching for honest and open politics and a better society? This was a Newbery Honor Book in 2001; and Bauer is funny and moving, even when you can see how the trick's done. She has the touch to make you believe in an American dream that's about community, decency and justice, rather than power, privilege and wealth; even when you know it is, for all that, just a dream. CB

The Twelve Tasks of Flavia Gemina

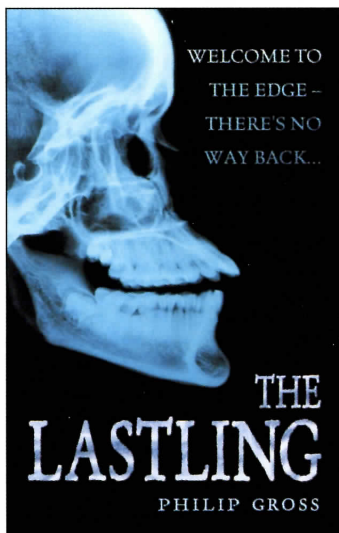
★★★★

Caroline Lawrence, Dolphin, 224pp, 1 84255 025 X, £4.99 pbk

The Vith of Lawrence's 'Roman Mysteries' starring Flavia and her friends 'a Jew, a beggar-boy and a slave-girl' this time mimicking the twelve labours of Hercules (in severely truncated form) as they search out the truth about the woman Flavia's widowed father has become entangled with.

My tester pronounced this volume better than the first two in the series, citing weakness of language and plot as their main deficiencies. These features are present here too: there are many inadequately resolved leads, the 'mystery' is flimsy, and Lawrence is heavy-handed at times in her eagerness to supply authentic Roman detail, while also casual about her use of English. A multiplicity of themes confused this reader, and while the characters are sympathetically drawn, they tend to be stereotypical as a result of the plots of the various volumes.

However, I was strangely gripped, and there are moments of true emotion and honesty in the main characters that redeem it on the whole. AG



The Lastling

★★★★

Philip Gross, Oxford, 240pp, 0 19 271942 4, £10.99 hbk

The West comes out of *The Lastling* pretty badly. Young Paris travels from her home in the States with her Uncle Franklin to the Himalayas where they are joined by the other members of the expedition. A rum lot of adventurers they are too: Gavin the ex-SAS man, Donald the gourmet, Renaud the French celebrity chef, and gun-toting, whisky-slugging Harriet. They comprise The Ultimate Diners' Club, seeking the sensations of hitherto untasted dishes. And if the pair of pink-headed ducks enjoyed by these grotesques in evening dress in their mountain camp are the world's last pink-headed ducks, so much the better.

Against this decadence, Gross sets the culture of Shengo, an elderly Buddhist monk, and his young pupil Tahr. For them, the true pathway lies in stories, a gentle spirituality and a oneness with their environment. When Tahr, his master dead, walks into the midst of the expedition, the contrasting values are all too clear. So too, is the spoiled brat shallowness of Paris. The boy and the girl, and their different universes, are drawn together through the appearance of an orphaned yeh-teh, or Mountain Spirit. No Abominable Snowman this, but a subtle, intelligent creature capable not only of fashioning tools, but also of love, of grief and of sacrifice.

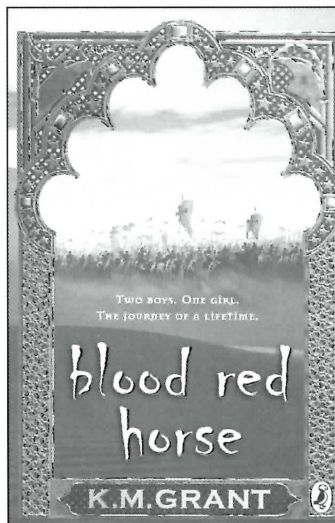
This is a haunting, persuasive novel. Best to forget pedestrian objections (such as, why on earth would the satanic Uncle Franklin take his niece on such a trip, or how would American Paris think in terms of *Boy's Own* adventures?). Read the book rather as a parable or a myth; the escapade is just horrifically on this side of credibility and its violence, cruelty and greed are all too believable. The old monk talks of 'life on the edge' and all three civilisations which collide here – those of Paris, Tahr and the yeh-teh – are indeed on the edge. Young Paris may just have learned enough for her own salvation. For young readers, the questions which may linger as they close the book are all around them; on the street, on the News and in the papers, in the forests and the seas, and in the condition we humans have constructed for ourselves. GF

Deep Secret

★★★

Berlie Doherty, Puffin, 272pp, 0 14 138039 X, £12.99 hbk

There are some outstanding passages in this novel recalling a rural way of life now long gone, even though the events described – the flooding of a farming valley in order to make a reservoir – took place from 1935-45. The author knows this part of the countryside intimately, but there is almost too much feeling in this book, both for the past itself and for the lives of the various characters faced by the destruction of their community. Add to this strong sense of loss, a plot involving an untimely death, a near murder, a buried baby and a long-held individual grief, and the general over-arching sense of melancholy at times threatens to obliterate the more positive things in this novel. But Berlie Doherty is such a skilled writer that her story always survives, although at times it is a close run thing as one tragedy follows another with barely a chance to catch breath. NT



