

## Deep into Nature: Ecology, Environment and Children's Literature

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## Editorial

I dived from my high wire  
into the sea,  
that great briny restless churn of a mind  
with its singing whales,  
mime-artist fish, writerly oysters  
polishing up their poems of pearls;  
the genius sea  
flat on its back to stare at the moon,  
the trampoline moon.  
I bounced and I flew,  
watching the lost blue ball of the earth  
rolling through space.

(Carol Ann Duffy (2000) 'Going on the Web'  
in *The Oldest Girl in the World*)

Lisa Sainsbury welcomed us to the fifteenth IBBY/NCRCL MA annual conference with this quotation. She felt its range of images would help us on our journey. 'We hope to explore ecological issues and the types of environment experienced by children and depicted by those writing for children, from urban dwellings to virtual space.'

Much of this issue of *IBBYLink* is devoted to conference, held at Roehampton University on 15 November 2008 and devoted to children's literature and the environment. Despite having had a record number of proposals for workshops, the actual numbers attending were a little lower than recent years, though there were well over a hundred, exclusive of speakers. Did some people feel that they had already adequately imbibed ecological messages, or was the credit crunch beginning to bite? Nearly all the speakers have contributed summaries of their talks, so those readers who were not able to attend should be able to experience something of the day, while those who were at a particular workshop session will be able to learn about the ones they could not attend.

Integral to the issue of the environment is the theme of pastoral, a genre much used in the past for comment on contemporary issues, but always felt to embody a positive essence. Keynote speaker Roni Natov established a serious yet hopeful tone for the conference by showing how two recent books focusing on teenagers with abuse problems portray the healing power of the natural world.

The Eden Project, constructed in a disused industrial landscape, has been an important agent not only in addressing today's environmental challenges, but also raising the awareness of young people. Books have been a significant part of this process, as highlighted by Jo Elworthy, its Director of Interpretation, and Natasha Biebow, who is responsible for the collaboration between Eden and Random House, which has resulted in a

number of books showing children the role they can play in protecting the environment.

The panel discussion chaired by Peter Hunt involved Tessa Strickland, who expressed the powerful conviction about human interdependence with nature that inspired her in the founding of Barefoot Books, Dawn Casey, one of its authors, and Janetta Otter-Barry, from Frances Lincoln, another ecologically aware children's publisher.

After news about the work of IBBY, this year including up-to-date information about the 2012 Congress which will be held in London and the fund-raising Christmas cards with a picture generously donated by Jan Pieńkowski, one of the speakers at last year's conference, and lunch, there were ten sets of parallel workshops, details of which have been supplied for *IBBYLink* by their presenters. Some of these focused on general issues, such as ecocriticism or the use of picture books in educating children about the environment, while others took an historical perspective or a specific setting as their background. Some presenters discussed the work of single authors, and the functions of animation and oral storytelling were not overlooked.

The workshops were followed by an illustrated talk from distinguished illustrator and author Michael Foreman, who was confronting ecological issues well before it became fashionable to do so. At tea a special presentation was made on behalf of the National Centre for Research in Children's Literature (NCRCL) to Susan Hancock on her retirement. She has done a great deal both for NCRCL and for IBBY, having been treasurer of IBBY for a number of years until Pam Robson took over. We then heard a fascinating talk from Michelle Paver who described the research trips that she had taken in the far north to ensure the authenticity of her *Chronicles of Ancient Darkness*, which seem to have struck a chord with those seeking connection with the natural world. Finally Susan Price ended on a challenging note by showing how her books, almost without her deliberate intention, reflect her own impersonal view of nature.

This issue of *IBBYLink* includes a considerable number of reviews, some germane to the subject of the conference itself. The topic for next year's conference, at Froebel College, Roehampton University, on Saturday 14 November, is comics and graphic novels, so put the date in your new diaries. It is sure to be an intellectually challenging and enjoyable day.

**Pat Pinsent**

*Roni Natov, Brooklyn College*

Roni Natov's keynote talk showed how two recent books, Bryan Talbot's *The Tale of One Bad Rat* (1995) and Laurie Anderson's *Speak* (1999), demonstrate the power of pastoral. These books both depict a green world as a healer in situations of rape. Andrew V. Ettin's *Literature and the Pastoral* (1984) tells us that 'pastoral images ... link us to our earliest, purest, most natural condition, and to the protected ... way of life that we imagine we remember from our own childhood' (p.45). For those not brought up in the country, pastoral imagery may be buried deep, but can emerge in dream and fantasy, as is the case in these two novels.

*The Tale of One Bad Rat* is a graphic novel about Helen Potter, a runaway teen who has suffered incest from her father since she was a young girl. The pastoral imagery comes to her through the Beatrix Potter books given to her as a young child, which cause her to focus on the Lake District as an icon of peace and safety. Helen's main source of comfort comes from her pet rat, which she has rescued from a lab at school and with which she identifies as a small creature preyed upon by larger ones, and caged for school experiments just as she is imprisoned by her parents' brutality. Eventually, through the pastoral experience, she comes to trust enough to break the silence of her abuse that she's held all these years. In the mountains of the Lake District, in the light of the pastoral landscape, Helen shrieks out her pain and feels freer of the dark oppressive 'visions' of her father that have followed her everywhere. Here, most significantly, the rat reappears as her muse, in her profound realisation that she can transform that darkness into a source of inner light. *The Tale of One Bad Rat* speaks, as all graphic novels do, through both image and word, which layer the text. The literal-plot level is interrupted by her past, presented vividly with the immediacy of the image. The entire story is framed by the realistic format of the informational book in its direct address to the readers. The foreword explains how children incorporate abuse into a dangerously negative self-image of blame and shame; the afterword describes the genesis of the story, the creative process, the real children who served as models, and, finally, where to go for help – all aspects necessary to telling this complex and chilling tale of survival.

*Speak* is another tale of survival. It begins, 'It is my first morning of high school. I have seven notebooks, a skirt I hate, and a stomach ache,' establishing Melinda's strong voice and her pain. She is sitting alone in class because she has been raped by a popular boy, at a party, and now she is shunned by nearly all her classmates. From a girl with many friends, happily inscribed into her school's young-teen culture, Melinda virtually becomes a pariah. Only Mr Freeman, her art teacher, seems to observe her pain and is able to help her. The combination of his interest in her and her own imagination works through a pastoral scene of a tree that becomes crucial to her healing process. Her healing emerges as she works hard in art class, trusting Mr Freeman, and, finally, revisits the tree under which the rape took place, before she is able to speak about the truth of the crime. The evolution of the tree painting parallels her healing process, the darkness she must enter, and the various stages of repair. The combination of pastoral and art, the artifice of pastoral, imaginatively recasts the distortion and barrenness of the world from which she has retreated. Little by little, the natural world also suggests her healing, as it repairs itself. Mr Freeman advises her that nothing in nature is perfect, and that her painted tree needs flaws; similarly she needs to accept herself as flawed, scarred and twisted, and even to embrace these traits, to make something beautiful out of all her pain. A recollection of a childhood moment, a pastoral memory, an emblem of timelessness, suggests the ways in which pastoral alters time and space, conflates with memory, and becomes an icon of healing. Finally she is able to name her attacker and to recognise that it was not her fault, and to go on to reconstruct her identity, to return to the scene of trauma, the tree under which the rape occurred, while a tree she planted in her own backyard is flourishing; her drawing enables her to tell Mr Freeman her story and thus melt the ice inside her.

Both *Speak* and *The Tale of One Bad Rat* suggest the power of pastoral to help in healing from crisis. They depict the way the pastoral can hold the healing image in the imagination until the wound is ready to be healed and the sufferer has integrated the trauma, is ready to resurface. Both these novels deal with extreme situations, but even in ordinary daily life, pastoral can provide a space, for young and older adults, where life is suspended and time stops long enough to hear the heart beat.

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## **Children's Books and the Eden Project**

*Jo Elworthy, Eden Project, and Natascha Biebow, Random House*

### **Jo Elworthy**

Eden is an environmental educational charity which explores how to address today's environmental challenges, how to break down the barriers against engagement with these challenges, and how best to communicate challenges, solutions and participative action. We've realised the importance of being positive and hopeful about our relationship with nature; we believe that we can all work together towards a better future. The Eden Project at St Austell, Cornwall, is a showcase, a theatre to show what can be done if a group of people work together to make something happen and refuse to take no for an answer. We don't say 'the rainforest is being cut down, we're doomed and it's all our fault' but rather, 'we know the rainforests are disappearing but they can be replanted, people can leave the world better than they found it, here's a story about some people who are doing it, and here's how you can help'. Eden focuses on the positive, on what people can do to make a difference, a theme which comes out in many of our books. As Tony Kendle (Eden Project's Foundation Director) said, 'Stories captivate, provide insight, test moral choices, paint possible futures, challenge and hold up a mirror in a way that is acceptable – personal and impersonal at the same time. Unless a culture has strong stories it loses its direction.' Eden aspires to be a place where the stories of our future are created and told – the Aesop's fables of the twenty-first century. We have ten storytellers who tell fictional stories, stories that help to communicate vital information. We find that appealing to the heart works much better than appealing to the head.

### **Natascha Biebow**

When in 1999 the Eden Project approached Transworld and Random House Children's Books (RHCBS) to form a partnership, it was because they knew that books would be an essential platform for spreading Eden's message of sustainability and the interdependence of plants and people. They didn't have the resources to set up their own publishing operation and were looking for a partner with an established presence in the marketplace and a global reach. RHCBS is in the business of story – and so we have in common with Eden the aim to motivate young readers to engage with the world around them, to be inspired by nature, to learn about the environment, and use their imaginations.

The Eden Project Children's Book list was launched with *The Eden Trail* (2001), an interactive guide book of the Eden Project, which was published in time for the project's opening in March 2001. Since then, the list has grown from strength to strength through the vision of its publisher, Kate Petty, who worked with RHCBS to bring the very best books about environmental subjects to young readers. She inspired several big-name children's-book authors and illustrators, such as Charlotte Voake and Jane Ray, to visit the Eden Project and dream up innovative ways to communicate environmental themes to children. She envisioned a list on which the books would be an exciting combination of information and fun. As both an author and editor, she had a gift for making even the most complicated non-fiction subjects hugely enjoyable and interactive for young readers.

In addition to the guide book, the books include: board and activity books; the story of the Garden of Eden; a series of picture books featuring George and Flora, making important environmental themes like food miles and recycling relevant and accessible to

four year olds; and two magnificent pop-up extravaganzas by Kate Petty, *The Global Garden* (2005) and *Earthly Treasure* (2008). For older children there are *Pirates, Plants and Plunder* (Stewart Ross, 2005) and *Greed, Seeds and Slavery*. Two delightful books illustrated by Charlotte Voake are due to appear in April 2009, one on wild flowers, the other on trees. We're currently working on the next book in the George and Flora series.

As the world around us changes and we are presented with new challenges, books can empower and inspire young readers and their adult carers to engage with the environment, to protect nature, and to dream up creative new solutions. Together, RHC B and Eden hope to create a future generation of more environmentally aware children and to safeguard all our futures.

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## **Publishers Protecting the Environment**

*Alison Kennedy, Egmont Press*

Ethical paper production of books is becoming an ever more important issue for publishers, and Egmont is blazing the trail. It may come as a surprise to find that influential non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund suggest that publishers could be contributing unknowingly to the demise of ancient forests. Owing to a lack of environmental control in publishers' procurement policies, products from illegal logging in countries such as Indonesia and Russia may be making their way into the papers used by book publishers. NGOs also highlight the issue of logging in unprotected ancient forest areas in Finland and Canada. Concerned about the implications of its own procurement and production policies, Egmont Press started to research its paper supply chain several years ago, and has since developed a detailed and systematic approach to its paper supply in order to ensure that none of its products comes from illegitimate sources. We hope that other publishers will use the same policy.

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## **Panel Discussion on Ecology, the Environment and Children's Literature**

*Dawn Casey, Tessa Strickland and Janetta Otter Barry, chaired by Peter Hunt*

This conference could not have come at a more crucial moment, the moment when the world has to make vital decisions about the relationship between humans and nature. The importance of children's books in the cycle of childhood-influencing-adulthood-influencing-childhood is undisputed, and the attitudes of mind that writers and publishers of today help to inculcate in their readers is essential to the way the world will be tomorrow.

Fundamentally, since the eighteenth century, the dominant model for Western industrial expansion has been that nature is something which humans can exploit by right. This has shifted gradually to the idea that humans and nature should (indeed, must) live in partnership – although the emphasis on who is the more powerful has also shifted: Can humans control nature, or will nature wreak its revenge? The opposing model has been the romantic concept of nature as pure, innocent and nurturing, and which holds a redemptive hope for humankind's misdeeds. Chris Jenks in *Childhood* (1996) links these ideas to parallel ideas of childhood, the 'Dionysian', which 'rests on the assumption of an initial evil or corruption within the child' – original sin – which means that the child (like nature) is wild and must be tamed (p.70). The 'Apollonian' child, in contrast, is the child as seen by Rousseau: 'children are born good ... angelic, innocent, untainted' (p.73). These children, like the natural world, need to be empathised with, can teach *us* a lot: nurture has to be mutual.

Such opposed views of nature still surface in contemporary children's books, notably 'young science fiction': often technology is presented as evil, the attempted domination

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of nature is corrupt and destructive, and thus regression to an idyllic, unspoilt, pastoral world is the most desirable answer. The problem here is, however, the conflict between the needs of fearful, technophobic, or Rousseauian *adults* being expressed through children's books, and the real world in which their young readers have to exist. Other examples are British children's books in the 1950s and 1960s (typified by Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958)), which struggled with the idea of a lost Arcadia, while children's sexuality, hardly an unimportant part of the lives of growing children, is commonly denied by adult writers. In the case of books with ecological themes, the argument that technology – whatever its role thus far in despoiling nature – must be part of the answer remains at odds with the two extremes of exploitation and retreat.

The panellists are at the leading edge of the production of books in this field, and it is interesting to see how they maintain a balance in their writing and publishing of children's books. Tessa Strickland, whose conviction about the link between ecology and children's literature is expressed in her article which follows this, is co-founder and Editor-in-Chief of the independent children's publisher Barefoot Books. Dawn Casey, an editor, teacher and writer, has produced *The Barefoot Book of Earth Tales* (forthcoming), a collection of stories from around the world which reflects her understanding of our relationship with nature, and her belief that such stories offer hope, based as they are on human accountability and the potential that the natural world offers for connectivity and spirituality. Janetta Otter-Barry, Children's Editorial Director at Frances Lincoln, observed how kindred the theme of ecology was with the strong interest the publishing house had always had in multiculturalism. This is reflected in books whose main qualities are frequently narrative and art, often using myth and legend, rather than non-fiction. Pioneering books by David Bellamy have recently been republished, while more recently texts such as Saviour Pirotta's *Turtle Watch* (2008) and Jackie Morris's *Snow Leopard* (2008) have revealed their commitment to alerting young readers to ecological themes. (See the reviews of *Turtle Watch* and *Snow Leopard* in this issue of *IBBYLink*.)

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## **Stones, Woods and Water: Deep Ecology and Children's Literature**

*Tessa Strickland, Barefoot Books*

If the story of humankind is the story of our relationship with nature, then the story of the past 200 years in this corner of the planet is the story of the fracturing of that relationship. The mindset that brought in the Industrial Revolution and the age of information technology has brought with it many advances in science; at the same time, there has been a deepening split in our collective psyche. On the one hand, we are of nature and dependent on a matrix of vulnerable living systems for our existence; on the other hand, we live in a way which has led to the extinction of many elements within these systems. How are we move to a sustainable, ecocentric lifestyle – and what does children's literature have to do with this revolution in waiting?

I believe literature has a vital and central role to play in healing the split. As a publisher of multicultural literature for children, I draw extensively on stories from traditional cultures, partly because these communities still live closer to nature than we do, offering a route towards this intimacy and the understanding that attends it and partly because the stories are carriers of a wisdom that is universal and timeless: the details may vary according to specifics of time and place, but there is a remarkable consistency in their messages. Story itself is fundamental to what it means to be human: it is the vehicle through which we learn to understand ourselves and others, to appreciate the ways in which we are different, and to see life from other perspectives than our own.

For story to be effective, and to awaken in us a sense of our interdependence, two ingredients seem to me to be essential. These are wildness and wonder. However, in contemporary Britain, this kind of storytelling is up against some significant obstacles.

Firstly, many children live in places where the wildness of nature is at many removes from their everyday experience, making them less able than they might otherwise be to know at first hand what it is like to be in living contact with systems and patterns that are not of the human technosphere – that are not within our control. In *The Wild Places* (2007) Robert MacFarlane strikes a warning note when he observes that ‘thought, like memory, inhabits external things as much as the inner regions of the human brain. When the physical correspondents of thought disappear, then thought, or its possibility, is also lost’. This is a bleak prospect. To counter it, we need to give children as much time and space as possible to be agents of their own learning, with freedom to learn from play, to draw on literature and on the other creative arts to access and express their feelings, and to have enough contact with nature to be sensitive to the wider, deeper patterns of which their lives are a part.

A second obstacle is education. As matters stand at present, recent government legislation on Early Years learning puts our youngest children in grave danger of being damaged by early pressure to achieve formal goals, taking away their freedom to learn through imaginative play. As Kim Simpson put it at the OpenEYE campaign conference, ‘The inner core of the child is intrinsically spiritual. This is the true self of the child, the core, and the purpose of the personality is to be a unique instrument for that “self” ... not to become an instrument for the state.’ Her statement reminds me that the true value of stories in education is the way in which they offer children images and ideas that help them join up the ecology of their inner worlds, or selves, with the ecology of the outer world – not the world of economic, political and cultural constructs and measurable, results-based goals, but the older, wilder world of stones, woods and water.

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## **Picture Books and the Environment: A Lifelong Concern**

*Michael Foreman, author and illustrator*

Ever since the beginning of my career as a children’s author and illustrator, in the dim and distant past, environmental issues have been reflected in my work. My first book (text by my first wife, Janet Charters), *The General*, published in 1961 while I was a student at the Royal College of Art, was seen as a pacifist tale at the time (‘a communist tract for the nursery’ was how one US reviewer saw it). However, there was also an environmental aspect to the book. The main character, the General, has a change of heart after seeing the flowers he has crushed on falling from his horse. He thinks about the havoc inflicted on the countryside by the actions of his army and instructs them to make his country the most beautiful in the world rather than the most powerful.

