

## The Family

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### Editorial

I was ever of opinion that, the honest man who married and brought up a large family, did more service than he who continued single, and only talked of population. (Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, 1766)

Writers of books for children, from which category Goldsmith need not be excluded, are very inclined to follow the philosophy of this quotation, partly, no doubt, because portraying a family gives so much scope for interaction between characters while not departing from the kind of limited environment that has often been thought to be suitable to the understanding of those of tender years. Certainly the history of children's literature, especially in its earlier years, is full of depictions of children in the bosom of their families.

Frequently, too, such tales were in the past seen as an ideal medium to inculcate the kinds of value espoused by the author. Maria Edgeworth, Mary Sherwood and Catherine Sinclair paved the way for the more entertaining, but still to some extent didactic, fiction of Louisa Alcott, Susan Coolidge and Charlotte Yonge, and they in turn are the precursors of E. Nesbit and countless others, and no doubt a 'family tree' can be traced all the way to the sometimes dysfunctional families of Anne Fine and Jacqueline Wilson. The articles in the

first section of this issue of *IBBYLink* trace some of this development and name some of its exponents, while, as ever, we include a good many reviews, both of children's literature and of books about it.

We regret that for financial reasons, this *IBBYLink* will not go out to most of our members by post – we have had to choose the cheaper method of dispatch by electronic means because of a shortage of funds. Many people may not realise that as a national branch in the top category for subscriptions, we have to pay 7,500 Swiss Francs to the central IBBY administration. Unfortunately, the depreciation of sterling against the euro means that this sum accounts for just about all of our reserves, leaving none for printing and dispatch of *IBBYLink*. Clearly we need to think seriously about fund raising, and possibly in due course an increase in subscriptions. We hope that everyone will have access to a copy in one form or another – where we know that individuals do not have access to the internet, we are photocopying it for them. And if you have access to any of the kind of treasure found in fairy tales, please let us know – a pot of gold would come in very useful!

**Pat Pinsent**

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## The Family in British Children's Literature

*Nicholas Tucker*

Unless set in outer space, all children's books are family stories. Even those many orphans in children's fiction are still defined to an extent by the families they don't have or by the replacement surrogate family they have managed to become part of by the end of their story. Characters like J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan (1902) or Astrid Lindgren's Pippi Longstocking (1945) may claim to enjoy their complete and enduring independence from parents, siblings and the rest of the package, but readers know better. By the end of his play there is something essentially hollow in Peter Pan's bravado about always wanting to stay young and have fun, and Pippi's state of social isolation never seems that attractive as a permanent way of life. As for those young adventurers who depart the family home in chapter 1 and go on to have wonderfully exciting and often dangerous times entirely on their own, they know there is always waiting for them that final return to the safety of the family in the last few pages. In the same way, real children playing fantastic imaginary games outside with their mates will still be more or less ready to come home for mundane supper and bedtime at the end of the day.

But if the family, or indeed the fact of the lack of it, remains omnipresent in children's books, its image has changed hugely over the centuries. In nineteenth-century children's books the family was a rock solid exemplar of the biblical commandment to honour your father and mother. Mr Fairchild could thereby be expected to play the leading part that he does in Mrs Sherwood's *The Fairchild Family* (1818), thoughtfully taking his children on one occasion to view the spectacle of a man hanged from a gibbet. But this is no equivalent to a modern father organising a trip to the London Dungeon, although the quality of the gruesome enjoyment provided to young readers at the time may well have been somewhat similar. Mr Fairchild also had a moral lesson to ram home – in this case, about the evils of family quarrels. In Johann Wyss's *The Swiss Family Robinson* (1812) the pastor father plays a leading role throughout, lecturing his four boys on natural history or the physical sciences whenever a new discovery is made. This famous book, although unfashionable now, gives the lie to the common idea that children's best fictional adventures can happen only when parents are not present. Although the bearded patriarch of this particular story hardly ever leaves the scene, this did nothing to dent the book's enormous popularity with children until relatively recently.

There are times in past children's literature when a family is not portrayed as an essential haven for its members. Starvation can make a decent life for anyone impossible, as in 'Hansel and Gretel'. There is also the question of the evil step-parent, nearly always female. Often with her own offspring's interests to push, she is frequently shown as having the capacity to destroy both her new family's protective economic function as well as its emotional base so far as children from the first marriage are concerned. Elderly or dying parents can also be a spur for bad behaviour on behalf of older children towards younger siblings. But by showing what can happen when a family falls apart, books containing these sorts of character and situation reinforce the essential role of the good, responsible loving family for children lucky enough to have one for themselves. This image of the family at its best has remained consistent in fiction throughout the ages, not least because it rings so true with what young readers would wish for themselves. While some children can still thrive as adults without family love and support in the early years, many do not. The consistency of this finding explains why stories about failing families have always been so meaningful to child readers. They know that the stakes are high; when they see fictional children going through severe family turbulence it is natural for them to feel sorry for such characters and also grateful for their own comparative security at home, if this is indeed what they have.

But while children have also always known about the paramount importance of lasting and demonstrative parental love in their lives, some parents could go on denying this idea until comparatively recently, still sending their offspring away to boarding school at ridiculously young ages, and elsewhere giving over their care largely to nannies. The

researches of the celebrated psychiatrist Dr John Bowlby just after the Second World War and the publication of his classic book *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (1953) marked the beginning of the end of any possible continuing justification for this sort of neglect. Bowlby finally and irreversibly claimed parental love as an imperative for all children, with a similar importance to the presence of vitamins in nutrition. How ironic, therefore, that just at the time when all parents were faced for the first time with the psychological truth about their emotional as well as economic importance for their children, the family itself should become under ever increasing attack. A world where divorce was almost unheard of changed to a time when at least a third of children would experience family disruption. Inevitably children's fiction picked up on this, with the family now often seen as the problem rather than the solution where a child's happiness was the issue. In the new children's fiction that followed, parents however loving were seldom seen at their best when locked in marital conflict, with their children often shown as suffering as a result. There is also the problem, again frequently aired in children's fiction, posed by a new parent coming in as a replacement for someone not dead but simply departed. What price family loyalty now?

The assumption still remains in most children's books that parents, whatever their differences, will continue to love their children, although this holds more true of mothers than of absent dads. A nightmare world where parental love can no longer be taken for granted as the norm is not yet with us, either in fact or fiction, but there are growing hints of something like that. Anne Fine's superb *Step by Wicked Step* (1995) has one child character who loves his mother's departing boy friend far more than he feels love for his own parents or they for him. Jacqueline Wilson's equally good *The Illustrated Mum* (1999) has an admittedly deranged mother who at one stage seems close to killing her own child. Gillian Cross's brilliant *Wolf* (1990) features a father who actually plans on doing just that. But whether the phenomenon of the unloving parent in life or in literature proves to be a growing trend or not, the fictional family – or lack of it – seems certain to remain well to the fore whenever authors write for a young audience.

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## Historical or Hysterical? Periodising Family Breakdown in Contemporary Children's Literature

*Sara Broad*

In all kinds of public discourse, political or journalistic, the past is continually brought up before us, its lessons read and reread as evidence of progress or decline (Johnson, 1982).

The family has always been a pervasive theme in children's literature, but a feature of modern children's books is that they often introduce the family as 'breaking down'. Many contemporary children's books choose to represent 'modern' families as 'failing' and specifically doing so in relation to earlier ideas about families. Critics of recent children's literature comment on the narratives in books by Melvin Burgess, Jacqueline Wilson and Anne Fine to suggest that the present moment is the most appropriate time to write about family failure. In this article, I will suggest that these ideas of modern dysfunctional family life in children's books rely on an idea of 'history' in order to produce this concept of 'hysteria' with regard to the family.

In order to consider this particular idea of the family, it is helpful to consider the language of 'time' in these texts. Frequently, historical change is measured in decades and it is often decades that are used by critics and writers of children's literature to argue change of one period over another. Social historians Baxendale and Pawling suggest that, 'Decades work for us because ... they rescue history from being an unstructured jumble of "one thing after another"' (1996: 2). Nonetheless, discussions of the 'significance' of a decade are arbitrary and necessarily retrospective.

Nonetheless, ideas of the 'meaning' of decades are often employed to write about the family in children's literature criticism. One of the reasons for this is that they appear to

offer the potential to locate a time when the 'correct' family arrangement was portrayed and to argue the point of its 'erosion'. Nicholas Tucker and Nikki Gamble, for example, cite the 1940s and the 1960s as the origins of social 'diversity and fragmentation in society which led to family breakdown' (2001: 26). They suggest that these decades are markers of change which in turn have led to writers producing later novels about family dysfunction. In this way, however, the 1940s and the 1960s are set up as not only leading to change, but as periods of change in themselves. This suggests more similarity than difference between these decades and of the present. Thus, if both the idea of the 1940s and the 1960s, and the idea of the present are seen to represent 'change', the question arises as to whether it is ever possible to find the point of origin of change or of the period before that change.

Ann Alston, another children's literature critic, suggests that children's books of the 1920s and 1930s demonstrate the 'best' time for the family in children's fiction. However, Alston states that the portrayal of these decades is idealistic – that the families in these books did not equate to what was happening in society, since, as she states, 'many families had lost husbands, fathers and sons' at this time (2008, 47). Moreover, she considers there was a deliberate intention to use these decades as the period of the 'idealised family ... in children's fiction' (p.47). Alston's reading of this 'flawed' information relies on one agreed interpretation of what 1920s and 1930s society represented, an interpretation against which 'flawed' texts might be set; it is not in itself the location of the point of family change in children's stories.

Children's writer Melvin Burgess suggests in his 1987 novel *Junk* that changing society can be directly referenced through personal experience of a decade. In the 'Author's Note' at the beginning of this novel, Burgess includes a reference to his own time spent in Bristol in the 1980s in order to produce an idea of verisimilitude. Yet Burgess also implies the wholesale universality of the 'events' in the text, when he writes that the 'events' in the novel 'have happened, are happening and will no doubt continue to happen' (1987: ii). Thus, even an idea of a fictionalised 1980s is also associated with an idea of the past, present and future, thereby making the concept of the 1980s no different from that of any other decade.

So are discussions of family change in children's fiction better interpreted as a species of 'hysteria' rather than of 'history'? The critic Fiona Feng-Hsin Liu makes the argument that contemporary family life is better analysed through emotions than through an idea of period. Writing about *Thursday's Child* (2007) by Sonia Hartnett, Feng-Hsin Liu is more concerned with the way that the Flute family struggle to cope than with her historical accuracy about the Great Depression. She writes:

As the trauma narratives for children gradually move away from centring on major political events to placing the lived experience of the individual child in the foreground against a vaguely depicted historical background, they demonstrate our changed concept of the histories and realities that we must share with children. (2007: 186).

So it may be possible to discuss the 'child' in an ahistorical manner, in a 'periodised' novel. Yet even while arguing that history is movable and reducible, Feng-Hsin Liu reinstates the idea that history is 'true' since she stresses the importance of historical evolution and goes on to equate 'histories' with 'realities' as of parallel importance for 'children'.

I would suggest that the reason that family breakdown is so prevalent in contemporary children's books is that there is an understanding that by reading about dysfunctional families it may be possible to guard against family breakdown in society. This is why there is an ongoing idea of correlation between literature and society, and why this is served through the ideas of periods of time to make the stories 'real'. What is different in contemporary children's books is that the discourse of modern 'family breakdown' is achieved only through ideas of the 'past'. The current preoccupation with 'the family' centres on ideas of what went before, in order to produce the idea of the modern dysfunctional family. It is not a social truth in need of 'correct' representation in children's literature.

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## Children's Literature and the Family: A Reading List

*Pam Robson*

### Short Stories and Picture Books

#### **Joan Aiken, *A Handful of Gold, Red Fox, 009968361X***

A superb collection of fifteen short stories for older readers, illustrated by Quentin Blake. 'The Rocking Donkey' is a sad tale of child abuse; the stepdaughter of a rich, heartless lady suffers neglect at her hands. 'The Dark Streets of Kimball's Green' is also a tale of child abuse; in this story a young girl is neglected by a wicked foster mother. Each rich story captures the imagination – here is pathos, fantasy and humour.

#### **David Almond, *Counting Stars, Hodder, 0340784806***

The author tells true stories, aimed at teenage readers, about his own childhood in the north-east of England. He writes about the death of his young sister, Barbara, followed by his mother's death from arthritis, and later his father's death. He reveals the close relationship he shared with his father. This is a lyrical, emotional collection which makes no concessions to the reader.

#### **Berlie Doherty (retold), illus. Jane Ray, *Fairy Tales, Walker, 0744594030***

An outstanding picture-book volume of twelve well-known fairy tales, retold, but faithful to the original versions. Fairy-tale sources are supplied. Superbly illustrated in a sophisticated style using subdued tones.

#### **Berlie Doherty, *Tough Luck, Collins Educational, 0003300579***

This collection for older readers was written in collaboration with pupils whilst the author was a writer in residence at an urban comprehensive. Themes include multicultural issues, physical abuse and broken marriages. A realistic, readable collection.

#### **Tony Bradman (ed.), *Love Them, Hate Them, Mammoth, 0749709545***

These are stories about siblings and sibling rivalry for 9–12 year olds. Contributions from many famous names, including Michelle Magorian, Jan Mark, Ann Pilling, Vivien Alcock and Annie Dalton. Themes which feature include twins, fostering and a new baby.

#### **Penelope Farmer, *Granny and Me, Walker, 0774560438***

A delightful collection with black-and-white artwork, to read aloud to 5–7 year olds. Each story features Ellie, a small girl who is helped by her lively granny to accept a new baby brother. This is no ordinary granny; she wears bright colours and shares some unusual activities with Ellie. When Ellie does naughty things, because of the new baby, granny helps her put things right. Granny has time for Ellie and soon the baby is big enough to join in their fun.

**Shirley Hughes, *The Big Alfie and Annie Rose Story Book*, London: Red Fox, 0099750309**

A picture-book compilation of realistic stories and poems about family situations, with bright, detailed illustrations by the author.

**Gene Kemp, *Roundabout*, Faber, 0571171648**

Nine short stories for 9–12 year olds, some with a school setting. ‘The Girl who Stayed for Half a Week’ is a moving story about a pathetic, abused child.

**Dick King-Smith, *Friends and Brothers*, Mammoth, 0749700483**

Lovely stories for 5–7 year olds that portray sibling rivalry and affection.

**Penelope Lively, *Fanny and the Monsters*, Mammoth, 0749706007**

These three stories for 7–9 year olds are set in late Victorian England. Fanny sees the dinosaurs at the Great Exhibition. A wonderfully authentic picture of family life is portrayed. The family is large and there are servants and a governess. The eponymous Fanny is constantly annoyed because of her treatment at home, just because she is a girl.

**Jacqueline Wilson, *The Worry Website*, Corgi, 0440864801**

This is a collection of linked short stories for 9–12 year olds, set in the classroom of a caring male teacher, Mr Speed, who has set up a website on which his class can record their worries anonymously. Problems vary from affairs of the heart to physical abuse. Mr Speed helps solve the problems when he can.

## Poems

**L. and C. Anholt, *Big Book of Families*, Walker, 0744577292**

A very large picture-book format for this collection of poems for the very young. Entries celebrate all kinds of family in a multitude of situations. There are families from all over the world here, laughing, crying and arguing together. Each spread has a header: Grannies and Grandads, Holidays, Family Trees. Lavishly illustrated with superb watercolour artwork.

**A. Earl and D. Sensier (eds.), *Poems about Families*, Hodder/Wayland, 0750211237**

A large format picture-book title for 7–9 year olds from the series *Poems About...* An anthology of short poems about families, enhanced by full-colour photographs and full-colour artwork. Poems by modern poets and old favourites of many nationalities.

**Sally Grindley (ed.), *Meet the Family Anthology*, Orchard, 1852133279**

A picture-book compilation of amusing poems, for 5–7 year olds, about various members of the family, including pets. A title with a comfortable multicultural appeal and full colour artwork. Poems by Shirley Hughes, Colin McNaughton, John Agard and others.

**Michelle Magorian, *Orange Paw Marks*, Puffin, 0140342095**

Lots of humorous verses about everyday family situations in this collection for 5–7 year olds. The world as viewed through the eyes of children. A small format with black-and-white, cartoon-style artwork.

**Rowena Sommerville, *The Martians Have Taken my Brother*, Red Fox, 0099293315**

A compilation of amusing poems for 9–12 year olds, with black-and-white line drawings. The predominant theme is family life. ‘The Klim Monitor’ is a moving picture of a dyslexic boy who gives out the milk. ‘Grandad’s Tree’ tells of a tree planted in memory of a much-loved grandfather.

**Jeanne Willis *Toffee Pockets*, Red Fox, 009910511X**

Rhyming verses for the very young highlight the relationship between young children and grandparents.

## Novels about Families

**Anne Fine, *The Granny Project*, Mammoth, 074974832X**

An excellent study of the tensions aroused through living with senility, viewed from many angles. A novel for older children, also published as a play.

**Geraldine Kaye, *A Breath of Fresh Air*, Mammoth, 0749700823**

A teenage story first published in 1987. Amy is the daughter of a mixed marriage; she lives with her white grandmother in Bristol. Her mother, a single parent, is never home. Her father is a mysterious figure whose identity she does not know. Then Gran shows Amy a letter from Africa. A school project about slavery and her adolescent anger combine to lead her into a fantasy in which she becomes Ama, an escaped slave girl who travels on board a slaver to the West Indies. After her return to reality, life is never the same again.

**Hilary McKay, *The Exiles*, Hodder, 0340855711**

An hilarious novel for 9–12 year olds. Four sisters are sent to stay with ‘Big Grandmother’ and a situation comedy ensues. This is an atypical grandmother and four tomboys. Chaos ensues and there are no resolutions. Winner of the Guardian Children’s Fiction Award in 1992.

