

Gendered Reading

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The relationship between gender and reading lends itself to a variety of different interpretations, several of which occur in the articles in this issue of *IBBYLink*. One is the extent to which boys and girls have different approaches to reading, often associated with the fact that surveys all seem to disclose that boys read less than girls. This question is explored here by Nicola Morgan, Chris Brown and Rebecca Butler, who present ways of tackling this problem but also refuse to accept facile generalities about it – by no means all boys are less avid readers than girls or automatically prefer non-fiction. That there has been an increase in titles aimed at adolescent boys is certainly true, but again, it would be rash to suppose that all the readers of Anthony Horowitz or Charlie Higson are boys, any more than in the past it was the case with G.A. Henty and R.L. Stevenson. Boys may indeed enjoy non-fiction and books from which they can pick up information, but the same is also true of many girls. The treatment of contemporary boyhood by Tim Bowler, as discussed by Michele Gill, does however seem to have most appeal to male readers.

It has always been understood that while girls may read 'boys' books', the opposite has less often been the case. And it is certainly highly unlikely that many boys would have approached the books written to guide young ladies on the path of virtue, as illustrated here by Bridget Carrington. Nineteenth-century girls themselves, however, seem to have been drawn to such 'action' authors as Dickens, Scott and Kingsley, with female authors lower down the list. Other too easily accepted assumptions may also be open to question – for instance, Jenny Kendrick's research into equine fiction in the interwar years reveals the falsity of the assumption that 'pony books' are directed solely at girls, invariably with female protagonists. In this period she finds that most of the protagonists were boys, as well as some of the authors.

Another angle related to gender and reading concerns the extent to which books can educate readers of both sexes to abandon their stereotypes about suitable roles for boys or girls. Pam Robson's database, as ever, furnishes a good many titles relevant here, showing that the work done in the 1970s and 1980s with such gender-reversal classics as Gene Kemp's *The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tyler* (1977) and Anne Fine's *Bill's New Frock* (1989) still continues. And indeed, if an article by Joan Smith in *The Times* of 14 August 2008 is to be believed, those of us of older generations would be rash to assume that the battle is won. Smith suggests that even though much has been achieved in the area of parity at work, nevertheless 'a generation of teenage girls has missed out on feminist ideas and is having to deal with an increasingly exploitative culture without the tools to look beyond the surface glitter Young women need to know that there's nothing wrong with liking clothes, shoes and boys (or other girls), but they're also in urgent need of a language and ethics that allow them to be themselves.' I would claim that fiction is one of the best instruments for doing just this.

Pat Pinent

Campaign for the Book

Alan Gibbons

Earlier this year I was invited to speak at a meeting against drastic cutbacks to Doncaster Library Service. My involvement in the campaign led me to investigate what I now see as a slow, corrosive marginalisation of the whole project of reading for pleasure in the UK. This is the stark picture, hidden by the undoubted successes of the 2008 Year of Reading:

- Public library closures – 60 last year and more planned
- A loss of professional library staff – down 13% between 1995 and 2005
- More untrained volunteers instead of qualified library staff
- Fewer books in schools, a 15% reduction while there has been a 28% rise in spending on education
- A shift from books to computer services
- The closure of school libraries to make way for IT suites
- The sacking or downgrading of both public and school librarians
- The closure of school libraries
- The marginalisation of reading for pleasure and the reading of whole books in many schools, as teaching to the test replaces the pleasure of acquiring knowledge for its own sake.

As a consequences of this picture, I have started collecting signatories for a Campaign for the Book Charter to be published in mid-September. It campaign for these measures:

1. The central place of reading for pleasure in society
2. A proper balance of book provision and IT in public and school libraries
3. The defence of public libraries and librarians from attempts to cut spending in a 'soft' area
4. An extension of the role of the school librarian and a recognition of the school library as a key engine of learning
5. The recruitment of more school librarians. It is a national scandal that less than a third of secondary schools has a trained librarian
6. The defence of the professional status of the public and school librarian. Opposition to downgrading. In some places this has reduced librarians' salaries by up to half
7. The promotion of reading whole books in school rather than excerpts
8. A higher profile for reading for pleasure in schools, including shadowing book awards, inviting authors and illustrators to visit and developing school creative writing magazines.

If you would like to support the campaign, contact Alan Gibbons at aagibbons@blueyonder.co.uk.

You can read the full draft statement on my blog: www.alangibbons.net.

Mind the Gender Gap

Nicola Morgan

GENDER

Boys and girls are different. Of course, that's a generalisation and there are many overlaps and exceptions. We can also argue about the roles of nature and nurture, but the fact remains that by the time boys and girls arrive at school, they very often behave differently, at least when in groups. They are also often different as readers. Statistically, boys have more reading difficulties, take longer learning to read and are less likely to describe themselves as keen readers, especially of fiction. So, we worry more about their reading.

As part of my work with the Child Literacy Centre, which I set up eight years ago, I have written and spoken about boys and reading before. I want to extend and even change those arguments somewhat, but first I need to repeat them.

My first point is that many boys would love non-fiction even if they don't find themselves switched on by fiction; many feel it's pointless to read about 'made-up things' when there's a whole fascinating real world to explore. (The same applies to many girls, but male readers of all ages do often lean towards non-fiction.) My response has been that we should produce and promote more and better-written children's non-fiction.

My second point is that reading is first for pleasure. I have used the analogy of spinach and strawberries. Simply, when we eat spinach we are very aware of how good it is for us. Even if we like it, we still think 'What a healthy choice this is!'. When we eat strawberries, we don't consider their health value, although strawberries are highly nutritious. Books should be seen as strawberries, things we consume for pleasure, without thinking about their benefits, not as spinach, something which forcibly reminds us of its benefit.

So far, I have only identified, accepted and tried to work within existing generalisations about boys, reading reluctance and non-fiction. I no longer think this is enough. We must think more boldly and deeply. Yes, we must value non-fiction; yes, we must produce more and better; yes, we must always remember that reading should be for pleasure (otherwise, a young reader will avoid it like spinach). And yes, therefore, if boys often like non-fiction, of course we should give it to them.

But I also think that we must look at ways to encourage young boys to read *novels*. I don't think we should leave them with only excellent non-fiction. There is one reason why I think this: that fiction develops the reader's emotional side and the understanding of other people – something which psychologists call 'theory of mind'. Neuroscientists are increasingly learning about the importance of emotions for things such as decision making, as well as the more obvious areas such as relationships and happiness. And the emotional brain and theory of mind perhaps need more attention in boys, who may have been negatively affected by the many gender-specific expectations during their first years (even if not also by their 'nature').

Let me tell you about my experience of boys-only schools and what happened to the boys in them as readers. One of three sisters, I was born, grew up and was educated in boys' boarding schools. I had no gender expectations of reading. I knew no girls other than my younger sisters. I was treated like the boys and as far as I was concerned reading novels was something boys and girls did equally, naturally and frequently. I'd forgotten about this until I did some work in Merchiston Castle School in Edinburgh, a boys-only senior school. The boys there read voraciously and without inhibition. There is no sense of 'Girls do this and boys do that' or any need to conform to gender stereotypes. Then there is the tiny Arnold House School, London, a boys' prep school, winners of the international Kids' Lit Quiz 2008, beating much larger schools from around the world. Although credit must go too to their coaches – two women passionate about reading for *everyone* – I can't help feeling that these boys' success and their utterly charming love of reading has at least partly been nurtured by the absence of

gender expectations surrounding them. Reading novels is just something you do, boy or girl.

I am *not* advocating single-sex education, as there are many other things to recommend a school; I am simply saying that when you remove expectations of what boys do and what girls do, you remove one of the obstacles to boys relating to fiction. Librarians in mixed schools have a much harder job to battle the stereotypes, while at the same time respecting any differences in nature between boys and girls.

One response to the ‘we need to talk about boys’ reading’ issue has been to produce books aimed specifically at boys. Anthony Horowitz and Darren Shan are two supremely successful examples. That, with the energy of school and youth librarians, has created an upsurge in boys’ reading. But the risk is that we fail to look outside stereotypes and really feed young minds. Yes, boys and girls are different, but we don’t need to reinforce those differences and we should never assume that they are absolute. Boys can equally enjoy books which are not marketed for boys, and there are plenty to choose from. School librarians know this, but parents, publishers and booksellers may need reminding. Let’s stop over-egging the differences and assuming that girls will always love frilly fairies and boys will only want machines and monsters.