*The Two Giants* (1967) and *War and Peas* (1974) both stressed the need that, in order to avoid conflict, the resources of the world should be shared. *Dinosaurs and all that Rubbish* (1972) shows dinosaurs waking from their slumbers in the underworld in response to human pollution of the earth; they point out that the world belongs to everyone. The book has never been out of print and was turned into a musical by David Wood and performed at Sadler’s Wells, London.

*One World* (1990) came from observing our children playing in a Cornish rock pool. They began by filling the bucket with sea water from the pool and then proceeded to collect the things from the pool, a couple of tiny fish, a shrimp, a crab and seaweed, thus creating their own little watery world in their bucket, a world they could hold in their hands. The more they put into their bucket, the poorer the pool became. Floating on the surface of the pool was a blob of oil and, at the end of the day when they left the beach, when everything had been returned to the pool, the only thing left in their bucket was the blob of oil. The pool was a microcosm of the world. It told a very big story on a very small and personal scale. Everyone, however small, can do something and if we all do a little, we’ll all do a lot! We all hold the real world in our hands.

*Peter’s Place* (text by Sally Grindley, 1995) tells a story of an oil-tanker spillage and the subsequent clean-up. *Dolphin Boy* (text by Michael Morpurgo, 2004) relates the efforts

of a small community to return a stranded dolphin to the sea. *Fox Tale* (2006) is about the growing friendship of a 'wild' boy and an urban fox. *Mia's Story* (2006) tells of a family living on a city dump in South America and how they survive by recycling rubbish.

The next book (due to be published in Spring 2009) will be *A Child's Garden*; it tells the story of a small boy trying to nurture a tiny plant growing in the ruins of a war zone. This will be followed (probably also 2009) by *Why the Animals Came to Town*, a rhyming tale of 'every kind of animal from all around the world, all coming down our street'. The animals have come to complain about the sorry state of their environment and a child vows to help them.

I have always felt that children would be very receptive to ideas about the environment and, with their constant access to television, knew as much, if not more, than their parents about the growing problems of pollution. Certainly, they seemed more concerned. The children who read my early books now have children of their own and often tell me that they share the same books with the new generation. Not so good for my royalties, but I guess it's good for trees ...

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## Trashing the Past and Trashing the Future

*Susan Price, author*

When I saw the title of this conference, I thought, 'ecology, environment, children's literature – I know nothing about these things.' But then it was pointed out to me that my book *The Sterkarm Handshake* was about people of today who, having trashed our present, go back and trash the past, and that my recent *Odin's Voice* trilogy is about trashing the future.

Some years ago, on holiday in Northumbria, I became fascinated by the border reivers, and decided to write about them. But I didn't want to write a book (*The Sterkarm Handshake*) set totally in the past. I wanted the present day to be compared and contrasted with the past. This was partly because of the difference between our present-day obsession with crime and our fear of violence, and what the people of the 'debatable lands' lived with all the time – they lived in a no-man's-land during perpetual petty warfare, subject to armed men taking away all that they possessed. One answer to how to present this comparison was by imagining a time machine, the Time Tube, which is built by a huge, multinational company to enable it to harvest the fossil fuels of the past. And what would the sixteenth-century reivers make of these strange people who seemed to come out of the hillside? I realised that they would think they were elves. Elves live under hills. Doors in the hillside open, and the Elves come out. Elves use magic – and as the science-fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke said, 'any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic'. The book could be summed up as people of the twenty-first century, having trashed their own world, going back in time and trashing the past.

Earlier this year *Odin's Son* was published, the culmination of my *Odin's Voice* trilogy. These books are about trashing the future. London is flooded, and there is immense poverty. Slavery has become a norm – it's one way of providing for a large population that can't feed itself. One of my heroines, Kylie, is a slave, but she begins to worship the ancient Nordic god Odin, and then she begins to speak for him – hence the title of the first book, *Odin's Voice*. She becomes such a celebrated godspeaker that it earns her freedom, and she takes the name 'Odinstoy'. I've been asked several times what the ancient god Odin is doing in a book set in the future. In this imagined future, people still worship Christ, Allah and Jehovah, but the established religion is that of the revived Greco-Roman gods Jove, Apollo and Minerva; while some people also worship the ancient Nordic gods Odin, Thor, Frey and Freya. This situation reflects the growth of neopaganism, paganism repackaged for the present day, with added 'green' appeal. All pagan religions had a fertility element, emphasising gratitude to and respect for the Earth. James Lovelock gave his theory the name 'Gaia' because Gaia was a Greek mother-goddess, and the very word 'Earth' comes from the name of a Nordic goddess,



Yorth. I thought it possible that, if we survive into the future at all, neopaganism might have become the established faith. In my book, Odin could be said, in some fashion, to represent ‘nature’ on Mars, where it is set, as he once represented the life force on Earth. Odin is the fertility that gives the harvest, and the bad weather that ruins it. He is the god who created this amazing world, and he is also the earthquake, the volcano, the tsunami, even, maybe, the global warming. But he’s also the one with the thirst for knowledge that will help you terraform Mars or halt global warming on Earth – and the one who will suddenly snatch that knowledge away and leave you to drown in the rising seas. You have to trust Odin, because he is the power behind it all. He is the one who has the power to grant you success in battle, or a good harvest or a safe arrival at your destination. So you worship him and sacrifice to him; and the one thing you can be sure of is that, as soon as it suits him, he’ll betray you.

In fact, these books of mine reflect better than I knew my view of nature – which is not kindly or idyllic, or even hostile. We are not even in the frame of reference. Nature is not being kind to us, or turning on us, or taking any notice of us at all. It’s pursuing its own agenda, which, according to Lovelock, is to preserve life on this planet. What kind of life is of no importance. Lovelock has said that the idea that we will destroy life on Earth is arrogant and ridiculous. We don’t have the power to destroy life on Earth. What will happen is that the Earth will destroy our life. Earth will flip into a new stasis, which may be much hotter or colder than we can survive, and a new kind of life will evolve. Whether we succeed in heading off global warming, or whether we’re replaced by life that can survive the new conditions – whether polar bears or *Homo sapiens* become extinct, or not – Gaia doesn’t care. Nor does Odin. We are tools for them – game pieces – but we’re of no importance. There’s nothing like ending a conference on a positive note – so here’s wishing well to the world and the life that comes after us. May it have as interesting a ride as we’ve had.

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## **Ecocitizens: What Does Urban Ecocriticism of Children’s Literature Unearth?**

*Jenny Bavidge, University of Greenwich*

## **WORKSHOPS**

The deep strain of ecological awareness in urban children’s literature emerges in stories about the recuperation of the natural in cities, environmental dystopias, urban transformation-by-imagination narratives and, perhaps, a residual pastoralism in city stories for children. All this seems to be relevant to the interests and concerns of ecocriticism. But should we be talking about ecocriticism of the literature of urban children *or* ecocriticism of children’s literature set in the urban world *or* ‘urban ecocriticism’ of children’s literature?

Ecocriticism hasn’t always taken notice of children’s literature. And although ecocritics allow there to be such a thing as urban ecocriticism, nobody seems quite sure what it is or what it could be. The ecocriticism of children’s literature hasn’t always taken very much notice of urban writing (there are very few references to urban settings in Sidney Dobrin and Kenneth Kidd’s edited collection *Wild Things: Children’s Culture and Ecocriticism* (2004), for example, where ecocriticism is taken to be primarily concerned with nature writing). I want to offer a few models for what I think urban ecocriticism could unearth were it applied to, or thought about alongside, children’s literature, children’s culture, or concepts and representations of childhood more widely. In return, such analysis might unearth something about that unearthly and unnatural place, the city itself.

If ecocriticism is about ethics, about analysing our relationship with and representation of the environment, then it has to turn its attention to the built environment as well as the ‘natural’, if only to notice that the natural or the rural or the pastoral comes into being as such when it is contrasted with the unnatural, the city or the urban. And while I’m not accusing children’s literature or children’s literature criticism of simply being in thrall to some pastoral idyll, there’s a real need to acknowledge the creative complexities of

aspects of urban life and urban literature. We can't let our thinking about the environments we live in and represent rest between the two oppositional poles of country/city. An ecocritical perspective on children's urban literature should not stop at identifying ecological 'messages' or limit itself to categorising works according to the country versus city paradigm; it should also be alert to the representation of rhythms, urban relationships, spatial perspectives and senses of movement in texts set in urban environments. I see in children's literature and the debates around representations of childhood, a constant engagement – whether conscious or unconscious – with the ideas that ecocriticism is interested in: What are our effects on the environment? How should we live? What is our experience of place? How do we connect with places and the other people in those places? Furthermore, urban representations in children's literature constantly grapple with the kinds of question that interest urban theorists: What are the ethics of city living? How do we get to know our urban environments? What is a city? Are the imagined dimensions of space (what Jonathan Raban calls the 'soft city') as real to us and as influential on our behaviours and attitudes as the concrete city beneath our feet? One philosopher of the urban, Iris Marion Young, has suggested that the city operates as a 'being together of strangers'. For her, this is a 'being together' based on an a priori ethical relationship between strangers. How children can find a place in this 'being together of strangers' is a deeply problematic question. Books written for children and with urban settings offer a compelling set of answers.

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## **Steam Powering the Silent Spring: New Ambivalences of 'Critical' Children's Ecology Literature**

*Alice Bell, Imperial College London*

Members of the 'green' movement are sometimes criticised for being anti-science. The history of romanticism casts a long shadow on the ways we dichotomise nature/society, technology/culture. The green movement is, however, full of scientific information and is equally likely to be ridiculed as too 'geeky', with climate-change sceptics being criticised for being anti-science. Such occasional apparent contradictions are part of the always complex relationship between nature, culture, knowledge and society. An awareness of this complexity is behind my reading of green politics in children's literature, in the context both of the traditionally anti-science genre of children's fiction and the more traditionally pro-science area of children's non-fiction. Recent publications from both genres seem to reflect a somewhat ambivalent approach to science and technology.

For example, many graphics-based, young-adult, non-fiction, green books, such as the junior edition of Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* (2007), seem to find an aesthetic in scientifically mediated images and excitement at the prospect of new energy technologies. A sense of necessary compromise runs through much of this literature. Neither of the two books entitled *You Can Save the Planet* (Wines, 2007; Hough, 2006) is anti-technology. Rather, they advocate avoiding extremely poisonous components by minimising waste and buying carefully, the latter aspect feeding into another key element of the pro-science discourse of such non-fiction – that all these books are well informed on the details of climate change and expect their readers to be likewise. In the world of junior green activism, knowledge seems quite clearly to be power, as is explicit in Giles Thaxton's *Spud Goes Green* (2006) and James Russell's *How to Turn to Your Parents Green* (2007), both of which juxtapose 'stupid' characters with brighter, well-informed and generally useful green activists.

Similar themes are reflected in fiction. For example, young adults' current vogue for steam-punk (e.g. Phillip Reeve's *Larklight* (2006)) seems to revel in an aesthetic of technology, albeit from an historical perspective. A recent young adult novel, Saci Lloyd's *The Carbon Diaries 2015* (2008), is especially interesting for expounding the potentially changing cultural view of the geek through analogies of sexual politics. Characters talk about the emergence of 'carbon dating', as people look for prospective

partners who can make, fix, predict and understand things rather than simply look beautiful or be cool enough to be in a band. This book applies a good deal of scientifically mediated information, in places showing things graphically. It also portrays hopes of new energy technologies and feelings of loss at the prospect of curtailing use of electronic devices, alongside grumbles over unfeeling engineers and jokes about how badly promises of the techno-fix have turned out in the past.

In trying to explain all this, David Gauntlett's mid-1990s study of the previous wave of children's green media (*Video Critical: Children, the Environment and Media Power*, 1996) provides some extremely useful context and analysis. Gauntlett suggests that the contradictions of mass-media ecology (e.g. a supermarket sponsored the *Blue Peter Green Book*, and all the plastic *Fern Gully* film merchandise) can be understood as the cultural industries aiming to signal their critical voice so as to keep pace with the ever-increasing sophistication of their audiences. Ulrich Beck (*The Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, 1992) talks of the risk society – that in the face of Chernobyl and other man-made environmental catastrophes, we look at technology with a sort of muted modernist zeal, mixing fear and hope. There is also Bruno Latour's contention that 'we have never been modern'; the false dichotomies of nature/culture or science/society were only ever constructs of small academic communities. There is also the strong possibility that this ambivalence is a function of its being children's literature: adult writers of children's fiction want to prepare their child readers for what is possible (and, in some cases, to start to apologise for it), but cannot do so without creating some sense of hope. As the very mundane tone of the diary form used by the *Carbon Diaries* really brings home, the imagined futures of green politics are ones the readers of today's children's books are going to live through.

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## Escape into the Outdoors? Messages Children's Literature Gives about the Environment

*Nick Swarbrick, Oxford Brookes University*

What we might call the folk inheritance persists: the outdoors is the place where the unwary get into trouble. We see Snow White taken out somewhere lonely to be done away with; she finds anonymity (for a while) among marginalised miners. Walker and Foreman's *Teeny-Tiny and the Witch Woman* (1975) sees the boys confront child sacrifice and cannibalism. In this mythic landscape, people who don't 'fit in' might be excluded: travelling families; foreigners; outlaws. Warning stories, therefore, may be seen as part of the limited preventative measures at the disposal of families in later mediaeval and early modern Europe: don't go in, and you will avoid danger. But a transgression, an ignoring of the adult injunction takes place, and then the tale unfolds, with the most obvious message: be wary and seek an opportunity to escape.

In *Outside Over There* (1981), Maurice Sendak begins by showing a 'nice' outdoors, and returns to it at the end of the book: a place where Mama sits, with the dog, 'in the arbour'. When Ida and the baby get into trouble, however, even the sunflowers have a dreamlike quality: a hint of the triffid about them, perhaps. Nature breaks in, chaos reigns, as Ida reveals her coldness towards her sister, and in the other window, a storm is sinking a ship: Papa is in peril; family stability is threatened. Ida was supposed to look after her baby sister 'but never looked' and when the goblins – miniature gothic Grim Reapers – come in from outside, Ida makes 'a serious mistake' by climbing the wrong way out of the window. When she is Outside Over There, Ida is in a dream world which has less of the ordered iconography we have seen in the garden. She is now shown to be without a firm footing, 'whirling by' the goblins who are initiating her sister into their world as a changeling. Ida's magic music saves her sister, who is reborn and reconciled to Ida, and they return home – fairly rapidly, as if the land they were in was just around the corner. *Outside Over There* is about a mental and emotional landscape of sibling jealousy and childhood anxiety; the outdoors that takes up most of the book is the place where Ida's emotions have dislocated her from her family and her home.

A similar quest is the central dilemma in Nick Butterworth's *After the Storm* (1992). Percy's world – and that of his post-Beatrix Potter animal companions – is disturbed by a terrific storm. Percy has to cope with repairs in the park following a great storm, which has resulted in loss of habitat for ten or more animals. Percy brings them to a large oak tree, which is made into 'a fine new place to live'. The tree survives this makeover, but Percy ends the story by taking an acorn to plant where the original tree had been. Here, the environment is a lived in and accessible place, not without difficulties but essentially tameable. Percy lives with animals that can either be seen as extensions of the human into the natural world, or, in another light, as tamed members of the wild, managed by a benign humanity, to whom they are smilingly grateful.

Given the date and subject of Lauren Child's *Snow is My Favourite and My Best* (2006), the lack of 'green message' must be seen as an explicit choice. In Samantha Hill's retelling of a TV episode, based on the Charlie and Lola book, nature is seen as something to be explored. The bolder Charlie leads Lola through experiences of winter – bears swimming in Arctic oceans and penguins on Antarctic ice – which she appreciates, but realises that this wouldn't do for every day, and gleefully lets her model snowman melt. This third way of looking at the outdoors implies that nature is simply nature, a lesson that Lola, and the readers, will need to learn.

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## **Windows on the World: Picture Books as a Starting Point for Education for Sustainable Development**

*Sophie Mackay*

Sustainable development is concerned with inspiring people in all parts of the world to find solutions that improve their quality of life without storing up problems for the future, or impacting unfairly on other peoples' lives. In this interactive workshop participants looked at a selection of contemporary picture books which explore different aspects of sustainable development. Participants reflected on the range of (often contradictory) messages these texts convey about human impact on the environment and the role of children in improving the environment for a more sustainable future. The session ended with a summary of the ways in which the UK government is seeking to address sustainable development in schools through the Sustainable Schools strategy and the Eco-Schools initiative.

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## **More than Human: How Deep Is Ecology in Children's Fiction?**

*Melanie Newman*

Nature provides a superb backdrop for children's fiction: intriguing, dangerous, beautiful and often funny. Yet from a deep ecologist's perspective the natural world would take more than a background role, and humans would not play the lead. In this paper, I look at the challenge of expressing deep ecology in children's literature and at how we can bring nature to life without assigning human characters to animals, plants, rocks and elements.

Rachel Carson said that to 'help your child to wonder' is one of the most significant actions we can take in fostering a society that will care for the living world. In *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1997), David Abrams suggests that the written word may be partly responsible for an estrangement in the relationship between humans and their environment. Deep ecology is the study of our environment through experiencing the system from within, appreciating each component for its place in the whole.

Echoing the participatory approach that runs throughout the theory, I aim to explore our attitude to writing about nature and to speculate as to whether there is a more creative way of reconnecting stories with the 'more-than-human' world.