**Jan Mark, *Thunder and Lightnings*, Puffin, 0140366172**

Jan Mark’s first novel and winner of the Carnegie Medal in 1976. A story for 9–12 year olds which tells of Andrew and his family who move to Norfolk. Andrew meets the near illiterate Victor, an expert on aeroplanes. The boys spend time together observing jets screaming overhead, especially the Lightnings. Beneath this simple storyline is a wealth of fascinating insight into two very different families. There is much room for discussion – is Victor really a slow learner? Now a Puffin Modern Classic.

### **Sibling Rivalry**

**Catherine Fisher, *Darkhenge*, Bodley Head, 0370328590**

A fantasy for older readers relating to the emotional turmoil that can erupt through sibling rivalry. Rob’s sister, Chloe, lies in a coma after a horse-riding accident. Rob, an artist, becomes part of the team working on the eponymous Darkhenge, an archaeological dig centred on this wooden structure at the heart of which lies an upturned tree. Rob meets Vetch, a strange being from the Unworld and together they enter Darkhenge where Chloe is imprisoned. But Chloe wants power, she claims to hate Rob because he made her invisible in the family. The forest encroaches on the Unworld and only at the last minute is Chloe restored to her family. A gripping read. Published in 2005.

**Mary Hoffman, *Nancy No-Size*, Mammoth, 0749700904**

A picture book for the very young about a black British family. Nancy is the middle child. She becomes increasingly cross at being too tall, too short, neither dark nor fair, too old, too young and so on. Only the reader knows, through the illustrations, that a birthday party is being prepared for Nancy’s birthday. Then Nancy feels just right. Lavishly illustrated.

**Pat Hutchins, *You’ll Soon Grow into them*, Titch, Red Fox, 0099207117**

A picture book for the very young. Older siblings offer cast-off clothes to Titch. Careful observation of the illustrations shows plants growing and birds nesting. Mum is pregnant. When Titch gets new clothes he offers his old ones to the baby. Observe the antics of the cat.

### **Divorced and Single-Parent families**

**Pam Ayres, *The Nubbler*, Orion Children’s Books, 1858814359**

A powerful, moving story for 8–11 year olds, highly recommended as a discussion tool to use with children witnessing an acrimonious marital break-up. Rufus suffers agonies listening to his parents fight, until the Nubbler takes his hand and helps him through it. Throughout the separation which follows and the establishing of access the Nubbler is there. Then a small girl needs the Nubbler’s help and he must leave. But Rufus can now cope and a sympathetic teacher, aware of his problems, is also a great support to him.

**Ann Bryant, *Too Good to be True*, Mammoth, 0749743255**

One title from a series in which each story narrates a stepfamily situation; each family is linked to another in the chain. 13-year-old Becca refuses to meet her new stepsister, Lissie, who is also 13. Becca becomes convinced that Lissie will be much prettier and

more talented than herself. Thanks to Jonathan, the two finally meet and find that they really like each other.

**Berlie Doherty, *Holly Starcross*, Puffin, 0140379533**

An atmospheric, emotional story about the eponymous Holly, a teenager haunted by the memory of her beloved father from whom she was taken by her mother. Holly now has a loving stepfather, younger twin siblings and a baby sister with Down's Syndrome. Then her father tracks her down and they spend illicit time together. Holly must choose where to live and finally decides to join her father, a farmer and horse breeder. Her mother is a glamorous TV presenter. Both offer her happiness. Holly narrates.

**Anne Fine, *Madame Doubtfire*, Puffin, 0140373551**

A humorous, perceptive story for older readers; there are scenes of anger and misery. Three children are torn between their divorced parents. The ending is realistically happy, but not 'happy ever after'. Also a Puffin Modern Classic and a film.

**Diana Hendry, *The Crazy Collector*, Barrington Stoke, 190226083X**

A title for reluctant 7–9 year old readers with black-and-white, cartoon-style artwork. Tess loves to collect things. She and her older brother James live with Mum. Tess decides to advertise for a granny as their real grans live abroad; Dad lives in America. The family find themselves interviewing lots of prospective grannies who all then become part of the family. The real gran from Australia arrives for Mum's birthday. James narrates this thought-provoking story which highlights the decline of the extended family.

**Maeve Henry, *A Summer Dance*, Mammoth, 0749723777**

Following the separation of their parents, 14 year old Teresa and Helen her younger sister move to a smaller house in a less well-to-do area, with their mother. Readjustments must be made; this is a difficult time for Teresa who feels the first pangs of love for their new friend Velsford, a 21-year-old student. He is of Indian parentage, from Goa. The reader sympathises with the mother who has broken away from an aggressive husband and seeks a new life.

**Pete Johnson, *Rescuing Dad*, Yearling, 0440864577**

A humorous, but meaningful, story for older readers about the traumatic effect of parental separation on two siblings. Joe's dad moves out and he and his sister, Claire, are determined to reform their father and bring about a reconciliation. Consequently Joe moves in with his father and turns him from a man in despair into a presentable figure able to cook and clean. Of course it is not quite that simple, but there is hope.

**Mo Kermode, *Codename Sebastian*, Puffin, 0140388753**

A story for older readers which is less light hearted than the cover suggests. Holly and Joe live with Mum, their father has left and remarried and now has a new baby to deal with. Then Mum begins to socialise and the children plot to follow her and record details of the men she meets. Holly witnesses the behaviour of other adults at its worst: her school-friends' parents having an affair. Then Holly and Jo realise that Mum's new boyfriend is most acceptable and she is entitled to a life of her own. An optimistic ending.

**Ruth Thomas, *The Secret*, Red Fox, 0099840006**

A gripping read for 9–12 year olds. The author manages to get inside the minds of her characters so that the emotion evoked by this moving story is overwhelming. Nicky and Roy, neglected but loved by their single mother, are left alone when she fails to return from a weekend away. Circumstances conspire to leave her without any memory in hospital. The children do not reveal her absence. Nicky is a violent child and the headmaster is the only person able to talk to her. Roy is a nervous boy protected by his sister. Near tragedy is averted and the family is reunited.

**Jean Ure, *Skinny Melon and Me*, Collins, 0007121520**

A humorous story for 9–12 year olds: Cherry reacts badly to her mother's new husband Roland, though he does his best to endear himself to her. Cherry is still devoted to her father, though he has little time for her. Various devices are employed to reveal the point of view of each character, including letters, rebus notes, diaries and dialogue. Gradually

the reader finds that Cherry's attitude is changing. A happy ending and a new baby in the family.

**Jacqueline Wilson, *The Suitcase Kid*, Yearling, 0440863112**

A story for 7–9 year olds with twenty-six short chapters, one for each letter of the alphabet; illuminated capitals are the only illustrations. Andy is 10 years old when Mum and Dad divorce. They each remarry so that she finds herself with five stepbrothers and stepsisters, a new 'uncle', a new stepmum, a new baby and two homes. The only constant is Radish, her toy rabbit. Near disaster brings a reconciling of all the elements. Winner of the Red House Children's Book Award in 1993.

**Fostering and Adoption**

**David Almond, *Heaven Eyes*, Hodder, 0340743689**

A moving story for 9–12 year olds, set in the north-east of England. Elements of fantasy combine with the stark reality of life in a children's home, and Erin, an orphan, narrates. Erin and January, her boyfriend, run away from the home and paddle a raft down river. They are joined by Mouse, another runaway. The three run aground in the black mud of the midden and meet the eponymous Heaven Eyes and Grampa. The former is a beautiful little girl with webbed hands and feet. Grampa protects her in their strange warehouse world. Then a 'body' is found in the mud; it leaves with Grampa's spirit. His death 'releases' Heaven Eyes. An emotional, disturbing tale.

**Bernard Ashley, *Little Soldier*, Orchard, 1860398790**

A powerful teenage story about an East African boy 'rescued' by do-gooders and brought to London's Docklands to live with foster parents. Kaninda has fought and killed as a boy soldier, tribe against tribe. He has seen his family massacred. The author gets inside his head so that the reader feels his discomfort in his Western surroundings; suffers his emotional traumas. Gang warfare on the local estate draws Kaninda in. The tragic outcome leads him to decide to settle there. His anguished drive to return home to Africa is set aside.

**Berlie Doherty, *The Snake-Stone*, Collins, 0006740227**

An outstanding teenage novel. James, in adolescence, is a champion diver. Knowing himself to be adopted he feels the need to find out about his real mother. The story progresses from two points of view. The reader follows James on his quest, whilst simultaneously hearing the story of the young girl who abandoned him. Eventually the two storylines merge in a most satisfactory ending.

**Sandra Glover, *Can You Keep a Secret?* Corgi, 0552548049**

A brief, but powerful, teen angst tale. Karen is the adopted child of a mixed marriage. When she realises that the abandoned baby found locally belongs to her school friend Zoe, she is desperate to persuade her to own up. Karen was herself abandoned at birth. Zoe agrees but then tells Karen's story to the newspapers. Only in the epilogue does the reader learn that Karen's story has been read by her 'Aunt' who reveals the truth introspectively about Karen's birth. Karen will never know the facts.

**Joan Lingard, *Tom and the Tree House*, Hodder, 0340716649**

A thoughtful story for 7–9 year olds about Tom, a small boy adopted from birth. Tom's adoptive parents love him and tell him he is special to them. The unexpected birth of their new baby worries Tom. In his newly built tree house he contemplates life and decides to stay there. But when he sees the cat on the baby's pram he rushes to the rescue of his baby sister. All is eventually resolved.

**Siobhan Parkinson, *The Moon King*, O'Brien Press, 0862785731**

An emotional novel for 9–12 year olds about Ricky, an autistic child, who is fostered with a family where others are being fostered and there is also a daughter called Helen. Ricky finds it hard to communicate and despite his progress Helen's unpleasantness towards him leads him to run away. Ricky explores the huge house and finds the eponymous Moon Chair in the attic. On this chair he becomes the Moon King. Differing font sizes distinguish Ricky's thoughts from the narrator's.

**Catherine Robinson, *Celia*, Scholastic, 0439963001**

A teenage novel containing some explicit sexual references, but the main theme of the story is the distress felt by Celia, who is adopted, when she finally tracks down the mother who rejected her as a baby. Celia walks out of her exam and leaves home to find her mother. She then discovers that she may be pregnant, though this proves to be a false alarm. She travels all over the country, hot on the trail, then, ironically, finds her mother a few miles from her own home. When her brother has a serious accident she returns home. Celia learns that her real mother is a successful rich woman with a very selfish streak.

**Jean Ure, *Meet the Radish*, Hodder, 0340727225**

An excellent title for 9–12 year olds highlighting child abuse and fostering, from the series Foster Family. An emotional, gripping tale in which Abi and her foster sister Sam, come to love little Gus, or Radish as he becomes known. Gus has been abused by his mother's boyfriend. The problem of bed-wetting arises and is dealt with. Gus's Mum takes him back but he runs away from her cruelty again. Abi and Sam welcome him back as part of their family.

**Jacqueline Wilson, *Dustbin Baby*, Yearling, 0552547964**

This story for older readers is narrated by 14-year-old April; it is her birthday, April 1st. April was left in a dustbin at birth. In her records she reads about all that has happened to her and retraces the past. A young man finds her in the dustbin and her story goes full circle; at the end she meets up with him again. April is fostered but her foster mother commits suicide. Fostered again she causes another child to fall downstairs after extreme provocation. Then in a children's home she is forced to become a burglar. Eventually she meets a teacher who gives her a home.

**Jacqueline Wilson, *Midnight*, Doubleday, 0385606052**

A short read for 9–12 year olds which conveys the reaction of a boy who suddenly discovers that he is adopted. The first person narrator is his 'sister' Violet. The narrative is bleak, with little humour. Will, Violet's brother, controls her by involving her in terrifying games, though she loves him. The parents are portrayed as being mildly dysfunctional. It transpires that Will's adoption was to replace a baby son who died. The story is told against the background of Violet's obsession with fairies and the writer of a series of fairy stories called Casper Dream. Fairy characters described seem to have parallels with the main characters.

**America**

**Robert Cormier, *Frenchtown Summer*, Puffin, 0141307145**

This is a lyrical poetic narrative for teenage readers, revealing the emotional struggle of a young boy to get close to his father. Short lines of narrative verse are organised in chapters, like a novel. It is summer, the setting is the small American town of Frenchtown. Eugene is beginning his first paper round. His self-awareness grows as he contemplates his surroundings. This is a haunting tale, a small world seen through the eyes of a child.

**Sharon Creech, *Ruby Holler*, Bloomsbury, 0747560293**

This atmospheric title for 9–12 year olds grips from the start. Dallas and Florida are twins who have always lived in a children's home where punishment and abuse are the norm. Fostered out, they experience further brutality and are always returned to the home. Then they are taken on by Tiller and Sairy, an elderly married couple who live in the eponymous Ruby Holler, an isolated wilderness which they love. Tilly and Sairy want to go on separate journeys and want Dallas and Florida to accompany each of them. Slowly the twins' suspicions are dissolved as Tiller and Sairy offer them kindness instead of anger. The twins also find their father.

**David Klass, *You Don't Know Me*, Puffin, 0141314060**

A brilliantly funny, but eminently moving, teenage novel. John is an adolescent, he narrates. His mother has a new boyfriend who beats John brutally. The narrative is heart rending as John questions everything about his life. He exposes the falsity of adult attitudes and responses. Gradually the reader learns to question his statements, many of

which he later declares to be untrue. He is bitter, but still able to joke. He questions society and reveals the flaws that allow physical abuse to go unnoticed.

**Patricia McCord, *Pictures in the Dark*, Bloomsbury, 07475575525**

This powerful novel for older readers reveals the world experienced by two sisters Carlie and Sarah, who live in constant fear of their mother. The girls are confined to their attic room, often without food, and denied the most basic needs such as use of the bathroom. Father seems oblivious to their plight. Carlie runs away after her mother attacks her; eventually mother breaks down and is hospitalised. Then the girls are able to form a new relationship with their father, but must face their mother on her return. An optimistic ending. Carlie finds romance. An excellent portrayal of the warped viewpoint of despairing children.

**Cynthia Voigt, *When She Hollers*, Collins, 0006750591**

An extremely powerful teenage novel; the reader follows one day in Tish's life. She is being sexually abused by her stepfather and is unable to express her feelings to others. Only the knife that she carries makes her feel secure. Circumstances force her to seek the help of a lawyer who sympathises – he is her friend's father. There is no happy ending, but the lawyer gives her the strength to return home, knowing that she now has the law on her side. This is a more powerful weapon than a knife. Strong language is used.

**Jacqueline Woodson, *Locomotion*, Puffin, 0014131608X**

A moving novel in poetic form for older readers. The eponymous Lonnie tells the reader about his sad life by writing down his thoughts as poems, encouraged by his teacher. Lonnie is black; his parents have been killed in a fire. His little sister and he have been separated and live with different foster parents. He sees his sister only occasionally and cherishes his time with her.

**Australia and New Zealand**

**Ursula Dubosarsky, *The First Book of Samuel*, Puffin, 0140369953**

A story for older readers about a complicated family set-up in which Sam and his half-sister Theodora are the innocent victims of the breakdown of their father's first marriage. The complex relationships and family background have combined to create Sam's lack of confidence. Near tragedy helps him find a new sense of self.

**Libby Gleeson, *Hannah Plus One*, Puffin, 0140380906**

A humorous, but thought-provoking story for 9–12 year olds about the eponymous Hannah, the youngest in the family with twin older sisters. Mum is expecting another baby and Hannah is in despair in case it is more twins and she is left alone. Her bizarre behaviour puzzles the family and she cultivates an imaginary friend Megan because that is what Mum and Dad almost called her when she was born. Only one baby is born and she is called Megan.

**Morris Gleitzman, *The Other Facts of Life*, Puffin, 0140368779**

A meaningful story for older readers and some strong language. Humour is employed to convey some powerful 'green' messages too. Ben's family become concerned: Does he need to be told about the facts of life? Indeed no, Ben is far more concerned about the starving millions in the world and sets out to make others aware. Father almost dies from a heart attack and this makes the family adopt a less competitive lifestyle.

**Nigel Gray, *Running away from Home*, Red Fox, 0099724618**

A picture book for the very young with realistic artwork by Gregory Rogers. A small boy called Sam is cross with his father and packs his bag to run away. It is raining so he waits outside beneath the house which has a veranda and screen door. A stunning title which conveys the extreme feelings that small children can experience.

**Robin Klein, *Barney's Blues*, Puffin, 0141302143**

Six short stories for 9–12 year olds about the eponymous Barney, the youngest in the family. He and his older siblings, Ella and Wynton, are in Nan's care whilst Mum and Dad are away on a musical tour. These are hilarious tales of sibling rivalry in which Nan

sides with Barney. Together they deal with the other two, though eventually peace descends.

**Margaret Mahy, *The Other Side of Silence*, Puffin, 0140378030**

A teenage novel. Hero is a voluntary mute, one of a close family who feels inadequate because of her mother's fame as an author of books on child development, and also her clever older siblings. Hero loses herself in silence, but dreams of a fantasy world in the trees of the large house owned by Miss Credence, a weird old lady. She unearths the terrible secret in the attic of the house where a girl is chained to a bed. She is the retarded daughter of the old lady. Hero speaks again as a result of this trauma. She writes about her experience and receives her mother's praise. This is enough for Hero and she destroys her writing.

**West Indies**

**Malorie Blackman, *Hurricane Betsey*, Mammoth, 07497 14239**

Four humorous stories, with black-and-white artwork, about the eponymous Betsey Biggalow, a little black girl who lives in the West Indies. Betsey is the youngest in the family and a constant source of trial and tribulation. Light-hearted tales about a West Indian family; similarities to a European lifestyle are apparent.