Blood Red Horse

★★★

K M Grant, Puffin, 288pp, 0 14 131706 X, £4.99 pbk

Blood Red Horse is a gripping adventure story, with an element of fantasy. Set at the time of the Crusades, it centres on a blood-red horse, whose life is entwined with those of the central human characters. Despite Hosanna's apparent unsuitability, Will chooses this horse to carry him to the Crusades with his father and his older brother Gavin. Eleanor, who is destined to marry Gavin, though she has feelings for Will, faces her own trials and tribulations as she waits in England for the boys' return. Lastly there is Kamil who has lost his parents to Crusaders and is determined to destroy the invaders of his country. Hosanna enables Will and Gavin to support each other through the most difficult times – the death of their father and the horrors of protracted warfare. Hosanna prevents Kamil and William from killing each other and the horse is also the catalyst for détente between Crusaders and Saracens. Hosanna enables Eleanor to resolve her conflicting feelings for Will and Gavin. However, the book goes beyond being merely an historical fantasy. Its underlying theme is that there is

more uniting people than there is dividing them. This has resonance in the present day, given the current conflict once again between West and East – in particular the dehumanising of the one by the other in order to slaughter the other.

At times events seem contrived – in particular, Will and Kamil's obsession with Hosanna in the face of so much else going on around them stretched credulity. Nonetheless, I would highly recommend this book for all ages from 12 upwards. SP

The Good Child's Guide to Rock'n'Roll

POETRY

★★★

Carol Ann Duffy, ill. Emily Feaver, Faber, 80pp, 0 571 21455 X, £12.99 hbk

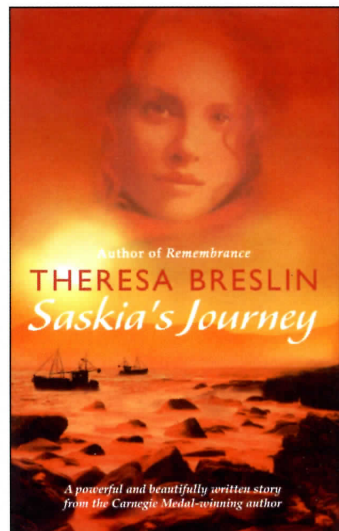
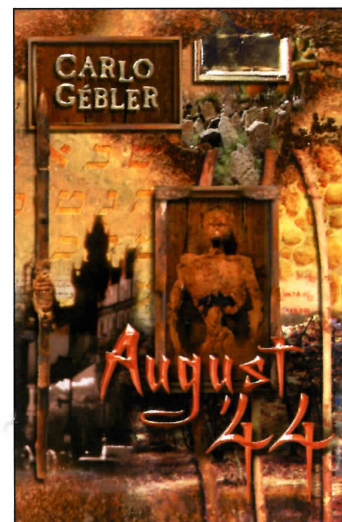
Duffy's latest collection for children is a mixed bag. It begins with 10 poems about rock and roll icons such as Bill Haley. The poems and their subjects are unlikely to grab the attention of many children and I imagine a great many readers giving up at this point. That's a shame as the collection has some amazing poems and stunning imagery. Who wouldn't smile at the image of 'the six wives of Henry VIII standing in the room like bridesmaids'? Or for that matter the idea of the dead enjoying fine weather as the living come and picnic on them. Some of the poems including 'The Wasp', 'Moth' and 'A Child's Song' hark back to a more nostalgic type of children's poetry. Elsewhere Duffy continues her gender twisting poems with poems such as 'Henrietta, The Eighth'. This collection will sell because of her name and reputation. Knowing this though I suspect her publishers have been a bit lazy with both the look of this collection and its editing. As a result it may be quite hard to get children to actually read it. TE

August '44

★★★★

Carlo Gébler, Egmont, 384pp, 1 4052 0237 8, £5.99 pbk

Gébler's engrossing novel deals, at one level, with the adolescence of Saul, a French Jewish boy living rough with his extended family to evade capture by the Nazis. But the striking feature of Gébler's novel is that this framing narrative also incorporates a lengthy Jewish folktale which portrays another period of anti-Semitic persecution,



Saskia's Journey

★★★★

Theresa Breslin, Doubleday, 240pp, 0 385 60482 3, £10.99 hbk

This is a story of Theresa Breslin's love affair with the sea wrapped around the story of Saskia's voyage of discovery into her past and thereby into her future. Saskia is in transition; it is her gap year and going to stay with her great-aunt in a small fishing community in the north-east of Scotland seems like a good idea. Mystery surrounds Aunt Alessandra and her house with the staring windows, perched on the edge of a rocky escarpment. As the days go on Saskia comes to understand things hidden in her own head, in the minds of her father and her aunt and in the strange old house.

Saskia is escaping from disagreements between her parents and her father's persuasive insistence that she study economics instead of marine biology. As she grows closer to her aunt and talks to the handsome Ben who is researching sea life in the locality, Saskia comprehends her maritime ancestry and the lure which water has for her. The sea permeates the story; it is there as a backdrop, in its effect on characters and in an underlying plea for conservation of fishing grounds. The interpolation of occasional paragraphs describing the life cycle of fish and the chapter headings, each relating to one of the 33 lighthouses around the coast of Britain, underlines themes of maturing and journey in a sensitive, finely structured novel which unfolds as delicately as a 'creamy purl of foam at the water's edge'. VC

this time in sixteenth-century Prague; this is brought to an end by the sagacity of the local rabbi, aided by the golem, the creature he has fashioned out of clay.