So, although books should be like strawberries and not spinach, we must consider the nutritional content of boys’ reading diet (but don’t tell them it’s good for them!). Now that we’ve succeeded in getting boys reading, we should offer rich and varied novels from a young age, stories that girls and boys can love equally. The emotional development of our boys is at stake.

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Boys into Books

Chris Brown

The ‘Boys into Books 11–14’ project was proposed by the then Department for Education and Science (DfES) early in 2007. An annotated booklist, together with advice and guidance, was commissioned from the School Library Association (SLA) and was supported by the opportunity for every state secondary school in England to select 20 free books from the list. Eileen Armstrong, school librarian at Cramlington Community High School, Northumberland, produced a superb selection in a short space of time and Alec Williams added a valuable introduction: these can be seen on the SLA’s website at www.sla.org.uk – search the index on the left-hand side of this home page. Although the criterion is clearly stated as ‘books boys will enjoy’, the *Times* coverage of the scheme focused not on the positive advantages and generous book gifting but on the absence of Dickens! However a very recent evaluation of the scheme has shown high levels of enthusiasm and much creative promotional activity in schools.

Late in 2007 the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) proposed a follow-up project with SLA aimed at the 5–11 age group. In view of another short timescale for the work involved I agreed to create the annotated list with the criterion of the majority of the books being ‘recent’, mainly from the last couple of years, as well as again being books boys will enjoy. Some consultation with the Reading Agency Chatterbooks groups and, in the last week of the autumn term, with a primary school, paved the way for an annotated list of 209 books to be compiled over a five-week period. This list was then made available online (see the SLA website) in February for library services to be able to make purchases funded by the DCSF with a budget of £5 million for the whole project. The hard copy of the list, with a foreword by the Minister of State for Schools and Learners, Jim Knight, has been produced in tens of thousands of copies for free distribution via library services as well. These will go out to schools, with most authorities apparently timing this for the start of the new school year. Schools

will then be able to block loan books on the list from their local library services, thus incorporating a school–library link into the ‘Boys into Books 5–11’ scheme.

‘Boys into Books 5–11’ also has a fourteen-page introduction which itself was compiled in a week. I decided that this might be most effective if I had in mind an intended readership of teachers and teaching assistants, as well as parents and governors, who may not be especially conversant or up to date with all things to do with books for the young. So I referred to the notes I have of talks I used to give for parents evenings in various schools and when introducing book enthusiasm into general INSET sessions, as well as in courses aimed at ‘returners’ to primary teaching. In the introduction I have been able to focus on reading for pleasure, the importance of time for immersion in reading, the range of books with appeal to boys, including graphic works and non-fiction, and the crucial need to know both children and books in order to make recommendations. Boys do tend to prefer books with action that never flags, humour in large dollops and characters somewhat larger than life. Extremely popular currently are fantasy tales of every shade, fast-paced stories of youngsters embroiled in spying scenarios and all sorts of buccaneering piracy. Titles linked with visual media features exert a great influence on choice but, as with all readers, boys’ individual preferences can also be wide and varied, so the list offers a broad and balanced selection too. I have been surprised at the warmth of the reception this introduction, described back to me as ‘jargon-free sense’, appears to be attracting.

Boys have always, well certainly since the late 1960s when my own teaching began, been the cause of concern as being less naturally inclined towards reading than girls. It is a generalisation but the observed consequence is that boys do not so readily build up a reserve of reading experience and general awareness to apply in their learning. In recent years the tendency of boys to read less has perhaps been more marked by the development of an array of time-consuming electronic diversions and the fact that these are often sited within individual bedrooms. I really do not know if reading as a whole is any the less than previously, but there is definitely a perception that it is. If this is the case, it may simply be because the distractions are more noticeable and more easily classifiable nowadays. None of this is to presume that everything is plain sailing as regards girls and reading – there is a proportion of girls who grow into obdurate reading refusniks: a Girls and Books project would surely be desirable should any further schemes be proposed.

With boys I’ve always found that some degree of success can be created by devising shared reading situations. ‘Reading is an anti-social activity’ is one of my pronouncements. Boys are in general inclined to be gregarious but reading a book is fundamentally a lone occupation and so teachers/librarians need to generate communal opportunities related to reading. Things such as groups devising a presentation or technologically enhanced advertising to ‘sell’ a book to others generate both enthusiasm and the need to have read the book to share it with the group. ‘Talkabout’ times, when a relaxed atmosphere can be enhanced by comfortable floor cushions and even edible goodies can be a friendly way of discussing book likes. The undoubted success of some modern series is due to the sharing of excitements, reinforced by TV and cinema, not by solitary readers all coincidentally reading the same books. The fact that it has become ‘cool’ to be fully au fait, or even one step ahead, with some titles/authors, if not with book reading as a whole, is a phenomenon that wise educators can learn from, develop and apply.

In their page of coverage of the scheme, *The Telegraph* naturally played down the ‘recent books’ criterion so they could trundle out someone who sees pictures in children’s books as a superfluous distraction from the words and who read Dickens at the age of 10. Lovely that: I think it totally delightful that a paper with *The Telegraph*’s leanings would habitually cite as an exemplar for young boys a reforming novelist, champion of the downtrodden and of worker’s rights, over and above the likes of such as Chris Riddell!

These DCSF book-gifting projects are certainly most welcome and I look forward to any evaluation of the ‘Boys into Books 5–11’ project sometime in 2009. But I’m sure that it

is already making some inroads, not least in promoting the enjoyment of reading, reading real books, whole books – with official funding and blessing – in the primary years.

[Chris Brown is Review Editor of *The School Librarian* and a former primary-school head teacher.]

Bart Doesn't Read, Why Should I?: Reading and Gender at Primary-School Level

Rebecca R. Butler

In 2005 the Education Department announced some significant findings about literacy in children. They stated that:

Boys' performance is lower than girls' in all literacy-related tasks and tests in England.

Four decades ago, girls were doing better than boys in the 11-plus examination, requiring education administrators to set a lower cut off point for boys to ensure equal numbers of each gender went on to grammar schools.

Three-quarters of mothers read with their children but only half of fathers do so.

Girls do better in every area of learning before they are five.

In their book *Reading the Difference* (CLPE 1993), Myra Barrs and Sue Pidgeon examined the difference between the reading of boys and girls. Astonishingly, Barrs states that gender is a more important factor in studies of reading than social class, ability or attainment. Thus it seems girls from bookless, working-class homes somehow find ways to read more than boys from book-filled, middle-class homes.

Secondly, gender is a major determinant of reading choice. There is a consistent pattern of boy choice and girl choice that cuts across all age and intelligence differences.

The third difference is in the area of achievement. Barrs says it is 'generally known' that girls achieve more highly than boys in reading. The superiority of girls is reflected in reading-test results and SATs (Standard Assessment Tests). The Ofsted reports on boys and English show that girls do better in public examinations, so much so that their grades are sometimes adjusted downwards to compensate for their unfair advantage of being female! Otherwise there might be no boys in schools that select on ability. These differences between the reading of boys and girls seem to persist in spite of attempts involving substantial investments by the government and LEAs to close the gender gap.

Let me provide the reader with some examples from my own experience which shed some light on this disturbing picture.

As a private one-to-one tutor I have a pupil whom I shall call A. He is ten-and-a-half years old. He comes to me once a week for reading tutorials. By 2009 he should have an English SATS score of 4. He is currently a 3b. He is not unintelligent. But he has a serious problem of attention. Left to his own devices, A fiddles with his clothes and plucks at his hair. The books A will read with pleasure on his own are for eight year olds. His mother is reading more age-appropriate books with him. He will allow her to read to him, but declines to read to her. A's father never reads with him. Everything in A's life takes second place to sport. He is a fanatical supporter of a certain premieriership club and plays several sports for his school. If a literacy class and a training session clash, sport wins. The only book I have seen A read with enthusiasm is the autobiography of a football hero. Pupil A leads a sheltered life. He has never been forced to do anything he doesn't want to do – and that includes reading age-appropriate books.