**China**

**Pamela Grant, *When a Girl is Born*, Oxford, 0192716999**

Turn-of-the-century China is the setting for this historically detailed teenage novel. Ko-Chin, the 14-year-old daughter of a traditional family, has the bound feet and introverted attitude of the downtrodden Chinese female. She is rescued from an arranged marriage by Han-Lao, a young reformist. Then her whole world is turned upside down as she learns to be emancipated.

**Adeline Yen Mah, *Chinese Cinderella*, Puffin, 0141304871**

A stark autobiography for older readers. The author tells of her childhood in China. Adeline's mother died giving birth to her. Her wealthy father remarries and her stepmother despises her. Soon she is sent away to boarding school and forgotten. Even her own brothers and sisters seem to ignore her. An appalling story of a real-life, wicked stepmother and a negligent father. The reader's sympathy is aroused, but constant references to the author's own scholarly achievements have a detrimental effect.

**Lensey Namioka, *Ties that Bind, Ties that Break*, Puffin, 0141317159**

An autobiography for 9–12 year olds that reveals details of the life of a Chinese woman who breaks with tradition. The story opens in 1911. Aifin is only five years old when she is betrothed, but her refusal to have her feet bound means the betrothal cannot take place. She goes to school and learns English, then becomes a nanny to an American missionary family. Eventually she travels to America with the family and meets her future husband.

**Ye Ting-Xing and W.Bell, *Throwaway Daughter*, Faber, 0571221548**

A powerful teenage story told by many 'voices'. Grace (Dong-Mei) is adopted as a baby by Canadian parents. When a student, she decides to seek out her birth mother in China. The reader hears the points of view of Grace's adoptive mother, her birth mother, her father, her grandfather and Grace herself. Thus a complete picture is provided and the reader is presented with a happy ending.

**Europe**

**Faiza Guene, *Just Like Tomorrow*, Chatto & Windus, 0701179104**

A teenage novel translated from the French by Sarah Adams in 2006. The setting is north of Paris on a high-rise estate. The first person narration is told by 15-year-old Doria, a teenage girl. Doria is the only child of Algerian parents, father has left and mother speaks no French. There is much wry humour but strong language too. Doria sees the funny side of her life, which sometimes seems desperately sad.

**Joan Lingard, *A Secret Place*, Hodder, 0340716614**

A short but powerful novel for 9–12 year olds from the Signature series. The story begins in Edinburgh but moves to Spain. 11-year-old Maria and her little brother Charlie, are kidnapped by their Spanish father and taken to an isolated village in Spain. Maria narrates; she is torn between her warring parents. At last the two adults are compelled to compromise. An interesting slant on divorce in which the children are seen to behave better than the adults. An interesting comparison of two cultures.

**India**

**Anita Desai, *The Village by the Sea*, Puffin, 0140361332**

The setting for this story for older readers is rural India, close to Bombay (Mumbai). Hari and his sister Lila have the responsibility of looking after their two small sisters because mother is sick and father is a drunk. They live in a fishing village; an industrial complex to make fertilisers is to be built. Hari joins the protest in the city and ends up living and working there. Contrasts between urban and rural life, rich and poor, and wet and dry seasons are apparent. A story of change and adapting to change. Winner of the Guardian Children's Fiction Award in 1983.

**Jamila Gavin, *Grandpa's Indian Summer*, Mammoth, 0749719915**

A novel for 7–9 year olds; sequel to *Grandpa Chatterji*. The setting is Calcutta; Neetu and Sanjay travel with their parents to stay with their grandfather at his home. Sanjay takes his cousin Rahul a cricket outfit; he discovers that the boys there love to play. This is a representation of middle-class life for an Indian family in India.

**Frances Mary Hendry, *Chandra*, Oxford, 0192753479**

A novel for older readers; winner of the Writers' Guild Award and the Lancashire Book Award. A powerful story set in New Delhi. The eponymous Chandra is 11 years old and a top student at school when her arranged marriage to 16-year-old Roopa takes place. His sudden death means that his desert-dwelling family imprison her as his widow slave. The divisions in modern India between old and new ways are highlighted. Chandra escapes but is disowned by her parents. Her grandmother and friends help her flee to Britain.

**Bangladesh**

**Elizabeth Lutzeier, *Lost for Words*, Macmillan, 0330398202**

A novel for older readers; Aysha and her mother are brought to England from Bangladesh by her father. He has been resident in England for many years and is a stranger to Aysha who is 13 years old. Her loving grandfather wishes her to go to school in England; neither she nor her mother can speak English. In starkly realistic terms the reader learns how the family cope without language in bed-and-breakfast accommodation and face racism. But this is only part of Aysha's story.

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## Parental Responsibilities

*Elizabeth Thiel*

For the Victorians, parental duty lay at the very heart of the happy and successful family. From the pre-Victorian James Janeway and Maria Edgeworth, to popular nineteenth-century authors such as Mary Sherwood and Charlotte Yonge, children's writers had long emphasised the necessity of good parenting in order that children should grow into responsible and implicitly respectable adults. If the neglectful parent was an anathema to moral convention and a blasphemous affront to the divine institution of the family, the parent who encouraged a child to descend into crime or beggary was perceived as entirely unnatural. In early 1871, the *North British Daily Mail*, in its series of articles about 'The Dark Side of Glasgow', reported on youthful begging and described how slum children, who had been raised in the midst of drunkenness and vice, were turned out in freezing temperatures to sing, beg or sell newspapers and were dispatched with parental threats in case they should return with insufficient money. The investigator gave one ragged 6-year-old girl some money in response to her begging to

buy a scone, and then watched and listened to the conversation as the girl returned to her mother:

‘What did he gie ye?’

The child mentioned the sum which was correct.

‘It is a lie,’ said the women, ‘he gied ye mair.’

‘No he didna,’ said the little one with child-like earnestness – ‘as sure as dathe.’

The mother shook the child violently, warning her with strong language to ‘see and get mair next time,’ then went across to the whisky shop opposite, to spend the child’s earnings. (Cited in Rose, 1988: 38)

In such scenarios, whether fact or fiction, it is invariably the mother figure who is deemed to be the most unnatural of all in a household where drink and vice are in evidence. Alcoholic fathers may be brutes, but drunken mothers are despicable; as George Needham (1884) comments: ‘That a *man* should become a vicious monster does not alarm us with such surprise, as that a woman should become a frenzied demon’ (p.76). The Victorian idealisation of womanhood largely disallows such women a significant voice in children’s fiction, although they may briefly be heard if they convert to Christianity, but, overall, the negligent mother is effectively silenced; to allow her a voice would be to acknowledge her existence as an individual and, perhaps, permit her to challenge the concept of the ‘natural’ maternal impulse. Moreover, there is little compromise in portraits of maternal failure amongst the lower classes. For example, the narrator of Florence Montgomery’s *Wild Mike and His Victim* (1875), the story of Tim, an impoverished invalid boy, and his bullying tormentor, Mike, firmly indicates who is culpable for Mike’s behaviour. As an aside to this example, Montgomery stated that her tale was ‘not intended for children’, but it is likely, according to Jacqueline Bratton (1981: 200) that *Wild Mike* was given to children to read.

[Mike’s mother] is violent-tempered and seldom sober, and her way of treating her own children often makes Tim tremble at her approach. . . . But he is more in awe of the children still; or, rather, of one of them – the eldest, a big, tawny-haired boy who goes by the name Wild Mike. No one can manage Wild Mike. His mother’s hard words and harder blows have no effect upon him. He is the terror of all the children in the street; a born bully, reckless and cruel. (p.6)

Mike may have been ‘born’ a bully, but his temperament is inherited from his violent mother and father who are raising a brood of abused and abusive children. The implication is that children raised in such a manner will replicate their parents’ behaviour and there are resonances of Herbert Spencer’s evolutionary theories in this passage. Spencer (1820–1903) is remembered primarily in relation to Social Darwinism which, at its most radical, subscribed to the belief that retrograde classes proliferate, but weaken racial stock. In this instance, Wild Mike is saved prior to the end of the tale and is spared a life of degeneracy; ill and dying, he is ‘converted’ by Mrs Collins, an angelic maternal being, and is forgiven by Tim before going to his beautiful death in peace: ‘And when the hospital awoke to life next morning, one little bed was empty; for the angels had come in the darkness and carried Wild Mike away’ (p.130). In contrast to the saintly Mrs Collins, Mike’s violent mother, frustrated because she cannot secure a bed in the Children’s Hospital for her son, ‘we[eps] and wails over him in loud and violent grief . . . [and] then, to drown her despair, [takes] to drinking more deeply than ever, and so render[s] herself useless, and worse than useless, to her unfortunate boy’ (p.78). Her maternal impulse may surface temporarily, but her inherent weakness of character and alcoholism serve to eradicate her natural feelings, while her violent lamentations characterise her as entirely alien to the maternal ideal.

Neglectful parents such as Mike’s mother have only a limited role in street-arab narratives, but they serve to justify the removal of the child to a ‘safer’ environment. The intervention of the angelic Mrs Collins is representative of a commonplace technique; a mother who is portrayed as negligent and failing in her duty is inevitably succeeded by an ideologically commendable character who, through a blending of religious instruction and careful nurturing, can ensure the spiritual well-being of the child and frequently endows him or her with a secure future. Similarly, sickly or weak

parents are replaced with more physically able individuals to ensure the salvation of the protagonist. In order for the child to thrive, it is essential that he or she be removed from the family home and relocated to more wholesome surroundings that implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, replicate at least some aspects of the middle-class family ideal. The viability of the impoverished family as a support network is thus denied and the transnormative family, for that is essentially what these alternative environments tend to provide, is ultimately depicted as preferable. Poor parents are presented as deceased, frail or incapable, or as corrupt and uncaring, and so represent the very antithesis of the ideological middle-class family. The absent parent is also occasionally represented in street-arab tales as in Hesba Stretton's *Alone in London* (1869) where Susan, the mother of Dolly and the estranged daughter of Oliver, abandons her child in order to follow her soldier husband. Dolly is deposited at Oliver's house and Susan returns some years later to find that Dolly has died. However, my research has shown that few street-arab tales follow this formula; sickly, dead or negligent parents are far more commonplace and indeed Tony, the street child who joins Oliver's household, tells how his mother died when he was small and states that he 'never had any father' (p.23). Moreover, the child himself is conceptualised in relation to those who 'care' or once cared for him or her. Identifiable primarily as the offspring of a drunken mother, a brutal father or a weak, dying or dead parent, he or she is not so much an individual as a representation of childhood that must strive to exist beyond the destructive influence of parental ineptitude or neglect.

[This article is an excerpt from E. Thiel, *The Fantasy of Family: Nineteenth Century Children's Literature and the Myth of the Domestic Ideal* (Routledge, 2008), reviewed in our last issue and reprinted with permission.]

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## **The Supernatural Anti-Mother in Louise Lawrence's *The Earth Witch* (1982)**

*Alison Waller*

There is a strong tendency in social and psychological theory to portray adolescence as a time of rupture from parental control and, indeed, many of the teenage novels I explore in *Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism* (2009) display a concern with adolescent individualism that overlooks the importance of familial contexts and define fantastic realism thus:

Young adult fantastic realism combines the recognisable characters and events of contemporary or recognisable adolescence found within teenage realism with some aspect of the consensually impossible, supernatural or unreal. This genre merges teen realism (and its sub-genre the problem novel) with elements of fantastic literature, including fantasy, horror, supernatural tales, fairy tales and – to a certain degree – science fiction or speculative fantasy. (Waller, 2009: 17)

Where family relationships are explored in young adult fantastic realism, such a rupture regularly appears as a kind of battle with a magical parent figure. This short discussion examines in detail one instance of the problematic relationship between teenage protagonists and a supernatural version of the mother.

In their discussion of C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), Margaret and Michael Rustin argue that Edmund's unhealthy alliance with the White Queen of Narnia rests on the illusive promise of a nurturing mother/child relationship. Edmund is tempted by this cold and undeniably evil woman because part of him is 'feeling hungry for mother's love and care' (Rustin and Rustin, *Narratives of Love and Loss*, 1987: 45). When he is 'mothered' by the witch he expects to find further traits that are characteristically associated with the conventional mother figure: domesticity, nourishment and caring tendencies. According to the Rustins' psychoanalytic reading, the White Witch's negation of each hoped-for quality represents the frustrated desires of Edmund who is separated from his own mother. Lewis's fantasy series is aimed at a pre-adolescent readership and Edmund is still positioned in the latency period, requiring a continued connection with a nurturing parent. As an adolescent he may have played out a slightly more ambiguous role, since when the anti-mother is confronted in teenage fantastic realism, sexual desire and fantasies of control are also at play. Louise Lawrence's *The Earth Witch* (1982) is a good example of the way a mother–son relationship is constructed and deconstructed through a fantastical trope of myth and witchcraft.

The story focuses on 17-year-old Owen Jones and his relationship with Bronwen Davies, a figure drawn from the Welsh *Mabinogion* who 'has many names but it is all one woman' (Lawrence, *The Earth Witch*, 1882: 22). Owen's real mother deserted him when he was a child and Bronwen emerges as a surrogate, offering him comfort and support although she is bitter and hostile to other inhabitants of the remote Welsh village that provides a backdrop to the story. Owen increasingly spends all his spare time with her, abandoning his guardian aunt and uncle, as well as his young friends Kate and Jonathan. Bronwen, in turn, admits, "I have always wanted a son like you" (p.66) and at one point holds him so that 'all the lost years of his childhood were ... crammed into one embrace' (p.105). She performs classic nurturing actions, tenderly applying ointment to Owen's back when it is sunburned and cut from working in her garden and, more crucially, feeding him with enchanted spring water and oatcakes that satisfy him completely but destroy his appetite for any other foods, including the dinners his Aunt Glad provides. These victuals have a significant role in cementing the power balance in this unnatural relationship; not only does Bronwen encourage Owen's dependence on her own mothering at the expense of alternative female characters such as his aunt, or his friend Kate (who, incidentally, is positioned as an appropriate romantic partner in the text), but she also binds him to her through the sinister magic spell cast on the food. Critic Diane Purkiss in *The Witch in History* (1996) links motherhood with food provision in her discussion of images of witchcraft, claiming that providing the child with its first sustenance is crucial to the identity of the mother (p.99). If that mother figure is instead a witch – an 'anti-mother' – then, the significance of food changes:

Food has significance for women because it is a means of nourishing, sustaining and protecting – and therefore controlling – the bodies into which it is instilled. The witch's food reverses this positive charge; instead of sustaining it destroys. The witch's gift of food to a *child* puts her in the place of the mother. (p.108)

Accordingly, as a 'mother' Bronwen proves to be a great threat to Owen and in offering the comforts of mothering is actually aiming to control, trap and kill him. Her final meal of stew, rye bread and cider is poisoned to paralyse so that she can sacrifice Owen to the spirit of Cerridwen, a Welsh goddess of nature who endlessly consumes and gives birth. (In the Welsh *Mabinogion*, Cerridwen brews divine knowledge in the cauldron of the underworld for her son, but when Gwion accidentally tastes the mixture instead, Cerridwen angrily pursues him in a number of different animal forms. When he finally changes into an ear of corn, Cerridwen turns herself into a hen and swallows him, only to give birth to him nine months later.) Lawrence's novel also engages with traditional narratives of a cannibal-witch to be found in fairy tales and folk tales such as 'Hansel and Gretel' and 'Black Annis'. Purkiss argues that the 'devouring witch' acts as both a 'bad' mother and as an incarnation of a good mother's fear of not providing enough for her children (pp.278–79).

Owen finds it comforting to be looked after and to submit totally to this mother figure, but surrendering completely means that he becomes trapped or destroyed and his own power is drained. This pattern is complicated further by his status as adolescent and as a newly sexual being. Bronwen's character changes with the seasons and is linked to natural cycles of fertility and sterility. During the spring and early summer she becomes a beautiful maiden, presenting an idealised version of feminine virginity as the village's May Queen. The power she wields slips from parental authority and motherly care to sexual influence and control, and Owen is now seduced by erotic desire rather than the comfort of latent childhood. This slippage indicates a complexity in power relations that is perhaps exclusive to teenage fiction, and particularly to fantastic realism. For however powerful a mother or anti-mother may be, the teenage child is close to the status of adult or even parent himself, and where Bronwen magically shifts from mother to maiden, Owen's status also changes from child to fully sexualised teenager. The adolescent boy is warned against female power in this situation, as Bronwen's sexual charms prove to be as debilitating as her maternal ones. Owen becomes as addicted to her love as he has been to her charmed food, and both sap his power in the everyday world outside her cottage. This blurring of relationships allows Owen to play out the potentially destructive desire for his mother in a clearly sexualised – but also wholly fantastic – arena. That is, although he is robbed of agency, fantastic elements of the novel do at least permit him to enact fully the classic psychoanalytic narrative of male adolescence.