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## **‘Out of the Everywhere into Here’: Romanticism, Ecocriticism and Children’s Literature**

*William Gray, University of Chichester*

The complex relationship between children’s literature and Romanticism has been much discussed. My *Fantasy, Myth and the Measure of Truth: Tales of Pullman, Lewis, Tolkien, MacDonald and Hoffmann* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) makes use of M.H. Abrams’s classic *Natural Supernaturalism* (Norton, 1973) to construct a genealogy, tracing the mythopoeic tradition running from German romanticism through George MacDonald to J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and (arguably) Philip Pullman. Abrams’s approach was seen as politically suspect by later neo-Marxist critics of Romanticism influenced by ‘cultural materialism’; more recently, however, it has been recuperated by ecocritic Kate Rigby in her ground breaking *Topographies of the Sacred: The Poetics of Place in European Romanticism* (University of Virginia Press, 2004). The complex relationship between Romanticism and ecocriticism (see also, for example, the work of Jonathan Bate) mirrors in some respects that between Romanticism and children’s literature itself. This paper seeks to bring together the discussions of these two contested relationships in order to explore how they might mutually inform each other. It offers readings of märchenhaft (fairy-tale-like) texts such as Novalis’s *Hyacinth and Roseblossom* (1802), E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *The Golden Pot* (1814), Fouqué’s *Undine* (1811), George MacDonald’s *The Golden Key* (1867) and Tolkien’s *Smith of Wootton Major* (1967), with some concluding remarks about Pullman’s His Dark Materials trilogy (1995, 1997, 2000), teasing out the ecocritical or environmental implications in these Romantic fairy tales for children of all ages.

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## **Victorian Children’s Literature and the Natural World: Parables, Fairy Tales and the Construction of ‘Moral Ecology’**

*Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, University of Toulouse*

The popularisation of science has long been the province of women. An early example is Jane Marcet’s *Conversations on Chemistry, Intended more especially for the Female Sex* (1805), which is famous for having influenced Michael Faraday. In the Victorian period women still played a key role in this area, especially as the growing professionalisation of science pushed them to the margins, excluding them from universities or scientific societies, while evolutionary theory defined them as intellectually inferior. The natural world, in particular, attracted many women popularisers, notably Sarah Bowdich, Mary Roberts, Agnes Catlow, Jane Loudon, Phebe Lankester, Elizabeth Twining, and Elizabeth and Mary Kirby.

Many Victorian women were involved in mediating the natural world to young readers, teaching them to behave with Christian benevolence towards it. Earlier children’s literature had often been excessively didactic, but by the beginning of the nineteenth century the importance of entertainment came to be understood, and popularisers of science incorporated storytelling, though they still tended to mediate science through a religious lens. Inevitably, the increasing secularisation of science in the nineteenth century led later female popularisers to find themselves at odds with official science. Some of them (such as Anne Wright and Jane Loudon) attempted to reconcile the biblical religious truths with current scientific theories; while others, such as Mrs Gatty, went so far as denouncing contemporary scientific discourse.

I would argue that these women popularisers all regarded the natural world as an ecosystem in which organisms were interrelated and interdependent. In so doing, whether they remained faithful to natural theology or moved towards scientific naturalism and advocated Darwin’s theories, Victorian women popularisers of science continually stressed the importance of moral qualities. Thus these women conveyed a moral view of the environment that reached far beyond the science and religion conflict

that marked the nineteenth century, a period in which Darwinian theories redefined the natural world in more and more materialistic terms.

Through following the evolution from works by Margaret Gatty, famous for her *Parables from Nature* (1855–1871) and her *British Sea-Weeds* (1863) and editor of one of the most famous Victorian children’s magazine, *Aunt Judy’s Magazine*, to the later works of Arabella Buckley (*The Fairy-Land of Science* (1879), *Life and Her Children* (1880) and *Winners in Life’s Race* (1882)), this paper explores how this sub-genre of children’s literature shaped an ‘ecological consciousness’, metamorphosing natural theology into ‘moral ecology’, to use Barbara T. Gates’s terminology (*Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living World*, 1998: 61). In addition, I also show how the popularisation of natural history offered women a writing experience. As they devised new narrative strategies, moving away from dialogues, conversations or the epistolary form towards more complex storytelling devices, women popularisers used more and more sensational ways and means to explain the mysteries of nature. This ultimately leads me to compare their storytelling strategies with Victorian women writers whose tales for children prompted children to preserve the natural world, such as Margaret Gatty’s daughter, Juliana Horatia Ewing.

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## **Politicising Nature to Children from the *Fisher’s Cot*: Mary Shelley’s *Maurice***

*Malini Roy, University of Oxford*

The title of my paper refers to a little-known children’s book, *Maurice, or The Fisher’s Cot* (1820), by the early-nineteenth-century author Mary Shelley. Its narrative centres on the protagonist, an orphan boy, who lives amidst a community of socio-economically deprived fishermen on the sea coast of Devonshire. The maritime setting of the book thus links to today’s overarching theme of children and the natural environment. I focus on this text in order to interrogate some of the assumptions underlying emergent ecofriendly metanarratives that are being constructed and manifested through the children’s books currently published and awarded prizes, whose values are subtly endorsed through the growing body of academic literature on children’s relationships with ecology.

This ecofriendly climate in the literary field mirrors current global concerns: ambitious and exploitative modes of mastering and altering an objectified nature are being criticised in favour of collaborative and nurturing modes of engaging with the natural environment. Ecoconscious values, widely disseminated through the media, have gained political urgency, as well as an ethical currency with its own subliminal social tension as costly, ethically sourced products remain beyond the economic reach of many. Such tension, as I show through my reading of Shelley’s *Maurice*, abounds in the field of children’s literature scholarship as well, as the ecofriendly diktat of a particular, consumerism-satiated urban culture appears to offer the ethical and aesthetic standard to judge literary treatments of children and the natural environment always and everywhere. Thus, texts like Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* (1911) prompt ecofeminist readings praising their prescient concern for the environment. But texts like *Maurice*, or its modern descendants, stand in danger of critical neglect if they make no didactic point about the virtues of living in harmony with nature. *Maurice* features extensive representations of the child in a semi-rural, outdoor setting, strongly related to the natural environment. But Shelley does not represent nature chiefly as a pastoral healer, and instead invokes its cruelty in a seemingly primitive register as she stresses the precarious lives of the fishermen on the stormy sea coast.

The danger with the ecocritical reception of a text like *Maurice* is that, because we may not find messages that tune in to the current ecoconscious climate, we may end up missing the kinds of political radicalism and aesthetic richness it does have to offer. There are some episodes where Shelley appears simply to suggest that the child Maurice finds peace and happiness in outdoors activities such as stargazing and sailing on the

sea, evoking both Rousseau's ideal of the 'child of nature', and the male Romantic poets, including her own husband, all of whom have been credited with the historical birth of ecoconsciousness. However, remembering feminist critics' caution that much Romantic literature is male centred, I look at how Shelley also echoes the writings of her mother Mary Wollstonecraft, concerning child-rearing contexts where children need to be protected against, rather than being willingly exposed to, the harshness of nature. When Shelley wrote *Maurice*, she had recently lost two young children to the inclemency of the local climate, a fact that probably contributes to her cautious attitude towards nature in the text. Seeing *Maurice* through an ecofeminist lens would seriously misrepresent Shelley's feminist critique of her male contemporaries' ideal of the child of nature, as suspicion towards nature fuels her writing practice in the text. Moreover, Shelley's writing invokes the rhetorical power of epic conflicts between humans and nature, in the literary vein of *King Lear*, in order to convey a subtle message of egalitarian politics.

Maurice is ultimately reunited with his well-off parents and liberated from the poverty of the fishing community. But his individual, bourgeois rise to respectability is qualified as Shelley ends her narrative by stressing the continued sufferings of the fishermen's lives as they struggle to survive merciless natural disasters. Shelley's understated message about the need for general socio-economic reform builds on the lives and writings of her mother, her father (William Godwin) and her husband.

As the complex narrative of *Maurice* remains crackling with unresolved tension, the text reveals that it may be worth questioning a passive acceptance of the consistent ecofriendly ethos pervading current discussions of children's literature.

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## Lost in the Wilderness: Lapland as the Heart of Darkness in Finnish Children's Literature

*Toni Lahtinen, University of Tampere, Finland*

Zacharias Topelius (1818–1898) is one of the most recognised and loved Finnish storytellers for children. He is best known for his fairy tales in the eight-volume series Reading for Children (*Läsning för barn*, 1865–1898). Many of his works played a significant role in the national awakening in Finland from the 1850s onwards and since then they have been translated into more than 20 languages.

Inspired by Hans Christian Andersen, Topelius wrote educational stories which often reflect their author's views as one of the first Finnish environmentalists. Moreover, his representations of nature have become a staple of the Finnish identity so that his name is almost a synonym for the Finnish landscape.

However in Topelius's stories and poems about Lapland, the arctic wilderness represents the other, in contrast with the 'Topelian landscape', hostile Lapland, which is seen as pagan and appears to be opposed to the friendly (Christian) nature encountered in his other stories. This opposition is particularly evident in one of his best-known fairy tales 'Sammy and Mountain King'; ('Sampo Lappalainen', 1860), a story that has had a profound impact on children's – and adult's – literature in Finland.

American representations of wilderness have been analysed at length from the ecocritical angle, but representations of the Nordic wilderness as a magical, supernatural or even unnatural zone, differ from the tradition associated with Thoreau. At the same time, Topelius's story raises more general questions about children and their relationship to the natural world: what kind of fear does the metaphor of wilderness embody in children's literature?

Since 'Sammy and Mountain King', Finnish depictions of wandering in Lapland's wilderness have often symbolised a journey to the subconscious – in the manner of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) where Africa signifies a repressed aspect of the European subconscious. Besides post-colonial questions, this Finnish tradition also

raises ecocritical discussion about the kind of wild nature we are trying to tame in children's literature.

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## **Belonging to Wilderness in Australian Children's Literature**

*Katherine E. Russo*

'For a gubba in Australia there can be no belonging. Ours is the trauma of never having belonged.' With these words, Germaine Greer has recently returned to claim a space for the 'pain of unbelonging' of Australian settlers in the preface of her collection of essays *The Pain of Unbelonging: Alienation and Identity in Australasian Literature* (2007). 'Unbelonging hurts', and the psychic pain of those who do not belong is, according to Greer, the reason for the unremitting brutal treatment of the Australian land, which is a constant reminder of the colonisers' rootlessness.

Driven by the desire to make the country more like home, early settlers of Australia not only attempted to transform the physical appearance of the country through architecture and botanical enterprises, but also sought to neutralise the 'environment's power to alienate' through a literary re-orientation of the way they looked at it. Children's literature played a vital role in the settlers' attempt to build an attachment to the Australian land and environment. It is part of a wide range of forms of 'indigenisation', a term coined by Terry Goldie to suggest 'the impossible necessity of becoming indigenous' (1989).

The impossibility of becoming indigenous is played out in Australian children's literature by gothic representations of wilderness, by recurrent tales in which settler children are lost in the bush, and by tales in which Australian native animals and plants are anthropomorphised (Ethel Pedley's *Dot and the Kangaroo*, 1899; May Gibb's *Snugglepot and Snugglepip*, 1918; etc.).

On the other hand, there has always been, and continues to flourish, a great wealth of indigenous children's literature through which the elders hand down their knowledge and sacred attachment to the environment (Kath Walker's *Stradbroke Dreamtime*, 1972; Lionel Fogarty's *Booyooburra: A Story of the Wakka Murri*, 1993; Gracie Green and Joe Tramacchi's *Tjarani/Roughtail: The Dreaming of the Roughtail Lizard and Other Stories Told by the Kukatja* (1992); Jane Christophersen's *My Home in Kakadu*, 2005; Mundara Koorang's *The Little Platypus and The Fire Spirit*, 2005; Mary Duroux's *The Rain Flower*, 2005; etc.). However, indigenous children literature has been highly disregarded by the general public, for it forces readers to acknowledge the aforementioned impossibility of becoming indigenous.

Nevertheless, it is the contention of this paper that there has been an ecocritical turn in recent years in the work of many Australian presses, such as Allen and Unwin, and Lucas, and especially in indigenous press houses such as Magabala Books and IAD Press. Their work might resolve this permanent state of displacement through a bioregional approach which transforms and acknowledges the indigenous knowledge of the environment and at the same time forces non-indigenous peoples to acknowledge their interdependent relation to indigenous peoples, inherent in their cohabitation of the same land.

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## **Deep into Nature: Wonderful Underwater Worlds for Land Children**

*Stefania Tondo, Suor Orsola Benincasa University, Naples*

Water stories for children can contribute to the preservation of the sense of the living value of water and inspire them to love and save it. Water fantasies for children enforce the sense of a strong relationship between humans and their environment, between land



and water, representing a never-ending tidal movement, both from land into water and from water to land. They create paraxial worlds, dialogically speaking to each other, and fabulous crossover creatures, half-land and half-water, who mediate the dialogue.

Water is the place of cleanliness, rich sea-life, and redemption in Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* (1863). Water functions as a regenerative plot-resolution step in Alice's 'The Pool of Tears' (Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 1865), crowded with Darwinian wonderland creatures. Moreover, water worlds teach moral values to the land world, for it is the place of magic, myth, mystics and mystery, where water-sprites dwell. This is the case in Louisa May Alcott's 'Ripple, the Water-Spirit' (*Flower Fables*, 1855), of the sacred Buddhist tale 'The Princess and the Water-Sprite' (*The Jataka or Birth-Stories*, III century BC), of the Sicilian legend of *Colapesce* (1230), of Edith Nesbit's *Wet Magic* (1913), and of more recent stories for children such as O. Preussler's *Der kleine Wassermann* (English translation by Anthea Bell, *The Water-Sprite*, 2001) and A. Bouchard's *Acqua dolce* (2008).

Water life is also central in movies for children, examples including *The Water-Babies* (Disney, 1935), *Nemo* (Pixar, 2003), *Shark Tale* (Dream Works, 2004), and *Water-Horse: The Legend of the Deep* (Sony Pictures, 2007). In contemporary drinking-water advertisements (Sangemini, Ferrarelle, Lete) water is represented as a life-giving element and as an element which has life in its magic, living particles, singing and interacting with land life.

Water signifies birth, childhood and life. It guides the music of the flowing dance of the universe, from land into water and from water to land, enlivening Kingsley's 'minute philosophy' of getting 'the whole infinite miracle of nature' in its tiniest manifestations, 'if you have only eyes to see it', and reviving Einstein's urge to 'look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better'. With the wonderful underwater worlds for children in mind, this study looks deep into water, determining what these worlds created for land children tell and teach us about loving and cherishing nature.

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## Ecology and Shamanism in Selected Children's Fiction

*Peter Bramwell, The Open University and University of Sunderland*

In young-adult fiction, shamans and medicine people and their communities are idealised as walking lightly on the earth, taking only what they need, and wasting nothing, their respect for the earth being integral to an animistic cosmology. However, they are presented as impotent in the face of colonising forces that bring environmental exploitation and devastation.

Susan Price's Ghost World trilogy (1987, 1992, 1994), Celia Rees's *Witch Child* (2000) and *Sorceress* (2002), and Michelle Paver's *Chronicles of Ancient Darkness* (2004 onwards) uphold the integrity of shamanic cultures by attempting to see them in their own terms, and also thereby critique decontextualised 'weekend shamanism', sometimes quite overtly. As young-adult fiction, these texts cannot avoid imposing notions of personal development, subjectivity and agency onto indigenous shamanism, but they interrogate the apprenticeship paradigm of resistance–submission–liberation, with its implied paradox that only through conformity can individualism be achieved. This paper gives a taste of my forthcoming book *Pagan Themes in Modern Children's Fiction: Green Man, Shamanism, Earth Mysteries* (forthcoming) (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), from which it is extracted and adapted.

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## **The Child in the World: Challenges to Traditional Literary Landscapes in the Young Adult Fiction of Meg Rosoff**

*Susan Anderson, Trinity and All Saints College Leeds*

This paper takes an ecocritical perspective on the writing of Meg Rosoff, focusing on the way in which two of her young-adult novels participate in and challenge traditional representations of the relationship between young people and the environment.

In *How I Live Now* (2004), the familiar trope of a self-sufficient group of children surviving without adult oversight and protection is tested within a dystopian near-future. The protagonist's own understanding of the natural world is radically altered by her experience of having to fend for herself, presented within an ostensibly realistic setting.

The tradition of self-sufficient children in adventure fiction is further challenged in *What I Was* (2007). The character of Finn seems to be an adept, a child who is integrated into the natural environment and able to survive alone 'in the wild'. The narrator's view of Finn as an autonomous, parentless, free entity is one of several impressions which are revealed as mistaken in the novel's denouement.

In both novels, the fantasy of freedom usually presented by adventure stories is critiqued through its juxtaposition with the bathetic realism of the narrator's tone. The cynical voice of the teenaged narrator of *How I Live Now* and the disillusioned voice presented by *What I Was* both ironise the clichéd presentation of the child's response to nature.

The sardonic tone of both narrators is actually what enables such clichés to be included. In some respects, this is a narrative sleight of hand that enables Rosoff to invoke these stereotypical representations of nature without having to commit to them. But there is a more substantial challenge to the tradition of early to mid-twentieth-century adventure fiction in these texts. Rosoff paradoxically demystifies the relationship between child and landscape by asserting the ultimate unknowability of the environment and its indifference to the child.

Rosoff's child characters do not learn mastery over nature in these stories. A retreat into the wild does not equip them with what they need to survive life in the adult world of culture and civilisation. In fact, this binary is rejected by the two novels, which present nature as one element of an unsympathetic and unknowable external world.

In earlier fiction, strategies of containment, rationalisation and control, such as the ownership of animals and the mapping of the landscape, are presented as skills which can deliver empowerment. In these two novels, they are exposed as illusory. Rather than mastering their surroundings, Rosoff's characters are shown as subject to them.

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## **Images of the Child Archetype and of Nature as the 'Great Mother' in the Work of Selma Lagerlöf, BB and Satoru Sato**

*Susan Hancock, University of Roehampton*

Drawing upon Jungian theory to explore archetypal content made manifest in children's literature texts, it is striking to see the extent to which images of the child motif and the mother archetype are, metaphorically, intertwined with images of nature and the natural world. In this paper I focus on three writers, from different parts of the globe (Sweden, Great Britain and Japan), whose work spans the troubled twentieth century. By exploring from a Jungian perspective the fiction for children of Selma Lagerlöf, BB (D.J. Watkins-Pitchford) and Satoru Sato, I uncover ways in which these writers envision childhood, nature and futurity, and the extent to which their writing is inextricably linked to the periods in which they lived.