Through this interpolation Gébler meditates on the power of story – 'this extraordinary invented world' – and storytelling, suggesting poignantly the necessity of narrative to the human psyche. Following the tragic denouement of the story of Saul and his family, it is the folktale which eventually sustains the boy, allowing him to transcend and transform the loneliness and pain of reality. CR

The Amulet of Samarkand

★★★★

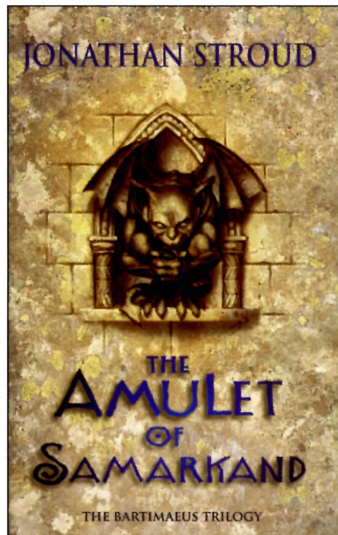
Jonathan Stroud, Doubleday, 496pp, 0 385 60599 4, £12.99 hbk

This is a long, fast-moving occult fantasy about a magician's apprentice who sets out to develop his powers in secret beyond the current stage of his training – as apprentices usually do. First he calls up an imp, then names and summons a djinni, a 5,000 year-old demon of the middle rank. The story is told from both points of view, third person for the boy, Nathaniel, and first person for Bartimaeus the djinni, whom readers may find an attractive rogue with his laid-back style and footnotes which set the scene for this alternative world with a rather different course of history.

Nathaniel desires to master the djinni to get him to steal the Amulet of Samarkand, a prized artefact which has already been stolen by a treacherous magician. Nathaniel simply wishes revenge on this magician who insulted his inexperience when visiting his master, but he is then caught up in a highly dangerous plot to overthrow the government, and is soon on the run, encountering a 'Resistance' of teenagers against the rule of magicians.

The story is a gripping cycle of spying, chasing, transformations, capture and escapes. I also enjoyed working out the world's history: it seems the magician-demon symbiosis has gone on for thousands of years. There was a Great War, but with Czechoslovakia, not Germany, no World War II, but a European conflict still going on: Britain still has an Empire. Gladstone was a powerful magician who 'brought the feuding factions of magicians under government control'; and there are plenty of topical and witty allusions to pick up. The film rights have already been sold.

Usually in children's fantasies about wizards' apprentices, such as those by Rowling, Le Guin, Wynne Jones, Duane and Pierce, the young person has innate magical powers which are then developed by study and memorising spells, often channelled through a wand or staff. In Stroud's universe magic is only created by summoning demons and using their powers, or by employing artefacts. Nathaniel's master owns two large bookcases containing a lifetime of learning. Demons, however, are an unhealthy source of power: adult fantasy authors and the vampire slayers of *Buffy* treat them with respect. If there is a chief supernatural evil, Bartimaeus has not told us, nor do we read of a countervailing source of good magic,



as we find in children's fantasies, delegating its powers down through gods or angels to child-heroes (though Westminster Abbey still stands, and certain demons are destroyed by 'the sound of church bells'). I am therefore intrigued about the cosmology in this first volume of a trilogy, suspect that Bartimaeus doesn't know everything, and wonder if the teenage resisters have innate powers not known to the ruling magicians. With its occasional violence and life-or-death episodes I would consider it more suited to the teenage section of the publisher's catalogue, for 12+ instead of their estimate of 9+, and I look forward to parts 2 and 3. JY

Hello H₂O

POETRY

★★★★

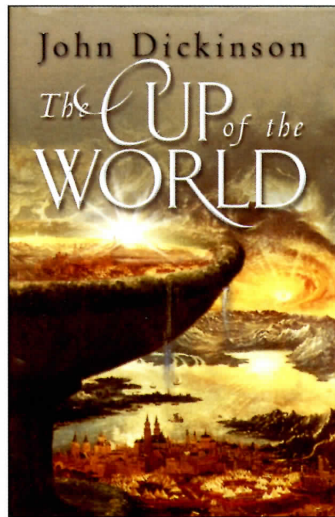
John Agard, ill. Satoshi Kitamura, Hodder, 80pp, 0 7502 4289 2, £9.99 hbk

Only Agard could achieve this – a collection of poems about science which dance and sing, celebrating the magic and mystery of science. From 'DNA' – 'Would it be okay to step on / those chemical rungs / and balance / on spiralling pairs / of nitrogen bases?' and 'Photosynthesis', to microbes and metals – 'marching, marching to the sound / of their own names: Aurum Argentum Cuprum Ferrum Stannum.' Agard is the true Poetsonian linking poetry with every area of life, whilst retaining the satirical spirit of the Caribbean calypsonian.