Whilst such a confusion of relationships does not provide Owen with any distinct agency, the situation shifts when a teenage character is the same sex as the threatening adult. For female characters, this power struggle is much more intricate. When the cycle of mother–maiden–crone has completed within Bronwen, the narrative suggests that Owen's friend Kate will take over the mantle of 'Earth Witch'. During the final scenes of a Halloween night, Bronwen finally attempts to kill and consume Owen by drugging him and turning herself into a vicious and ravenous carnivorous sow. She is thwarted by Kate, however, who arrives in time to destroy the creature and rescue Owen. By killing Bronwen, Kate fantastically absorbs the spirit of this figure who 'would walk forever in the flesh of woman' (p.201) and she tries to comprehend the change:

It was power Bronwen had, power to enchant and destroy, power without conscience: and Kate could feel that same power in herself, the small stirrings of an embryonic thing that had yet to be born or given way to ... an instinct of blood sacrifices and fertility rites, ancient rituals of birth and death, a woman wanting to come free [...] sensuous, savage, uninhibited, earthy and sexual as nature, beautiful as Bronwen, cruel and gentle as the land. What Kate saw, loved and feared and hated in Bronwen were the secret parts of herself. (pp.133–34)

This extraordinary passage suggests that all the maternal and sexual power that Bronwen possesses is passed onto Kate as she reaches adolescence and indicates her sexual interest in Owen. The danger Kate faces is clearly no longer external but becomes inherent in her own power as she reaches the state of potential motherhood herself (that is, becoming sexual and fertile). That her attitude towards this power is obviously ambivalent, incorporating fear and hate as well as love, is significant. Bronwen's version of womanhood is portrayed in seductive terms but ultimately she symbolises danger and the destruction of 'normal' male youthfulness. She also represents inappropriate aspects of femininity. Kate's 'secret parts' are only secretly celebrated; in essence her new 'power without conscience' does not form an acceptable discourse of either female adolescence or of symbolic motherhood.

[This article is an excerpt from Alison Waller's *Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism*, 2009 (reviewed elsewhere in this issue of *IBBYLink*), reproduced by permission of the author and the publisher, Routledge.]

## David Bearne and the Ideal Edwardian Family

*Pat Pinsent*

The novels about childhood by a celibate priest might not be the first place to look for a depiction of the ideal family, but that is indeed what the work of David Bearne SJ (1856–1920) provides. He produced about thirty books, mostly published during the Edwardian period – poetry, saints’ lives, short stories – all, I think it is safe to say, forgotten and difficult to obtain today, though running into several editions during his lifetime. Highly spoken of by a range of magazines, and particularly recommended for boys (female characters are few, and seem largely to serve the domestic and spiritual needs of the young male protagonists), these books are surprisingly readable.

Many of Bearne’s stories are set in a fictional village on the Yorkshire–Lancashire borders: *Ridingdale Stories*, *The Ridingdale Boys*, *Lance and his Friends* and *A Ridingdale Year* (some running into two volumes) portray the adventures of a family of eleven boys and their friends, plus three girls, over a period of about four years.

Their father, a convert to Catholicism, has founded his own small school, for his family and other Catholic boys in the village, so some of the adventures are set in the classroom (in which, at one point, Lance, who is about ten at the beginning of the sequence, lets loose a ferret). Lance is a lively boy whose temper is inclined to flare up, and who, Bearne seems to delight in telling his readers, is often naughty – for instance, as well as the ferret incident, he fills up his brothers’ clogs with liquid glue – but he always repents and goes to confession. He also possesses an angelic voice and there is the prospect of his singing in a public performance but because this makes him neglect his other studies, he agrees when his parents want him to reject this opportunity.

As can be imagined, there are plenty of ways for Bearne to incorporate moral teaching. One of his main messages is about humility – whatever their rank in society, the boys at the school all wear clogs and smocks (the illustrations include photos of a slightly embarrassed looking boy thus clad!). Honesty, consideration for others, and the importance of prayer and a Catholic education are amongst the others. In spite of the moral didacticism, the stories have the appeal of a very three-dimensional picture of a pastoral society now far removed from us in sensibility. Perhaps most noticeable to us are the class relationships which mean that the children of the squire are always addressed as ‘Master’, a deference which is repaid by the sense of responsibility for everyone which is displayed by the squire and his wife.

Why read stories like these, with simple plot lines and rather stereotypical characterisation, by a minor writer whose work is in many respects justly forgotten? I would answer this by suggesting that minor writers often convey the spirit of an age more accurately than do their major contemporaries, who are likely to transcend its limitations by the very qualities which make their work endure. To learn that many of Bearne’s contemporaries appreciated his writing for its creation of ‘flesh and blood’ characters, his ‘wonderful knowledge and appreciation of boy character’, gives us the kind of understanding of the context of the works of writers such as Rudyard Kipling, Francis Hodgson Burnett, E. Nesbit, Kenneth Grahame and J.M. Barrie that the reading of social histories alone fails to achieve.

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## Issues for Family Reading

*Stella Thebridge*

Now that storytelling and reading aloud are restricted in the main to adults sharing with groups of young children, there is less emphasis on books suitable for whole families. Sometimes there will be a book that everyone reads – the Harry Potter series springs to mind in this respect – where families may end up buying multiple copies so that all members can read it at the same time (our family got round this by using different

bookmarks in the one copy!). But such examples are rare and made more so by the delineation of age-banded books and a burgeoning body of writing for all groups – from sumptuously illustrated picture books to high-quality reads for children and young people of all ages, particularly teenagers. While this is tremendous for each age group, many adults miss out on some writing that is eminently suited to an adult readership; for example, the work of authors such as Malorie Blackman, Melvyn Burgess, Ally Kennen, Geraldine McCaughrean, Mal Peet and Philip Pullman, to name but a very few.

Some books continue to lend themselves to rereading in adulthood as well as to sharing between children and adults, the most notable and perhaps unsurpassed example being A.A. Milne’s *Winnie the Pooh* and *The House at Pooh Corner*. It is also apparent that books that become films or plays start to be read by those who have seen the screen or stage version, and this may well be both the children and the adults who have viewed them together. Examples that come to mind are C.S. Lewis’s Narnia series, Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* series, various of Roald Dahl’s many novels, and Michael Morpurgo’s novels, several of which have adapted well to the stage.

There is also an increase in ‘issues-based’ books for families to share. This is a very useful development, both for traditional family groups and for adults who live or work with children as foster carers, childminders, teachers etc. Many of these issues lend themselves to a book-based approach of sharing between adult and child. This arises from a variety of reasons, including any and all of the following:

- emotional difficulty associated with some topics where adults feel they cannot adequately discuss the issue in hand;
- children cannot/will not raise the subject with adults;
- risk of misinformation about the facts of the topic;
- risk of bias or a lack of impartiality in discussing the topic;
- usefulness of illustration to make points about the topic;
- value of a neutral situation in a book to trigger discussion.

Topics might include straightforward first experiences like going to school, visiting the dentist and having a babysitter, where a book can help an adult to explain an everyday experience through a situation to which the child can relate.

Other topics may reflect changes that are not common to all, that need a particular perspective for the child whose own experience will never be quite the same as anyone else’s; for example, divorce and separation, severe illness and death of a family member, or potential issues like stranger danger, moving house and death of a pet.

Some books are purely factual; for example, the following.

<b>Series</b>	<b>Topic</b>
Hodder Wayland’s Values	Keeping safe; my family’s changing
Usborne’s First Experiences	Moving house; doctor; dentist; school
QED Publishing’s Understanding...	Time to share; be nice; bereavement; bullying etc.
Hodder’s A First Look at...	Honesty; politeness

Depending on the age and reading fluency of the child these may be best read separately by both adult and child or (more commonly) shared. Either way, there should always be an opportunity for discussion of books like these for the child to avoid misinterpretation and compounding fears through misunderstanding. The essence, however, is that all relevant members of the family access the book in some way.

Other books relate to particular issues by telling a story; for example, the following.

<b>Author</b>	<b>Title/series</b>	<b>Topic</b>
Janet and Allan Ahlberg	<i>Starting School</i>	
Stan and Jan Berenstain	Berenstain Bears First Time Storybooks	New baby; losing a pet
Malorie Blackman	<i>Cloudbusting</i> (written as a poem)	Bullying
Judith Foxon	<i>Nutmeg</i>	Fostering and adoption
Michael Rosen	<i>The Sad Book</i>	Grief; loss
Tony Ross	<i>The Boy who Cried Wolf</i>	Lying
Francesca Simon	<i>Horrid Henry and the Bogy Babysitter</i>	
Shirley Hughes	<i>Alfie Gets in First</i>	Potential dangerous or frightening situation for small child

These are much easier to share in the usual story-sharing time at home, or at school or nursery in a group setting. Any of these books can also be used in a group to encourage all to think about an issue even if it does not specifically relate to all the children at that point. This is particularly true of books about, for example, relationships with strangers and moving house. Again, it is important not to create anxiety with any children who could not cope with a particular circumstance. For example, books dealing with death should always be very carefully introduced in group settings.

Many publishers of books for young children include books about difficult issues, and those listed above are a tiny sample. The internet provides a host of options for choosing books on a particular topic and, whether from a review site or a straight ordering site like Amazon, it should be possible to find something appropriate to a specific topic either as a story or non-fiction. For example, a useful list of books on divorce and separation is available at [www.divorce.co.uk/Portals/0/pdf/Books\\_for\\_children.pdf](http://www.divorce.co.uk/Portals/0/pdf/Books_for_children.pdf).

Most public libraries have separate collections of books for parents to share with children where users can browse, perhaps called 'parents collection' or 'family matters'. Whether these books are separated out or not, library staff should be able to guide users to appropriate books in stock that are quickly available to borrow – much cheaper than buying!

One potential area of difficulty is the literacy of adults themselves. This is why some are fearful of sharing books. Their sense of inadequacy may result from their own poor literacy due to a lack of education, or a lack of familiarity with the child's main language. Interestingly, however, research compiled for the Family Reading Matters campaign suggests that parental attitude to and involvement in a child's literacy have greater impact on the child's own literacy development than the parent's own literacy level, when compared with the case of literate adults who show no interest in sharing books (see website noted below).

Issues related to adult literacy and interest in children's literacy are being addressed by national campaigns and taken up in some cases by adult-learning schemes in libraries, community centres and extended schools, where the opportunity for adults to learn alongside their children helps overcome any lack of confidence in the adults. This is because the home is seen as the key place for a child's literacy to be addressed, rather than nursery or school, where children spend only a small proportion of their time. The BBC RAW (reading and writing) campaign is a good example of a sustained high-profile campaign that has resources to offer adults via its website to encourage family reading where the adults can achieve a measure of confidence as they share the books.

The National Literacy Trust has done much to promote literacy across age groups, and its Family Reading Matters campaign is a very useful follow-on to the work begun in the National Year of Reading to encourage reading in the home.

### **Useful websites**

BBC RAW campaign – [www.bbc.co.uk/raw](http://www.bbc.co.uk/raw). Adult-literacy programme that includes family reading and special themes like Breathing Places.

Book Trust – [www.booktrustchildrensbooks.org.uk/](http://www.booktrustchildrensbooks.org.uk/). Very useful book database for all age groups. Search on 'social issues' keyword to access a range of titles.

Family Reading Matters – [www.literacytrust.org.uk/familyreading/index.html](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/familyreading/index.html). This is the follow-on to the National Literacy Trust's Family Reading campaign. Useful advocacy and research information.

National Literacy Trust – [www.literacytrust.org.uk/familyreading/parents/index.html](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/familyreading/parents/index.html). Useful information and further links.

Vital Link – [www.vitallink.org.uk](http://www.vitallink.org.uk). Adult-literacy site which incorporates the book-finder database at [www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk](http://www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk). Also promoted the Got Kids? Get Reading campaign that encouraged adults with low-literacy levels to gain confidence in reading with their children.

Write Away – [www.writeaway.org.uk](http://www.writeaway.org.uk). Nikki Gamble's excellent site for book reviews for young people includes books by age band and also book guides, notably the Ultimate Book Guide series for various age groups. These are well worth consulting as they identify genres and include some areas of issues-based books.

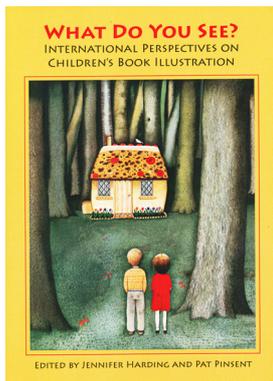
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## REVIEWS

### Books about Children's Literature

#### *What Do You See? International Perspectives on Children's Book Illustration*

Jennifer Harding and Pat Pinsent (ed.), Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pb. 978 1 443 80037 5, £25.99; hb. 978-1-8471-8850-2, £49.99, 2008, 268pp.



There is, Pat Pinsent writes in her introduction to this remarkable book, 'no excuse for ignorance about illustrated texts [for children] in the non-Anglo-Saxon world' (p.2) – and certainly after the publication of this book, there is no excuse for ignorance about their connections and ramifications. Collections of conference papers can, notoriously, be very uneven, but this collection, from the 14th IBBY/NCRCL MA Roehampton meeting is a glowing exception. With twenty-two chapters ranging from a national celebration such as Diane Hofmeyr's 'Beyond Borders: South African Illustration as a Visual Feast' to an intriguing grass-roots discussion – Vasiliki Labitsi's 'Students as Illustrators: Illustrated Storybooks in Greek Primary Education', *What Do You See?* is an eclectic visual and intellectual treat, without a single paper that cannot find some wider application. Its eighty generous (and often glorious) illustrations not only cover breadth (from Cyprus to Australia) but depth, as in Kate Nobel's 'Picture Books and the Development of Cultural Literacy' – PhD work which backs up a fact that many of us feel intuitively, that young children have 'an acute awareness of the different communicative possibilities of word and image' (p.161).

Nobel's work is characteristic of one of the two things that set this book apart: the inclusion of in-depth research of the exemplary practical kind that tackles the difficult truths of the interaction between real children and images. Stella Thebridge's breathtaking investigation of how 'looked-after children' react to illustrations such as Helen Oxenbury's for *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* (as part of the Warwickshire Libraries 'Switched on to Reading' project) reminds us forcefully that the power of illustration is not just a critical figure of speech. The bibliographies of these papers are, as it were, worth the price of admission alone.

The second distinguishing feature of *What Do You See?* is that it is genuinely international: by which I do not mean merely that it includes writers, illustrations, and illustrations from across the world. Too often (as, sadly, with too many conferences), that sort of compilation manages only to highlight isolated spots of national brilliance, excellent in themselves, but not necessarily accessible to or of interest to their neighbours. Here a firm structure and tight editing juxtaposes authors' voices (e.g. interviews with Jan Pieńowski and Satoshi Kitamura) with reports on international synthesising initiatives (e.g. Penni Cotton on the European Picture Book Collection websites) and national traditions (e.g. Evelyn Arizpe on Mexico), and points out how each is relevant to the others.

Lest this seems to be unalloyed joy – which it very nearly is – there are moments when the legacy of the conference intrudes slightly: for example, the final chapter, an account of a talk given by two young Flemish illustrators Sabien Clement and Tom Schamp, although pretty (and it is a pleasure to make their acquaintance) is strikingly unanalytic and disconnected from the major themes).

It is rare for a hardbitten reviewer to find himself absorbed in the byways of what is, when all is said, a reference book. But having been seduced for some time by Peter Cook's 'Go Ask Alice: The Image of the Child in the 60s Counterculture' and several other papers rather outside my immediate sphere of interest, I can almost recommend *What Do You See?* as a bedside book. It really is that interesting! The book has a very good index to help those seeking a particular book, author, illustrator or topic.

**Peter Hunt**

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### ***Victorian Quartet: Four Forgotten Women Writer***

Liz Thiel, Elaine Lomax, Bridget Carrington and Mary Sebag-Montefiore, Lichfield: Pied Piper Publishing, pb. 978-0-9552-1065-5, £18.00, 2008, b/w illustrations, 296pp.

The nineteenth-century children's writers ('Hesba Stretton', Mary Louise Molesworth, 'Brenda' and Flora Shaw) who are the subjects of this volume were, as Kim Reynolds states in her Introduction, popular and influential authors, as well as 'managing homes, families, financial vicissitudes, social niceties and Herculean workloads' (p.i.). That their work should be virtually unknown today except to specialists in children's literature is our loss, for even if it is unlikely to appeal to more than a small minority of the age group for which it was originally intended, their novels throw a considerable degree of light on the mores of the Victorian family and have much to give to the social historian.

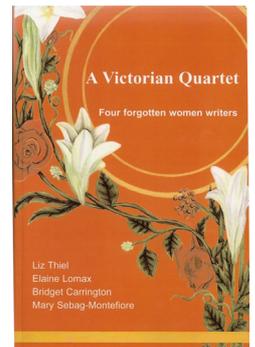
The four sections reveal different approaches to the task of familiarising readers with previously unknown writers. Elaine Lomax's study of 'Hesba Stretton' (Sarah Smith, 1832–1911) makes extensive use of her journals and personal papers to give a context to the discussion of the portrayal of childhood, the situation of women of various 'stations' and the 'outsider' as portrayed in Stretton's many books and short stories.

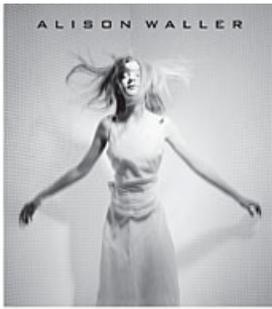
Mary Sebag-Montefiore's perspective on Molesworth (1839–1921) is that of seeking to prove wrong those critics who dismiss the work of this writer for its 'datedness, snobbishness and sentimentality' (p.83). She discusses Molesworth's treatment of the relationships between servants, nurses and children, of home life and of manners, concluding that her message was that 'trying to be very good [was] the only sure way to be happy' (p.138).

If 'Brenda' (Georgina Castle Smith, 1845–1933) is remembered at all today, it is for her portrayal in *Froggy's Little Brother* (1875) of the hardships experienced by the Victorian poor. But Liz Thiel reveals that her writings 'extended beyond the street-arab genre to encompass middle-class life and the social issues of class and temperance, and ... the scandal of female alcoholism' (p.149). Thiel's own encounter with the author began with 'Brenda's Box', a writing desk containing a collection of memorabilia, treasured by her great-granddaughter.