Pupils B and C are sister and brother. They are biological siblings, both adopted into the same family. Their adoptive parents take their education very seriously indeed, bringing both to individual literacy sessions with me, and paying shockingly expensive

independent school fees for both. Both B and C exhibit symptoms of anxiety, probably deriving from their adopted status. C is an intelligent boy of almost ten years with a high degree of personal charm. He will read on his own, and handles age-appropriate material. His sister finds reading a problem because she suffers short-term memory loss. C has been bullied at school. I speculate that he may turn to books as a retreat from a world that is uncongenial. That perhaps distinguishes him from A. C's SATS score is 4a.

I also work as a literacy volunteer at a state primary school in an affluent suburb. I have sessions with the children who need extra assistance designed to bring them level with their peers. Of the 30 pupils in the age range seven to eleven whom I see, maybe 85 per cent are boys. A few of my pupils come from migrant families and may be said to be just catching up, though sometimes even with the extra help, migrant children don't always catch up. In fact, it is true that almost the only girls I see on account of literacy problems are migrant children, some of them gifted. A girl from Iraq whom I took on last September is now (July 2008) pretty well up to speed.

What lies at the root of this gender difference in literacy skill? I have studied much of the learned work on the subject, including the Barrs and Pidgeon book referred to. I have yet to encounter a wholly convincing explanation or one that fits my personal experience. It is certainly true that among the sports heroes some young boys admire, very few would qualify as bookish or even articulate. The dominant figures in public entertainment for boys hardly qualify as advocates of literature either. The heroes of action movies and Playstation games are rarely seen book in hand.

Perhaps the most universally recognised icon of contemporary boyhood is Bart Simpson, who happily leaves reading to Lisa. In the primary schools I know, nearly all the teaching staff are female. Does this predispose male pupils to think of reading as a girly activity? It may also be the case that in Britain insufficient attention has traditionally been given to the potential of the *bande dessinée* as an introduction to further reading. It may also be true that there is a deficiency in the teaching and learning culture around books. Are there novel ways of teaching literacy waiting to be discovered?

I have been once or twice to book-signing events when a new Harry Potter book was to be published. The enthusiasm and excitement of the children – girls and boys – had to be seen to be believed. If only we could find a way of engendering similar enthusiasm among boys for a wider range of books!

A Contemporary British Boyhood: The Violent and Isolated Landscape of Tim Bowler's *Blade* Series

Michele Gill

So he's looking at me with his puggy face, this big jerk of a policeman, and I'm thinking, take him out or let him live?

Big question.

I don't like questions. Questions are about choices and choices are a pain. I like certainties. Got to do this, got to do that, no debate. Take him out, let him live. Know what you got to do. Certainty.

Only I'm not certain here. I'm pretty sure I want to take him out. I hate the sight of him and I hate being back at the police station.

The knife feels good hidden inside my sock.

(Blade: Playing Dead, 2008: 1–2)

So begins the first novel in Tim Bowler's new, high-octane, edgy series which follows the fortunes of Blade as he seeks to escape the attentions of the police, a vicious girl gang and shady villains from his past, ducking and diving through a grim, violent and

run-down city landscape, trying to make himself invisible. The reader is taken on a roller-coaster journey as one dangerous situation elides into another, building to a crescendo at the end of book two (*Blade: Closing In*, 2008) and with at least two more novels to follow, Blade's desperate attempts to outrun death are set to continue apace.

Blade is a fourteen-year-old, homeless boy, seemingly without family or friends. He is running away from a past which Bowler describes as both dark and troubled, but which is as yet undisclosed to the reader, apart from references to a dead girl called Becky and Blade's seeming reluctance to continue carrying or using a knife following her death. Bowler uses a first-person narrator to draw the reader into Blade's world – but is he a reliable narrator? Is he a victim or is he being hunted down with just cause? He has committed knife-related crimes in the past, has been known to the police from the age of seven and continues to live outside the law on the edge of society. Can the reader sympathise or even empathise with his situation?

Bowler gradually introduces conflicting characteristics to Blade as the fast-paced chase continues. The bold and sometimes brash narration through which Blade communicates with the reader simultaneously reveals a hard, streetwise kid and a boy who isn't as much in control or as 'shut down' emotionally as he claims. He describes a series of 'snugs' across the city where he sleeps, houses from which the residents are regularly absent. This allows him space and time to wash, sleep and eat and, most important, be safe for a few hours. His preferred houses are ones which have lots of books so that he can spend the night reading; *The Wind in the Willows* is a particular favourite. Bowler describes Blade as allowing himself to be drawn into the life of another Becky, against his better judgement, because he wants to protect Jaz, a young girl he believes to be Becky's daughter. In comparison with his behaviour towards the world in general, he is gentle and patient with the child, motivated again by something from his past, but the reader isn't given the whole picture.

While the plot and character devices employed by Bowler in these novels are not original per se, their subject matter seems particularly pertinent in Britain today. Since the beginning of 2008, the number of young men and teenage boys who have died on the streets in knife-related violence has escalated at a frightening pace. A seemingly never-ending roll call of names and faces appears relentlessly on television screens and in newspaper headlines; some are portrayed with sympathy, innocent victims of a society described as losing control; others, implicated in knife culture, are viewed more ambiguously, being both victims and perpetrators. As those in authority search for explanations and solutions, cultural images of boyhood become further mired in crisis, seemingly engulfing all boys, positioning them as problematic and potentially dangerous.

Fictional versions of boyhood cannot be equated directly with boys' real-life experiences. However, these texts, and numerous others which seek to describe versions of boyhoods, do present pertinent cultural images to their readers; they represent ways of imagining contemporary boyhoods, each unique. In Bowler's texts this means taking on the picture of an outwardly violent, socially alienated youth while simultaneously recognising a vulnerable, troubled boy, an individual. Supporting Blade in his attempts to escape, we, the onlookers, move into a morally ambiguous space: suddenly good and evil are no longer so simple to separate when applied to an individual boy's circumstances. Perhaps a timely reminder

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‘Enlisting the passions on the side of virtue’ (Tobias Smollett about Samuel Richardson): Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Young Adult Girls’ Reading

Bridget Carrington

Until the 1870 Education Act provided access to reading for even the poorest children, the ability to enjoy a book by reading it oneself – as distinct from having it read out loud – was generally restricted to a limited number of young readers whose social background was reasonably privileged. Since at least the mid-eighteenth century, young adult (YA) girls, unfitted by their education for extensive reading in the classics or philosophy, turned to novels to provide both entertainment and instruction, while novelists of integrity, such as Samuel Richardson (who had in earlier years produced many ‘Conduct Books’ to instruct girls), swiftly identified the need for fiction of this type. I use the term YA to describe girls between puberty and marriage – a movable feast in the years from 1265 to 1875 when the age of consent was twelve and which by 1885 had risen only to thirteen.

As primary evidence of what eighteenth-century YA girls were reading, the diaries of contemporary girls offer an invaluable source. The diary of Elizabeth (Betsey) Wynne provides us with an important record of what an actual adolescent female was reading from 1789. Betsey was born on 19 April 1779, the second of the five daughters of Richard Wynne and his French wife. In 1788, Mrs. Wynne’s health deteriorated, and the Wynne family sold their property in England and went to live with Richard’s married sister in Venice, taking with them their servants, horses and dogs. From there they travelled widely within Italy, and eventually settled for a while at Wartegg in Switzerland, where many of Betsey’s entries relating to her reading were written. At the age of eighteen Betsey fell in love with Captain Thomas Fremantle of Nelson’s navy, and married him, continuing her diaries (42 notebooks’ worth!) until her death in 1857.

As well as popular non-fiction works and collections of tales such as Madame de Genlis’s *Veillées du Chateau* (translated into English as *Tales of the Castle* soon after its original publication), the Wynne family routinely read plays together, particularly works by Molière, in their original language, and performed them for friends and family. Fiction reading was a favourite pastime amongst the adolescent girls, and on 4 January 1792 the thirteen-year-old Betsey Wynne records, writing in French, ‘I read a little of Robinson Crusoe’ – possibly Daniel Defoe’s original 1719 English version, or in a French translation made in 1720–1721. The earliest reference she makes to an English novel is on 17 November 1791, when aged twelve. Writing in French, Betsey notes, ‘Mr. Jaegle makes us read an English book that is called *The Vicar of Wakefield* which is very pretty, interesting, well wrote and where there are some very good characters.’