Kitamura's simple and powerful illustrations are perfectly matched to these lively, loving and humorous poems. At the heart of each poem is science and life. It may be a discovery, a law, a fact or a scientist, but every poem is an inspiration and an invitation to find out more as Galileo does in the poem 'Daydreaming Galileo': 'Don't you see my eyes turning / the pages of the skies? / I'm busy browsing / the grand book of the universe. / A book I simply can't put down.' And, as the helpful notes at the back of the book say, 'he died at the age of 78, knowing he was right.'

Brilliant!

HT



The Cup of the World

★★★★

John Dickinson, David Fickling Books, 436pp, 0 385 60516 1, £12.99 hbk

In an intensely realised fantasy world, something like medieval Britain, the strong-willed Phaedra insists on her right to marry a man she loves but realises she will not be able to refuse the king's son when he comes to court her. She calls for help from the man she has met for many years in a kind of dream world who turns out to be the very real lord from across the lake whom she is happy to marry instantly. A bitter civil war ensues in which Phaedra causes the death of her father and the betrayal of her homeland. Interestingly the focus is not the warring itself but its effect on Phaedra's life away from the battles, as wife and then mother, and the equivalent civil war within her as she tries to distinguish right from wrong and who can be trusted. What is the 'dream' world, a hell or heaven, how have she and her husband entered it and at what cost? The answers shift about as events move on and her understanding, including that of her own actions, develops. It may be over-fancy to hear Shakespearean echoes: refusing the crown until the third offer, the relationship of fathers and daughters, the internal and external effects of civil war. It could in part be *Macbeth*, seen from the women's point of view, including the questionable goodness of the supernatural, although what relation Phaedra and her husband may have with Lord and Lady Macbeth is an element in the carefully balanced suspense. While high fantasy, which takes a while to tune into, it has the claustrophobic feel of a political and moral thriller that constantly surprises your expectations. AJ

Inkheart

★★★★

Cornelia Funke, Chicken House, 544pp, 1 904442 09 9, £12.99 hbk

Inkheart has been published simultaneously in the UK, US and the author's native Germany after *The Thief Lord* did so well in the US bestseller lists. It's the first of a trilogy and film rights have already been sold. Funke has arrayed a fine cast of characters to strive for that next fantasy bestseller slot and like Philip Pullman she has taken great literary themes and attempted to convey

their pros and cons to her young audience – a love of books, the role of author, the role of literacy and imagination in civilisation, how evil is created and breeds violence. A character called 'Silvertongue' and a tame marten also give the impression she is more indebted to Pullman than she would perhaps like to admit but the story overall is more raw and less satisfying than *His Dark Materials*.

Twelve-year-old Meggie and her father Mo live quietly together in the country after her mother disappeared when she was three. Mo is a bookbinder, an occupation evocatively described with an obvious love for books. This love becomes central to the themes and plot once we are introduced to Meggie's great aunt Elinor, who has whole libraries of collectable books, and to Mo's special gift of being able to make storybook characters step out of the print and paper and become alive. Meggie and Mo experience a stressful, frightening summer when the evil character Capricorn whom Mo inadvertently let loose from the pages of an Italian fantasy novel called 'Inkheart', takes them prisoner, burning Elinor's precious books along the way and threatening death at every turn. His henchmen, the Black Jackets, cannot read and are thus portrayed as ignorant and bad, whipping out knives and guns to threaten Mo, Elinor and Meggie. Thankfully Mo and the author of 'Inkheart', Fenoglio, come up with a solution at the end and good conquers evil for the time being, with the added bonus that Meggie's mother returns from the pages of a book.

Funke's novel has some mixed messages for children about the power of books and the role of author in fiction which could do with further discussion. She attempts to open up wider literary horizons to today's children with pertinent quotations from different books prefacing each chapter while characters from *Treasure Island*, *Peter Pan* and Hans Christian Andersen come alive as they are read aloud out of books, but she has not dared to incorporate more modern books into her fantasy. Meggie and Mo see authors erroneously as 'dead or very, very old', which is out of touch with the current cult of celebrity authors in the UK and US, but may not jar in Germany. Funke also has a mixed attitude to Fenoglio and his creation of the original 'Inkheart' – she treats him with some contempt through Meggie's eyes, as he does not understand the magnitude of his characters coming alive, but ends in a twee way with fairies and gnomes from his novel populating Aunt Elinor's house. OD

Tales of the Dead: Ancient Egypt

INFORMATION STORY ★★★★★

Stewart Ross, ill. Inklind and Richard Bonson, Dorling Kindersley, 32pp, 1 4053 0187 2, £9.99 hbk

DK bring us another variation on the blurring of fact and fiction. *Ancient Egypt* combines double page spreads and 'cut-away' illustrations about building the pyramids and mummification with a cartoon story about tomb robbing that runs around the edges of the pages. There's a lot that's awkward about the result. The pages are crowded.