Perhaps the most surprising of these four women is Flora Shaw (1852–1929), a renowned journalist and historian who was awarded the DBE in 1918 for her work with Belgian refugees. Her five novels for young readers were all produced before her marriage in 1902 to Sir Frederick Lugard, a colonial administrator. Most of Bridget Carrington's attention here is given to *Castle Blair* (1877), which is set in Ireland and features some lively characters, notably Winnie, whom Carrington sees as a precursor of the many tomboy characters who subsequently enlivened twentieth-century children's fiction.

The illustrations to this book include portraits of each of the authors as well as domestic scenes and frontispieces from their novels, and there are detailed references and bibliographies. It should certainly be essential reading not only for researchers on these four writers but also for those seeking the kinds of detail about social class and relationships in the Victorian era, for which literature is often the best and most readable source.





**CONSTRUCTING  
ADOLESCENCE IN  
FANTASTIC REALISM**

***Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism***

Alison Waller, Abingdon: Routledge, hb. 978-0-4159-5832-5, £60.00, 2009, 220pp.

Probably the first question that many readers will find themselves asking when confronted by this scholarly monograph is about ‘fantastic realism’ itself – how, for instance, does it differ from ‘magic realism’? Alison Waller not only clarifies this distinction but also makes an admirable case for the importance of this genre in relation to young-adult readers. She claims that:

Young adult fantastic realism combines the characteristics and events of contemporary or recognisable adolescence found within teenage realism with some aspects of the consensually impossible, supernatural or unreal. [It] ... merges teen realism (and its sub-genre the problem novel) with elements of fantastic literature, including fantasy, horror, supernatural tales, fairy tales and – to a certain degree – science fiction or speculative fantasy. The dominant tone and style is realism: events are generally described ‘as they really are’ without recourse to overtly metaphorical, allegorical or archaic language. (p.17)

She goes on to say that:

Magic realism ... creates a world that appears like ours but which is supernaturally or magically unlike it at a structural level ... in fantastic realism the protagonist does not expect the impossible to happen [whereas] ... in magic realism those impossible happenings are incorporated into a world view that the characters ... find natural or acceptable. (p.21)

Because adolescence is a period when biological changes have far-reaching effects linked with the young adult’s exploration of psychological and social identity, the way in which this genre confronts the protagonists with situations that neither they, nor the implied teenage reader, can understand, means that it is uniquely appropriate to this liminal stage of development.

The bulk of the book is devoted to close readings of a range of texts that reflect some of the varieties of literature mentioned above: haunting, time travel and time slip, witchcraft and magic gifts, metamorphosis, the supernatural and the uncanny, and texts set in the future. That the teenager’s ‘ideas of social and physical transformation’ and of ‘the developmental necessity of forming an individual, unique and personal identity’ can be explored through these ‘fantastic tropes’ (p.26) provides a credible rationale for the concentration on a range of texts.

Perhaps it is unsurprising that the names of certain authors recur in more than one chapter. David Almond, Melvin Burgess, Robert Cormier, Margaret Mahy, Robert Westall and particularly Peter Dickinson are amongst those whose works are most integral to the development of Waller’s well-worked out and thoroughly supported and illustrated argument, that ‘structurally and thematically the combination of fantastic and realist modes implicitly constructs adolescence as a liminal state between childhood and adulthood’ (p.187). In her conclusion, she makes use (with reservations) of some of the insights of evolutionary psychology to suggest that adolescence as a stage of development is not simply a cultural construct but rather that behaviour characteristic of this phase, such as questioning authority and challenging earlier ways of learning, may be of use to the evolution of the human race as a whole. Dickinson’s *Eva* (1988) could almost be seen as paradigmatic of this view, in the way in which the heroine (with a chimp body and a human mind) is the progenitor of a new, hybrid species (p.193).

This is only one of a myriad of new and challenging insights provided here into a substantial quantity of fantasy fiction which, over the past forty years or so, has come to form a significant corpus of the material written and marketed for an age range from teenagers upward. Waller’s closely argued text, which takes account of a number of theoretical viewpoints from a variety of different disciplines, forms an important contribution to the critical debate in this area.

[An excerpt from this book is included in the articles in this copy of *IBBYLink*.]

### ***Fantasy, Myth and the Measure of Truth: Tales of Pullman, Lewis, MacDonald and Hoffman***

William Gray, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, hb. 978-0-2300-0505-1, £50, 2009, 232pp.

As William Gray states at the beginning of this thought-provoking and ambitious text, his aim is to relate children's fantasy fiction, culminating in the His Dark Materials trilogy of Philip Pullman, to the Romantic tradition, so powerful in nineteenth-century Britain and Germany. To this end he examines how the writers named in his subtitle create new mythologies in the service of a 'high argument', which in Pullman's case Gray defines as 'his attempt to suggest the possibility of a reconciliation of humanity with itself and with nature in which experience re-appropriates the lost vision of innocence, but on a higher plane' (p.4). Early in the book Gray quotes Lewis to support the insight that 'only when a mythology ceases to be believed in as a living religious system does it become free to be recycled as imaginative "Romance"' – it was only someone as bold as Blake who was able to create a new mythology out of Christian material at a stage when others, such as Wordsworth, feared to such an undertaking.

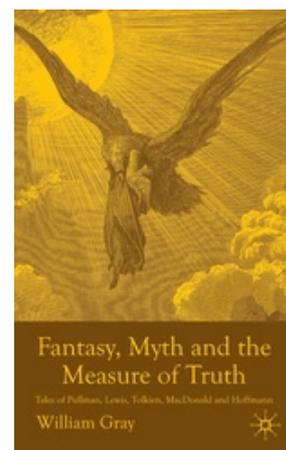
Before reaching more contemporary writers, Gray devotes chapters to the use by the German writers Novalis and Hoffman of myths to embody spiritual aspirations, and the extent to which their work could be seen as influential on George MacDonald's fantasies for both adults and children, which in turn proved so important as precursors to both Tolkien and Lewis. He concludes this section with his conviction that 'MacDonald's commitment to the mythopoeic imagination as being of divine origin and power ... is central to twentieth-century debates about fantasy literature' (p.60).

Gray's lengthiest chapters are devoted to the work of Tolkien and Lewis, authors whose explicit Christian commitment underpins their fantasy sub-creations, but in very different ways. Tolkien claimed that *Lord of the Rings* was 'a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. That is why I have not put in, or have cut out, practically all references to anything like "religion", to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism' (p.99). By contrast, Lewis, both in his science-fiction trilogy and in the *Chronicles of Narnia*, uses Christian theological and scriptural material, notably the Creation, the Fall, the Atonement and the Last Judgement, as integral to his plot development, though his final work of fiction, *Till We Have Faces* (1956), retells a pagan myth in order to confront his readers with an encounter with 'the Wholly Other' (p.151).

The chapter on His Dark Materials suggests that despite his frequently avowed hostility to Lewis, Pullman's rationale for his choice of fiction as a means to confront fundamental questions about the universe strongly resembles Lewis's claim that 'Sometimes fairy stories may say best what's to be said' (p.154). Gray also suggests that Pullman is at times, almost in spite of himself, close to what Gray terms Lewis's 'dialectical' Platonism, which 'by no means necessarily implies a devaluation, let alone a hatred, of this world' (p.159).

The book concludes with a short excursus into how Rowling's Harry Potter series can be seen as intermediate between Tolkien and Lewis; while, like Tolkien, she generally avoids referring explicitly to Christian material, her Christian meaning, like Lewis's, is hard to miss. Clearly such an attitude towards Christianity differs notably from Pullman's 'ostentatious ... distort[ion of] orthodox Christian symbolism in his myth', yet Gray claims that the works of both Rowling and Pullman conceal 'version[s] of ... Christian-based liberal humanism' which have much in common (pp.187–88).

My necessarily abbreviated presentation of Gray's argument here will, I hope, encourage others to encounter it in full in this challenging book. I would however have wished that its author had added a conclusion which did justice to the issues he had raised in his Prelude, instead of diverting his and the reader's attention to another set of texts. I also found the general use of initials as abbreviations for frequently mentioned references somewhat irritating, though I can understand a reluctance to write their names



in full too often. The book is nevertheless a worthy addition to the increasing volume of critical material devoted to fantasy.

**Pat Pinsent**

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***The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture***

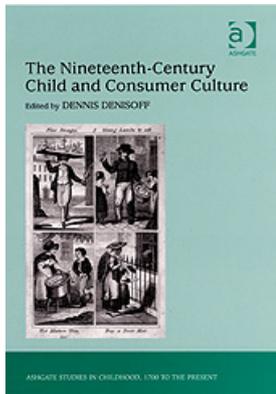
Dennis Denisoff (ed.), Aldershot: Ashgate, hb. 978-0-7546-6156-6, £55.00, 2008, 252pp.

At a time when advertising aimed at children appears ever more prolific and persuasive, this eclectic collection of essays is a topical reminder that children have long been exposed to the machinations of consumer culture. As Denisoff points out in his introduction, with reference to the observations of Victorian social commentator James Greenwood, 'by the mid-nineteenth century the British were well aware that the young, despite lacking actual money, played a crucial role in the production, consumption and distribution of consumerism' (p.6). In a society increasingly defined by desire and consumption, notions of childhood fuelled such drives, as Denisoff comments, and indeed consumer culture per se, he suggests, was characterised and sustained by youth.

Denisoff's scholarly, theoretical and highly accessible introduction: 'Small Change: The Consumerist Designs of the Nineteenth-Century Child', establishes the breadth of research featured in the twelve subsequent essays and provides a solid foundation for comprehending the notion of the child as both consumer and consumed, the latter primarily in terms of the child's role in the perpetuation of middle-class ideologies. This is not simply a collection examining the marketing prowess of the period, although the subject is considered, as is the anxiety over 'bad toys' voiced by Maria Edgeworth in *Practical Education*. As Teresa Michals observes in her essay 'Experiments before Breakfast: Toys, Education and Middle-Class Childhood', 'The Good Toy ... is an educational tool .... Rather than useless toys, Edgeworth's rational children are surrounded by a multitude of quite different playthings .... She favors [sic] most enthusiastically toys that foster scientific inquiry, although toys that encourage strength and coordination are also well worth buying' (p.39). However, while the collection explores the child as consumer, it also interrogates the social construct of childhood and the way in which the child was commodified, for example, through orphan fiction, as in Tamara Wagner's "'We Have Orphans [...] in Stock": Crime and the Consumption of Sensational Children' which neatly and convincingly links sensation serials to Dickens' characterisations.

Thus Denisoff's text is wide ranging in intent, yet sufficiently focused to provide a thorough exploration of its declared subject area. Essays are organised thematically in groups of three and in a coherent fashion: part one focuses on 'Play Things: Toys and Theatre', part two on 'Consuming Desires', part three on 'Adulthood and Nationhood' and the final section on 'Children and the Terrors of Cultural Consumption'. This sectioning provides some interesting, albeit clearly related, groupings. 'Henry James and the Sexualisation of the Victorian Girl' by Michele Mendelssohn sits alongside Carol Mavor's study of adults' consumption of the young in Lewis Carroll ('For-getting to Eat: Alice's Mouthing Metonymy'). Both are in company with Richard A. Kaye's 'Salome's Lost Childhood: Wilde's Daughter of Sodom, Jugendstil Culture and the Queer Afterlife of a Decadent Myth', which examines the multitude of Salome figures that appeared from the mid-nineteenth century onwards and asserts that such representations challenged the identity of consumerism from desirable to uncontrollable.

Through such careful grouping, the eclectic nature of the collection becomes positively laudable and indeed the variety of approaches to the child and consumerism contained within the book should encourage readers to venture beyond their usual academic comfort zones. The essays draw on a variety of scholarly disciplines from literature to sociology: Patricia Demers' careful and illuminating study of Lucy Lane Clifford's *Anyhow Stories* on desire and dehumanisation ('Toys and Terror: Lucy Clifford's *Anyhow Stories*') is followed by Wagner's examination of orphans and Monica Flegel's analysis of the NSPCC and the paradoxes of child protection ('"And now Tom Being



Killed, and all Spent and Eaten”: Children, Consumption and Commerce in Nineteenth-Century Child-Protection Discourse’). Such positioning invites the reader to wander and, in doing so, to begin to comprehend ever more of the intricacies and diversities of the nineteenth-century world.

Overall, Denisoff’s collection is a valuable addition to nineteenth-century studies, offering, as it does, a fresh approach to the construct of childhood and the ways in which the child was perceived as both consumer and product. Students of the period, whatever their focus, will locate much of interest to supplement their knowledge, while the implicit parallels between nineteenth-century attitudes and those of twenty-first Western society establish additional insights that demonstrate the contemporary relevance of such a study. Moreover, as a scholarly text that is clearly knowledgeable and readable, *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture* may well prove a useful, and in many ways fascinating, resource for both undergraduate and postgraduate exploration.

**Liz Thiel**

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***Understanding Children’s Books: A Guide for Education Professionals***

Prue Goodwin (ed.), London: Sage, 2008, pb. 978-1-8478-7032-2, £19.99, 2009, 144pp.

Aimed at early years and childcare professionals, and teachers working with children from nursery to Key Stage 3, this small paperback contains eleven chapters of guidance for non-specialists in children’s literature about the choice of the best reading for children. The expertise of the eleven contributors ensures that the advice is practical, thoughtful and readable, and their credentials are presented in the book’s early pages, while Prue Goodwin’s editorial hand has created a unity and clarity of presentation which maximises its accessibility to the busy adults who seek its wisdom.

In her opening chapter Goodwin explains the remit and rationale behind the book, and a resumé of each contributor’s argument is given. She concludes with her personal choice of timeless texts, and suggestions for useful children’s book websites. Each chapter begins with two or three bullet points summarising its focus, and concludes with suggestions of classic texts in each genre or age range.

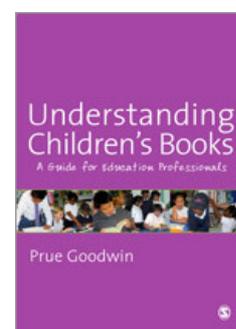
Four of the clearly presented chapters examine the importance of selecting the most appropriate books for babies (Liz Attenborough), the very young (Margaret Perkins), early reading (Vivienne Smith), and fiction for children and young people (Catriona Nicholson). These offer advice not only on books but also on how and why to use them. Occasionally I felt that there was an unnecessarily censorial tone, such as that which dictates that Quentin Blake’s *Clown* was ‘suitable only for older children’; surely we suffer sufficiently from publishers’ age banding of books without this kind of remark.

The six further chapters are genre driven: traditional tales (Ann Lazim), translated texts (Gillian Lathey), non-fiction (Nikki Gamble), poetry (Michael Lockwood) and graphic texts (Mel Gibson). The importance of picture books (Judith Graham), already the part subject of several age-based chapters, is further examined, revealing their complexity, their variety and the specialised terminology used to describe them. Some of these chapters are aimed more noticeably at those setting out in childcare or education by challenging the reader with questions, and some revive debate about the importance (or otherwise) of what is worthwhile reading for children. Many chapters give a brief but enlightening history of the genre.

This is a welcome, immensely usable book for parents and carers as well as professionals, and indeed for anyone who enjoys children’s books.

**Bridget Carrington**

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## Children's Books – General

### *The Sandfather*

Linda Newbery, London: Orion Children's Books, pb. 978-1-8425-5548-0, £6.99, 2009, 24pp.

*The Sandfather* begins with 13-year-old Hal getting into trouble at school and dreaming about the Afro-Caribbean father he has never known. The story at first appears to be rather humdrum, but once Hal is removed from the everyday world of school, GCSEs and fighting in the corridor, Linda Newbery manages to generate a narrative of pace and depth. This is due in part to some strong characters, such as Great Aunt Jude, with whom Hal is sent to stay while his mother is in hospital. Aunt Jude lives in the quiet seaside town of Ryton and has an interesting and rather touching friendship with a once-notorious artist called Don, who now spends much of his time in a beach hut trying to develop a new direction for his painting. Hal finds an ally and friend in the forthright but troubled Don and often escapes down to the seafront to share tea and identity crises with him. More crucially in terms of plot, we are drawn into an intriguing secret when Hal overhears Jude and Don talking about the return of one of his mother's old boyfriends: a Jamaican man called Wesley Prince. Hal's growing obsession with this potential father figure and the scenes of stalking and confrontation that follow offer a compelling mystery and a sensitive account of a boy's search for identity and meaning. While some readers might feel frustrated by the novel's rather anticlimactic final chapters, Newbery is skilled in suggesting optimism without easy answers.

Traces of Ryton's surprising creativity seep into the narrative, from Don's subtle seascapes to a display of marbles at the local glassworks: most important is the sandman that appears to Hal in his dreams and which he builds on the beach with the help of a Polish girl called Czeszka. Newbery's beautiful evocations of the sea and its surroundings stand out like small, well-observed paintings in the novel. Hal's personal struggle is subtly internalised, but the other young characters, such as Czeszka and Hal's friend Luke, are less successfully evoked and feel slightly pale next to more engaging, older individuals. Perhaps there is also a sense that we have read many books like this before, but comparisons with Tim Bowler's *River Boy* or Nicky Singer's *Feather Boy* simply act to create a fascinating collection of narratives dealing with identity and imagination through the fruitful interaction between youth and age.