At the beginning of the century, Lagerlöf, in her two-part children's story *Nils Holgerssons Underbara Resa Genom Sverige* (1906–1907) [*The Wonderful Adventures*

of Nils, and *Further Wonderful Adventures of Nils*, trans. Velma Swanston Howard], speaks, in prose replete with images of the child motif and wise-mother figure, to a continuity of mutual support between nature and humankind stretching far beyond an individual life span. By the end of the Second World War, however, the English writer BB is clearly in despair at the destruction of the environment. His books *The Little Grey Men* (1942) and *The Little Grey Men Go Down the Bright Stream* (1948) can be read in ecocritical terms as a tirade against anthropocentric forces that are seen as destructive to the land and to the natural creatures that inhabit it. Following the cessation of hostilities, Japanese writer Satoru Sato creates a child survivor in *Daremo shiranai chiisa na kuni* (1959) [*A Little Country No One Knows*, trans. R. McCreery], one who ultimately finds meaning and solace in nature. ‘Reborn’ from a regenerative womb-like space, surrounded by trees, the suggestive lushness of red camellias and living waters, Sato’s first person narrator is depicted renewing and defending his relationship with his heritage.

Looking back over these texts and the times they span, I shall show that prior to the cataclysmic events of the early and mid-twentieth century, in Lagerlöf’s text, there is a suggested harmony between female and male, young and old, nature and humankind as these are evidenced in outer lives and images of inner life. In contrast, by the end of the Second World War, although the surface text recreates a ‘relatedness’ with a patriarchal god-figure, BB’s subtext speaks to the perceived aridity of inner and outer worlds and perhaps a yearning for an underlying nurturing ‘great mother’. In Sato’s subtext, there seems to be a recurrent sense of the need for rebirth, with again nature as the ‘great maternal’ of past, present and future.

In my conclusion I suggest that images of the ‘great mother’, arising in the unconscious and associated with nature, are always present as an undercurrent in these texts. However, while Lagerlöf can see continuity in generations of wise elder figures, ‘BB’ has lost hope and sees ‘her’ ravaged by mankind – vividly suggested in his image of a living stream, imprisoned underground to suit the relentless advance of technology. Finally, speaking to the possibility of the eventual re-emergence of a viable relationship with nature, Sato’s words are a poignant plea to humanity to re-establish a sense of being a child of the natural world and to protect, love and nurture it despite the inexorable demands of human ‘progress’.

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## **Natural Settings in Thai Children’s Literature: Water, Home and Family in Jane Vejjajiva’s *The Happiness of Kati***

*Preeyaporn Charoenbutra, Ubon Ratchathani University, Thailand*

Thai lullabies prove to modern readers that there is beauty in lives surrounded by peaceful nature. Natural setting is a factor that has long been included in Thai children’s texts, as if its role is to nurture young people as well as to inculcate them in the rich cultural values of extended family structure in an agrarian culture such as Thailand. From lullabies to folk tales and oral stories to fiction, the portrayal of ideal childhood in Thai children’s literature is commonly set in a context of fertile nature and traditional values (Wittayakorn Chiangkoon’s *Encyclopedia: 100 Books Young Thais Should Read*, 2001), with the effect of inspiring even a non-Thai writer (Minfong Ho’s *Hush! A Thai Lullaby*, 1996). Contemporary Thai novelists also portray lives from various angles and sometimes reflect reality such as family problems in urban society, an instance being the 2006 South East Asian Write Award winner, *The Happiness of Kati* by Jane Vejjajiva.

Going through the ordeal of losing her mother, Kati, a nine-year-old girl, grows through love and pain during her journey from one home to another. In my study I examine the implied meanings of Kati’s three homes: on the water; by the sea; and in the city. The journey itself reflects Kati’s personal development as well as relevant Buddhist teachings. Nature is shown to have a nurturing role, compensating Kati for the loss of her mother, as the natural setting links with Kati’s learning how to cope with her painful memory. Nature’s role also parallels the extended family structure in which elderly

people are central in providing love and care for the young. Natural surroundings are represented in line with the traditional wisdom of Thai culture, representing strong cultural values characteristic of Thai childhood. The message of Thai children's literature is that to live happily, young people should embrace Thai cultural values which help build up strong family ties. Young people growing up in rural Thailand receive a great deal of benefit from nature, especially the healing power of water as represented in the novel. Kati could have been an abandoned child after the loss of her mother if she had not had a 'home' to heal her mind and enable her to move on in her life.

Thai culture has been rooted in extended family structure, so the child is not alone in the world but is within a community. Nature serves a nurturing function in *The Happiness of Kati* since it provides Kati with the feeling of home. The home by the sea might seem to represent emptiness and loneliness, since the mother no longer lives there, but Kati is able to transcend the vastness by embracing the beauty of nature into a deeper understanding of life. Kati has already found her place: home by the water in a rural area with her grandparents and other folk. After a journey towards her memory of her mother, Kati finally finds a safe place in a surrogate family in which nature nurtures and empowers all lives.

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## **Running Wild and Ridden: Native Ponies and their Wild Habitats in the Work of Allen W. Seaby (1867–1953)**

*Jenny Kendrick*

Allen W. Seaby, Professor of Fine Art at Reading University from 1920 to 1933 (where he taught the young Kathleen Hale), and a well-known ornithological illustrator, also wrote and illustrated a series of children's books in which ponies appear as the heroes of their own stories, rather than as the adjuncts to the girl rider so typical of the later style of formulaic pony fiction established by Joanna Cannan's *A Pony for Jean* (1936). Between 1923 and 1949, Seaby produced six fiction titles and two information books which portrayed British native ponies in their wild settings, such as Dartmoor and Exmoor, the New Forest, Wales and the Shetland Islands, starting with *Skewbald, the New Forest Pony* (1923). In addition, Seaby produced a series on art history for students, practical technique books relating to the woodcut (for which he is probably best known in the art world) and a number of children's books based on historical subjects. Seaby also illustrated the work of other writers; without necessarily realising it, many of us may have been acquainted with Seaby's illustrations as children through his watercolours for two Ladybird books on British birds by Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald (published in 1953 and 1954).

In this paper, I introduce Allen W. Seaby's pony stories, set them against the background of the interwar British pony story, and explore the ways in which Seaby engages with the natural world. In 'Pony Stories' in the *Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English*, Alison Haymonds explains that in the 1920s there was 'a growing interest in native pony breeds' and argues that pony 'devotee' Seaby's nature books 'paved the way for scores of minor Black Beautys' (2001: 573–74).

Whilst principally concerned to mediate the life stories of native ponies to child readers, Seaby brings no single perspective to environmental writing. Seaby is perhaps primarily an observer of the natural world in terms of its flora and fauna, and privileges the naturalist above the 'sportsman or collector', implying that he or she is more observant, knowledgeable and insightful, being able to deduce, for example, the species and nest site from the location of a feather (*Skewbald*, p.45). Seaby's interest in the science of nature is also evident in frequent forays into subjects such as breed characteristics and suitability to habitat, as, for example, in *British Ponies: Running Wild and Ridden* where he asserts that attempts to improve the bloodlines of native breeds tend to fail. Such attempts, Seaby argues, are unsuccessful because they fail to understand the close relationship between the pony and his environment, and that the pony's 'qualities of

hardiness, endurance, and strength, his physical being, including his height, are closely bound up with the conditions under which he lives' (1936: 14).

Throughout Seaby's pony fiction, the perspective of another observer of nature, the artist, is continually present, not only in terms of the painterly eye noting landscape, colour, light and line, but also occasionally in the plots themselves, as, for example, in *Sons of Skewbald*, in which Sally, a sixteen-year-old New Forest girl, can 'cook, do housework, garden, saddle and ride a pony' as well as 'draw, paint and carve and use what carpenter's tools she needed' in order to produce wooden toys. Carving and painting toys was also a hobby of Seaby's, according to his grandson Robert Gillmor, who owns a set of wooden ponies made by Seaby and used as the basis of an illustration for *Sons of Skewbald* (1937: 26).

Seaby sets these viewpoints of naturalist, scientist and artist against the ways in which the human inhabitants gain their livelihoods from Britain's wilder landscapes and how they interact with the ponies. Seaby's consciousness of the anthropological reflects both interwar concerns with the conservation of Britain's wild landscapes and way of life, and with the loss of rural and equine skills, a key feature of equine fiction in the aftermath of the Great War and in the face of increasing mechanisation in transport and agriculture. Like many other pony-story authors in the interwar period, Seaby grew up in the late Victorian period, and a note of nostalgia for the horse-drawn days of his youth is evident, as well as a concern about the impact of motor traffic as 'motors get more and more dangerous to the ponies' (*Sons of Skewbald*, p.55). However, whilst most contemporary pony-story writers foreground the breaking and bringing on of native ponies as suitable children's mounts, Seaby remains a naturalist at heart, privileging 'the pony on his native heath, untrammelled and free to go where he pleases' above human necessity (*British Ponies*, p.ix-x).

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## **Is our Future Set in Stone? A Discussion of Michelle Paver's *Chronicles of Ancient Darkness***

*Jean Webb, University of Worcester*

Michelle Paver's *Chronicles of Ancient Darkness*, which currently comprises five of the six projected books: *Wolf Brother* (2005), *Spirit Walker* (2006), *Soul Eater* (2006), *Outcast* (2007) and *Oath Breaker* (2008), are set in the Stone Age. The location is an indeterminate place somewhere in northern Europe. The period is one when people lived very closely with their environment. Paver's social structure is organised into different clans associated with wild life and the landscape, for example the Wolf Clan. Torak is the young hero who was raised by wolves and has a destiny of which he becomes increasingly aware throughout the series. The series centres on the organisation of society into clans, the close physical and mystical relationship with nature and the environment, and the central role that the younger generation have in the mystical destiny of their peoples.

As Western culture becomes increasingly urbanised, the relationship of the human subject with nature and the environment is ever more that of the civilised observer, in the context for example of zoos and nature reserves. There is also the growing threat to the natural world emanating from climate change and the destruction, for instance, of forests for commercial development. Paver's *Chronicles of Ancient Darkness* recount a closely researched history of life in the Stone Age, combined with a fictional social world.

This paper considers the construction of Paver's world and the implications it has for consideration by the reader concerning the environmental and social problems currently facing Western culture. Some reference is also made to Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Books* which, during a period of British imperialism, presented a different construction of the social world of Mowgli and his journey of self-discovery, in order to produce a 'moral

guide book' for the inheritors of the Empire. Paver's protagonists are also on journeys of self-discovery; their task is to save their world.

By removing the reader from contemporary 'normality' into a prehistoric period, Paver can obliquely critique the contemporary situation in Western culture. For example, considerations of racism and multiculturalism and of environmental awareness are embedded in the series. The contemporary scientifically driven world, a world in which the sense of mystery is removed by technology, is problematised. In today's scientific world the expectation is that the child subject 'ought to be able to know and understand'. This differs from Torak's world where there is a respect for mysticism and spirituality. Perhaps the Stone Age, as depicted by Paver, has a good deal to teach contemporary readers about respect for the environment and a positive relationship with nature, in the hope that there will be a fecund, healthy and vibrant world to be enjoyed by children 10,000 years into the future.

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## **Telling Secrets in the City: Narrative Possibility and the Urban Environment**

*Zetta Elliott, Mount Holyoke College*

This paper is a consideration of the power of secrets, the negotiation of memory, and the ways in which writers imagine children in the urban environment. I am not a scholar of children's literature, but an 'emerging author' and an 'eternal child' with a passion for intriguing stories and beautifully rendered illustrations. I draw primarily upon my own experiences growing up in Canada in the 1970s and the ten years I spent teaching children in New York City. I focus first on the picture books of Ezra Jack Keats, which captured my imagination as a child and informed the development of my own urban aesthetic. I then briefly consider the usefulness of Frances Hodgson Burnett's novel *The Secret Garden* (1911) in creating a model for discovery within, and reclamation of, the urban environment. To conclude, I discuss the narrative possibilities I hoped to engender in my own picture book, *Bird* (forthcoming).

As a Canadian child growing up in a semi-rural community, I had an easy relationship with nature; our backyard was filled with fruit trees, and my father maintained a sprawling vegetable garden in which my siblings and I were free to dig. It was not uncommon (yet still quite thrilling) to see wild animals in the wide, open fields, the nearby parks and the stands of trees not yet cleared for residential development. During my formative years, the natural world was a place of bounty, beauty and safety.

When I became an adult and moved to Brooklyn, New York, I was amazed at my friends' reactions to urban wildlife: pigeons and squirrels were shooed away as disease-carrying pests, and even beds of ivy were considered suspect since beneath them might lurk much-despised rats. The children I taught went to parks only on school field trips and so had a different (and, it could be argued, limited) appreciation of the natural world. There is much in the urban environment that has been deemed 'unnatural', and certainly unhealthy, to child development, yet despite the degradation of the physical environment, the spirit of urban children remains vibrant, resilient and irrepressible.

In my writing, I attempt to merge my love of nature (and gardens, in particular) with my obligation to represent artistically, and also to educate and advocate for, urban children. Antiguan-born author Jamaica Kincaid argues that gardening is always 'an exercise of power'. If changing the landscape is a question of power, then I want city kids to know that that power is within their reach. For me, it is significant that the children in my stories remain within the city rather than being whisked away to an alternate location; as a black, feminist writer it is important to me that children believe *their* community has intrinsic value and equal potential for magic, mystery and healing. I think city kids should know that they, too, can have fantastic adventures without having to escape into a book that denies their existence, or that figures the city only as the site from which 'good people' try to escape. Although I appreciate the efforts of groups such as the

Fresh Air Fund, which temporarily relocate urban children to the countryside, and though I love and still encourage children to read novels like *The Secret Garden*, I feel compelled to write stories that explore, expand and centre the varied realities of urban children.

For me, the greatest challenge in developing an urban aesthetic is, I think, to represent the experiences of city kids without echoing and thereby reinforcing philanthropic or sociological narratives that figure urban children as pitiful, powerless and/or pathological. Yet narrative possibilities are endless and cannot be contained; a secret told in a story is a secret no more. And so I am cautious, and I try to be careful as I write about the magic – and the misery – of urban children's realities.

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## Nature Children and Oral Storytelling

*Ragnhild A. Mørch*

Oral storytelling can be the ideal connection between children and the natural environment, strengthening their relationship to ecology and contributing to their ecoawareness. The simple telling of traditional stories, such as the Nordic myth 'Mimir's Well', can help children appreciate ecology in past, present and future situations. A further development is to use stories as part of a project, and there are examples from various parts of Europe that show how effective this can be.

At Gatton Park, a large country estate in Surrey, Louise Miller, the education officer of the educational trust, runs projects for local schools. On one of these, 'Bags of Ideas', based on a walk through the surrounding woodlands and grasslands, past the ponds and lake, she told them stories in specific locations. During their walk through the grounds, the children also collected small objects which they used later in the day to create both artefacts and their own stories. The immediate feedback clearly indicated that the project as such was a great success – the children were engaged throughout and loved it. I also met some of the children again over a year after they had taken part and I was amazed to learn how many details of the stories and the activities they remembered. Projects like this are a step in the right direction. (See [www.visitgatton.org.uk](http://www.visitgatton.org.uk).)

In Germany, 'Speechless', a long-term storytelling project at a primary school in Berlin shows the effect of storytelling on children's imagination and their perception of the world. Children from Years 1 and 2 experienced oral storytelling once or twice a week from three visiting storytellers. The school lies in one of the poorest areas of Berlin and 90% of the children who took part in the project were non-native German speakers with backgrounds from a wide variety of countries. As many were used to speaking their mother tongue at home, their understanding of German was poor when they began school. Not only did their language ability increase considerably, but their imaginations were enhanced by the stories, which gave them a much broader knowledge of an environment beyond the limits of the city streets.

An annual project in Norway begins at a lake which is Oslo's main source of drinking water, and children walk with two Norwegian storytellers by the side of the river till it reaches the fjord, listening to stories about the history of the area, both industrial and rural. Through hearing about the people concerned, the children develop a sense of caring for the environment and not polluting the water. (See [www.snirkelsnakk.no](http://www.snirkelsnakk.no).)

There is no conflict between oral storytelling and book culture. In fact, the children involved in these projects were more likely to want to read stories as a result of hearing them. We need to inspire children and support their curiosity so that they themselves have the urge to act, to be engaged and to *care*. Oral storytelling is an extraordinarily effective means to make this happen.

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# Call of the Wild: Environmental Perspectives on Disney Animation

*David Whitley, University of Cambridge*

Many of Disney's most popular animated features – *Bambi*, *The Jungle Book*, *Pocahontas*, *The Lion King* and so on – are set within the natural world. The plots of these films also rehearse fundamental themes of human connectedness to nature. So a number of questions arise as to the effect of such narratives, which are often viewed over and over again, on children's sense of their own connectedness to nature. Such films could, on the one hand, create a kind of substratum of attitudes towards the environment, an imaginative playground for exploring feelings about the natural world in fantasy forms. Alternatively, many academic critics have been highly critical of what they see as a sanitised and gaudily alluring image of nature in many of the most popular Disney feature animations. Yet these narratives do connect with children and engage their feelings in fundamental ways, and the emotional response that is elicited may not be as shallow and mendacious as these critiques would suggest. In this conference I examine whether *Bambi* (1942) and *Finding Nemo* (2003) have qualities that engage with environmental issues at more than a superficial level.

Both these films go to extraordinary lengths to imbue the natural environments depicted with a strong sense of realistic detail. Not only is this heightened realism pleasing to the eye, but also it creates a more distinctive, richer sense of the natural world than is normally available in the animated medium. Indeed, the sensuous variety of forms present in *Bambi*'s forest and *Finding Nemo*'s ocean worlds has the potential to make audiences engage emotionally with these respective environments. This is particularly true in *Bambi*, where the film narrative culminates in a forest fire that threatens to engulf all the living forms that have been evoked in such attentive detail earlier. But in *Finding Nemo* too, the strange beauty of the undersea world (whose refracted light, colour and space were developed with such accuracy that the animators had to pull back a little to allow fantasy elements more play) delights and even creates a sense of awe in viewers. The way the movement of animals is depicted is important here too. Although the creatures in both films are heavily anthropomorphised, the care that has been taken to develop realistic and distinctive forms and movements means that a strong element of the animal nature of the protagonists is also retained. Thus the creatures are not simply ciphers for human behaviour. The realism of these films thus functions in complex ways, shaping audiences' emotional engagement.