The Vicar of Wakefield, Oliver Goldsmith’s novel of 1766, is also being read by adolescent girls in Jane Austen’s *Emma* (1816), and in the Louisa Alcott’s *Little Women* (1868). In July 1769 the sixteen-year-old Fanny Burney, in one of the first entries in her diary, writes at length about Goldsmith’s novel, indicating that she found: ‘This book is of a very singular kind...’, and she found it very moving. It seems, however, from erasures in the text on the page, that Fanny, revising her diaries many years later, substantially altered the tone of these comments, having at the age of sixteen found much less in *The Vicar* that entertained her. Faintly on the page appears the earlier, erased comment ‘The book is not at all satisfactory.’

Betsey Wynne’s diary entry for 14 June 1792 records ‘I began to read the Paul and Virginia book that Mrs. Braun brought here, it is very pretty’. The Wynne girls obviously enjoyed it, for on the 20th her sister Eugenia records: ‘I read for the second time... Paul and Virginia, that is charming.’ *Paul et Virginie*, a romantic novel by Jacques-Henri Bernadin de Saint-Pierre, was published in France in 1787, and several English translations followed almost immediately. It is the story of orphans who eventually become lovers: Virginia drowns rather than lose her modesty by casting aside her voluminous garments, and Paul then dies of grief. Though popular well into the late

nineteenth century, the novel was criticised by George Moore because it gave ‘erroneous and superficial notions of the value of life and love’ and was therefore a far more dangerous choice of reading for YA girls than the more overtly romantic or sensational Gothic novel.



Jean-Honore Fragonard
Young Girl Reading
(c.1776)
© Bridgeman Art Library/
National Gallery of Art,
Washington DC, USA

Betsey also enjoyed Fielding, writing on 3 October 1793 that ‘I read again in *Tom Johns* [sic] the Society in the Coach being rather sulky’. We know that Dr Johnson would not have approved, for Hannah More tells us that ‘if a modest lady had done so improper a thing as to read [*Tom Jones*], she should not do so immodest a thing as to avow!’ The novel which met with her greatest approval however (and with that of many YA girls in the eighteenth and nineteenth century) was Richardson’s *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, seven massive volumes published in 1753–1754 which deal with the relationship of Harriet Byron, a twenty-year-old orphan with a variety of suitors, reported, together with Grandison’s reaction and his own complicated amours, through Harriet’s correspondence. Betsey comments frequently and favourably on Grandison, reading it from 26 February to 11 April 1793, starting with ‘I stayed at home and read *Grandison* that we have in French, a charming book’ and concluding ‘I have done to read Grandisson that Book has amused me vastly’. Betsey must have been relieved that Prévost’s translation reduced the original to a mere four volumes! Another admirer of *Grandisson* was Catherine Morland, seventeen-year-old heroine of Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, an avid reader of the more modern genre of Gothic horror novels such as Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), protesting to her dismissive friend Isabella that *Grandison* ‘... is not like Udolpho at all; but yet I think it is very entertaining’. Like her heroine, the adolescent Jane Austen read Richardson repeatedly, and was enthralled by *Grandison* in particular; at the age of sixteen Austen wrote a short dramatisation of Richardson’s novel, one of her earliest known works. Austen’s novels are a rich source of information about YA girls’ reading, her characters often noting their views on the latest addition to the shelves of the local circulating library.

As we move later into the nineteenth century, not only do diary and autobiographical reading records increase – and survive – but young people’s reading becomes the subject of particular interest to educationalists as well as to literary and social commentators. With the 1870 Education Act enabling access to reading for even the poorest children, the publishing houses capitalised on a new, vast and enthusiastic market. Almost immediately, experts (some more so than others) began to recommend suitable reading for perplexed parents and guardians to guide their impressionable charges towards. It is interesting that a century and a quarter later we are in the middle of an impassioned argument between publishers and authors about the need for such guidance, in the form of age banding of books! By 1887 Charlotte M. Yonge, the prolific author of a variety of factual and fiction books for all ages, produced *What Books to Lend and What to Give* to help sort the wheat from the chaff, and the following year Edward Salmon collected together into a book a number of the articles about young people’s reading habits he had written for a wide variety of monthly family magazines: *Juvenile Literature as it Is*. (See next page.)

Salmon’s was a serious attempt to analyse both the reading habits of boys and girls, and to comment on what he had discovered were the most popular and worthwhile authors and titles. He was clear that boys and girls had different tastes, and he made use of research among a thousand girls from eleven to nineteen years of age. Salmon considers that prescribing or restricting girls’ reading for pleasure is pointless, as ‘[i]ndividual reading must depend upon individual taste, save of course, when reading solely for study and instruction’. Noting the absence at the top of the lists of those writers we might expect YA girls to choose, the conclusion he draws is that ‘[i]f girls were to select their own books ... they would make a choice very different from that which their elders make for them’.

Does anything change?

II.—WHAT GIRLS READ.

The replies from girls number a few more than a thousand. A perusal of the statistics which are the result will prove generally more surprising, and on that account more instructive, than in the case of the boys. The favourite authors are :—

Charles Dickens,	355	Grimm,	20
Sir Walter Scott,	248	Thackeray,	20
C. Kingsley,	103	Mrs Walton,	20
C. M. Yonge,	100	W. H. G. Kingston,	19
Shakespeare,	75	Whyte Melville,	18
Mrs Henry Wood,	58	Mrs Craik,	15
E. Wetherell,	56	Macaulay,	15
George Eliot,	50	Miss Alcott,	14
Lord Lytton,	46	Miss Braddon,	13
Andersen,	33	Harrison Ainsworth,	13
Longfellow,	32	Miss Worboise,	12
A.L.O.E.,	32	Bunyan,	11
Hesba Stretton,	27	Mrs H. B. Stowe,	11
Canon Farrar,	27	Lord Tennyson,	10
Grace Aguilar,	23	Miss Montgomery,	9
Jules Verne,	22	R. D. Blackmore,	9

Miss Havergal,	9	Miss Edgeworth,	6
W. Black,	8	R. M. Ballantyne,	6
Defoe,	8	Lewis Carroll,	5
Mark Twain,	8	Mrs Gaskell,	5
C. Brontë,	8	Mrs Hemans,	5
F. Smedley,	7	Mrs E. Marshall,	5
Carlyle,	7	Captain Marryat,	5
John Ruskin,	7	F. Anstey,	5

Books in the greatest favour are voted as follows :—

Westward Ho!	34	Lorna Doone,	8
The Wide, Wide World,	29	Eric,	8
The Bible,	27	St Winifreds,	8
A Peep Behind the Scenes,	27	Hereward the Wake,	8
John Halifax, Gentleman,	25	Pilgrim's Progress,	8
David Copperfield,	22	The Mill on the Floss,	7
Little Women,	21	The Lamplighter,	7
Ivanhoe,	18	The Swiss Family Robinson,	6
The Days of Bruce,	16	John Inglesant,	6
The Daisy Chain,	13	Last Days of Pompeii,	6
The Heir of Redcliffe,	12	Last of the Barons,	6
Kenilworth,	12	The Heroes,	6
The Pickwick Papers,	11	Two Years Ago,	5
Little Meg's Children,	10	Little Dot,	5
Good Wives,	9	Melbourne House,	5
Christie's Old Organ,	8	Home Influence,	5
Queechy,	8	The Newcomes,	5
Scottish Chiefs,	8	Hypatia,	5
The Channings,	8	East Lynne,	5
Uncle Tom's Cabin,	8		

Edward Salmon (1888) 'What Girls Read'. In *Juvenile Literature as it Is*. London: Henry Drage. pp. 21 and 22.

Boys and their Ponies: Or what Was the Pony Story Like before the Pony Story?

Jenny Kendrick

I've been researching British equine fiction in the interwar years for some time and, amongst other things, mulling over the claim by Josephine Pullein-Thomson that her mother's first children's book (*A Pony for Jean*, 1936) began the girls' pony-story genre.