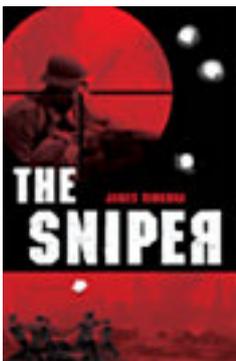
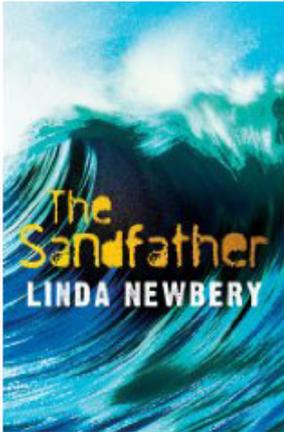
**Alison Waller**

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### *The Sniper*

James Riordan, London: Frances Lincoln, pb. 978-1-8450-7885-0, £ 6.99, 2008, 240pp.

The author's latest novel is set during the Great Patriotic War and, more particularly, during the siege of Stalingrad, a conflict which went some way to changing the course and eventual outcome of the Second World War in Europe. It is written from the perspective of a Russian school girl, Tania Belova, and based on the real-life figure of Tania Chernova whose dream of becoming a nurse is cruelly interrupted by the German invasion. After learning about the initial devastation caused by enemy bombing, we follow her: first as she joins with her fellow Pioneer Brigade members in handling an anti-aircraft gun; and then, separated from friends and family, as she subsequently trains behind the lines as a sniper. She is tasked with eliminating German officers and NCOs in order to disrupt and undermine the German army's effectiveness and morale – a factor which greatly contributed to the Soviets' eventual hard-fought victory which saw no less than 1.1 million perish and the Germans lose some 850,000 combatants. Riordan writes with pace and verve, having set the mood with a highly atmospheric opening chapter. He keeps the reader turning the pages and I for one could not put the book down. There are wonderfully vivid and tautly written descriptive passages here and Riordan does not shirk from presenting the cruelty and hardship endured by the Russian people and their enemies. He never leaves the reader in any doubt about who has the moral high ground here, as Tania comes to accept that the taking of life is something that must be done without question and without undue heart searching.



Those interested in pursuing further the author's post-war experiences and the story of how a working-class boy from Portsmouth came to play football for Spartak Moscow should investigate his memorable biography *Comrade Jim: The Spy who Played for Spartak* (Fourth Estate, 2008).

**John Newman**

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### ***Homeless Bird***

Gloria Whelan, London: Frances Lincoln, pb, 978-1-8450-7977-2, £5.99, 2009, 166pp.

Koly is an Indian girl of thirteen who is thrust against her will into an arranged marriage. She is sent to live with her parents-in-law, where she discovers three disturbing facts. Her husband Hari may be even younger than she, he is mortally ill from tuberculosis, and his parents have found Koly interesting only because she has brought with her a dowry. The money is to be used to take Hari to the Ganges where they hope he may make a miraculous recovery.

Hari dies and Koly becomes a teenage widow. She is taken to a city of widows, there to be abandoned. In fact a man named Raji finds her a home in a commune of widows, where she manages some kind of independent life working on embroidery. In the end she marries, this time willingly and to Raji.

The first section of Whelan's book, where Koly is attempting to make a life with Hari's family, has uncomfortable echoes of fairy tales such as 'Cinderella'. Nevertheless the characters are believable in a real world and the reader feels fully engaged with poor Koly's destiny. Despite the gloomy context of the story, the writing style is highly lyrical, which eases the dramatic tension. The narrative is simple and clear. There must have been a temptation for Whelan to interrupt the flow with unwieldy accounts of Hindu culture, but this temptation is thankfully resisted. She satisfies the reader's curiosity about cultural matters, and there is a glossary at the end of the book.

The only real service that her first husband's family rendered Koly was to teach her to read. Her father-in-law performed this act of kindness despite opposition from his wife. In an act of conscious homage, she studies poems by Tagore, one of India's greatest poets. One of his poems is entitled 'Homeless Bird'.

This novel, introducing young Western readers to some unappealing aspects of Indian life, ran a serious risk of degenerating into didacticism and of patronising the poor of the subcontinent. Whelan avoids these twin traps by writing with genuine compassion and insight and by maintaining with great integrity the uncluttered structure of her narrative.

### ***Yellow Star***

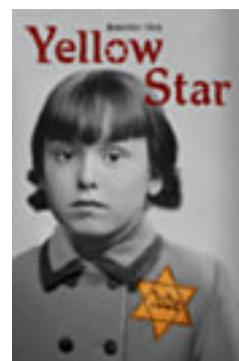
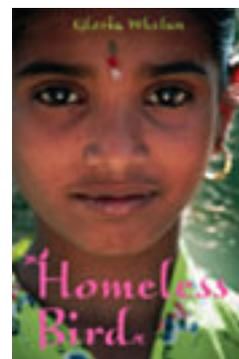
Jennifer Roy, London: Frances Lincoln, pb, 978-1-8450-7908-6, £6.99, 2006, 220pp.

Sylvia Perlmutter was a Holocaust survivor trapped in the Jewish ghetto of Lodz, Poland. Her story of survival, from the age of four to one day short of her tenth birthday, was narrated to her niece Jennifer Roy. In order to capture the immediacy of the spoken word, Roy has composed this book as a series of episodes in free verse.

The situation is convincingly perceived through the eyes of a child. The young Sylvia, of course, cannot wrap her mind round the political realities of the situation, yet she sees all too clearly the world she knew in turmoil. She can grasp – and detest – the symbols that designate her inferiority, her lack of human dignity.

It is the law  
That all Jews have to wear the  
Star of David  
When they leave their house,  
Or else be arrested.

I wish I could  
Rip the star off  
(carefully, stitch by stitch, so as not to ruin my lovely coat),



Because yellow is meant to be  
A happy colour,  
Not the colour of  
Hate.

The book is divided into four chronological sections. The transition from the Sylvia [sic] of one age to her older self, Sylvia, is not always convincingly handled. What seems to be a weakness, however, may reflect reality. Age in the ghetto is not necessarily governed by time alone. The most revealing stylistic note is the manner in which appalling events are narrated. They are frightening, but really only part of daily life. When Sylvia and her father have to lie in an open grave to save themselves, it is depicted as an unsurprising stratagem. It's what one does to survive. 'More shootings', Papa says quietly.

Miraculously, the whole family survives. The thrust of the narrative, otherwise admirable, is interrupted by historical notes prefacing each segment. The aim is worthy, to allow young readers to place these events in context. But the obstruction to the narrative flow is awkward: why not place the notes in an appendix, where they could be found by whoever was interested? At the end of the book is a section containing the timeline of the major wartime events. So the book ends on a didactic note, dulling its personal sparkle.

***Pongwiffy: Back on Track***

Kaye Umansky, illus. Nick Price, London: Bloomsbury, pb. 978-0-7475-9694-3, £5.99, 2009, 232pp.

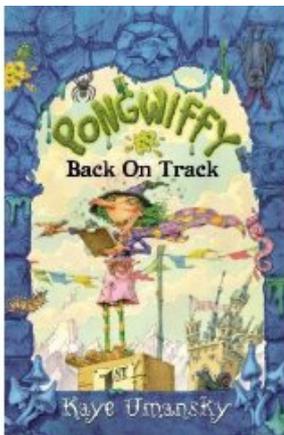
Pongwiffy is a dishevelled and pungent but benign witch. She lives in a hovel with her Slavic familiar, a hamster named Hugo. Pongwiffy decides to launch an Olympic games, in her language known as 'the O'Lumpicks', to encourage fitness among the witch community. By chance, at the same time two Yetis decide to open a sweet shop in Witchway Wood under the name 'Sugarcandy's'. A gaggle of goblins find themselves hard up. One of them must seek employment. A male goblin named Nanny Susan is hired to look after Baby Philpot Stonking, the giantess's offspring. Unfortunately, on the day of the O'Lumpicks the baby breaks into the sweet shop and gorges himself. As the word spreads that free sweets are on offer, the games are forgotten.

The language of the book is colloquial and humorous, relying on frequent authorial interventions and a liberal scattering of neologisms. The narrative advances at a swift pace. The chapters are brief, enabling less-confident readers to engage more easily with the text. The characters are very comical and very engaging. My personal favourite is the hamster Hugo, Pongwiffy's supporter and mentor, though he is closely challenged by the twin familiars of twin witches, Siamese cats called Identikit and Copicat.

Occasionally the praiseworthy lesson of the book in favour of exercise and healthy eating moves too far to centre stage, eclipsing the jaunty narrative and hinting at didacticism. One of the hardest tasks in children's literature is to deliver worthy messages without preaching.

Nick Price's illustrations echo the bizarre characters and plot twists of the text, but, to my eye, edge too far in the direction of adult grotesquerie to accord with this light-hearted text.

I would recommend this book for readers aged eight and over, and for Lord Coe and the British Olympic Committee.



### ***Moving On***

Alan Gibbons, illus. Julia Page, Edinburgh: Barrington Stoke, pb. 978-1-8429-9617-1, £5.99, 2009, 62pp. Reading age 8. Interest age 10–14.

This book is designed to open the eyes of young readers to the problems confronting one of Britain's minorities, the travelling people. Parts of the book provide factual information, alongside fictional episodes to maintain interest.

Minty is a teenage Romany traveller. Danny is a slightly older Irish traveller. Together they face the problems of travelling life and cope in different ways. Local communities and their police forces are prejudiced against travellers, often attributing crime to them without evidence. Travelling families are moved on from campsites by local authorities. Sometimes when the travellers are accommodated on campsites, there isn't room for all of them: some are forced against their will into rented houses.

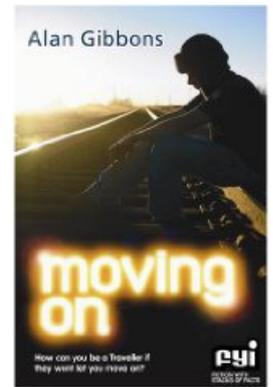
The children of travellers, according to Alan Gibbons, do badly at school because the education system is not fitted to their needs and because they rarely attend the same school for long. These complaints, if justified, amount to systematic racial discrimination.

The stories of Minty and Danny serve as illustrations of the forces that shape their lives. The narrative style is clear and simple. Gibbons conveys a genuine sympathy for the travellers and their plight, as opposed to striking a pose to produce a worthy book. He has set himself a formidable task, packing consideration of such complex social issues into a short book.

Julia Page's illustrations are realistic black and white portrayals of the action. Given the nature of the text, a style more reminiscent of graphic novels might have been better suited. Gibbons, of course, makes no attempt to convey the other side of the story, the feelings that arise in a settled community when travellers arrive.

This is an overtly didactic book. But the aim it pursues – greater mutual understanding between groups of citizens – is a worthy one.

**Rebecca R. Butler**



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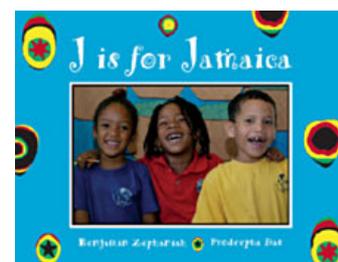
### ***J is for Jamaica***

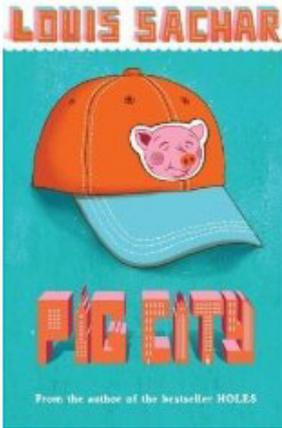
Benjamin Zephaniah, photog. Prodecepta Das, London: Frances Lincoln, pb. 978-1-8450-7609-2, £7.95, 2009, 32pp.

From *cricket* to *pumpkin*, from *hummingbird* to *yam*, this photographic alphabet sets out to show the colourful diversity of life in Jamaica. One of a dozen titles in Frances Lincoln's World Alphabet series, *J is for Jamaica* combines idiosyncratic rhyming quatrains by Zephaniah with Das's clear, colourful images.

Zephaniah's introduction locates Jamaica both geographically and socially, and his text for each letter celebrates the friendliness, generosity, daily life and heritage of the inhabitants, despite the island's problems. Some of the rhymes only work if the reader imagines (or uses) a Jamaican delivery, a device which ensures that the verses are as full of Jamaican beauty as the stunning photographs.

On each page, readers' eyes are drawn to one or more large photographs, their subjects explained and expanded upon in the text. As we move from letter to letter we get a comprehensive overview of the island, enabling readers to discover similarities and differences between their own lives and those of the islanders. To city dwellers, many of the fruits and vegetables will be familiar from shops and markets, but the landscape, the plants and animals and the wonderful sunshine will surely inspire readers to find out more about the country and its people.





### ***Pig City***

Louis Sacher, London: Bloomsbury, pb. 978-0-7475-9924-1, £5.99, 2009, 240pp.

Originally published in 1987 as *Sixth Grade Secrets*, this is one of Sachar's lighter pieces, distinguished from the majority of his backlist by the presence of a female protagonist.

Sachar's plot revolves around Laura, who, like George Washington, never tells a lie, but manages to evade the truth quite skilfully. She starts a secret club called Pig City, inspired by the slogan on a hat purchased at a car-boot sale. To ensure that members keep the club secret, they must reveal something embarrassing to the other members as 'insurance'. As a result of misunderstandings, and practical jokes played by other members of her class, a rival club emerges, a feud develops and Laura eventually realises that her claim to complete truthfulness is a hollow (and pointless) one.

*Pig City* does not match up to later Sachar titles such as *Holes* or *Someday Angelina*, but it does have some thought-provoking messages for young readers about the nature of truth, undue pride (Laura is unreasonably proud of her long hair), and loyalty and friendship. It is a text that captures the essence of life in the US equivalent of lower Key Stage 2, and speaks to its audience in their own idiom. Despite its age (and many of its original readers would have Key Stage 2 children of their own now), its republication will attract and engage a new audience without unduly taxing their reading skills.

### **Bridget Carrington**

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### ***Victoria Goes to Brazil***

Maria de Fatima Campos, London: Frances Lincoln, hb. 978-1-8450-7927-7, 2009, £12.99, 40pp.

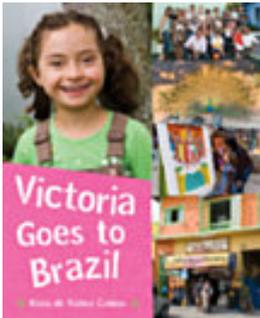
It is very nearly the school holidays. Whilst mum gets all the documents ready for the trip to Brazil, Victoria prepares the book she has been given in which she will stick all her pictures to show dad and her friends when they return home. Arriving in Sao Paulo after a long flight, they drive to Ilha Bella to meet mum's best friend, join in a saint's procession in Paranagua, eat lots of very delicious Brazilian food, speak Portuguese (Brazil's main language) and visit Itu where, quite literally, everything is big, including the pencil Victoria buys for her dad. Wherever they go, Victoria meets friends, great-grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins and friends, and she leaves with some fabulous pictures and wonderful memories of Brazil and her large Brazilian family. On this brief, whistle-stop tour through some of the sights, sounds and smells of Brazil, our narrator, Victoria, introduces us to the wide variety of the country, from big cities to islands, and farms to schools. There are also boat trips, native Indians, festivals, artists, schools, planes and more to experience on this trip.

Organised by the names of the places Victoria is taken to, this is a snapshot of Brazilian life, a picture of a family, and a brief introduction to a fascinating and varied culture. It is an ideal resource for using in the classroom to explain to children a little more about this country, its people and traditions. A very helpful glossary explains some of the Portuguese words used in the book and a short index enables readers to find specific information quickly. A brief biography of Victoria reveals that she has Downs Syndrome. The book is annotated with some suggested websites to visit, which gives the book an added dimension but does not detract from its primary aim to provide its young audience with more information about Brazil.

The book closes with a delicious recipe for Pastel Caipria – a filled pastry – that should definitely be tried and tested!

### **Louise Ellis-Barrett**

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### ***Let there be Peace: Prayers from around the World***

Jeremy Brooks, illus. Jude Daly, London: Frances Lincoln, hb. 978-1-8450-7530-9, 2009, £11.99, 32pp.

Anthologies of prayers often fall into the trap of a saccharin presentation which harks back to the nineteenth century. This collection is refreshingly contemporary in tone and appearance. Jeremy Brooks, himself a vicar, has taken the theme of ‘peace’ – a universal plea that crosses all boundaries of culture and creed – and has gathered ‘prayers’ from all over the world. As a result there are examples representing many of the world’s religions, Buddhism, Hindu, Islam, Judaism as well as Christian. Several prayers represent individuals, some of them children; a number have arisen out of specific conflicts. They are all short, to the point, and would speak to a multicultural audience from all backgrounds, providing food for thought if not for prayer in the conventional sense. Jude Daly’s illustrations are the perfect accompaniment, childlike in style, bridging the gap between the traditional and modern.

This is a collection that could grace any school or Sunday School library, but could also be an attractive gift since its picture-book format welcomes the reader and encourages browsing. Too often prayers can seem tedious, overlong and inappropriately pious. Here are words – concise and heartfelt – to which anyone can respond, whatever their age or background, with immediacy and feeling. The theme is universal and current; Brooks’ selection offers a useful tool for reflection or expression which is accessible across a wide age range.

#### **Ferelith Horden**

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### **Children’s Books for Young People who Find Reading Difficult**

The following are all published in 2009, Edinburgh: Barrington Stoke.  
RA = reading age, IA = interest age.

*Hunted*, Elizabeth Kay, illus. Dylan Gibson, pb. 978-1-8429-9542-6, £4.99, 72pp. RA 8. IA 9–12.

*Icefall*, John Townsend, illus. Pulsar Studios, pb. 978-1-8429-9570-9, £4.99, 72pp. RA 8, IA 9–12.

*Snow Tigers*, Simon Chapman, illus. Seb Camagajevac, pb. 978-1-8429-9609-6, £5.99, 70pp. RA 8, IA 10–14.