The plots of both films also direct this emotional engagement towards issues that connect with the ethos of conservation. *Bambi*, for instance, depicts the life cycle of a deer within a distinctively North American forest environment – showing its birth, first faltering attempts at walking, survival of the harsh exigencies of winter, the poignant death of its mother and eventually its successful reproduction – all framed within the dramatic context of threat caused by human incursion into the forest region. Nature's idyllic innocence and beauty are made to appear supremely vulnerable to human invasion, especially as intensified in hunting and the carelessness which gives rise to the fire, which has the effect of suggesting the possibility of environmental catastrophe.

This threat of potentially destructive human interaction with natural environments is also present within *Finding Nemo*, from the capture of the eponymous clownfish, through an episode involving a marine wreck surrounded by mines, to an escape via a sewage system, highlighting the pollution caused by modern urban environments. Finally, an image of intensive, industrial-scale fishing encourages viewers to align themselves emotionally with the fishes' desperate plight. Clearly the film is rich in themes that have potency as environmental issues.

*Finding Nemo* registers these themes in more fluid, multidirectional ways than does *Bambi*, so that it is not always clear what stance the viewer is being invited to take up on the underlying environmental issues. Nevertheless it has the potential to engage young hearts and minds with such issues. The makers of *Finding Nemo* were strongly



influenced by *Bambi* in terms of developing a visual style with a special, almost poetic, quality of feeling for the environment depicted. This suggests that the potential of animated film making to heighten consciousness of environmental issues has not yet been fully explored or realised.

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## REVIEWS

### Books about Children's Literature

#### *Children's Literature: A Reader's History from Aesop to Harry Potter*

Seth Lerer, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, cloth 978 0 226 47300 0, £17.50, 2008, 396pp.



My first reaction on seeing an advertisement for this book was to query whether yet another history of children's literature was needed. Seth Lerer's answer to this is to claim that 'No single volume has attempted the tasks I have set myself' (p.12). He regards earlier works as being limited in their focus, some of them concentrating only on a single period or on English-language texts, while others have the function of popularising or celebrating. Lerer's different perspective in this volume results to some extent from his academic background, combining the specialisms of philology and medieval literature – and, quite clearly, from internal evidence, an extensive knowledge of the Greek and Latin classics.

Consequently it is not until the fourth or fifth chapter that Lerer reaches the authors who serve as the starting point for most of the existing histories, and even then the reader will search the index in vain for such stalwarts of the children's literature canon as Thomas Day's *Sandford and Merton* (1853) or Mary Martha Sherwood's *The History of the Fairchild Family* (1818, 1842 and 1847). Nor, with the exception of nonsense, is much attention given to children's poetry more recent than that of John Bunyan and Isaac Watts.

I should make clear that I am not censuring this book for these and many other omissions, but rather indicating that the 'reader' whose 'history' this is – presumably Seth Lerer himself – makes a very individual selection which is all the more interesting to those familiar with the standard texts. In the light of his comment on the limited focus of many of the existing histories in confining themselves to English-language texts, it is however worth remarking that after the early material on Greek and Latin, there is not in fact much here about literature that is not first-language English, though Comenius, Carlo Collodi and 'Strewelpeter' do make brief appearances.

These carpings aside, there is much of interest in this book. I shall highlight a few that particularly interested me, but all readers will have their own paths through this book and will be struck by Lerer's frequently original 'take' on books they think they know well. Some well-known fables, for instance, may not always have been read as advocating the morals attributed to them by subsequent readers: many of them are 'tales of power and control ... be content with who you are; do not aspire to rise above your station; respect those above you; keep things in the order of nature' (p.33), lessons perhaps unexpected from Aesop, 'a slave, and an ugly one at that' (ibid.). Lerer claims too that fables remain a defining form of children's literature, teaching 'ideas of authorship, notions of audience, ideals of verbal action – in short, literature itself' (p.35).

Another area on which Lerer throws unexpected light is the link he detects between the medieval schoolroom and the drama of that period. He observes that the mid-fifteenth-century play *Mankind*, 'long thought of as a moral drama played by itinerant actors ... more recently has been examined as a document of youthful mockery and fun ... the play is full of jejune wit ... and throughout, scenes of reading and writing mock the pedagogic practices of the day' (p.67). This is an insight which not only extends the notion of children's literature but also enriches my appreciation of a play that I myself often taught as part of a medieval literature course.

Other sections I personally found of interest include an extended discussion of Sarah Fielding's influential *The Governess* (1749) in the light not only of Locke's theories about education but also of forgotten texts such as Francis Coventry's *Adventures of a Lap-Dog* (1751) or Thomas Bridges *The Adventures of a Bank-Note* (1770), which Lerer suggests 'illustrate how novels are really stories of the child ... how the adventurer is but a child departing home', how Gulliver, Crusoe and even David Copperfield are little

different from the 'little banknote' setting out from home (p.123). Into the same exploration paradigm Lerer later draws, among others, Maurice Sendak's Max in *The Wild Things* (1992).

It is perhaps his ability to think outside periodisation that can be most stimulating (if occasionally a little perverse). Another instance is the number of narratives in which Lerer detects the influence of Charles Darwin.

Not only Kingsley, Kipling and Wells, but surely Lewis Carroll, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Jules Verne, and countless other[s] ... But to my mind, no twentieth-century author, whether for children or adults, is more profoundly Darwinian in inheritance and idiom than Dr Seuss. (p.184)

Lerer goes on to justify this claim on the basis of the extravagance of Seuss's creations of extraordinary zoology.

As a philologist, Lerer brings his linguistic knowledge into his study of fairy tales, demonstrating how central this genre has been to scholars of language and its history, such as the Brothers Grimm, Tolkien and Lewis. He shows how the nineteenth-century interest in etymology led its practitioners into a study of folklore, and, in turn, an anthropological perspective on the way the family is seen in so many fairy tales.

Throughout, this is a history of 'reception' rather than authorship, and, to that end, Lerer includes a brief survey of book history as his epilogue, focusing mostly on picture books. I would see *Children's Literature: A Reader's History* as an invaluable supplement to, rather than a replacement of, the many other, more traditional, histories. To answer my original query, yes, the book probably was needed, but maybe 'history' is the wrong word for this scholarly but very individual work, which unlike the systematic treatment of a history, works by highlighting texts significant to the author himself. He ends on a personal note, describing the evolution of his own son's reading, from Margaret Wise Brown's *Goodnight Moon* (1947) to Richard Dawkins, and recounting the boy's accusation, 'Dad, you read too much'. There is certainly evidence in this book of the extraordinary width of Lerer's reading and it is certain that readers, however familiar they may be with children's literature, will find both new perspectives on familiar texts and enticing references to books they have not yet read.

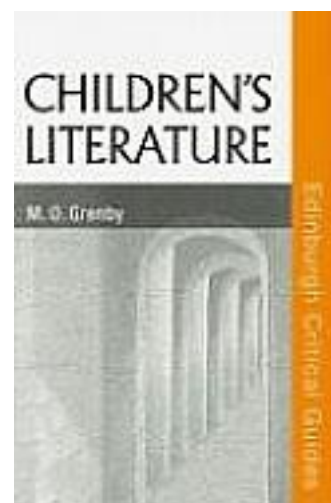
### ***Children's Literature***

Matthew Grenby, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pb. 978 0 7486 2274 0, £15.99, 2008, 224pp.

Is it the zeal of publishers to make sure that potential purchasers know exactly what they are buying that causes so many books to be entitled, in full or in part, 'Children's Literature'? Peter Hunt once remarked that nearly all his book titles started in this way, though they at least, unlike this one, generally have subtitles which single them out from each other! Surely it would be good for sales to indicate in some way the distinctive features of yet another book on the subject. And Matthew Grenby's book does indeed have specific qualities which should recommend it to readers, especially students of the subject, at all levels.

Grenby explains his rationale in his Introduction – he does not intend to provide detailed information on books and authors except insofar as they fit into a wider pattern. Rather than following a chronological structure overall, he traces in separate chapters the development of the various genres which make up the canon of children's literature. Even within his scrutiny of a genre, he is not afraid to depart from the order in which the texts were written in order to highlight the connections between works of very different periods.

The approach taken by this book may conveniently be illustrated from its opening chapter which is on that most traditional of genres, the fable. Hardly surprisingly, Grenby starts with Aesop, providing quotations not only from early versions such as that of Sir Roger L. Estrange (1692) but also from adaptations by Walter Crane, Vivian French and Michael Morpurgo. He then goes on to indicate the debt to the fable tradition owed by authors such as Anna Sewell, Sarah Trimmer, Ted Hughes, Roald Dahl, Robert



O'Brien, James Thurber and Rudyard Kipling (in an achronological order well justified by his argument). He also provides information on far less familiar writers, such as Dubose Heyward, a white Southerner whose *The Country Bunny* (1939) is a fable with strong messages about race, poverty and gender. This vast range leads Grenby to the conclusion that 'What is striking about the fable is both how little the form has changed over the many century of its existence, but how easily it has been adapted to suit the attitudes, anxieties and priorities of different periods' (p.28). As do all the chapters, this one concludes with a useful Summary of Key Points, before its extensive notes.

Other chapters deal in a similar manner with poetry, moral tales, school stories, family stories, fantasy and adventure stories, all with interesting and sometimes unexpected links between texts of different periods, for instance between Laura Ingalls Wilder, Stephenson's *Kidnapped* and Kipling's *Kim* as frontier novels facing questions exhibiting a tension between cultures (pp.191–92).

In his Conclusion, Grenby suggests that children's literature studies 'stands at a fork in the road', between integration into wider literary studies or a preservation of its separateness. He concludes that children's literature criticism should blur its boundaries rather than defining and policing them, but that whichever way it goes, it is likely to be in directions that are 'entirely unpredictable'.

The utility of this book to students is enhanced by the inclusion of an annotated chronological table at the beginning and a glossary and guide to further reading at the end. But its wider interest to those already well versed in children's literature should be apparent from the small amount of detail that I have had space to include about it.

***The Fantasy of Family: Nineteenth-Century Children's Literature and the Myth of the Domestic Ideal***

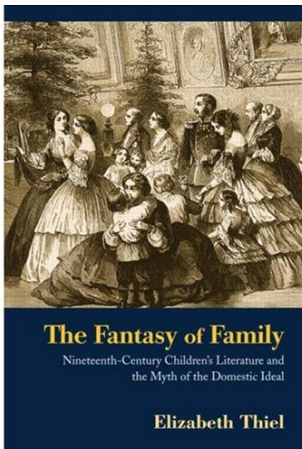
Elizabeth Thiel, Abingdon: Routledge, pb. 978 0 415 98035 7, £60.00, 2008, 199pp.

This book starts with a well-justified assertion that we are all 'late Victorians', our nostalgia for a largely imagined past being nurtured by astute twenty-first-century commercial interests, and leading to a situation in which politicians and society at large crave for the largely mythical virtues of the 'traditional' family. Thiel reveals how, even in the nineteenth century, this ideology was 'fundamentally problematic'; then as now, the 'transnormative' family, one in which there were not two parents and their biological offspring, featured in both literature and life. As well as a good many families in which step-parents took over the position vacated by a deceased father or mother, there were many instances of other relatives performing the nurturing role. This situation might not always arise only because of premature death – for instance, many parents left their children behind when they went off for a post in the Empire.

Having established that the domestic idyll was not always to be found in real life, Thiel goes on to consider a wide range of literature, much of which is little known. She begins with 'street-arab' tales, showing how Hesba Stretton and 'Brenda' (Georgina Castle Smith) portray children whose parents are still alive but have abdicated the parental role. These middle-class authors shared the perception that 'poor parents care little for their children', who consequently need to be rescued and secured in the middle-class sanctuary provided by the welfare organisations which will form them into moral and religious members of society, and train them for a suitable occupation.

An interesting close analysis of Lucy Clifford's frightening tale 'The New Mother' serves to establish how fragile the domestic idyll could be. The departure of the kind mother and the advent, when the children misbehave, of her harsh replacement, implies that the 'angel in the house' paradigm depends on the children behaving in an ideal manner. Thiel suggests that despite the complexity of this story, it certainly 'explores the loss of a mother and her replacement by an unwelcome outsider' (p.84) – a situation clearly related to the vexed question of the stepmother, a frequent figure in Victorian fiction. Analysis of other texts leads Thiel to the conclusion that however hard the stepmother tries, she can never be seen as more than a substitute image for the lost ideal.

Discussion of several stories in which the substitute carers are aunts or uncles reveals the contrast between the spinster aunt, seldom portrayed favourably and often seen as



‘surplus to requirements’, and the bachelor uncle. He is not only popular with the children because of his boyishness, but also, ironically, frequently manifests traditionally female attributes that the spinster lacks.

The female author herself, as represented by Mary Louisa Molesworth, ‘Brenda’, Charlotte Yonge and Lucy Clifford, is the theme of the final chapter, and Thiel suggests that such writers were seldom simple conduits of ideology. Although they may have paid lip service to the concept of the ideal woman, in fact their work reveals the ambiguities and instabilities latent within this construct. To that extent they may have pointed, whether deliberately or involuntarily, to its lack of substance.

Finally Thiel looks briefly at the effect of the untenable nineteenth-century family ideal, and shows how, despite always having lacked foundation, in reality it still survives within both children’s literature and general consciousness. Given that in today’s society there is an even greater range and larger number of transnormative families, this myth still has the potential to generate a sense of unease with the quality of contemporary family life.

My only criticism of this articulate, readable and scholarly text is of its title. Whereas the subtitle makes clear that it is the *myth* of the domestic ideal that is being questioned, I wonder whether the words ‘The fantasy of family’ could be misleading. With the possible exception of Clifford’s short story, the literature discussed throughout belongs to the genre of realism rather than fantasy, and while it would indeed be interesting to explore the way in which the ‘domestic ideal’ pervades Victorian fantasy, that would demand another volume. Yet another also would appear to be needed in order to explore the legacy of this myth in twentieth-century domestic fiction. Both such tasks would be highly rewarding and illuminating.

**Pat Pinsent**

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## **Books for Children**

### ***Dan and the Mudman***

Jonny Zucker, London: Frances Lincoln, hb. 978 1 84507 851 5, £8.99, 2008, 128pp.

A resentful Dan is not keen on the move to a town out of London, a smaller house and a new school for the sake of his mother’s new job as part of an attempt to clear the family debts. Being in the charge of the friendly and capable Lucy does not protect him from the class trio led by Steve, and Dan inadvertently gives them a good line against him by telling them he is eating a packed lunch not the school dinner because he doesn’t eat ‘bacon or pork and some other stuff’ – and that because he is Jewish. Immediately the ‘Bacon Boy’ taunts start, to be followed by such declarations, said to be from Steve’s councillor uncle, as ‘Jews run the country’ and ‘All Jews are rich’. His locker is broken in to and ‘dirty Jew’ is scrawled on his pencil case. Dan is well able to parry these verbal attacks but inwardly they disturb and upset him. Further bullying, this time physical, follows when Dan decides to resume his running and meets the gang when out training.

Alongside these happenings, each class member has to undertake a project of their own choosing. Dan is stumped. When the deadline for starting the project comes, Dan still has no ideas but finds himself drawn to the art cupboard, taking out some clay and working with it, eventually forming a rather odd-looking man – his ‘mudman’. Dan is startled at what he has done, but his teacher is impressed.

But odd things then start to happen. He is looking at the clay figure in his bedroom at home when it starts to glow in the centre of its chest and Dan is then transported to a river and watches two men, supervised by an older man, knee deep in the water. After this short episode he tries to repeat the experience a few times without success, but then he is successful and this time he watches the men make a mudman eight-feet high and sees the older man put something in its mouth that makes it seem to come alive and move. The figure moves towards him. In panic he runs but its left-hand grabs Dan – then, as its right-hand is raised and Dan screams, he is back in his bedroom. And the eight-foot mudman is with him.



Each happening is related to Lucy who first tells him it is a daydream. Later she agrees there is something going on and joins him at the library to try and get some clues as to the meaning of it all. They come across the legend of the Golem of Prague. In 1580, Jews were attacked in Prague and Rabbi Loeb created a 'Golem' – a creature 'steeped in Jewish mysticism' – from the Danube mud and gave it life. After its creation, attacks on Jews diminished, while several anti-Jewish rabble rousers were hurt and some killed in peculiar circumstances.

Convinced by the legend, Dan and Lucy hide the Golem in Dan's garage as they are worried it will go out and attack someone – maybe Steve, and even kill him. At school, Dan puts his mudman in his locker.

The story switches between sixteenth-century Prague and present-day Wareham. The Golem asks Dan to help him in Prague to right some ancient wrongs while Dan needs the Golem's help in Wareham.

The book is slightly preachy at times but it mostly steers clear of this and tells a good and exciting story with the 'message' of tolerance and anti-racism well hidden and twisted into the story of the treatment of the Jews in Prague and of the resolution of Dan's problems with Steve and his assistants. The story of dogs breaking up a right-wing political meeting in Wareham organised by Steve is a little far fetched, as is the project video presentation and the 'appearance' of Rabbi Loeb. But overall this is a good story with an important message that is not given too explicitly.

### ***Ghostscape***

Joe Layburn, illus. John Williams, London: Frances Lincoln, hb. 978 1 84507 826 3, £8.99, 2008, 112pp.



Another story of bullying and of parallel worlds, but his time in Year Five of a primary school and involving two girls – the sophisticated Chevon, and Aisha, a newly arrived Somali. There are other Somali children in the class but they are now Westernised, while Aisha still prefers to speak her native language and wears a headscarf.

While escaping to the toilet, she encounters an oddly dressed, friendly boy who asks her if she is scared of the bombs and calls the headmaster 'Mr Dickinson'. Aisha is baffled at both these statements. And the toilet and the corridor look different. But then the floor seemed to lurch and the boy is gone.

When she tells the story to her playmates in the playground, they tell her she is seeing things because she is 'stressed out by Chevon'.