Up to now pony stories had been written with the pony as the central figure. But this story is told by Jean, who cares for horses more than anything else in the world, and turns the thin, discarded pony Cavalier into a winner.

(*Fair Girls and Grey Horses*, Allison & Busby, 1996, p. 147)

Whether or not Joanna Cannan is the instigator of a genre which has been loved by girl readers and frequently derided by children's literature critics, this rescue, rehabilitation and recognition formula undoubtedly became the pattern for innumerable imitators, not least Cannan's own daughters.

Prior to this usage of the term, the pony story seems to have followed the life of a pony (à la *Black Beauty*), either from the pony's point of view or 'autobiographically'; for example, *Moorland Mousie* (1929) by 'Golden Gorse' (Muriel Wace). However, there are many more examples of texts from the interwar period which fit neither of these protagonist-based definitions. Family adventure in the style of Arthur Ransome, for instance, is well represented, not least by *The Far-Distant Oxus* (1938) by schoolgirls Katherine Hull and Pamela Whitlock, who sent their manuscript to Ransome, who took it to his own publisher, Jonathan Cape.

But what about texts that have boy protagonists? Can they be 'pony stories' in the Pullein-Thomson's sense if the protagonist is a boy? As Alison Haymonds points out, such novels tend to feature wild horses and to be 'set against a "Wild West" backdrop, and employ male protagonists, who tame their horses' rather than conforming to the 'realistic, domestic' style established by Cannan ('Pony Books' in Peter Hunt (ed.) *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, London: Routledge, p. 360). However, there are a number of books of the interwar period featuring boy protagonists that predate Cannan and yet which (other than gender) seem to employ elements of the pony story as defined by Haymonds.

[A] young girl, lacking in confidence and self esteem, longs for a pony but cannot afford one; she finds a special pony, longs to own it, and acquires it by chance or by saving money; she discovers the economic problems of keeping a pony, learns to ride, school and look after it properly and, in the process, gains confidence and a skill; something threatens the status quo, often lack of money, and it seems the girl may lose the pony; however, in the end, she rides it to success in a show.

(*ibid*, p. 361)

Broncho (1930) by Richard Ball, is one example. The novel relates the life story of the eponymous Broncho, largely written from the point of view of his teenage owner Roger. Arguably this is a horse story rather than a pony story, but all the key elements of the pony story as defined by Haymonds are here. Broncho is 'the very horse of his [Roger's] dreams' (p. 8) although he needs rescuing from a dealer who has starved and maltreated him. Roger has only half the money for the horse but refuses assistance to buy him. He schools Broncho, using 'such knowledge as seemed to be instinctive' (pp. 19–20), before the First World War intervenes, injuring and separating them. Eventually, on a horse-buying trip to Ireland, Roger unexpectedly recognises Broncho and buys him again, this time not to be parted. This is an emotional meeting, reminiscent of *Black Beauty* at the very end being recognised by Joe Green; as Broncho whinnies 'a low breathless greeting' Roger has to bite his lip 'to stop its trembling' (p. 111). Roger brings Broncho back to fitness and together they win the show jumping at Olympia.

One of the most prolific of the interwar pony story authors was Eleanor Helme, occasionally co-writing with Nance Paul; their protagonists are almost invariably boys. *The Joker and Jerry Again* (1932) is Helme and Paul's second pony novel and, like *Broncho*, it appears to conform quite closely to Haymonds' criteria for the post-Cannan pony story. Pat has never ridden before, but meeting the piebald Joker makes him realise that he longs to ride in the way the farmer's son Sam does, where 'pony and rider' are 'perfectly at one with each other' (p. 21). Fulfilling Haymonds' criteria for discovering the economic realities of owning a pony, Pat learns to ride, but it comes at a cost, and he weeds and works as a groom in order to earn enough money to pay for his lessons and hacks. When he discovers that Joker is to be sold, Pat despairs of being able to buy him, but his newly acquired riding skill means that he can rescue Jerry, an Exmoor pony, and receive the reward which will enable him to buy Joker.

Today's marginalisation of girls' formulaic pony books is not, I feel, an indication of how interwar equine fiction was received, nor perhaps is it likely to be an indicator of the gender of readers. Pony books were reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement* as well as in magazines such as *Riding*, and pre-Cannan protagonists are usually boys, or family groups in which boys and girls demonstrate equal skills in riding and pony care. Whilst *Broncho* is the only one of the ten or so titles of the period featuring boy protagonists to have been written by a male author, riding in the interwar years, and the dissemination of knowledge about it, was dominated by former cavalry officers, who wrote many of the instruction books and were involved with the inception of the Pony Club in 1929.

Almost all of the ten books allow the boy protagonists the same attachment to their ponies as later appears in girls' fiction. The focus, as so often in equine literature of the period, is on the development of a mutually dependent relationship which will allow the child rider to school his pony and be able to ride it, whilst the pony is guaranteed the knowledgeable care it needs. So, whilst Josephine Pulein-Thompson may well have a good claim that her mother started the girls' genre, could the pony story have already existed – and have been for boys?

Gender and Reading

Pam Robson

Where Have All the Folk Heroines Gone? is the apt title of an article by James Riordan featured in the September 1982 issue of *Books for Keeps*. At that time, feminism was in vogue and the submissive role of female characters in traditional fairy tales was receiving a bad press. Riordan points out that 'Most folk and fairy tales are about boys, men and male adventures.' He questions the absence of traditional fairy-tale heroines who *can* be found in certain cultures but are nevertheless rare; he cites the Frog Princess tale from Eastern Europe. He applauds the emergence of the humorous non-stereotypical fairy tale with a strong heroine. Riordan emphasises the necessity to redress the gender balance: 'Fairy tales can and should encourage the imagination and creativity of all children ... at the expense of none.'

Ways of Being Male: Representing Masculinities in Children's Literature and Film, a collection of essays edited by John Stephens, appeared 20 years after Riordan's article. By this time, the impact of feminism had been profound. Gender stereotypes had been made such targets of ridicule that heroes effectively metamorphosed. Margaret Meek analyses this transformation in an article published in the July 2003 issue of *Books for Keeps*, with particular reference to *Ways of being Male*.

Thus gender is an aspect of the ways stories are told, and the way a reader is invited to view the world the author ... has created. So now that masculine subjectivities include some of the characteristics once claimed for women only, we have to 'picture' males as heroes of a different kind. (Meek, 2003)

Meek also expresses concern at one statement from the collection which describes children's literature as 'unintentionally but implicitly homophobic'.

Children learn about the world through stories and now have access to numerous titles which present female and male characters juxtaposed in more balanced roles and situations. However, gender analysis of texts must take into account the target audience of the author – plausible gender roles must, by definition, make allowances for gender differences.

The following list presents a variety of titles which address gender issues. Prose titles from before 2000 are included only if they have subsequently been reissued or have an international relevance. Hence classic anti-sexist texts such as Gene Kemp's *The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tyler* (1977), Babette Cole's *Princess Smartypants* (1986), Anne Fine's *Bill's New Frock* (1988) and Anthony Browne's *Piggybook* (1992) are omitted. Details of these books and many others can be found in Pat Pinsent's *Children's Literature and the Politics of Equality* (London: Fulton, 1997).

Fairy tales and picture books

(Illustrations by the authors unless otherwise indicated.)

Pamela Allen (2000) *Inside Mary Elizabeth's House*, London: Puffin, 0140567119

A picture book for younger children. The illustrations convey much about the characters, enhancing and extending the simple large-print text. Each day the eponymous Mary Elizabeth tells four tough-looking boys that there is a monster in her house. Each time the boys scoff. The reader is invited to view more closely and something, visible through the upstairs window, gets bigger and bigger. Finally Mary Elizabeth invites the boys in for dinner. They do meet a monster and flee. Distinct echoes of Sendak here.

Martin Baynton ([1988] 2007) *Jane and the Dragon*. London: Walker, 0744578108

First title in a series about Jane, a small girl who becomes a brave knight. Jane is a princess who hates to sew. Only the court jester understands her wish to become a knight. She sets out to deal with a fierce dragon only to befriend the lonely creature. The king and queen are amazed when Jane removes her armour and reveals her identity. The success of this title has been followed by a new edition, published in 2007, to tie in with a TV series.