The detail in the illustrations is frequently too small (at least for my aged eyes). I am not quite sure how the roof goes back in some of the cut-aways. The cartoon story reads top to bottom on the left-hand page and usually, but not always, bottom to top on the right. Nor is it an exciting story. However, there is a lot of well organised textual and pictorial information, some of which I don't remember from other titles on this subject, and the content of the cartoon story is cleverly linked with the factual information on the same page. The book is perhaps most suited as a browser and the story may encourage children to read through the book, taking in some of the other information on the way, and get a broader picture of Ancient Egypt than they might from merely hunting down specific facts. The index is fuller than in some DK titles. There doesn't seem to be any reason for the inclusion of half a dozen cartoon 'out-takes' on the index page, other than to fill up vacant space. CB

Fundamentalism

Alex Woolf, 0 7502 4366 X

Nationalism

Richard Tames, 0 7502 4368 6

NON-FICTION ★★★

Hodder Wayland 'Ideas of the Modern World', 64pp, £12.99 each hbk

Although these two titles are in the 'Ideas of the Modern World' series (alongside titles on Capitalism and anti-Capitalism, Communism, Democracy, Fascism and Feminism), the books show how the two related concepts link the modern world back to anti-rational passions that have haunted mankind for centuries.

Both books convey information in accessible prose. They are laid out clearly and spaciouly, each page consisting of a column of text supported by historical and contemporary illustrations, including many colour photographs. Key ideas and episodes are summarised in tinted boxes, and each has useful annexes in the form of glossaries, time lines and lists of further resources. Both authors start by explaining the background to their topics before illustrating issues with wide-ranging geographical and historical instances.

The controversial nature of the content is handled cautiously. Tames disputes the view that nationalism is a natural or common sense impulse, but might have been more critical of the evasive distinction between nationalism and patriotism. Woolf provides a very timely antidote to the conflation of fundamentalism with Islam by foregrounding the role played by American Christians in

recent outbreaks of religious extremism. Perhaps a chapter on non-religious forms of fundamentalism would have helped to establish that dangerously restricted thinking is not confined to those convinced that they speak for god.

Both books are highly recommended for critical reading. They provide a useful resource for augmenting work with more immediate sources such as newspapers, TV and websites. GH

Eureka! Great Inventors and their Brilliant Brainwaves

NON-FICTION ★★★

Richard Platt, Kingfisher, 96pp, 0 7534 0819 8, £12.99 hbk

This book focuses on thirty-five inventions and their inventors, each on a two-page spread, from Galileo's pendulum to Tim Berners Lee's World Wide Web, divided into chapters on Everyday Life and Health (including vaccination, nylon), Getting Around (hot-air balloon, hovercraft), Lenses and Light (telescope, photography), Electricity (telephone, television), Patience and Planning (automatic lubrication – the real McCoy, sound recording). Except in the last chapter, there is emphasis on sudden realisation, hence the title.

The text is generally clear, extensively illustrated, and supported by a chronology, a glossary and an index. There is a brief biography of each inventor. The difficulties of development, after the eureka moment has passed, are well presented. Questions of precedence are confronted. Minor cavil: DNA fingerprinting is presented without the slightest hint of its limitations or of the unfortunate consequences of wrong identification. FP

Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Ancient Rome

NON-FICTION ★★★

Mike Corbishley, British Museum Press, 160pp, 0 7141 3021 4, £15.99 hbk

The opening pages of this title don't grab your attention. There are maps, notes about dates, and suggestions on thematic trails that might be used as an alternative to the alphabetical way through the book. But once these necessary preliminaries are over, there is plenty for the young enthusiast to enjoy. This isn't an introduction to Roman life. Nor, at 160 pages, is it attempting to be comprehensive. It is cleverly pitched for readers who have an interest in Roman life and some historical awareness and are keen to broaden their knowledge. Corbishley's chosen subjects are a good mix of

social and political history with biographies of important figures. He is lucid and lively, achieves a good balance of general information and interesting detail, and is aware where specialist terms need more explanation. He is careful, too, to keep the reader aware of change and variation in Roman history. The entries are cross-referenced by the highlighting of subjects that have their own entries. The text is supported, too, by well chosen and captioned illustrations, many of them colour photographs taken by the British Museum or Corbishley himself, sometimes of remains and artefacts, sometimes of reconstructions and re-enactments, so that the reader is presented with a variety of visual evidence. The high quality of these reproductions may explain the relatively high price of the book. CB

The Rough Guide to Books for Teenagers

NON-FICTION ★★★

Nicholas Tucker and Julia Eccleshare, Rough Guides, 304pp, 1 84353 138 0, £5.99 pbk

This neat, chubby, pocket-sized guide consists of over 200 reviews, each 200 or 300 words long, of books with strong appeal to a teenage readership. The selection is split into 11 categories, most of them self-selecting: 'love, sex and change', 'crime', 'adventure', 'horror', and so on. Each review begins with a plot description, followed by enthusiastic recommendations in which critical reservations are perhaps too rare and rash superlatives too frequent. Since the main aim is to catch the interest of browsing teenagers this does not matter much, though it is a slight drawback for the teachers and librarians who will form the secondary readership. But every reader is likely to find the guide stimulating and helpful. The choice is catholic, ranging from established classics like *Jane Eyre* to novels (quite rightly culled from both the 'adult' and 'young adult' market) published very recently. Best of all is the generous space given to books now a decade or more old, high in quality but at risk of falling victim to turnover fever, such as Joan G Robinson's *When Marnie Was There* or Robert Westall's *Falling Into Glory*. Happily, too, there is no dumbing down: many of the books suggested are linguistically and emotionally demanding. Since all choices must be in print in a commercial climate of short shelf lives, the guide will need frequent updating, but as of now it is an admirable tool for every teenage reader. PH