In a further encounter with Chevon, Aisha becomes very angry and retaliates to Chevon's taunts by hitting her and holding her down. As Chevon is screaming, the boy appears again and touches Aisha's wrist 'We've got to go, Aisha. That's the sirens going off. We're in danger.' She is now in the Second World War, 1940. Her modern school building has now been replaced by a 'Victorian building of sooty bricks' still labelled Trentham Primary. The boy's name is Richard. As they run to the shelter of a railway bridge, Aisha says 'In Somalia the bad guys used to ride in jeeps firing off bullets into the sky, into people's homes.' Richard questions 'So British Somalia is where you're from?'

I lived in London during the raids although I am rather too young to remember 1940. Most of the descriptions of the reactions of Richard's grandad with whom he lives and the fear instilled by the sound of plane engines ring true. However, the description of the children running through bombarded streets instead of sheltering seems exaggerated.

Aisha finds that she is invisible to all except Richard when they are challenged by a warden; she realises that Richard is a ghost in her world and she is such in his. In her mind, Aisha is contrasting the 1940 situation to which she been transported with that in Somalia from which she has escaped – both causing people to become refugees, including Richard and his grandad whose home has just been destroyed in the raid. Trentham School has now become a refugee centre.

Richard likens Chevon to Hitler but Aisha realises that there are no similarities; her problems now seem trivial and she describes Chevon as 'pathetic'. The next encounter between Aisha and Chevon includes Richard – visible to Aisha but not to Chevon. When a globe is thrown by Richard in order to counter Chevon's aggression against Aisha, it seems to Chevon that Aisha is a witch with special powers; she is petrified and begs Aisha to leave her alone. To me this scene did not reflect the characters well and was too unrealistic.

The story moves to Aisha's mother and their relationship and describes the relationship that had existed between Aisha and her father, whom she had loved dearly before he had been shot dead in Somalia by a casual gunman. The encounter described between Aisha and her mother again does not seem to fit very well into the general story but rather to introduce some moral messages in too obvious a manner.

As the story switches between the two worlds, Chevon is forgotten and the focus is on the Blitz, the fate of the school building and its inhabitants, including Richard, who are sheltering from the bombs – including Richard. The ending is neat but would have been better not hinted at beforehand.

The book is illustrated in black and white with both full-page sketches and some smaller ones dispersed in the text. My favourite is of Jan the lollipop lady in her kitchen. Although the book is well written, I think the parallels between Aisha and her family's Somalia and Richard's world of the Blitz are not sufficient for the easy connection, which I think is the 'message' of the book. Does this blend of the realism of the war and the fantasy of ghosts work convincingly?

**Jennifer Harding**

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### ***Captain Pugwash: A Pirate Story***

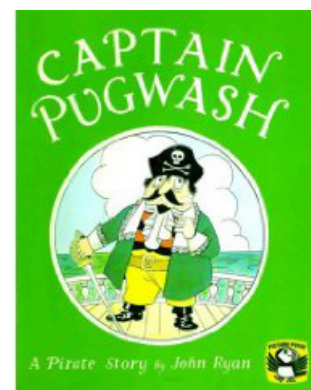
John Ryan, with CD read by Jim Broadbent, London: Frances Lincoln, 978 1 8457 919 2, £6.99, 2008, 31pp.

As if looking through the lens of a telescope, the reader sights Captain Pugwash, a gentleman pirate, on the front cover and, on turning the book over, his capable young cabin boy Tom on the back. Between the covers a rollicking, wavy tale unfolds. Unable to resist the lure of treasure, Captain Pugwash has a scary encounter with his arch rival, the villainous cut-throat Jake and his dastardly crew when he boards what he believes to be an abandoned ship. The reliable Tom is at hand to rescue his master when Captain Pugwash is ignominiously made to walk the plank. Cut-throat Jake and his bloodthirsty crew are the engineers of their own defeat in the ensuing fracas between the pirate ships. Meanwhile Captain Pugwash preens himself in front of his admiring, indolent crew. Only Tom knows the full story which he keeps to himself as he falls asleep after a hard day's work at sea.

This book was first published in 1957 and has been reissued now. Pirate tales never date, and this one will be popular with young readers who will be enlivened not only by the writing but also by the numerous, vigorous and colourful illustrations. Additionally there is a CD; Jim Broadbent tells the story engagingly and is accompanied by a crew of pirates, and specially composed music and maritime sound effects.

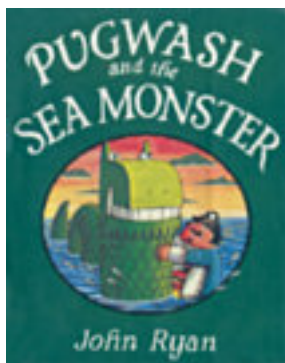
**Judith Philo**

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### ***Pugwash and the Sea Monster***

John Ryan, London: Frances Lincoln, hb. 978 1 84507 888 1, £11.99, 2008, 32pp.



A welcome republication by Frances Lincoln of a Bodley Head title from more than 30 years ago, this Pugwash adventure will promote the indomitable sea captain to a new generation of enthusiasts. Originally created in 1950 for a full-colour, comic strip in the first issue of the late, oft-lamented *Eagle* comic, John Ryan's portly seafarer had emerged (in black and white, of course) on TV by 1957 (ingeniously animated by Ryan himself), was reinvented in colour in the 1970s, and reappeared 20 years after that as a series of far-less engaging, computer-generated cartoons. Readers of the *Eagle*'s sister magazine, *Girl*, may not realise that the cartoon *Lettice Leefe* was another of Ryan's inventions, one which itself must be considered ripe for reinvention, with its very twenty-first-century subtitle 'The Greenest Girl in School'!

*Pugwash and the Sea Monster* relates the attempts of gallant, fearless (and amazingly inept) Captain Pugwash of the *Black Pig* to steal treasure from the dastardly pirate, cut-throat Jake. Disguised as a sea monster, he plans to frighten the pirates away from their island hideout, a cunning plan which works admirably until Jake discovers he has been tricked. Luckily his revenge is thwarted by the appearance of a real sea monster, and the crew of the *Black Pig* hurriedly attempt a retreat towards their ship. However the tide has risen during their absence, and it is, in common with all the Pugwash stories, Tom the cabin boy whose quick thinking and ingenuity saves the day.

Ryan's story is fast moving, funny, and liberally sprinkled with his own brand of comic seafaring expletives. Swirling around and between sections of narrative are his splendidly distinctive cartoon illustrations – bold, brightly coloured and filled with movement and detail. At the time when Ryan created Pugwash, young readers had a limited choice of books illustrated in full colour. How astonishing and exciting his piratical tales must have appeared to their audience – humorous swashbuckling stories brought vividly to visual life in action-packed images which supported and extended the text. *Pugwash and the Sea Monster* displays an extensive range of the techniques which Ryan devised to progress his narrative action across a spread, from full-page illustrations of the event on the page to maps, and from individual portraits of the characters to comic-strip extensions of the text itself. For readers and listeners alike the illustrations provide much of the detail and humour of the story, and can be 'read' as enjoyably as can the text. This is splendid stuff, which demonstrates clearly why books will never be surpassed by other media: if you want to prove this, [www.outpost221.com/pugwash/pug4.htm](http://www.outpost221.com/pugwash/pug4.htm) has an interactive version of this tale which demonstrates very clearly just why books are superior to e-books!

For readers who remember Pugwash's nautical career from earlier years, much of Ryan's artwork can be found in the Centre for the Study of Cartoons at the University of Kent, and they could also delve further into Ryan's career by reading "'Ahoy Me Hearties!' Captain Pugwash, Bits of Movable Paper, and the Bible: A Tribute to John Ryan', *Children's Literature in Education*, vol. 34, no. 3, September 2003, pp. 219–35.

### **Bridget Carrington**

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### ***The Illustrated Fairy Gazette: A Christmas Celebration***

Avrill Tyrrel, illus. Frances Tyrrel, Dorking: Templar Publishing, hb. 978 1 84011 671 7, £12.99, 2008, 28pp.

This bumper book, with its pretty cover depicting a small group of fairy carol singers and a flowery ornate border with eye-catching gold detail, is designed as a special Christmas gift for readers who believe in Father Christmas and the magical kingdom of fairies. It requires children with delicate, careful hands in order to take full advantage of the many pull-out fairy secrets therein, such as a paper fairy for the reader to dress and booklets of special fairy recipes and songs.

The overriding conceit is that Katie Clarke, a grandmother and collector of unusual books, has discovered copies of a real fairy magazine and she has decided to publish it





as a 'bumper Christmas special' and so provide a stocking full of delights. The Publisher's Note on the inside cover, addressed to the reader, claims that we are privileged to have this insight into the fairy world and customs. The fairy magazine has its journalists and feature writers, a modern element which does not sit well with the traditional depiction of fairies and is a little mawkish. The idea of gifts bestowed by fairies is reminiscent of the Lilac Fairy in *The Sleeping Beauty* and the Sugar Plum Fairy in *The Nutcracker*. There is an opportunity for children to learn how to produce their own letter to Santa Claus, since the fairy version of 'Jingle Bells' suggests that fairies are involved in delivering presents with him. The book ends with a fairy Advent calendar, beginning with the winter solstice and ending with Fairy New Year.

The whole volume is illustrated in pastel shades and fairies with flowing locks in the tradition of the *Flower Fairies* by Cicely Mary Barker. The final end pages are entitled 'The Twelve Fairy Days of Christmas' but the fact there are twelve blessings seems somewhat strained. Nevertheless these illustrations of butterfly-winged fairies going about human activities in miniature, include skating, tobogganing, dancing around a Christmas tree, making snowballs, walking a fairy dog and ice skating are appealing, with sparkling silver glitter. Some of the text is in cursive script and there are small pictures which would delight the right child but I feel that this volume would not have mass appeal and even the activities, which add the words 'An adult to help', are likely to be too fiddly for many children. My overall impression is the reader's own imagination stimulated by this album will provide the real enchantment the book claims for itself.

**Susan Bailes**

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### ***Turtle Watch***

Saviour Pirota, illus. Nilesh Mistry, London: Frances Lincoln, pb. 978 1 84507 939 0, £6.99, 2008, 32pp.

Two children, Taro and Yuko, see an old man, Jiro-San, sweeping the beach. Clearly the old man is crazy, thinks Yuko. Taro guesses that the old man is waiting for something. He believes Jiro-San is full of 'wonderful secrets'. Jiro-San confesses that he is awaiting the arrival of some old friends, who will put in an appearance only if the beach is cleansed of holidaymakers' rubbish.

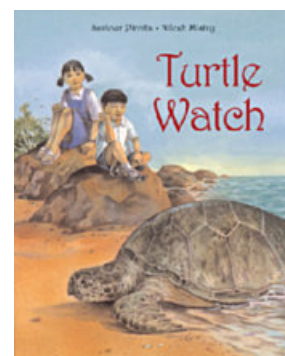
After a night during which the old friends fail to appear, the children and the old man row out to sea on a reconnaissance. Dolphins and a whale are greeted as old friends, but they are not the ones whose arrival has been keenly anticipated. Both children are now persuaded to join in the cleaning of the beach.

Eventually the first of the old friends appears, a female turtle who inspects the beach, finds it satisfactory and brings her sisters ashore. They all lay their eggs and bury them in the clean sand. After eight weeks the beach is teeming with newly hatched baby turtles. The book ends with a factual postscript about sea turtles and their life.

This book has a clear environmental message, crisply delivered. Human holidaymakers can all too easily pollute the natural scene and endanger the life cycles of creatures who share our planet. Young and old can work together to protect the planet from casually inflicted damage. This worthy message is reinforced by Mistry's elegant and tasteful illustrations, evoking the beauty of the natural world and the children's wonder. The book, however, only narrowly avoids the risk of being didactic. Young readers may be in danger of feeling that they are being lectured, or even preached at. When such a danger arises, a mediating adult is sometimes able to help young readers. In this case, however, the fact that the text is more or less seamless and lacks discontinuities means that there is no need for an adult to play an interpretive role and hence to change the focus from any over-didacticism. All we can do is hope that young readers will not feel that the didactic tone obscures a worthy message.

**Rebecca R. Butler**

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### ***The Snow Leopard***

Jackie Morris, London: Frances Lincoln, pb. 978 1 84507 668 9, £6.99, 2008, 32pp.



Jackie Morris's strength as an illustrator lies in her ability not only to capture the physical presence of an animal like the snow leopard, its movement, the texture of its pelt, the power of the muscles beneath the skin, so that you can almost see its breath in the cold air and smell its warmth – but also somehow to evoke the wonder that we humans can feel when we meet it, an awe that is intensified by the harsh remoteness of its habitat and the rarity of its appearances even there.

Morris's best illustrations have a meditative quality. The story here accompanies and overlays them like a soft, lyrical chant, causing a sense of timelessness and peace, despite the moments of drama within the tale. The snow leopard is the ageing spirit guardian of an ancient way of life, both human and natural, in the distant peaks of the Himalayas. A village child senses the snow leopard's protecting song in her dreams and, after the leopard has exhausted her strength driving back invaders who have violated the valley, takes on both the leopard's shape and her role as guardian.

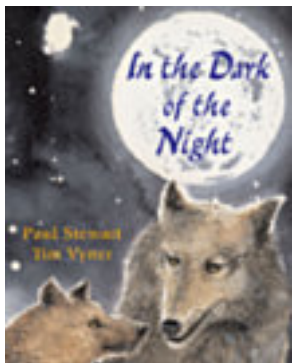
The story draws on indigenous Himalayan myths of shape shifting, which themselves speak of the human urge to become one with nature – an urge second only to our wish to dominate it. And it is perhaps no coincidence that Morris's images of the sleeping child and the majestic leopard recall, in sentiment if not in style, the works of Henri Rousseau. They, too, are a dreamlike contemplation of the mystery, beauty and implicit tension between the natural and the human worlds.

**Clive Barnes**

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### ***In the Dark of the Night***

Paul Stewart, illus. Tim Vyner, London: Frances Lincoln, hb. 978 1 84507 764 8, £11.99, 2008, 32pp.



The text of this book consists entirely of a dialogue between an adult male wolf, Papa Wolf, and his male cub, Cub-of-Mine. Before any accusation is levelled, the book pleads guilty, instantly and completely, to the anthropomorphic fallacy. The father convinces his offspring that the time has come for him to explore the world outside their cosy lair. Together they cross the woods and valleys, populated by night birds, rabbits and deer. They pass a huge phantasmagoric animal dreamt up by the cub's imagination. They reach a mountain top where, in a barren moonlit landscape, they join dozens of other wolves howling at the moon. This, we gather, is the ritual that marks the adolescence of every wolf cub. On their return, the cub who originally trembled to abandon the safety of the lair is, of course, now reluctant to re-enter its confines. Life outside is much more exciting.

The dialogue of the wolves is constructed in free verse, its rhythmic structure perhaps designed to comfort young readers. Sometimes the structure is unconvincing. The cub objects that he cannot sing along with his father because he doesn't know the words or the tune. At such points, we feel that the attribution of human values to the animals is going just too far. In general, however, the suspension of disbelief works well and a young reader can accompany the wolves on their journey with conviction.

The message of the book is comforting but the sombre colours in which it is depicted are more disturbing. In the illustrations it looks as if the forms of the two wolves are realised in pen and ink against watercolour backgrounds. The landscapes are mystical, while the wolves are represented realistically.

This is a rite of passage story but its true significance lies in the animals it chooses to depict. In children's stories such as *Little Red Riding Hood* wolves usually have a symbolic menacing value, the ancient enemy of humankind. Like Michelle Paver's *Wolf Brother* (2004), this book seeks to establish wolves as denizens of the natural world, and in that aim achieves a worthwhile success.

**Rebecca R. Butler**

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### ***Boy, Were We Wrong about Dinosaurs!***

Kathleen V. Kudlinski, illus. S.D. Schindler, London: Frances Lincoln, hb. 978 1 845 07907 9, £11.99, 2008, 32pp.

This is the ideal book for adults, and especially teachers, who have difficulty in admitting that they don't know everything, or that they might have been wrong! It is also valuable to show young readers that knowledge is not finite, nor (fossil-related puns aside) set in stone ....

Beginning with the ancient Chinese discovering fossil dinosaurs and interpreting them as the remains of dragons, each spread shows how over the centuries we have made informed guesses about the remains we have found, and how subsequent discoveries or further investigation has shown that 'many of our past guesses about dinosaurs were just as wrong'. Illustrations of earlier reconstructions (the iguanodon's nose spike being a well-known example) face what we currently think they looked like. The latest thoughts on how they moved and how they lived (hot or cold-blooded), skin colour and texture – feather, fur and fin – is included, accompanied by accurate but unfussy illustrations. Repeatedly readers are reminded 'we can only guess', using the latest available information.

The final spreads indicate that earlier ideas about why dinosaurs died out were probably wrong, and suggests the asteroid explosion dust-cloud theory as a possibility; however it again warns 'we could still be wrong'. It explains that if scientists are right, birds may be the nearest thing to living dinosaurs that we have now. It also warns readers that there are still many books in libraries and bookshops that have 'the old ways of thinking'. This admirable picture book concludes by encouraging its young readers to remain open minded, with the ultimate goal that they might in future be the scientists who show how wrong our current dinosaur theories are.

**Bridget Carrington**



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### ***From Somalia with Love***

Na'ima B. Robert, London: Frances Lincoln, pb. 978 1 84507 832 4, £5.99, 2008, 157pp.

Set against a background of dark trees and high-rise flats, the pale, serious, youthful face of a girl wearing a *hijab* looks outwards at the reader. Safia Dirie is the narrator of *From Somalia with Love*; a fourteen-year-old Muslim Somali girl who lives with her mother, Hoyo, and her two older teenage brothers, Ahmed and Abdullahi, in a tenth-floor, three-bedroom flat on an estate in Tower Hamlets. Having fled from war-torn Somalia 12 years ago when they became separated, without any news, from their father, Abo, a patriot, the family have adapted to living in England. The children attend local schools where the pupils reflect the local ethnic mix. Safia's special friend is Hamida whose family are second-generation immigrants from Bengal. In their daily life Safia's family maintain their cultural traditions and religious observance: the strict practice of regular daily prayer, the women at home and the men at the mosque; the clothes they wear; the food they prepare; and in the everyday language and phrases (included and woven into the text) that express their secular and religious allegiances and identity. Due to Hoyo's lack of knowledge of British usage of surnames, when faced with British immigration procedures she registered the family surname as Dirie, their grandfather's name as he was already a resident in Britain. In Somalia surnames denote kinship or tribal identity through being the 'daughter of' or 'son of' someone.