Tony Blundell (2002) *Beware of Girls*, London: Puffin, 0140566600

An hilarious title in the fairy tale genre – the wicked wolf is repeatedly thwarted by an enterprising girl. The wolf becomes increasingly frenzied while the girl remains cool, calm and collected.

Kaye Umansky, illus. Trevor Dunton (2001) *Prince Dandypants and the Masked Avenger*, London: Puffin, 014131012X

The fairy tale genre is given a delightful 'send-up'. The eponymous prince, an effeminate dandy, sets off to win the hand of the neighbouring princess. He is accompanied by his long-suffering assistant, Jollops, an aspiring jester, and a resourceful girl called Charlie. Thanks to Charlie, the prince is saved from a giant and thwarts the evil doings of the masked avenger. The latter is pretending to be a Robin Hood character and plots a rebellion by the peasants. There is no happy wedding at the end, but lots of possibilities.

Short stories and folk tales

Anne Fine (2001) *Very Different*, London: Mammoth, 0749743700

Nine short stories for older children. Careful reading is required to capture the subtle nuances. 'Fabric crafts' is a meaningful tale about a boy who likes to embroider.

Robert Leeson, illus. Axel Scheffler (1994) *Smart Girls*, London: Walker 0744552230

A retelling of five traditional folk tales, each from a different country, but linked by the common thread of the smartness of a female heroine. Stories from England, Ireland, Norway, Ukraine and Egypt.

Poetry

Tony Bradman, illus. Kim Palmer (1992) *Our Side of the Playground*, London: Red Fox, 0099977702

This anthology reads from the back and from the front. Contributions from R. McGough, J. Cunliffe, J. Agard, J. Ure and others. The different attitudes of boys and girls are examined.

S. Steele and M. Styles, illus. Jane Ray (1989) *Mother Gave a Shout*, London: A&C Black, 0713632429

A multicultural anthology of poems by women and girls. Contributions from well-known poets and children, including Stevie Smith and Grace Nichols. Divided into nine sections, some amusing, some sad, some thought provoking.

Culture and gender

Afghanistan

Deborah Ellis (2004) *The Breadwinner*, Oxford University Press, 0192752847

The setting is prior to the war and the Taliban are in control. Parvana's family live in fear – women must wear the burqa and remain indoors. Then her father is arrested and Parvana must pretend to be a boy in order to go outside and earn some money. Some horrific descriptions of Taliban punishments. Narrative is occasionally stilted. Sequel is *Parvana's Journey*.

Morris Gleitzman (2002) *Boy Overboard*, London: Puffin, 014131625X

Jamal narrates this story, set in Afghanistan prior to the overthrow of the Taliban. He and his sister Bibi love to play football, though girls are forbidden to do so. Their mother is a teacher, although this is also forbidden, and she is arrested and sent for execution. Father rescues his wife and the family pay smugglers to help them flee on a boat to Australia. Jamal and Bibi are separated from their parents, robbed by the crew and left to drown, until rescued by the navy. But the Australian government does not want refugees. A story with humour and pathos.

Suzanne Fisher Staples (2006) *Under the Persimmon Tree*, London: Walker, 0744555973

In war-torn Afghanistan, the Taliban battles against the USA. Najmah sees her mother and baby brother killed by American bombs, having already lost her father and brother who have been conscripted by the Taliban. Her family grow persimmons. She dresses as a boy and manages to reach a refugee camp in Pakistan where she is sent to the school of an American, Elaine (Nusrat), who is married to an Afghanistani doctor. Nusrat has converted to Islam and she too has a persimmon tree. Nusrat's husband and Najmah's father are both killed. Both return home and events remain inconclusive.

China

Pamela Grant (2001) *When a Girl is Born*, Oxford: University Press, 0192716999

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

India

Frances Mary Hendry (2004) *Chandra*, Oxford: University Press, 0192753479

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

Historical stories

Marjorie Darke ([1975] 2002) *A Question of Courage*, London: Barn Owl Books, 1903015219

This is the reissue of a novel first published in 1975. The setting moves from Birmingham to London, where the women's suffragette movement is in full swing. Emily is a seamstress, angered by her treatment at home, who finds herself drawn into the movement by Louise, a young lady of wealth. Then Emily moves to London and is eventually imprisoned for her actions, though she does come to realise that violence is not the answer.

Frances Mary Hendry (2000) *Chains*, Oxford University Press, 0192751662

The setting is the late eighteenth century; the anti-slavery movement is in progress. Juliet takes her brother's place, disguised as a man, to travel aboard their father's trading ship. She witnesses the full horror of the slave trade between Liverpool, Africa and America. Parallel events are described in linked chapters. In this way the reader follows events as they occur. The characters of Hassan (son of a Muslim slaver), Gbodi (an African girl whose seething hatred infects the other slaves) and Dand (a young Scottish lad press-ganged into service) come together. Juliet becomes convinced of the evils of slavery.

Philip Reeve (2007) *Here Lies Arthur*, London: Scholastic, 978 0439955331

A deconstruction of previous tales of King Arthur. Reeve uses his central character Gwyna, who narrates, to show the reality of a bully who achieved fame through the power of stories told by her master Mryddin. The latter is a trickster who uses storytelling (aka lies) to create the myth of King Arthur. Gwyna changes roles – first as boy, then as girl, in order to survive. She is the real hero of the story.

Fantasy and futurism

Eoin Colfer (2001) *Artemis Fowl*, London: Puffin, 0141312122

The setting for this fantasy is Ireland. The eponymous anti-hero is a 12-year-old boy and an international villain. Artemis steals the book of the fairies to discover their secrets, and with it he tricks the technologically advanced fairies who live inside the Earth into releasing gold to him. Captain Holly Short is sent to Ireland to recharge her magic powers. When Artemis kidnaps her he sets the plot in motion. Mulch, a villainous dwarf, is employed to free Holly from captivity; he can tunnel through soil using his mouth and then expel it from his rear – a rude element with child appeal. Artemis wins the day. The series continues, and Artemis and Holly learn to work together.

James Jauncey (2007) *The Witness*, London: Picador, 978 0330447133

The setting for this futuristic tale is the Highlands of Scotland. Two factions battle for power in a dystopian situation. A Land Act removing land ownership from lairds has led to the destruction of society. The rebels fight to restore normalcy. 18-year-old John witnesses a massacre perpetrated by the authorities and escapes with Ninian, a youngster suffering from fragile X syndrome (i.e. autism). John recalls with pain the tragic loss of his young brother Davie, who also had personality problems. He meets again the man who once bullied both him and Davie. John protects Ninian and demonstrates amazing patience. Extreme violence and death take place and language is strong. John meets Lila who understands Ninian and together they finally reach 'Tod' the rebel leader who happens to be Ninian's father. John testifies against the authorities and the rebels win the day.

Joan Lennon (2007) *Questors*, London: Puffin, 0141381510

This is Lennon's first published teenage story, a fantasy in which three threatened worlds coexist. But the order of things has been disturbed and three heroes – one from each world – are called upon to find the three objects that will restore the balance. The young heroes, Madlen, Cam and Bryn, discover that they are siblings and meet their mother, Mrs Mac, for the first time. She is housekeeper at London House and quietly demonstrates unusual powers, disguised within household objects. Cam's gender is undetermined. In his world, gender identity is established later in life. The three hidden

objects are not the usual quest objects and these heroes can only blunder their way to success, despite evil opponents. This fantasy has originality, humour and ingenuity.

Jan Mark (2005) *Riding Tycho*, London: Macmillan, 0333997735

A dystopic novel: some people have reached another planet where they lead a rigid, primitive existence in which rules must be followed and men and boys bully females into submission. Demetria meets a political prisoner, Ianto, who tells her of Earth, where people are free. He is one of a group of scientists sent to assist the new planet but they are imprisoned instead. The eponymous Tycho is an ocean current which carries logs to an island; Demetria makes her escape on a log after Ianto is punished for flying a kite. The sequel *Voyager* was published in 2006, the year of Jan Mark's untimely death.

Brian Jacques, illus. David Elliot (2005) *High Rhulain*, London: Puffin, 0141381604

Tiria Wildlough, a young otter, is elected queen, and becomes the eponymous High Rhulain. Otters have been enslaved by the wild cats on Green Isle. Tiria, aided by the Long Patrol of hares, manages to free them, with the help of an injured osprey and a goose.