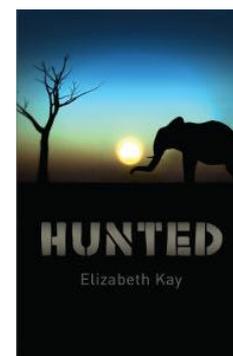
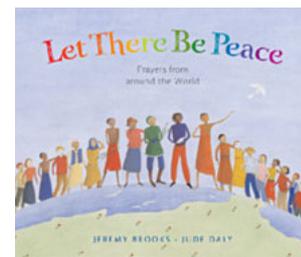
*Germ Wars*, Gill Arbuthnott, illus. Mike Phillips, pb. 978-1-8429-9608 9, £4.99, 70pp. RA 8, IA 10–14.

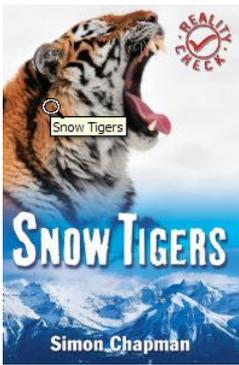
*The Fix*, Sophie McKenzie, pb. 978-1-8429-9605-8, £5.99, 96pp. RA 8, IA 12+.

*101 Ways to get your Child to Read*, Patience Thomson, pb. 978-1-8429-9671-3, £1.99, 96pp.

When Patience Thomson was Principal of Fairley House, a school for dyslexic children, she found it difficult to find books for pupils who were ready to read ‘real’ books, as there were very few of a suitable level that matched both their interests and their reading skills. The books were often either too childish or too long and complex. Therefore, when she retired, she co-founded Barrington Stoke, a publisher specialising in books for inexperienced or reluctant readers. The books have proved very popular, partly I think because she is in a unique position to know what these children want; she consults her readers before the books are published to ensure their appeal. The books have to be:

- Short with gripping plots and interesting characters. ‘Fast reads with no boring bits and a story that doesn’t let go of you till the last page.’
- Written by authors who are read by other children of their age.
- Attractive to look at with inviting covers that look just the same as other books for their age.





- Easy to read – well spaced in a clear font on yellow or off-white paper which is easier on the eye than white paper.
- Reviewed by a group of potential readers who comment on all aspects of the book from vocabulary and style to pace and plot structure.

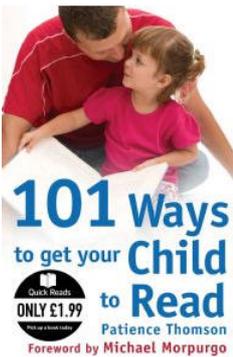
The five recently published books listed above fulfil these criteria and cover a range of genres. There is a story about a boy's adventure in Africa with elephants and ivory poachers, a fast-paced thriller, a gripping adventure set in Siberia when the area was first being charted, a football story with a moral dilemma and a factual book about viruses and bacteria, all of which I feel will hold the attention of inexperienced or reluctant readers. The plots are appropriate to the intended readers' ages whilst the language and structure are suited to their reading ages. I particularly enjoyed *Germ Warfare*, which combines clear scientific description with some quirky facts; and *Hunted*, which has an exciting plot with believable relationships between the characters.

All the books have relatively simple vocabulary and sentence structure. In some instances the authors are so skilful that I scarcely noticed this, but I did feel that *Icefall* had too many short sentences, which detracted a little from my enjoyment of the book. However, I am aware that young readers who are only just gaining confidence may feel quite comfortable with short sentences which do not tax the short-term memory. Nevertheless some of the other books avoided this by using simple connectives which I am sure inexperienced readers could manage.



The final book, *101 Ways to get your Child to Read*, was written by Patience Thomson for parents and carers. It is full of practical ideas and covers everything from early problems with phonics to concentration difficulties and choosing suitable books. At £1.99 it's a bargain and would be useful for all parents whose children are learning to read, whether they are having difficulties or not.

All the children's books reviewed provide a bridge between reading programmes or books that are read for the purpose of learning to read and the wealth of children's literature awaiting young readers. I have worked with both children and adults who have reading difficulties and, when they first read a book they consider to be 'real', it is very special to them and provides a much-needed boost to self-esteem. I therefore feel that these books deserve a place in every library.



## Sue Carless

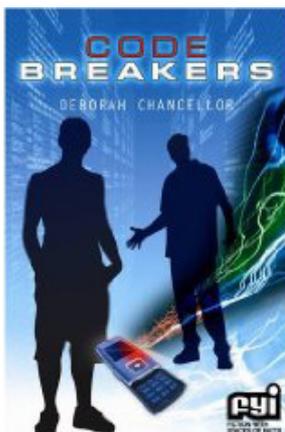
### *Codebreakers*

Deborah Chancellor, illus. Zoografic, Edinburgh: Barrington Stoke, pb. 978-1-8429-9611-9, £5.99, 2009, 75pp. RA 8. IA 10–14.

Jack and Harry are two enthusiastic young code breakers. At a railway station they see a man angrily tapping away at his mobile phone. He drops his phone without noticing, then boards a train. The boys examine the text messages he's been sending and find they are all in code – an irresistible challenge for young cryptographers. When they decode the messages, they find that the son of a famous footballer is about to be kidnapped en route to boarding school. Harry cycles to the footballer's house to persuade the boy not to attend school that day. Jack and Harry contact the police, who are duly sceptical. But they go along with the story and prevent the kidnap.

This is a straightforward adventure story for young boys to read. The narrative is interspersed with facts about codes and code breaking. It describes, for example, the codes that Mary Queen of Scots used in her plot to have Queen Elizabeth I assassinated: unfortunately for her, the codes were broken and the plot revealed.

The narrative of this book is slightly more imaginative than some Barrington Stoke books, even venturing into simile. The plot is mostly credible, except when Harry stays out all night to work on the code without being detected by his mother. The use of mobile phones and the internet in the book gives it a decent contemporary tone.



Zoografic's illustrations are, as the pseudonym suggests, in the style of graphic novels and complement the text well.

This is a book designed specifically for young male readers who rarely pick up a book. One can only applaud the attempt.

### ***Perry's 5***

Gareth P. Jones, illus. Dylan Gibson, Edinburgh: Barrington Stoke, pb. 978-1-8429-9640-9, £4.99, 2009, 59pp. RA 8. IA 9–12.

'Sounds impossible,' said Raj.

'Sounds like a challenge,' I replied. (p.7)

This is a teenage heist story. These five GCSE students are a computer geek, two Goth girls with pick-pocketing dexterity, a runner and the last – Perry – a criminal mastermind. Together they decide to steal the GCSE maths paper, preparing in this unconventional manner for an exam they would all otherwise be destined to fail.

Like all master criminals, Perry plans his caper in microscopic detail. He works out how to get hold of the key to the safe, when the papers will be delivered, and even obtains a description of the envelope in which the papers will be contained. There is (as always) just one snag. The teacher who is the examinations officer is Mr Manley-Hopkins (yes, seriously: whether any reference is intended to the creator of 'this morning's minion' is not quite clear) and he is a notorious sadist. If they are caught, they're in deep trouble.

As in the best heist movies, once the caper begins everything that can go wrong does go wrong, including a collision with a plate-glass door and documents left on a copier. The only thing that saves the operation from being a total disaster is that the wicked Manley-Hopkins doesn't emerge with an undiluted triumph either.

The book's narrative is clear and pacey. The language is simple. 'Sadistic' denotes the only complex notion engaged, and is clearly explained. The illustrations add much to the narrative, clearly derived from the graphic novel. These teenagers are confident, even cocky, and savvy. Their street wisdom will appeal particularly to the reluctant male reader. It is a refreshing sign of the times that two of the gang are female and one an Asian.

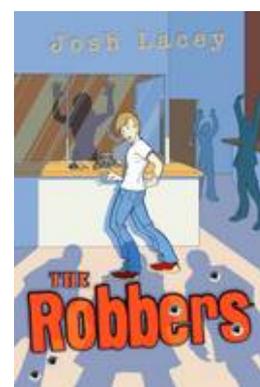
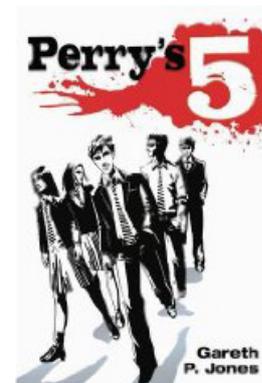
The prefatory information about author and illustrator is wittily presented in the form of agent ID cards. The mission statement of publishers Barrington Stoke promises appeal to reluctant readers, something this book will achieve, especially to boys just coming up to GCSE. The track record of the publisher suggests it will attain its praiseworthy and daunting remit.

### ***The Robbers***

Josh Lacey, illus. Stephen Elford, Edinburgh: Barrington Stoke, pb. 978-1-8429-9639-3, £4.99, 61pp. RA 8. IA 9–12.

This is another in the series of Barrington Stoke books designed to deliver easy material for reluctant readers. Peter visits the bank, planning to pay in his savings and buy a computer. As his loose change is being counted, a gang of robbers enters the bank. They hold Peter at gunpoint and force the bank staff to open the vault. They flee in a green getaway car. But they have underestimated Peter. He steals a bicycle and gives chase. At first the police treat Peter just as a bicycle thief, but eventually he persuades them of the truth. The thieves are captured, the money regained and Peter earns a reward – enough to allow him to buy his new computer, plus a new bicycle to replace the one he smashed up chasing the thieves.

This is a fairly standard heist story designed to appeal to young boys, as well as to anyone who has felt the victim of injustice. The storytelling language is clear and unadorned. Peter's character is established well enough for young male readers to identify with him. Lacey confirms the effort his young protagonist has made to save the money he needs, and his burning desire not to see it disappear. Elford's illustrations fit well with the heist theme and are, understandably, reminiscent of the style of graphic



novels. The prefatory profiles of the author and the illustrator are formatted like police mugshots.

**Rebecca R. Butler**

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***Worlds Moving On: Poems by Richard Tysoe and his Friends***

Richard Tysoe, Sylvia Tysoe et.al., illus. Richard Tysoe, Bedford: Cranfield Press, pb. 978-0-9522-8763-6, £6.00, 2009, 132pp.

That this new collection from a writer with a strong interest in science has much to offer to teachers in particular results from his personal enthusiasm in collaborating with the pupils in the many schools he visits. Divided into sections relating to water, animals, fossil remains and cave people, railways, travel, space, the sea and 'just having fun', and illustrated by the author, these lively poems would be likely to encourage children to write their own. Recommended for readers of any age!

I quote, however, from an earlier collection – a verse that the poet suggested we might include because of its link with the subject of the current *IBBYLink*, the family.

First Day at Nursery

I went with my Mum through a very big door;  
To a very large room was the place we had come;  
Some ladies and children were in there all talking:  
But I'd only gone in with Mum.  
A lady was there, she was talking with Mum.  
She led me by hand then to look at some toys;  
And led me along to some more girls and boys:  
But while I was watching them, Mum went away –  
She went while I watched them at play!  
I ran for the door, but the big door was locked.  
I hammered, I hollered! I started to cry!  
I called and I bawled, but my exit was blocked:  
I banged with my hands! But the handles were high.  
My gaolers were kind, though I kicked and I cried  
For my mother – stolen away and outside!  
She didn't come back when I made all that fuss.  
She came back for me at the end of the day.  
And while I was having good fun with my friends  
She'd come to collect me: I wanted to play!  
*(Riding the Elements, 1995)*

**Pat Pinsent**

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## REPORTS

### **IBBY AGM, Thursday 26 February 2009**

Ann Lazim presided at this AGM, which, for various reasons, was taking place about twenty months after the previous one, also held at Puffin in The Strand, London. She reported on the two conferences that had been held during this period, and also on the work of the committee in shortlisting for the Children's Laureate and selecting British nominees for the Hans Christian Andersen and other awards. She also reported on the work of the IBBY Executive Committee, which she had been on until last September and of which Nikki Gamble is now a member. Subjects that are being discussed included 'twinning' between different national branches. The editing of *Bookbird* has passed from Valerie Coughlan and Siobhan Parkinson to two American academics.

The next British IBBY conference will be held at Roehampton University on 14 November 2009, on 'Comics and Graphic Novels'. One of the prime authorities on the subject, Mel Gibson from the University of Northumbria, has been booked as a keynote speaker, and others are currently being contacted.

Progress is being made with the IBBY Congress 2012: committees have been set up and a venue identified. The theme is 'Crossing Boundaries: Translations and Migrations'. The sale of Christmas cards (thanks to John Dunne's work and Jan Piencowski's picture) has been a great asset.

About twenty-five people were present at the meeting, and about the same number sent apologies. It closed shortly after 6.30 p.m.

The popular Australian novelist – of British extraction – then spoke about *Once* and his latest book *Then*, a sequel to *Once*. Both books are the result of much research on his part into holocaust history. He mentioned his awareness that seeing other people exposes us only to their surface, while we know from our own consciousness how limited this perspective is. His conviction is that stories need to arise from one or more problems in the characters' lives that the work of fiction goes on to confront. He had wanted for some time to write a book focusing on a very deep friendship, and *Once* does this in the relationship between Felix and Zelda – Felix, of Jewish background, has been living for four years from the beginning of the Second World War in a Catholic orphanage where his parents have placed him for safety. Witnessing the book burnings of that period, he is worried about his parents, who were booksellers; he leaves, but discovers things are far worse than he had realised. He meets Zelda and at the beginning of *Then* (about which Morris Gleitzman deliberately said little) they have escaped from a train to a death camp. The author had written this sequel because he couldn't leave the characters where they were, and it gave him an opportunity to deepen his links with them. The third book, entitled *Now*, is set sixty-five years later and involves the granddaughter of one of the characters.

Gleitzman feels that it is necessary for children to know about the worst that humanity is capable of. But at the same time, he wants his fiction to convince young readers that the human capacity for love and friendship is as great as that for destruction.

### **Childhood in its Time: The Child in British Literature**

Canterbury Christchurch University. 28–29 March 2009.

The first keynote speaker at this stimulating international conference, Hugh Cunningham, confronted the wide range of delegates with the sad fact that only since the nineteenth century has the expectation been that childhood should be a happy period of life. The theme of the second keynote talk, by Warren Chernaik, 'Dying Young: Shakespeare's Children', certainly intensified this note of gloom, given that many of the young characters appeared as victims, survival being a relative rarity. Even Kim Reynolds' presentation (read, in her unavoidable absence, by a conference organiser, Adrienne Gavin) sounded a similar note in its exploration of boys' magazines as a possible encouragement for young men to join up during the First World War.

It would be wrong, however, to imply that the conference as a whole was sombre – the more than forty workshop sessions, presenting literature which ranged from the sixteenth century till today, suggested that there had in the past been many happy childhoods, both real and fictional, while providing insights on a variety of authors, well-known or obscure, for both children and adults. Lively discussion, both in and outside these sessions, meant that participants enjoyed the opportunity of exchanging their perspectives on children's literature with researchers from all over the world. It would be good to have at some time in the future a conference that explored the concept of childhood as displayed in literature from outside Britain.

### **'Juggling with Words': Federation of Children's Book Groups**

Worth Abbey, Turners Hill. 3–5 April 2009.

As ever, this conference was marked by its many presentations by authors of children's books, rather than academic papers. The first evening gave delegates the opportunity to hear Michael Rosen reading and talking about some of his own poems, which, as often, created empathy by recalling events from his own childhood. As well as inviting established authors (such as Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler, who were celebrating ten years of *The Gruffalo*), the Federation always seeks to put the spotlight on new talent, and several sessions, together with many of the seminars, were devoted to writers who had only a few publications to their names as yet. David Fickling talked about the short life of the comic *DFC*, shut down by the financial squeeze before many people had even discovered it – though there is hope for rebirth in the future. As ever, publishers were out in force, and it was possible to equip oneself with free reading matter for months to come – though I suspect that the wine wasn't flowing as freely as in the past, with a reduction in sponsorship. Nevertheless, an enjoyable and satisfying occasion.

### **Poetry and Childhood**

British Library, London. 20–21 April 2009

This conference, organised by the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education (especially Morag Styles) and inspired by the suggestion of Michael Rosen as Children's Laureate, was associated with the British Library exhibition 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Bat'. It attracted an international audience, who as well as a discussion between Michael Rosen and the outgoing Poet Laureate Andrew Motion, also had the opportunity to hear a reading from Carol Ann Duffy, his successor (as we subsequently learnt). The children's laureate gave a fascinating picture of the way his own childhood has provided the inspiration for so much of his later writing, facilitated by the educational background of his parents Harold and Connie Rosen. Another lively poetry reading was given by Jackie Kay, while Lissa Paul, the keynote speaker, touched on the complex relationship between poetry and economics, and also gave some attention to the poetry and family of Ted Hughes. The subjects of the fifty seminar papers ranged widely, from the work of major poets to nonsense and nursery rhymes, from ballads to comics and picture books, and looked at poetry from many parts of the world. Special attention was given in some groups to children's response and to teachers' knowledge about poetry. On the second day, there were opportunities to hear from British Library staff about special collections, or to learn about the complex history of the seminal text *Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book* (1744). The hope was voiced that there may be future conferences on children's poetry, and, given the enthusiasm of participants and the fact that this conference was oversubscribed, this certainly seems to be a project that people in the children's literature community could well undertake.

### **Tenth Anniversary of the Children's Laureate**

National Theatre, London. 27 April 2009.