The novel opens with Safia learning of 'the best news ever and the most shocking news ever'. The best news is that Safia's mother's sister is finally getting married. This will be an occasion of celebration and cultural affirmation for everyone. The most shocking news is that the father she does not remember is coming to Britain to be reunited with the family. Safia experiences this news with an unexpectedly heavy heart. To her surprise she discovers that her favourite brother Ahmed is similarly uncertain about his feelings and expectations of this reunion. 'All I know is that things are gonna be different with Abo around ... he hardly knows us and he doesn't know this country – it's



gonna be a livin' culture shock for him when he gets here and finds us all westernised and not speaking proper Somali,' he remarks darkly.

And so it proves to be. Abo's arrival changes the family constellation dramatically. The parents' love for each other is powerfully renewed. Abdullahi comes closest to fulfilling his father's expectations of a Muslim Somali son, whilst Ahmed's ways receive disapproval not acceptance, and Safia feels excluded by the strength of her parents' relationship and neglected by her mother. Her friendship with Hamida suffers because of her unhappiness. Distrusting herself, she feels estranged from her immediate and extended family, most acutely when her beloved brother Ahmed challenges the authority of his father who banishes him from the family home in outrage. Safia finds some precarious diversion meeting up with her flirty cousin Firdous. However her family's care and concern provide the protection that she needs at the critical moment. From this point, she is listened to by her mother. Hoyo tells Safia of the circumstances of her and Abo's love which she had kept safeguarded in her heart rather than speaking about it during the years of separation, and Safia is able to talk to her mother about her uncertain feelings for her father, of her anger with him for sending Ahmed away and with her mother for not intervening.

The family members begin to address the difficulties that have divided them and to make adjustments; Abo makes plans to learn English. Love of words and language particularly poetry proves to be the special bond between Abo and Safia. Safia has always written poetry; pinned on her bedroom walls are poems that she likes and also her own compositions. She discovers that her father is a poet and one who is well regarded in the Somali community. He is delighted to find this gift for poetry in his daughter and promises to teach her the special classic forms of Somali literature. The aunt's wedding brings everyone together in celebration, and the book to an end. Safia recites her specially composed poem for her aunt to the assembled company and reflects, 'Alhamdulillah [all praise is for Allah] there I was: a Muslim Somali-British girl, come home at last.'

This is a vivid and sympathetic novel written from the view point of a teenage girl who has many different perspectives to integrate in her life: not only those of her own personal development and identity, but also those of her Somali family following their reunion after a long separation caused by civil war. The adjustments to be made of settling in a country that is not their homeland are clearly described and also the importance of maintaining cultural, traditional and religious ways of life. The integration into the general narrative of unfamiliar words and phrases gives authenticity to the reader's experience, comprehension being assured by the provision of an extensive glossary. The author's own background is culturally mixed, and she has also had experience of working with immigrant Somali students in east London which perhaps provided the inspiration for this novel.

### **Judith Philo**

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#### ***Night Flight***

Michaela Morgan, illus. Erika Pal, London: Frances Lincoln, pb. 978 1 845 07874 0, £5.99, 2008, 96pp.



A short novel which perceptively portrays the psychological damage inflicted on children by being made refugees, and losing family and all that is familiar. A new life should be exciting, but for Danni it's a battle. He and his 'Aunty', a fosterer, live in a tower block, and he has only distant memories of his faraway, warm, sunny home and his loving mother. His new language is proving difficult – we feel he is electively mute – he gets bullied by the other children and he has nightmares. However, one day when his school visits a city farm, Danni meets a grey horse called Moonlight, who is ill and whose life is drawing to an end. He forms an instant bond with the animal, recognising in her something of himself, for she is unable to change her situation or communicate her needs.

As their relationship grows, Danni begins to tell his own story to the horse, and we discover the terrible memories he bears. When the horse dies, Danni is initially distraught, until he has a vision/dream in which the horse appears, unicorn like, released from its suffering, able to fly and to carry Danni away with her, far from his earthbound troubles. This gives him an inner strength with which to face his new life.

This is not just a book for readers of seven and over, as its age banding states; it is a book for all ages, with an important and life-affirming message for anyone who has ever suffered and been mentally scarred by their experiences.

### **Bridget Carrington**

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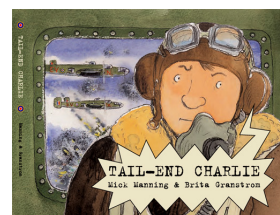
#### ***Tail-End Charlie***

Mick Manning and Brita Grandström, London: Frances Lincoln, hb. 978 1 84507 651 1, £11.99, 2008, 40pp.

A true story, in Charlie's own words ... I should know, I was his skipper.

Stories like this should never be forgotten.

These quotes on the back cover are from two 180 Squadron pilots 1944–1945. So the implication is that this is a serious book, and not one to shrink from describing the realities of war. But look at the front cover. The face has rather a cartoonish appearance and the eyes don't seem to express fear; yet here is a pilot in the air with enemy planes close by. Surely he would be petrified?



Opening the book, we find this description: 'Mick Manning listened to his father's hair-raising tales about life as an RAF air gunner during the Second World War. Now, years later, Mick has carefully recreated those stories as if his Dad was speaking those words.' The frontispiece and end pages are scrapbook-style double spreads of photographs, logbooks, certificates, comics, letters, cards, etc. which will encourage the reader to proceed. This is the style adopted for most of the book – double spreads with inserts. Each spread has a background illustration on which are superimposed various items: one or more pages of Charlie's notebook diary, speech balloons and captioned additional illustrations. The following are a few examples.

The opening spread is 'War begins, 1939' with diary entry '... I always loved eggs. ... [Now] shops only sold dried egg powder – ugh!' An insert describes how Charlie's mother mixed and cooked the egg powder and shows Charlie eating it with a disgusted expression. The background illustration is of a housing estate with posters – one is 'Dig for Victory' – with a crowd watching the erection of a barrage balloon: 'Will the balloons stop the German bombers, Dad?' Another inserted illustration is captioned 'I joined the civil defence, delivering messages, putting up barrage balloons. ...' and another shows a shop and is captioned 'You need ration coupons to buy most things.' Cigarette cards show 'anti-aircraft searchlight', 'medium trailer fire pump in action' and 'air-raid precautions'. The atmosphere is excellently set to reflect the era and the reactions of those involved.

The notebook entries stick mainly to facts and not feelings. Only the spread 'Off-duty' gives hints of the toll on the gunners' emotions.

The ops went on – and so did the casualties. Mates we'd been joking with at breakfast, suddenly gone forever. How did we cope? We played cards and sports. We had nights out in town, holding parties in cafés. We sang silly songs and acted the goat, plonking out tunes on an old piano. We sang to remember and we sang to forget. We sang for our lives.

A mess party is shown and the speech bubbles have the words of the song 'There were rats, rats/ Twice as big as cats/ In the quartermaster's store/ In the store. In the store.' An insert captioned 'How did we ever relax?' shows three men drinking and playing cards at a table in the dormitory with a fourth man just sitting on his bed with his head in his hands.

An interview with *The Times* describes Manning's approach.

Manning emphasises the importance of teaching children about the sacrifices made by his father's generation: 'Kids need to understand what they went through. ... The war was filled with tragedy and a lot of people never came home. ... We should all take time to think about that generation.'

The book certainly fulfils its aims and gives an excellent picture of the life of the airmen and also some intimations of the deprivations for civilians. It is a page-turning read, excellently presented and illustrated in an eye-catching manner. I should have liked to have seen more that tells of the horrors, as, apart from a few spreads, the book emphasises the heroism of the men who fought and not the suffering and the mental anguish. Nor does the book try to tone down the anti-German feeling, obviously inherent at the time, but not something to be dwelt on now, although it does use the word Nazi and explain the Nazi movement in the glossary.

**Jennifer Harding**

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### *One Boy's War*

Lynn Huggins-Cooper, illus. Ian Benfold Haywood, London: Frances Lincoln, hb. 978 0 71367 115 5, £11.99, 2008, 32pp.



This picture book seems ideally suited for Key Stage 2 pupils studying the theme of war with cross curricular value for English and History. Its cover depicts the central figure, a sixteen-year-old boy, Sydney Dobson, who is writing in his diary about daily life in the trenches. In the distance is an exploding mine. The boy is dressed in First World War uniform and this idea of personal writing is continued in the rest of the book as all the text is cursive script which contrasts in tone with his more optimistic letters home to his mother. The early pages of the text are of a scene totally contrasting with the cover, an idyllic park in the Durham countryside full of greenery and tranquil ducks on a pond, with a couple walking happily as sunset approaches.

The book is dedicated to the real Sydney Dobson, who died in the fields of Belgium, and to the author's father, who was sent off to fight in the Middle East but returned. The use of the present tense adds to the immediacy as the family learn that England is at war with Germany and 'It is every man's duty to fight for King and Country'. Sydney won't be sixteen until Christmas but he is determined to join up, full of bravado. Whilst his Pa leaves to fight, with 'eyes full of excitement', his Ma's eyes are puffy and red-rimmed from crying. Sydney believes the Kaiser is like a bully invading France and he plans to make his father proud of him, lying about his age and getting away with it because he is tall. Convinced that the war will be over by Christmas, Sydney is gradually disillusioned, beginning with the reality of the cramped travel conditions. The note he leaves is read by his mother, depicted working in a munitions factory playing her part.

The harsh conditions of the trenches are highlighted by the appalling rain, 'torrents of it', and Ypres ('Wipers') is very different from the bird-filled hedges of Durham. Sydney's vivid account of battle noise and deadly 'Boshe bullets' buzzing like angry bees emphasises the dreadful conditions, along with lice, rats and trench foot. Inevitably, death strikes his nearby companion, Billy. Then the final command comes to go over the top using ladders: 'Suppose the Boshe feel the same.' The final pages depict Sydney and his mates being shot, lying in the cold snow, with explosions like stars in the night sky. Ironically, on the same page is a letter from his father, Peter, to his wife explaining that he has been injured but will return soon: 'But knowing you both are safe has kept me going.'

The end pages are used by the author to give historical information and place Sydney's experiences in context. Above all we are told that Sydney was a real person whose experience typifies that of the thousands of young men who gave up their lives for their country in the 'Great War'.

For me, the effect of this text is diminished somewhat by its close resemblance to its predecessor *War Game* (1993) by Michael Foreman. Many of the illustrations seem

imitative even to details of colouring and methods of presentation. Nevertheless for a first encounter with the topic, *One Boy's War* provides a good introduction to the topic and a helpful addition to war-theme texts.

**Susan Bailes**

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### ***Our World of Water***

Beatrice Hollyer, London: Frances Lincoln in association with Oxfam, hb. 978 1 84507 648 1, £12.99, 2008, 48pp.

This picture book for primary-school readers contains a wealth of practical wisdom about the value and use of water. As part of Oxfam's Education and Youth Programme, it enables young people to understand their world and make a positive difference to it. The message is as much for young adults as for children, because it deals with the crucial issue of how we in the developed world seldom pause to reflect on the full extent to which life depends on water, how it supports and sustains us, and how little some of us appreciate its value.

In her introduction, written in Rome, city of fountains, novelist Zadie Smith makes an earnest plea that we think twice about the way we use water, and recognise that it is not, in fact, unlimited. Even in this land of plenty, climate change is causing weather and rainfall patterns to change. Smith draws attention to how the lives of millions of people in developing countries do not enjoy good sanitation or a reliable and local supply of fresh water that is safe to drink and use for cooking.

This book is the story of six families who live in parts of the world where access to water cannot be taken for granted, but frequently involves laborious and difficult journeys on foot to distant ponds or wells. The text in this attractive and readable book uses different fonts for the narratives and for the comments of the children in each family, who detail their life styles, activities and most enjoyable activities, such as special festivals, days out, dressing up, having different food, music, dancing and fun.

We visit an alpaca-rearing family in the mountains of Peru, where the source of water is melting ice; even now climate change is causing shortages. In Mauritania, north Africa, where it hardly ever rains and hot, sandy wind blows across the city, care must be taken to store precious drinking water and conserve every drop for humans and animals to drink. In Ethiopia, a seven-year-old boy cannot attend school as he must watch over the family's herds of cattle, sheep and goats, while the women and girls walk up to three hours, twice a day, to carry pond water home. When the ponds are dry, they just travel even further to water the animals and collect water for themselves from deep wells. In Tajikistan, villagers bordering Afghanistan have no running water and must trek down a steep hillside to find a spring of fresh water. Each account has at its core the struggle to access this precious liquid. Even in Bangladesh, where there appears to be abundant water in rivers, lakes and ponds, the villagers must pump clean water out of tubewells from sources deep underground.

The emphasis in these stories is never on the hardship but on the skilled knowledge children have about the management and use of unpolluted water, and its importance in their lives. Festivals from Islamic and other cultures play an important part in the stories and help to broaden the scope of this book. There are excellent glossaries for each chapter, and a double-page spread of useful facts – for example that water covers 75% of the planet's surface, and that one in six of the world's people have no access to clean water. The index allows topics readily to be followed up. Any child opening this book will find it both an attractive and worthwhile reference book and an enjoyable read.

**Joyce Holliday**

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### ***A World of Prayers***

Jeremy Brooks (sel.), illus. Elena Gomez, London: Frances Lincoln, pb. 978 1 84507 487 6, £6.99, 2008, 48pp. (hb. 2005)



Beautifully designed and illustrated, *A World of Prayers*, by vicar Jeremy Brooks, is a large-format picture book which introduces a series of short prayers selected from Christian traditions around the world. The illustrator is Elena Gomez, whose often jewel-coloured illustrations sweep across the pages, flowing round text and white space in a warm and visually satisfying way. Brooks largely organises the selection around the day: morning, mealtimes, night-time and blessings, each section including representative prayers from around the British Isles (though not Wales, I'm afraid), Europe and the rest of the world.

Lovely though it is, I am not quite certain of the target audience for this book, as whilst it is in picture-book format, not all the prayers are necessarily understandable by preschool children ('Give me the strength to meet each day with quiet will', for example). It would be useful perhaps within a Christian family and in a C. of E. primary school, where the custom of praying with children may exist, but there are features which I would suggest make this book less broadly applicable. It tends to presuppose a knowledgeable audience who will be familiar with theological terminology such as 'faith' and the 'will' of God, for example, and it also addresses a middle-class, 'supper'-eating readership.

Elena Gomez responds to the challenge of balancing the traditional origin of the prayers with an address to the modern child with a mixture of warmth, humour (for example, tartan-clad 'ghoulies and ghosties') and a sense of meditation. Whilst most of the children portrayed are clearly modern, I wonder whether British children of Chinese and Japanese origin will recognise themselves in the more historical, even stereotypical, shaven-headed, pigtailed depictions of their national costumes.

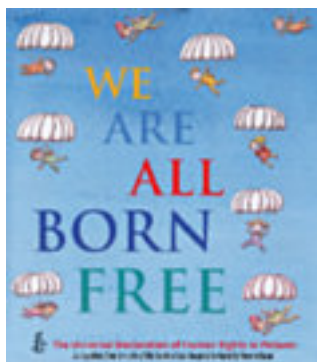
*A World of Prayers* is a beautifully presented book, which I'm sure will find its place on the shelves of RE resource cupboards and school libraries across the country. The prayers are often spiritual and meaningful and the illustration intriguingly multilayered, so the fact that the register is rather middle class and some representations are stereotyped may perhaps disappoint only this reviewer.

**Jenny Kendrick**

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### ***We Are All Born Free: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Pictures***

London: Frances Lincoln, in association with Amnesty International, hb. 978 1 84597 605 4, £12.99, 2008, 72pp.



It is just 60 years since the United Nations adopted the thirty articles which are illustrated here. Janusz Korczak, a Polish doctor who devoted his life's work to children up to the Second World War was probably one source of inspiration for the United Nations committee that was chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt. This book, especially prepared for children, contains the work of 30 internationally renowned illustrators, each focusing on a particular right, including those to life, liberty, security, freedom of opinion and expression, and the right not to be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

It is a remarkable project and a beautiful book. The cover illustration features a diversity of small children parachuting freely and happily in a cloudless blue sky around the title – twenty-first century versions of classical 'putti'. At the bottom, Amnesty International's symbol of a candle wrapped in barbed wire is placed beside the title words, with a statement that all royalties from the sale of this book will be donated to Amnesty. The scarlet endpapers glow as the book is opened. John Boyne, author of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, and David Tennant/Doctor Who, each write an endorsement of the book and the ideals that it commemorates.

John Burningham illustrates the first two rights; on one side of the page the parachuting children have changed into recognisable Burningham figures and are energetically



engaged on a trampoline, party balloons drifting around them; on the opposite page the writing is set out simply and clearly. Thereafter each artist has a double-page illustration with writing contained within the picture. All are quite distinct in character so that there is never a sense of routinely turning the page. Every page demands close and detailed attention to the pictorial and colourful representations, each contains its own spirit. I can name only a few of the artists, chosen simply because of features of their work that struck me in my first reading of this book – a book which demands to be studied again and again.

One artist, Hang Sung Dam, a South Korean, who illustrates Article Fourteen, was an Amnesty International prisoner of conscience. Other artists come from countries where there are or have been repressive governments or dictatorships. All the pictures are eloquent and complex compositions. Some are fierce caricatures such as a shocking image of a mutilated rag doll, while others are softly toned and dreamlike, or brilliantly colourful. The huge blindfold image of Justice holding tiny figures of boys and girls in exact balance conveys something immense and awesome. Pictures are playful, humorous, sad, sombre, startling, terrifying, gleeful, thoughtful, comic and graphic. A particularly succinct one is Satoshi Kitamura's illustration of Article Twenty by four contrasted hands extended to touch each other. Others are childish, lyrical and joyfully ingenious and detailed. I am grateful to Marcia Williams, whose illustration concludes the book, for letting me know that she incorporated into her borders a motif from every single artist, a pictorial index as it were. I spent some time identifying and matching the images she chose with their original source. It seems to me that her picture has the potential of a hologram: whatever piece of it is selected will carry within it a part of the whole and is therefore representative of the great ideals that these historic articles and this book seek to celebrate.