Encyclopedia of People

Dorling Kindersley, 304pp, 0 7513 6798 2, £19.99 hbk

The Kingfisher Geography Encyclopedia

Clive Gifford, Kingfisher, 496pp, 0 7534 0823 6, £30.00 hbk

NON-FICTION ★★★

Two or so years ago we celebrated the emergence of Usborne's *Peoples of the World* – a photo-led and highly entertaining and informative gallop through the planet's main population groups. DK's *Encyclopedia* (I'm of an age to spell it with two a's and don't see why or where the first one's gone) uses nine consultants and the usual galaxy of star editors to cover the same ground at a more ruminative ramble, allowing greater grazing and better browsing – as you'd expect for ten quid more. So whereas two years ago we found creoles dignified by one sentence describing them as regional dialects, here we get two pages, spelling créole with an *accent aigu* and explaining that, as every jazz-buff knows, créoles can be people as well as language. This is a highly entertaining ramble, giving, as the publishers claim, 'an initial understanding of the enormous diversity of cultures in the world today'. We meet peoples unknown to us (for me it's the Uros of Peru and the Bajau of the Philippines – water dwellers both) and surprising cultural occasions – the Great Pentecost Jump and the National Lobster Crate Race. So it's an absorbing browse and, where it touches, a good information source as well. Excellent pictorial quality and relevance make this an excellent book for the curious family (well, you know what I mean) and a worthy addition to a conscientious reference collection. Oh, and – remember this – there's no textual mention of Belgium and the world's largest island is Australia.

The catch from Kingfisher uses just one consultant as it examines our planet land by land. After a look at the overall structure of the globe – plate tectonics, oxbow lakes and many other old friends – we examine each continent. We see landscape, peoples, culture and, very valuably, country by country national vital statistics in traditional 'geography' fashion. Being politically based, this book sends the reviewer scurrying to Iraq, to be rewarded by a commendably objective spread concluding with the uncertainty of the country's post-Saddam future. This is a sound and extremely useful volume and, moreover, Belgium gets the full treatment and the world's largest island is Greenland. TP

REVIEWS 14+ Secondary/Adult

Knife Edge

★★★

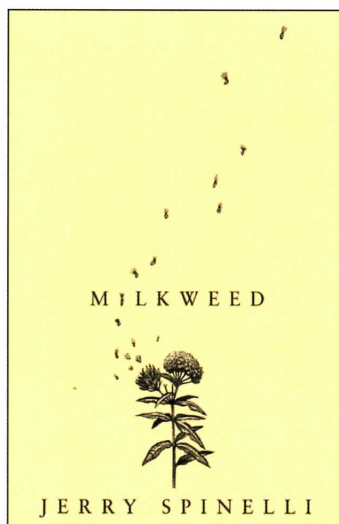
Malorie Blackman, Doubleday, 368pp, 0 385 60527 7, £12.99 hbk

The sequel to *Noughts & Crosses*, this novel is if anything even more disturbing. It is set in the same

nightmare apartheid situation within an imaginary country where black people are on top and everyone else is treated as third class. Sephy now has her mixed race baby, whom she must try to raise against the suspicions of both social groups. And then there is Jude, her young terrorist brother-in-law so psychopathic that even Robert Cormier

would have been proud to have created him. For a while nothing too bad happens, and there is a pleasant interlude when Sephy nearly makes it as a pop star. But the author clearly feels that the type of racial hatred she writes about is so inherently evil that everyone involved must eventually suffer from it, and the story ends in murder, blackmail and an attempt at

infanticide. No happy endings, then, but there is a third volume still to come in what is a genuine literary achievement from Britain's leading black writer for teenagers. NT



Milkweed

★★★★★

Jerry Spinelli, Orchard, 272pp, 1 84362 484 2, £10.99 hbk

'It was thrilling just to see a plant, a spot of green in the ghetto desert.' The plant in question is the milkweed of Spinelli's title, miraculously managing to flourish 'by a heap of rubble' in the Warsaw Jewish quarter of October 1939, the setting for a book which must now constitute the most remarkable of children's Holocaust fiction. At its centre is a young boy of various names, never quite certain of his identity or origins, although the yellow medal he wears around his neck would seem to point to gypsy ancestry. It is through the innocence, almost the naiveté, of this boy's eyes that the reader is given a heartrending insight into the conditions of a city under Nazi occupation and the degradation and humiliation of a persecuted childhood lived amidst its Jewish population. This, as he expresses it at one point, is 'the ghetto where children grew down instead of up'. While this is a story dominated by images of starvation, shootings, beatings and every other imaginable form of dehumanisation, its ultimate message, beautifully conveyed symbolically in the role given to the milkweed plant dispersing its 'snowy shower' of seedlings, is one of evil overcome and hope restored. RD

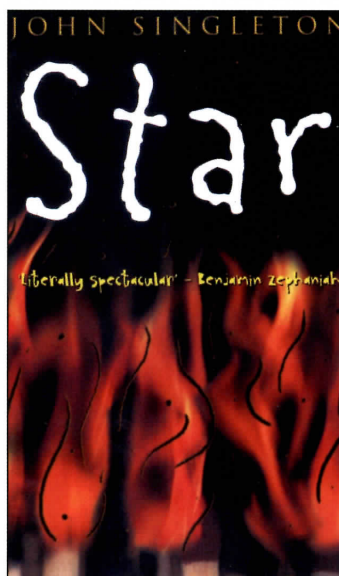
Star

★★★★★

John Singleton, Puffin, 256pp, 0 14 138004 7, £9.99 hbk

It is hard to find anything joyful in the painful life of Jez Turner; he is parentless, abused in a Home run by a tyrant Big Mother and bullied by a vicious inmate, Hodge. There are very few bright spots in his day. Miss Chips, his form teacher, is a caring adult, Macker is a good, if deeply disturbed mate and Mags wants to help him escape his troubles, if he'd only let her. Then there is his imagined/secret friend in the skies, Star. And there's the power of fire.