Heroes and heroines

Ian Bone, illus. Craig Smith (1999) *Winning Back Dad*, London: Walker, 0744572916

This story for younger readers is set in Australia. Kel loves to drive his Dad's truck, but Dad has to sell up and become a house husband, looking after the baby while Mum goes out to work. Kel is determined to get Dad back to his old self and enters him for the nappy-hanging competition at school. Despite all the odds Dad is joint winner. There is a nice twist at the end of the story and Dad comes to enjoy being at home.

Julia Golding (2007) *Ringmaster*, London: Egmont 978 1405230506

This is the first title of a brand new adventure series featuring the 14-year-old girl spy, Darcie Lock. Darcie lives a privileged life in Kenya, where her father is employed by the British High Commission. Her mother regularly travels to the USA. After her father is kidnapped by villains, Darcie discovers that both her parents are spies. Darcie is asked to help find her father and soon learns some useful skills. Violent situations occur but Darcie succeeds in rescuing her father and destroying a terrorist group. The eponymous Ringmaster is the evil Madame Tsui, who disappears, injured but not fatally, leaving an open-ended narrative. Darcie is portrayed as a real teenager, not a super hero.

Joyce Carol Oates (2002) *Big Mouth and Ugly Girl*, London: Collins, 000714573X

This powerful teenage story is set in America. The eponymous Big Mouth is Matt Donaghy who is questioned by the police after someone claims he has threatened to use a gun in school. Gossip buzzes and only Ugly Girl, Ursula Briggs, defends Matt. Finally cleared, Matt becomes depressed. His family threatens to sue the school and his friends turn against him. His dog is kidnapped and he is bullied. Ursula and Matt become closer and eventually all is resolved. Ursula, who is tall and strong, defies all gender rules.

Wendelin Van Draanen (1998) *Sammy Keyes and the Hotel Thief*, London: Scholastic, 04339981239

Sammy lives in her grandmother's apartment whilst her negligent mother is in Hollywood. An assertive heroine, she is prone to angry outbursts against injustice, especially bullying, and is something of a sleuth too. She witnesses a burglary through her binoculars but the thief sees her as well. There is plenty of humour in the narrative, the first of a series.

EPBC, BARFIE, and EDM Reporter: EU-Funded European Educational Projects

OTHER ISSUES

Lilia Ratcheva-Stratieva, coordinator of BARFIE and EDM Reporter, Kinderliteraturhaus, Vienna, Austria

Perhaps some of you have heard of EPBC, BARFIE or EDM Reporter? These abbreviations stand for European educational projects – the European Picture Book Collection, Books and Reading for Intercultural Education and the Electronic Digital Reporter. They are all connected with literature for children, reading promotion and intercultural education. Originally based only on books, these projects and networks gradually started to include other media, such as the internet and e-learning, and proved that today it is simply impossible to use only one medium in the process of education. The combination of different media is offered to teachers in order to make the educational process more interesting, more vivid, more active and more interactive.

The group involved with the above mentioned literary projects is only one of the many networks whose activities are funded in the framework of the European educational programmes. In different dynamic combinations of experts, the group assists teachers, librarians and students to discover the joys of teaching, learning and reading: it helps teachers and librarians to find individual approaches to their pupils, and children to discover their fields of interest and to deepen their competencies in working with new media, as well as their literary competencies. These facilities can all serve to help users to become all-round personalities – not only experts in their own fields but also people who enjoy art and the other intellectual opportunities that life can offer.

The latest of the European projects connected with literature, and the main group of partners (though there are also different combinations with other partners outside the main group), are the EDM Reporter Comenius 3 network, Readcom (a Grundtvig project) and Visualising Europe (a Comenius 2 project).

In order to understand better the dynamics of the group and the different ideas realised in the partnership, we have to go back to the first European educational literary projects connected with literature for children, and to the roots of the so-called family tree of these projects. Among the first generation of the EU Comenius projects, without which the creation of networks would not have been possible, are two Comenius 2 projects: the EPBC and the in-service training course on European children's literature on war and peace, whose authors and coordinators, respectively Penni Cotton and Annemie Leysen, later became partners in projects such as BARFIE, the EDM Reporter and Readcom, and also had the opportunity to develop further their ideas and to contribute to the new projects.

Only on this basis was it possible to create a network of literary projects suitable for intercultural education. Some years later, in 2002, the BARFIE Comenius 3 network was created. The main task of the network was to connect some of the projects based on literature for children and young people with the promotion of readership and intercultural education, and to recommend them for use in the educational process.

BARFIE was one of the first Comenius 3 networks that were funded by the European Commission. Besides organising each year an international conference and disseminating the results of the previous projects, the BARFIE network developed a catalogue of European books on intercultural education. The catalogue contained books from 18 European countries, all suitable for intercultural education, and was published in three languages: English, French and German. The translations of the books were quoted where available, but the catalogue also provided an inspiration to publishers to translate and publish other books.

Intercultural education is understood in the BARFIE network in a very broad sense. It means not only the ability to communicate with, and respect, people from different nations, religions, and races, but also to understand and relate to disabled people and to children from families with difficulties or with special needs. The network links

institutions working in the field of literature for children. Theses have been written based on the BARFIE network and the BARFIE book selection. Some of the partners, especially the libraries, regularly use BARFIE books in their work.

At the same time, Penni Cotton initiated the ESET (European School Education Training Course) project, which is based on the EPBC and shows methods of working with the EPBC books in the classroom.

The EDM Reporter is associated with two other projects: Readcom and Visualising Europe. Readcom, a project financed by the Grundtvig adult-education programme, which was involved in creating book clubs and a programme for a course for book club organisers and promoters of books and reading, was coordinated by Piotr Jankowski, director of the public library in the Warsaw district of Ursus, Poland. This project was distinguished as one of the most interesting and successful projects under the Grundtvig programme. Furthermore, a colleague from Portugal, Margarida Morgado, developed the idea for a project named Visualising Europe, also based on books for children and young people. This project focuses on the education in visual literacy of primary-school children (6–12 year olds), while emphasising intercultural education.

The EDM Reporter Comenius 3 network uses the opportunities that the internet offers in order to support intercultural education and reading promotion, and to deepen the literary competencies of pupils. The EDM Reporter does not advocate the replacement of books by the internet, but promotes the use of the internet together with books. Sometimes the internet offers possibilities that a book cannot offer; it can also give suggestions for teachers and librarians, developed by experienced promoters. The internet suggestions may be used in many European countries at the same time and they may supplement one another. At the very beginning of the network a survey on the children's use of the internet was conducted in the 14 participating countries.

Finally, in the year 2006, the European Commission approved the project SEEC (South-East European Centre for Literature and Media for Children) in the framework of the European programme Culture 2000, a regional project also based on children's literature and media. The organisers are based in the south-east Europe countries of Bulgaria, Poland, Cyprus and Austria. The network's aims are to create a south-east European research library for children's and youth literature, publish four issues of a literary journal *Aeolus*, award literary prizes, organise a literary festival and create a website. The overall aim is to initiate cooperation and networking among institutions in south-east Europe working in the field of children's literature. The EU funding was for one year but the journal now has a sponsor and the project will continue.

As already mentioned, the basic group of partners in the BARFIE network has been incorporated into the EDM Reporter network, but only 14 partners from 11 countries took part in BARFIE, while in the EDM Reporter there are already 19 partners from 14 countries. The partners are institutions working in the field of literature for children, universities and educational institutes training teachers, and libraries. The group has been enlarged to include teachers and schools, because experience has shown how important it is to include teachers and librarians in the networks and to have the opportunity to test, in the classroom or in the library, the new methods of intercultural education, book promotion and enlarging the literary competencies of children.

Websites

Details of the EPBC, BARFIE, EDM Reporter and ESET projects and networks can be accessed from the EPBC home page at www.ncrcl.ac.uk/epbc/EN/index.asp.

The BARFIE catalogue (2004) is at www.bpursus.waw.pl/katalog_barfie1.pdf.

Readcom home page is at en.readcom.info/index.php.