A final reflection: whilst it is important to celebrate and to renew faith in these articles, we cannot forget or overlook that many children and adults continue to suffer cruelty, poverty and injustice in their daily lives, some in countries that do not subscribe to these ideals. In our country and other like-minded ones we must continue to endeavour to address and redress many of the social inequalities that underlie and contribute to family failure and abuse. Eleanor Roosevelt's phrase that 'human rights begin in small places' makes these grand ideals more closely related to our everyday selves and lives. This is what those writers and artists who create books for children do.

I wholeheartedly recommend this book to everyone; every household should have a copy of it.

**Judith Philo**

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### ***ABC UK***

James Dunn, illus. Helen Bate, London: Frances Lincoln, hb. 978 1 845 07696 2, £11.99, 2008, 40pp.

Described as 'an alphabet celebration of the UK and its vibrant cultural identity' this is a very different ABC which offers as much to adult as to younger readers. The subjects chosen to illustrate each letter are drawn from well-known locations or people connected now or historically with each of the four UK countries, or with activities that take place in them. Historical, fictional and mythical references include King Arthur (A), dragons (D), explorers (E), Sherlock Holmes (H), Nessie (N) and Robin Hood (R), while iconic real-life characters are represented by the Beatles (B) and the Queen (Q). Each spread provides the opportunity of intriguing discussion for readers, and for this the two generic groupings, inventors (I, but a Heath Robinson-like illustration) and explorers (E) offer a rich resource. Places include Giant's Causeway (G), Llanfair PG (in its full-letter glory) (L), Stonehenge (S) and 'zero degrees latitude' (a canny Z) which could of course lead readers to its location, Greenwich, and its importance geographically.

Between F (football) and Y (Yorkshire pudding) we also find (K)ilt, (O)ak, (M)ini (skirt and car) and (W)ellies (a comment on the British weather?), as well as a kiss (X) between Romeo and Juliet, which surreptitiously introduces another historical/literary



figure and one of his most famous works. Similarly Tenniel and *Alice* creep in via (T)ea, the illustration recalling the Mad Hatter and his tea party. UK multiculturalism is celebrated via (C)arnival, (J)ury, which shows the diversity frequently found there, (V)indaloo and the original symbol of British diversity, the (U)nion Jack. A short glossary expands on the subjects of the alphabet, answering immediate questions, but encouraging further research.

Frances Lincoln is a publisher well known for a lateral take on life: this alphabet – good fun and very different from most – continues that admirable trait.

### **Bridget Carrington**

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#### ***P is for Poland***

Agnieszka Mrówczyńska and Prodeepa Das, London: Frances Lincoln, hb. 978 1 84507 917 8, £11.99, 2008, 32pp.



Conveying the essence of a national culture to a young readership by means of just 26 alphabetically arranged words and their meanings is a challenging task. The author has managed to select words that describe not only uniquely Polish traditions, festivals, foods and legends but also the countryside, and thus introduce Poland to children. This book would be suitable for Polish children who now find themselves away from their country of birth and need a book to help them explain to their new friends a little of Poland and to show them interesting photographs. It would also help them to extend their vocabulary by introducing the new words in a context familiar to them. However this book would also capture the imagination of children who have never visited Poland or who have only learnt about it from the tales of their parents or grandparents. *P is for Poland* would be a good resource in any classroom as the photographs are clear and full of content, and suitable for many activities, whether it be for looking for similarities/differences between countries, designing colourful cloths or cards with typical Polish patterns, making Christmas or Easter decorations or even trying some of the different foods.

One drawback of this educational book is the inconsistency of the presentation of the words; sometimes the Polish word is used (for example jagody or szopka), sometimes the English (for example amber or eagle) and even the Russian ‘borsch’ and not Polish ‘barszcz’ for beetroot soup. The Author’s Note at the start of the book refers to one of the distinctively Polish traditions associated with Christmas, Wigilia; however no further mention is made in the text. It is also disappointing to see that they couldn’t find any alternative for the letter X other than the hackneyed Xmas, which for many people will fail to indicate Christ for whom the Greek letter  $\chi$  stands.

Overall this little book contains a wealth of information about modern Poland and together with the well-chosen photographs may encourage even young pupils to want to learn more about Poland, her peoples and her history.

### **Anna Kowal**

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#### ***The Young Inferno***

John Agard and Satoshi Kitamura, London: Frances Lincoln, hb. 978 1 84507 760 3, £12.99, 2008, 80pp.



There exists quite a tradition in English-language children’s literature of abridged, child-oriented introductions to adult classics. From Lamb’s tales from Shakespeare to abridged versions of *Don Quixote* or children’s editions of tales from the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* or the *Ramayana*, writers and illustrators want children to get to know universal stories and epic poetry. Now it’s the turn of Dante’s *Inferno*, inspired by Italian nightclub recitations of Dante ‘against a rock and techno soundscape’, and rendered in thirteen cantos of verse by John Agard with stark black-and-white images by Satoshi Kitamura.

In this updated version, a teenage hoodie descends into hell guided by the comfortably familiar Aesop, rather than by Virgil as in Dante's original poem. Agard's awestruck young hero learns a few trenchant political lessons along the way. In the first circle of hell, those who committed the sin of political apathy and didn't even cast a vote scream in pain, their skin covered with wasps and flies. Other, more pointed, references address the misuse of scientific discovery that has led to the atomic bomb, or chastise '...that smooth duo who caused much blood to flow/ between the Tigris and Euphrates'. Examples of human folly, greed and cruelty pile one upon another, with allusions to historical or contemporary figures both in Agard's verse and in Kitamura's images.

Agard's twenty-first century voice and his use of full and half rhyme lend this terrible journey a compelling rhythm and pace, although the boy's final ascent from hell and into his school library seems abrupt and incongruous. Nonetheless, a coda of hope in a budding love for schoolmate Beatrice is a welcome conclusion to a hellish journey. Kitamura's silhouettes and edgy line drawings express the menace and foreboding inherent in what the boy sees, just as clearly as they capture the emotion of his reactions. The Agard-Kitamura partnership goes from strength to strength, and this is their most potent collaboration so far.

**Gillian Lathey**

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## REPORTS

### **Beloved Kids?: Children's Writers as Parents**

Children's Book History Society day conference, Crown Court Church of Scotland, Covent Garden, London. 20 September 2008.

Kenneth Grahame, Enid Blyton, the Reverend Wilbert Awdry and A.A. Milne were the writers whose parenting behaviour was subjected to scrutiny at this conference held in the Covent Garden Crown Court Church hall. Peter Hunt revealed that while Grahame's son Alistair may have been at least partially the recipient of *Wind in the Willows*, his father never seemed to go out of his way to spend time with him. Blyton, according to David Rudd, despite creating an idealised figure of herself as a mother, seemed to regard her books as more favoured children than the real ones. By contrast, Brian Sibley depicted the creator of Thomas the Tank Engine as a happy family man, which is perhaps why his son Christopher felt able to continue his father's saga. Ann Thwaite showed Milne as a devoted father, better at writing for his son than playing with him. Finally Dennis Butts suggested that many children's writers, notably J.M. Barrie, may have lacked the maturity to tackle the 'very big adventure' of growing up, whether in literature or in life. Altogether this was an entertaining, informative and enjoyable day.

### **Tamarind Books as part of Random House Children's Books**

South Africa House, Strand, London. 2 October 2008.

Verna Wilkins is well known for her pioneering work in founding Tamarind Books in 1987, thus rendering black children more visible and fostering literature as a tool of intercultural dialogue. This occasion celebrated a union with Random House that is already flourishing, with several new books on the way.

### ***We Are All Born Free: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Pictures***

Waterstones bookshop, Piccadilly, London. 27 October 2008.

The launch of this book (see review in this issue of *IBBYLink*) was hosted by Amnesty International. The occasion included the world premiere of the short film *Everybody* and an exhibition of the illustrations from the book. The Co-operative Bank funded the production of the film as well as cinema advertising as part of its Defending Human Rights campaign in partnership with Amnesty International. The gathering was to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948. It was a vibrant, colourful occasion, thronging with children, artists, writers, actors and many others.

Kate Allen, director of Amnesty International UK, spoke warmly of the beauty and spirit of the book and of the artists who had contributed to it. She quoted Eleanor Roosevelt, who said:

Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.

The short film *Everybody*, a compilation of images from the book, was narrated live by the actors Julian Rhind-Tutt and Amanda Mealing. The colourful animation of words and pictures from the book in juxtaposition was enlivening and the spirit of the evening further enhanced. The film has now been released generally. The evening was a splendid celebration of an historic anniversary and a renewing of its aims and ideals.

(Judith Philo)

### **The Patrick Hardy Lecture, Verna Wilkins, ‘Diversity: The Right to be Seen’**

Goodenough College, London. 29 October 2008.

At this prestigious annual event, Verna Wilkins gave an entertaining account of how she ‘had no choice’ other than to found Tamarind Books, so that young children, thinking visually, would acquire a rounded view of today’s world. She described her early struggles to ensure distribution, and how she herself became a writer of some of the books. Her success certainly relates to the fact that she has not ‘done issues’ so much as sought to produce books that children will enjoy.

### **John Agard and Satoshi Kitamura’s *The Young Inferno***

The Island Queen, Islington, London. 4 November 2008.

At this book launch event, Agard set the book into the context of his own Jesuit education and his desire to emulate the way in which Dante, virtually the founder of vernacular literature in Italy, made use of ‘the language of the street’. This was followed by his lively reading some of the sections of his book, which places a teenage boy into a contemporary version of hell, with Aesop (whose name is probably a corruption of ‘Ethiopian’) as a guide instead of Dante’s Virgil. He certainly inspired me to buy the book for a teenage grandson. See this issue of *IBBYLink* for a review of the book.

### **Roald Dahl Funny Prize inaugural ceremony**

Unicorn Theatre, London. 13 November 2008.

Michael Rosen as Children’s Laureate described a ‘light-bulb’ moment when he realised that there was a need for an award for the kind of book so enjoyed by children but often edged out by more ‘serious’ books when prizes are awarded. Videos made by children from schools which were represented at the ceremony gave some information about the books, before the winners were announced. Other speakers were Quentin Blake, and Viv Bird of Booktrust.

From a shortlist for children up to the age of six (which also comprised *Stick Man* by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler, Nick Sharratt’s *Elephant Wellyphant*, Oliver Jeffers’ *The Great Paper Chase*, Jean Willis’s *There’s an Ouch in my Pouch* and John Fardell’s *Manfred the Baddie*), the winner was *The Witch’s Children Go to School* by Ursula Jones and Russell Ayto. For the 7 to 14 year olds, the winner (from a shortlist which also included Michael Bond and R.W. Alley’s *Paddington Here and Now*, Louise Rennison’s *Stop in the Name of Pants*, Frank Cottrell Boyce’s *Cosmic*, Dinah Capparuci’s *Aliens Don’t Eat Dog Food*, and Kjartan Poskitt and Philip Reeve’s *Urgum and the Goo Goo Bah!*) was Andy Stanton and David Tazzyman’s *Mr Gum and the Dancing Bear*. It was obvious that the judges’ choices were popular with the school children present, who like hordes of others will benefit from the sponsorship of the award by the Dahl Foundation. See [www.roalddahlprize.org](http://www.roalddahlprize.org).

### **Booktrust Teenage Prize**

Puffin, Strand, London. 18 November 2008.

The view over the Thames in both directions makes any visit to the Puffin offices worthwhile! This prize gets its authenticity from the way in which, each year, four teenagers are recruited (by a writing competition) to join the four adult judges plus one of the teenage judges from the previous year. One of the features of the ceremony is the presence of these judges’ proud parents! This year the shortlist comprised Kate Thompson’s *Creature of the Night*, Anthony McGowan’s *The Knife that Killed me*, Sally Gardner’s *The Red Necklace*, Anthony Horowitz’s *Snakehead*, Tanya Landman’s *Apache* and Patrick Ness’s *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, which was the winner. Chair of the judges, Amanda Craig, talked of the high quality of today’s texts for young adults, and described the winner as a cross between *Tristram Shandy* and the work of Russell Hoban and Ursula Le Guin.

### **Eleanor Farjeon Award**

Unicorn Theatre, London. 26 November 2008.

Anne Harvey, as representative of the Eleanor Farjeon Foundation, described the shortlist (Children's Book History Society; Elizabeth Hammill and Mary Briggs of *Seven Stories*; Michael Morpurgo, author and founder of the charity Farms for City Children; David Wood, children's author and dramatist; and Chris Brown, former teacher, radio speaker and review editor for *The School Librarian*) as a very strong one, before she announced the winner as Chris Brown. In his acceptance speech he stressed in particular the importance of librarians. Guest speaker, Meg Rosoff, suggested that authors spent much of their time courting inspiration, while people like Chris Brown were doing the real work of getting children to read.

### **Old Possum's Children's Poetry Competition**

Unicorn Theatre, London. 15 December 2008.

After poet Andrew Fusek Peters had entertained the large number of children present, together with the parents of the winners, Michael Rosen in his inimitable style introduced the young poets whose work was printed in the 2008 collection published by the Poetry Society. This year, as well as awards of money and books to the winners and those shortlisted from schools in the UK, poems were also published resulting from a separate competition for children whose first language is not English. The standard of the work of all the children, chosen from 3,000 entries, was impressive, as was the interesting variety of ways in which they interpreted this year's topic of 'Work' (including war, international finance and computing – the winner in the younger age group wrote about a 'carpet boy'). Winning poems are featured on [www.childrenspetrybookshelf.co.uk](http://www.childrenspetrybookshelf.co.uk).

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## **FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

### **Poetry and Childhood**

British Library, London. 20 and 21 March 2009.

An International Conference to accompany the British Library's exhibition of 250 years of poetry for children. Speakers include Carol Ann Duffy, Jackie Kay, Andrew Motion, Michael Rosen and Lissa Paul. Workshops by British Library curators plus papers on a variety of topics. Cost for the two-day conference £80, including tea, coffee and lunch on both days. Contact Hannah Drake [hvd21@cam.ac.uk](mailto:hvd21@cam.ac.uk), 01223 767735.

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

Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury, Kent. 28–29 March 2009.

A two-day international conference with keynote speakers Warren Chernaik, Hugh Cunningham and Kimberley Reynolds. 'Childhood in its Time' seeks to trace how the history of childhood in Britain is reflected, portrayed, or even created, in literature from the medieval period to the present day. The conference is particularly interested in how literary childhood is represented *within* its historical period and in how such representations develop over time. Contact [adrienne.gavin@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:adrienne.gavin@canterbury.ac.uk) and [andrew.humphries@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.humphries@canterbury.ac.uk) for further information. Conference website: [www.canterbury.ac.uk/arts-humanities/english-language-studies/ChildhoodInItsTime.aspx](http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/arts-humanities/english-language-studies/ChildhoodInItsTime.aspx).

### **Place and Space in Children's Literature**

Keble College, University of Oxford. 27–28 March 2009.

Speakers include Philip Pullman, Peter Hunt, Farah Mendlesohn, Margaret Kean and Diane Purkiss. Details at <http://placeandspace.org>. Contact [oxchildrenslit@gmail.com](mailto:oxchildrenslit@gmail.com).

## **The Child and the Book**

Vancouver Island University, Nanaimo, BC, Canada. 1–3 May 2009.

An international graduate student conference with keynote speakers Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer. The theme of the conference is 'This Land is Our Land'. Details from Donna Wilford (d.wilford@shaw.ca). Conference website: [www.roehampton.ac.uk/researchcentres/ncrcl/events/thechildandthebook/index.html](http://www.roehampton.ac.uk/researchcentres/ncrcl/events/thechildandthebook/index.html).

## **Diana Wynne Jones**

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).

## **Comics and Graphic Novels**

Roehampton University, London. Saturday 14 November 2009.

The annual 2009 IBBY/NCRCL MA conference. Contact [L.Atkins@roehampton.ac.uk](mailto:L.Atkins@roehampton.ac.uk) for further information.

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## **NEWS**

### **IBBY Christmas cards**

The first IBBY Christmas card, featuring an illustration by Jan Pieńkowski from *The First Christmas* (new edn. Puffin, 2006) has proved a great success with over 5,000 cards sold (500+ packs of ten). Orders were received from IBBY members, libraries and individuals (who hopefully will become members) and two independent bookshops who also sold packs. Our thanks go to everyone who ordered cards and to Jan Pieńkowski for donating the illustration for our use.

The money raised from sales of the card will be used to help fund other IBBY activities, including International Children's Book Day in April, and to support our nominations for the Hans Christian Andersen awards this year. Following the success of this year's card it is intended to follow it up with another card next year.

(John Dunne)

### ***Deep into Nature: Ecology, Environment and Children's Literature***

The complete papers from the fifteenth annual IBBY/NCRCL MA conference held at Roehampton University on 15 November 2008, abstracts of which are in this issue of *IBBYLink* will be published in book form by Pied Piper Publishing. The book will be available at the next annual conference at Roehampton University on 14 November 2009.

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

The proceedings of the fourteenth annual IBBY/NCRCL MA conference held in 2007 have been published in book form by Cambridge Scholars Publishing. The book is extensively illustrated, reflecting the topic of the conference. Although published in time for the 2008 conference, the book was unfortunately not for sale at the event. It can be obtained from the publisher ([www.c-s-p.org](http://www.c-s-p.org)) in paperback 978-1-4438-0007-5 (£25.99) and hardback 9781847188502 (£49.99). On Amazon the paperback is currently £17.15 and the hardback is £32.99. The publisher's website has a pdf of some sample pages, including Jan Pieńkowski's illustrated chapter.

The next issue of *IBBYLink* (Summer 2009) (copydate 30 April 2009) will be on children's literature and the family – focusing on all aspects and meanings of 'family': security, problems, dysfunctional, same sex parents/carers, bullying, looked-after children, adoption, etc.

The Autumn 2009 issue (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, and adventure fiction that contains number clues.

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).

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Editor: Pat Pinsent, 23 Burcott Road, Purley CR8 4AD

Associate editor: Jennifer Harding

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

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