Crammed with vivid incident, told in literally sparkling language and imagery, this is a must for readers who require something to get their minds around. Amidst some disturbingly cruel action the imagination triumphs and proves that 'sometime you have to do a bad



thing to make good things happen'. A very significant first novel. DB

Boy 2 Girl

★★★★★

Terence Blacker, Macmillan, 288pp, 0 330 42121 2, £9.99 pbk

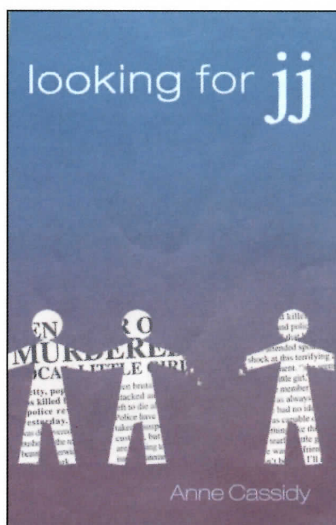
Blacker's eye for an unusual storyline has produced an ambitious and successful take on the question of sexual identity and gender stereotyping among teenagers. Sam Lopez's mother is killed in a car crash, his father abandoned the family years ago and it is left to his aunt to bring him from his American home to her family in England. He is swiftly recruited by his cousin to settle an old score with the girls in his class by dressing as one of them, learning all their secrets and then revealing his true identity. However, things do not go exactly to plan and the story takes a walk around the issues of friendship and rivalry, as well as those of sexuality and stereotyping.



This is a book for older readers – Year 8 and above – not just because of its content but also because of its sometimes confusing format. There is a hard core of a dozen protagonists and until the reader is far enough into the story to be aware of each character's distinctive voice the narrative can feel cluttered and overwhelming. However, this minor blemish aside, Blacker has created a thoughtful and entertaining read in which teenage voices are skillfully realised and teachers and parents

are excruciating enough to dodge the caricature trap and squirmingly convince.

Throughout, there is no concession to the formulaic or the trite and this is a novel which deserves to be read and discussed widely across a broader subject band than English – there is ample material here for the innovative PSHE teacher, too. VR



Looking for JJ

★★★★★

Anne Cassidy, Scholastic, 304pp, 0 439 97712 6, £12.99 hbk

Jennifer Jones, the eponymous 'JJ', killed her best friend at ten. Now 16, and just released from detention, she has a new identity and the opportunity to make a fresh start of her life. But, persecuted by press and public alike, has she any hope of – or right to – privacy? Can she leave her past actions behind her? And what real chance has she of leading a normal life?

The novel begins in the present. Teenager Jennifer has been placed in the care of Rosie, a social worker and, under the name of Alice Tully, she works in a Croydon coffee shop. Alice *aches* for anonymity. Alice *craves* conformity. Alice *wants* to forget. But the actions of the past haunt her present life. Ever worried that her true identity will be revealed, she continually replays and reflects on the monstrous event that no name change or change of address will erase – that 'moment of madness', six long years ago, on a day out with friends, that will change her

life forever.

Totally gripping, *Looking for JJ* presents a compelling insight into the incomprehensible actions of a child that kills another child. In a teasingly-structured novel, in which the events of the past are interwoven with the events of the present, the reader finishes the novel clear as to *what* happened, but with no comforting, single, answer as to *why*. NA

Yoss

★★★

Odo Hirsch, Walker, 368pp, 0 7445 8337 3, £5.99 pbk

Yoss is a strange novel, a mixture of the mundane and the cut-throat, an adventure that doesn't quite become an adventure and is it an allegory for young adults or only adults? *Yoss* sets off from his village high in the mountains to become a man – symbolically at first, then literally – and makes his way to a medieval town in the valley. Along the way he is deceived by two thieves, Conrad and Gaspar, and painfully (for the reader) loses his innocence in the ways of gambling, trickery and disloyalty. Nearly in prison, he is rescued by the merchant whom he inadvertently robbed, unknowingly becoming his slave. The scenes at the merchant's house, where the merchant's childless wife takes an interest in him, plays with themes of love, guilt and honour but *Yoss* does not emerge much wiser. The mistress' regard for him has uncomfortable shades of erotic love, though supposedly she is only thinking of him as a surrogate son. The interaction of the resident artist, who is painting the mistress' portrait and the ceiling of the merchant's banquet hall, with *Yoss* and the mistress, whispers of Tracy Chevalier's *Girl with Pearl Earring* but fails to articulate it satisfactorily.