It was quite exciting to see seated on the stage of the Olivier auditorium the five incumbents so far of the position of Children's Laureate: Quentin Blake, Anne Fine, Michael Morpurgo, Jacqueline Wilson and the ubiquitous Michael Rosen. Interviewed by John Mullan from University College London, they each spoke about their aspirations during the two years they had held office. Quentin Blake recalled having arranged an exhibition at the National Gallery, London. Anne Fine spoke of her encouragement of the creation of bookplates to inspire children to collect their own

library, together with her work on Braille books and collections of poetry. Michael Morpurgo, who confessed to having been a reluctant reader as a child, had fostered a love for stories. Jacqueline Wilson had particularly devoted herself to encouraging reading aloud. Michael Rosen spoke about his campaigns in favour of school children having the opportunity to read books rather than merely excerpts, and also his part in curating the exhibition 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Bat' at the British Library. Discussion then turned to adaptation, a subject germane to the theatrical setting. There were questions from the audience about how much say the author has, the role of the illustrator as adaptor, the laureates' favourite adaptations of their works, and how many books they have each produced. The event marked a very satisfying finale for the current laureate – who will be a hard act to follow.

### **Booktrust Conference 2009**

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London. 3 March 2009.

'The gift of books: inspiring a lifelong love of reading'

A well-attended invitation conference organised by Booktrust was a timely reminder of the hugely important Booktrust schemes. Booktrust gave away three and a half million book packs last year through its three projects, all supported by government funding:

Bookstart for babies (and Bookstart plus for toddlers);

Booktime for 5 year olds;

Booked Up for 11+ where children choose a free book from a list.

There is also Letterbox Club for children aged 7–11 in foster families: patrons are Roehampton University's Professorial Fellow Jacqueline Wilson (who spoke on the project) and poet Lemn Sissay who silenced the whole audience with his story. He is of Ethiopian heritage but grew up in care as 'Norman'. The turning point for him was the gift of a book of poetry, 'The Mersey Sound', from a teacher – hence his support for the project. Marion Keen-Downs and Jenny Kendrick, both ex-Roehampton University MA students, are working on the Letterbox Club project.

Professor Tanya Byron, author of the high-profile Byron Review on children and technology, was our host for the day. There was much talk of children as 'digital natives' and of ways to encourage reading via technology rather than regarding technology as the enemy of reading. Altogether this was a thought-provoking day away from the ivory tower and in the company of highly dedicated practitioners working to bring books to ALL children.

(Gillian Lathey)

### **Marsh Award**

English Speaking Union, London. 20 January 2009.

The fact that the English Speaking Union now administers this increasingly prestigious award for a children's book translated into English was reflected in the location of the award ceremony at the Union's elegant and imposing headquarters in Mayfair. After Aleksandra Marsh had expressed her gratitude to the ESU and to the booksellers (notably Borders and the independents) who had given special displays to the shortlisted titles, a token of appreciation in the form of a bouquet was given to Gillian Lathey, of the National Centre for Research in Children's Literature at Roehampton University, for working on the award since its inception. Freed from the administrative load, Gillian has been able to participate as a judge this year, a role she has found very enjoyable.

Anthony Horowitz gave a sparkling speech in which he talked of the difficulties of translation (having, as a teenager in France, once admitted to being pregnant when he really meant 'full up'!). As an author translated into at least twenty-five different languages, he understands the intimate relationship between writers and translators, even if they may never actually meet in the flesh. He explored possible reasons for the notorious reluctance of English-speaking readers to purchase translated books, finding it difficult to accept that unfamiliar sounding names or settings could really be as much of an obstacle as an inbuilt chauvinism and in some instances a lack of stimulating book jackets. He went on to speak about each of the shortlisted books, congratulating the

small independent press AuroraMetro for having three books on the list. These were *My Brother Johnny* by Francesco d'Adamo, a very powerful Italian novel with the background of a fictitious war, translated by Sian Williams; *Letters from Alain*, by Enrique Perez Diaz, about a boy in Cuba, translated from the Spanish by Simon Breden; and *Tina's Web*, by Alki Zei, a prize-winning Greek novel dealing with teenage problems, translated by John Thornley. The variety of these three books is ample testimony to the editorial policy of Aurora Metro. The remaining three shortlisted books were *When the Snow Fell*, by the prolific Swedish writer Henning Mankel (now known to television audiences from his detective series *Wallander*), translated by Laurie Thompson and published by Andersen Press; Valérie Zenatti's *Message in a Bottle*, set in conflict-ridden Palestine, translated from the French by Adriana Hunter and published by Bloomsbury; and the winner, Timothée de Fombelle's *Toby Alone*, published by Walker Books and translated by Sarah Ardizzone (who also won the Marsh four years ago under her previous name of Adams).

In her speech of acceptance, Ardizzone spoke of her pleasure in winning, given such an excellent and varied shortlist, and gave some account of the book, whose central character is 2 mm. tall and lives in a tree (a setting which can be seen to image our world and its conflicts). The sequel, *Tony and the Secrets of the Tree*, is due out later this year. Ardizzone also paid tribute to her publishers, who, she said, treat translators as being as significant as authors and illustrators.

It is good to know that the number and quality of books submitted for this award are increasing. There is no doubt that it is an important agent in furthering the market for books translated into English, though we still have some way to go before reaching the proportions found in continental Europe. The Marsh Award is, as Ardizzone stated, an important agent in giving freedom to those communicating across cultural boundaries.

#### **The Fairy Tale after Angela Carter**

University of East Anglia, Norwich. 22–25 April 2009.

Over 100 delegates attended this conference, from universities in Australia, America, Canada, the UK, Ireland, Japan, Brazil, Portugal, Italy, France, Switzerland, Belgium, Turkey and Egypt, for days full of fairy-tale scholarship. In addition to plenary speeches by Jack Zipes, Marina Warner, Donald Haase and Cristina Bacchilega; and authors Michele Roberts and Sara Maitland read from their new works of fiction. A Hungarian puppeteer performed an exclusive UK rendition of Grimm's tales at the Norwich Puppet Theatre. The status of fairy-tale scholarship was vigorously debated by all, and selected papers will be published in a forthcoming edition of the *Marvels and Tales* journal.

(Julie Barton)

#### **University of Oxford Children's Literature and Youth Culture Colloquium**

Keble College, Oxford. 27–28 March 2009.

This international conference was on 'Place and Space in Children's Literature'. The conference opened with a speech by Philip Pullman titled 'Inside, Outside, Elsewhere' in which the author talked about borderlands created when readers encounter texts. His focus on the importance of illustrations in this process was echoed by Peter Hunt in the next day's plenary session, who argued that children's classics represent spaces as more or less adult domains. Margaret Keen explored the historical and scientific space of the Botanic Garden in Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series while Maria Nikolajeva discussed exchanges between external and internal spaces in George MacDonald's *Lilith*. Panels throughout the day represented the broad scope of the conference theme, approaching space and place from post-colonial, ecocritical, psychoanalytical and feminist perspectives, as well as considering the physical places represented in picture books and the spaces in which children's literature is encountered. The closing panel, chaired by Farah Mendlesohn and featuring Claire Squires, Rhiannon Lassiter, Philip Pullman and Peter Hunt, considered how we work with children's literature in 'real-world' spaces and provoked lively debate. It was a stimulating and friendly event.

(Alison Waller)

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### **Brave New Worlds. Old and New Classics of Children's Literature**

University of Salerno, Italy. 11–12 June 2009.

The conference will discuss how children's classics transmit cultural values and reflect ideologies, and look at the construction and deconstruction of national canons of children's literature in contemporary culture. Participants include Anne Fine, Peter Hunt, Sandra Beckett, Jean Perrot, Alessandro Serpieri, Morag Styles, Anja Muller, and Roberto D'Ajello. Contact Elena Paruolo, [eparuolo@unisa.it](mailto:eparuolo@unisa.it) or Laura Tosi, [tosilaur@unive.it](mailto:tosilaur@unive.it).

### **Campaign for the Book**

Birmingham, Saturday 27 June 2009.

Speakers so far include Lyn Brown MP, Ed Vaizey MP, Richard Younger Ross MP, Roy Clare MLA, Celia Rees, Beverley Naidoo, Gillian Cross, Frank Cottrell Boyce, Charlie Alcock, Clare Broadbent, Miranda McKearney, Martyn Coles and Marilyn Mottram. Contact Alan Gibbons, 13 Chatsworth Avenue, Liverpool, L9 3AX.

### **Changing Childhood**

University of Chichester. 2–4 July 2009.

Organised by the Youth and Children's Work Deptment of the Diocese of Chichester in collaboration with the University of Chichester and The Children's Society to commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the UN International Year of the Child and the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child. Contact [irene.smale@diochi.org.uk](mailto:irene.smale@diochi.org.uk).

### **Beyond Borders: Art, Narrative and Culture in Picture Books**

University of Glasgow. 18–20 September 2009.

The conference will include presentations that provide a new focus for research and scholarship through questions of what it means to go beyond borders in art, narrative and culture in picture books. Speakers include Sandra Beckett, Teresa Duran, Barbara Kiefer, Bettina Kummerling-Meibauer, Maria Nikolajeva, Perry Nodelman, Martin Salisbury, Morag Styles, Sophie Van der Linden and Jean Webb. Contact [e.arizpe@educ.gla.ac.uk](mailto:e.arizpe@educ.gla.ac.uk).

### **IBBY/NCRCL MA Annual Conference 'Comics and Graphic Novels'**

Fröebel College, Roehampton University. Saturday 14 November 2009.

Call for papers on any and all aspects of comics and graphic novels – detailed flyer available.

Keynote speaker Dr Mel Gibson. Contact Ann Lazim, Centre for Literacy in Primary Education, Webber St., London SE1 8QW, [annlazim@gmail.com](mailto:annlazim@gmail.com).

### **Bill Naughton: A Centenary Celebration**

Octagon Theatre, Bolton. 24–25 November 2009

This conference is hosted by University of Bolton, Bolton Museum and Archive Service, and the Octagon Theatre. Keynote speakers include Neil Sinyard, Stephen Lacey and David Thacker. Contact Professor David Rudd, [d.rudd@bolton.ac.uk](mailto:d.rudd@bolton.ac.uk).

### **Diana Wynne Jones Celebration Conference**

University of the West of England, Bristol, 3, 4 and 5 July 2009.

Call for papers on any and all aspects of the writing of Diana Wynne Jones, her influence, fan activity and scholarship, TV and film adaptations, etc. Organisers Charles Butler, Farah Mendlesohn and Chris Bell. Accommodation will be at the University of the West of England, Frenchay Campus. Contact [farah.sf@gmail.com](mailto:farah.sf@gmail.com).

## NEWS

### **Diverse Voices Prize**

The new Frances Lincoln Diverse Voices prize was awarded on 30 April 30 to Cristy Burne for her book *Takeshita Demons*, about a Japanese girl living in London – the judges loved the way that readers were kept hooked by the story right to the end.

### **New Children's List at Frances Lincoln**

Janetta Otter-Barry, Editorial Director of Frances Lincoln Children's Books, is setting up her own list, under the Frances Lincoln umbrella. It will comprise a mix of picture books, information books and young fiction. Otter-Barry will be replaced as Editorial Director by Maurice Lyon, who has worked for several major publishers as well as freelance.

### **Write4Children**

A new peer reviewed e-journal on the theory and practice of writing for children seeks articles, discussion papers and reviews. See [www.write4children.org](http://www.write4children.org).

### **Laureates' Sources of Inspiration (Seek the Intertextuality!)**

To celebrate the ten years of the Children's Laureate, the five holders of the title were asked to name their seven favourite children's books.

Quentin Blake: *Little Tim and the Brave Sea Captain*, *Queenie the Bantam*, *The Box of Delights*, *Rose Blanche*, *Five Children and It*, *Snow White*, *Stuart Little*; Anne Fine: *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase*, *Absolute Zero*, *Just William*, *Journey to the River Sea*, *Lavender's Blue*, *A Child's Garden of Verses*, *The Sword in the Stone*.

Michael Morpurgo: *Five Go to Smuggler's Top*, *Mike Mulligan and his Steam Shovel*, *Oliver Twist*, *Just So Stories*, *A Book of Nonsense*, *Treasure Island*, *The Happy Prince*.

Jacqueline Wilson: *Little Women*, *A Little Princess*, *What Katy Did*, *The Family from One End Street*, *The Railway Children*, *Ballet Shoes*, *Mary Poppins*.

Michael Rosen: *Clown*, *The Diary of a Young Girl*, *Emil and the Detectives*, *Not Now Bernard*, *Terry Jones' Fairy Tales*, *Mr Gum and the Dancing Bear*, *Daz4Zoe*.

### **Heywood Hill**

Kirsten Anderson of G. Heywood Hill Ltd, London, has for many years produced a quarterly newsletters for her customers. Non-customers may subscribe for £10 a year. Each newsletter has an interview with a well-known author. The interview with Brian Wildsmith is available on the shop's website [www.heywoodhill.com](http://www.heywoodhill.com). Contact [books@heywoodhill.com](mailto:books@heywoodhill.com) for the newsletter.

(Jennifer Harding)

### **The Times Stephen Spender Prize**

This prize is for a translation from any language, classical or modern, into English of a poem chosen by the entrant. There are three classes: 14 and under, 18 and under, and open. A free booklet of the winning entries of the 2008 prize is now available from [info@stephenspender.org](mailto:info@stephenspender.org). The winner of the 18 and under class was also the overall winner with his translation of Ovid's *Amores I.V*. The poems can be read online at [www.stephen-spender.org](http://www.stephen-spender.org).

(Jennifer Harding)

### **Hans Christian Andersen awards 2010**

The list of candidates is at [www.ibby.org/index.php?id=962](http://www.ibby.org/index.php?id=962) and will be published in the next issue of *IBBYLink*. IBBY UK has selected Michael Foreman for the illustrator award and David Almond for the author award.

(Jennifer Harding)

### **Branford Boase Award 2009**

The shortlist for the 10th annual Branford Boase Award was announced on 1 May 2009.

*The Traitor Gam*, B.R. Collins, ed. Emma Matthewson (Bloomsbury).

*The Toymaker*, Jeremy De Quidt, ed. Bella Pearson (David Fickling Books).

*Flood Child*, Emily Diamand, ed. Imogen Cooper (published originally as *Reavers Ransom*, Chicken House).

*Between Two Seas*, Marie-Louise Jensen, ed. Liz Cross (OUP).

*Bloodline*, Katy Moran, ed. Denise Johnstone-Burt, (Walker Books).

*The Knife of Never Letting Go*, Patrick Ness, ed. Denise Johnstone-Burt (Walker Books).

*Ways to Live Forever*, Sally Nicholls, ed. Marian Lloyd (Marian Lloyd Books).

The judging panel, chaired by Julia Eccleshare, included Jenny Downham, author of last year's winner, *Before I Die*, Jane Churchill of the Cheltenham Literary Festival, librarian John Dunne, and Caroline Horn of the Reading Zone website and the *Bookseller*.

The Branford Boase Award was set up to reward the most promising new writers, as well as to reward excellence in writing and in publishing.

The winner will be announced on 9 July 2009 at an award ceremony at Walker Books in London.

(John Dunne)

### **CILIP Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Children's Book Awards 2009**

The Carnegie Medal is awarded by children's librarians for an outstanding book for children and young people. 44 nominations were received.

The Kate Greenaway Medal is awarded by children's librarians for an outstanding book in terms of illustration for children and young people. Thirty-nine nominations were received.

Shadowing the awards helps engage children in reading, develop their own creative responses to reading and to interact and debate their favourite books with other young people. This is currently taking place for the shortlist.

#### **CILIP Carnegie Medal Shortlist**

Boyce, Frank Cottrell (2008) *Cosmic*, London: Macmillan (8+).

Brooks, Kevin (2008) *Black Rabbit Summer*, London: Puffin (14+).

Colfer, Eoin (2008) *Airman*, London: Puffin (9+).

Dowd, Siobhan (2008) *Bog Child*, London: David Fickling Books (12+).

Gray, Keith (2008) *Ostrich Boys*, London: Definitions (12+).

Ness, Patrick (2008) *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, London: Walker (14+).

Thompson, Kate (2008) *Creature of the Night*, London: Bodley Head (14+).

#### **CILIP Kate Greenaway Medal Shortlist**

Barrett, Angela (text Paul Gallico) (2007) *The Snow Goose*, London: Hutchinson (10+).

Craсте, Marc (text by Helen Ward) (2007–2008) *Varmints*, Dorking: Templar (7+).

Docherty, Thomas (2008) *Little Boat*, Dorking: Templar (3+).

Graham, Bob (2008) *How to Heal a Broken Wing*, London: Walker (3+).

Jeffers, Oliver (2007) *The Way back Home*, London: HarperCollins (3+).

Mckean, Dave (text by David Almond) (2008) *The Savage*, London: Walker (10+).

Rayner, Catherine (2008) *Harris Finds his Feet*, London: Little Tiger Press (3+).

Wormell, Chris (2008) *Molly and the Night Monster*, London: Jonathan Cape (3+).

The next issue of *IBBYLink* (Autumn 2009) (copydate 31 July 2009) will concentrate on number – not from an educational point of view but looking at ‘hidden mathematics’ – including traditional and less explicit counting books, and, perhaps, codes and ciphers, number riddles, poems and nursery rhymes, fairy tales, and adventure fiction that contains number clues.

The Spring 2010 issue of *IBBYLink* will contain articles and workshops from the IBBY/NCRCL MA November 2009 annual conference on comics and graphic novels.

Articles on other subjects, reviews, reports, information about conferences and similar items are also welcomed for both issues. Contributions to [PatPinsent@aol.com](mailto:PatPinsent@aol.com).

#### *IBBYLink* 25 Summer 2009

The newsletter of the British section of the International Board for Books for Young People (IBBY UK), published three times a year.

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To sponsor a future issue of *IBBYLink*, contact [PatPinsent@aol.com](mailto:PatPinsent@aol.com).

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