There are murders aplenty, together with mentions of illegitimacy and incest, all in keeping with typical notions of medieval goings-on, but the ending is anticlimactic (*Yoss* returns to his village to live out his days) and he'll lose respect of modern-day teenagers for not understanding much of what is in front of him. *Yoss* feels like an adult novel dressed up as a book for teenagers purely because it features a teenage protagonist, which in this cross-over age of publishing is bizarre. It may do better as a worthy allegory of a time gone by, but even marketed as an adult novel it won't be flying off the shelves. OD

PICTURE BOOKS AND INFORMATION BOOKS RELEVANT TO OLDER READERS:

Cinderlily: A Floral Fairy Tale (see p20)

Jason and the Golden Fleece (see p20)

Erika's Story (see p21)

The Last Resort (see p23)

Tales of the Dead: Ancient Egypt (see p25)

CLASSICS IN SHORT No.44

Brian Alderson

Since he's probably off on holiday to Tijuana, or Trinidad, or Timbuktu, this is just the time to celebrate

18 January 2004

Dear Mr Briggs, sir:

Our Editor, who keeps a watchful eye on her calendar (not least to keep her errant Classicist in order), tells me that today is your seventieth birthday.

I don't believe her.

After all, it's only a year or two ago that we were rejoicing in the warm glow of *Ring-a-Ring o' Roses* or admiring the compact elegance of *Midnight Adventure*. But I must admit that you have been mightily productive since those early offspring arrived, what with whomping great treasures of nursery rhymes and fairy tales, frightening *bandes dessinées* (pour épater le bourgeois), and all those long short and tall picture books that have brought such comfort to media men and the makers of woolly toys.

I know all this because, unlike you, I am an aged and tottering person who has, through rheumy eyes, viewed your joyous progress and piled up your Collected Works (but not the chinaware) as a consolation against the time when the wind blows cold. So when Our Editor commands me to classicize you I am dubious how to do so in all this embarrassment of Briggandage.

Did I not have such records, what matter?

For I see that – believing rumours of your advancing age – one of your publishers has put out what looks to be a preliminary tombstone treasury of your *Blooming Books**. Supervised by Ms Nicolette Jones your whole oeuvre is paraded before us – somewhat promiscuously as to chronology, since the good lady seeks to chop you up into categories: early years, nursery classics, a gallery of characters,

and (of course) Social Issues, all rounded off with a very rudimentary 'bibliography'. Your admirers and students of your peculiar artistry may browse cheerfully through this conspectus, albeit with some frustration, since there seems to be no clear policy on how to illustrate you. Sometimes we see an odd page or two from attractive but now unobtainable volumes, occasionally there's a preparatory sketch or an ephemeral drawing which cause us to shout for more, and then, most oddly, there are complete or near-complete, reprints of whole books which may well yet be bought from the bookshops.

Classics all, you may say, but having to select one title brings home just how loose a term 'classic' is (are Ms Jones's 'nursery classics' all really that?).

Discussing that metaphysical question with Our Editor, I was perversely inclined to single out *Jim and the Beanstalk* on the grounds that it marks the arrival of – if I may be so pompous – the quintessential You as author-illustrator. (*The Elephant and the Bad Baby*, which came out a year earlier, is certainly classic in its handling of a cumulative tale, but there you were working with another writer.) What would have been perverse in selecting *Jim* as our chosen book though would have been the all-too-predictable fact of its being about to go out of print – a common fate for Great Books these days.

So we shook the bran-tub one more time.

The Editor was keen on *Fungus*, either in his original 1977 glory or plopping up in 1982 and he does indeed dwell in the classic carnivalesque tradition of 'the world turned upside down'. But does your wildly original take on the theme have classic status to anyone outside the fraternity of punsters? We also nearly fell for *The Snowman* which may well be the world's choice judging by its commercial exploitation. Who could fault the warmth of this winter's tale, the perfect drawing that carries your wordless narrative to its touching conclusion? Surely – no contest?

And yet... and yet... for this hypercritical critic a faint unease persists over the indoor larks that occupy so much of the centre of the book: hand-warming at the fridge, feasting from the freezer etc. Yes, sir, they are a delight, but – in narrative terms – arbitrary, happy adventures of ideas which do not cumulate in any significant way until the wonders of the night flight to Brighton.

For that reason and that alone your other universally acknowledged classic, *Father Christmas*, must take the biscuit (with a sup of port on the side). It has the same mastery of pictorial narrative, now coupled with the joy of seeing your curmudgeonly hero defy convention and hearing his monosyllabic grousing (how different from all those ho-ho-ing Santas brought in on Clement Clark Moore's behalf in BfK 42?). Frame by frame the momentum of the story is sustained and the shifts and pauses of the old chap's journeyings have an organic quality that is less evident in the doings of that other winter character. Thank you though for everything, dear boy, we would not want to be without any of it – and have a Bloomin' Happy Birthday, Brian. ■

* Raymond Briggs Blooming Books, words by Nicolette Jones, Jonathan Cape in association with Puffin Books, 2003, 288pp, 0 224 06478 9, £19.99 hbk.

Father Christmas, Puffin, 0 14 050125 8, £5.99 pbk.

Brian Alderson is founder of the Children's Books History Society and children's book consultant for *The Times*.