Visualising Europe home page is at <http://ve.ese.ipcb.pt>.

The SEEC website is in Bulgarian and English. The English version is at <http://www.seec-bg.net:80>. It does not yet [July 2008] have copies of the four 2007 journals or a report of the festival.

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

Jennifer Harding

The proceedings of the IBBY/NRCL MA conference in November 2007 held at Roehampton University will be published as a book of the above title by Cambridge Scholars Publishing. It is currently (August 2008) in press.

Children's book illustration seems to be very much in the news following the launch of the Booktrust's campaign 'The Big Picture'. The Big Picture Campaign was launched in 2007 as a new initiative to promote picture books and illustrators. The campaign included a long list of 27 illustrators with books first published in the UK after 2002 and an announcement of the 'ten best new illustrators' by the Children's Laureate Michael Rosen at the Bologna Children's Book Fair on 31 March 2008. The judging committee included the author and illustrator Anthony Browne, the final speaker at the IBBY/NRCL MA conference.

Not only did Anthony Browne speak at the conference but Walker Books gave permission for one of his illustrations to be reproduced on the front cover of the conference publication. Amongst the 'ten best new illustrators' chosen by Anthony Browne and his committee are Lisa Evans and Alexis Deacon – both discussed (with illustrations) in the paper by Martin Salisbury – one of the keynote speakers at the conference.

Awards seem prominent for those in the book: Jan Pieńkowski, Piet Gobler (discussed in Dianne Hofmeyr's paper on South African illustration) and Mauricio Gómez Morín (discussed in Evelyn Arizpe's paper) were 2007 Hans Anderson Illustration Award nominees; Anthony Browne was the 2000 Hans Anderson Illustration Award winner; and Roberto Innocenti (discussed in Rebecca R. Butler's paper on the Holocaust) is the 2008 Hans Anderson Illustration Award winner.

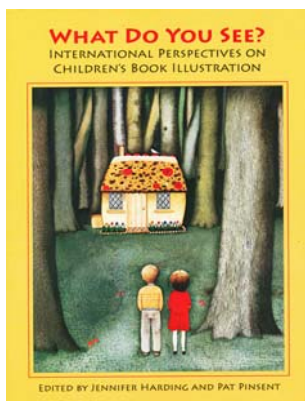
It has not struck me before what I am missing by having only one body and hence being able to be present at only one of the simultaneous conference workshops. All the papers in the book are fascinating and I just wish I had seen all the presentations. The only papers not presented for the book are those by Elena Xení, Fiona Collins and Tammy Mielke. Of the main sessions, the only presenters unable to send in a synopsis are Anthony Browne and Neal Hoskins/André Letria. Most of the papers contain full-colour illustrations – choosing which to include was difficult, there is a total of 81 illustrations.

The book is divided into sections: Europe, Further Afield, Remembering the Child Audience and Conclusion.

'Europe' includes a short synopsis of Jan Pieńkowski's session, Penni Cotton's and Petros Panaou's papers on the European Picture Book Collection, Lisa Boggiss Boyce on the pop-up book market, Magdalena Sikorska on Sven Nordqvist, Stefania Tondo on *Alice* translated and reillustrated in Italian and Nepalese, and Ann Lazim/Nikki Gamble on a Belgian version of Little Red Riding Hood (including some rather gruesome illustrations).

'Further Afield' starts with short summaries of the sessions by Satoshi Kitamura with Klaus Flugge and by Prodecepta Das. The papers that follow are those of Jean Webb on Native American culture and illustration, Evelyn Arizpe on Mexican illustration, Dianne Hofmeyr on South African illustration, Mike Desmet on a innovative Chinese version of the legend of Monkey King and Peter Cook on the representation of childhood in the 1960s.

'Remembering the Child Audience' has papers on educational themes, describing many adaptable projects and initiatives. Kate Noble, Dora Oronti and Vasilike Labitsi show illustrations and book projects by children. Kate Noble worked with children requiring extra reading help, Dora Oronti describes children's responses in illustration to dance and music, and Vasilike Labitsi worked with primary school pupils. Stella Thebridge



discusses problems of books for looked-after children and Rebecca R. Butler looks at three books for children describing the Holocaust.

‘Conclusion’ starts with a shortened transcript of Martin Salisbury’s presentation of the young illustrators he has tutored at Anglia Ruskin University on the Children's Book Illustration course. The variety of the illustrations is amazing. He discusses students’ work from Taiwan, the UK, Norway, France, Iran, Argentina, Belgium, Spain, Germany and the USA. One of the Norwegian artists, Stian Hole, is one of the two illustrators discussed in the special issue of *Blackbird* (2008, vol. 46, no.3, pp. 45–51) on Nordic children’s literature. The other article in this final section is a brief transcription of the joint talk by Sabien Clement and Tom Schamp, two young Flemish artists. They discussed their different approaches to illustrating similar topics and their different methods of working.

In editing the book, I found the papers so interesting that I have bought almost all the English-language books discussed. Some that are not published in this country I have been able to find second-hand on Amazon Marketplace and one book I have been able to purchase overseas. All worth the effort.

Work cited

Harding, Jennifer and Pinsent, Pat , ed. (2008) *What Do You See? International Perspectives in Children’s Book Illustration*, Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Publication date 1 October 2008.

REVIEWS

Books about children's literature

Popular Children's Literature in Britain

Julia Briggs, Dennis Butts and M.O. Grenby (eds), Aldershot, Ashgate, hb. 978 1 84014 242 6, £55.00, 2008, 374pp.



Although this book was conceived before the birth of the Harry Potter saga, there is no doubt that J.K. Rowling's commercial success as a popular children's author has given extra significance to the very laudable venture undertaken on the initiative of Professor Julia Briggs, who unfortunately died in August 2007 while the book was in press. She and the two other editors have compiled a volume that will be of interest to children's literature scholars whatever their period of particular specialisation. They have also assembled an impressive array of contributors whose informative articles will be of great value to students of the subject.

In his very substantial general introduction, Matthew Grenby tackles the particular problems associated with the term 'popular'. As he indicates, some of the chapters assume it to mean 'that which is suited to ordinary tastes ... the inexpensive and the ephemeral ... "what the unsophisticated reader has chosen for pleasure"' (p. 2), while other contributors think in terms of material that has been well liked or commercially successful. The difficulty of establishing which books have truly been popular with children in any period before the twentieth century and the well-nigh impossibility of discovering children's real opinions means that in many instances the adjective 'popular' is more accurately descriptive of the attitudes of their parents and teachers. One interesting conclusion that emerges from the diverse accounts of popular children's literature is that the outstanding success of a limited number of celebrity children's authors is a feature only of recent times.

The strength of the Introduction in fact lies in the way in which Grenby exposes these and other problem issues to the reader. Nor does he have answers to such questions as why books containing very similar elements can vary so considerably in the extent to which they captivate readers, or indeed why some books are popular in their own period but fail the test of time. He does conclude however that once a text has attained longevity, and become part of popular culture, as, in different ways has been the case for *Robinson Crusoe*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Lord of the Rings* – and indeed Blyton's Noddy books – 'it becomes almost impossible to dislodge' (p. 20).

The chapters in Part One, 'Old tales retold', look at chapbooks, fairy tales and the treatment of Robin Hood in boys' weeklies. Grenby's discussion of popular culture in early modern Britain is particularly valuable in providing documentation on the complex issue of the definition of a chapbook, something all too often taken for granted. Each of such attributes as small size, cheap price, being sold by chapmen, and containing plebeian content seem to apply to many but not all the texts commonly so described. Nor of course is it possible to determine the extent to which children were among the readers of popular material such as *Guy of Warwick* or *The Seven Champions of Christendom*, and references by mature readers to what they read in their youth are not always totally reliable. What does seem clear, however, is that cultural interchange between popular reading and 'respectable' children's literature was a two-way traffic, and that 'no final rupture has ever occurred between children's literature and popular culture' (p. 46).

Part Two is devoted to four erstwhile 'popular' authors now unread by children: Barbara Hofland, Hesba Stretton, G.A. Henty, and Angela Brazil. I suspect that the last three of these will be fairly familiar to most readers of *IBBYLink*, but that, like me, they may know little of the first-named. Hofland, whose career is ably presented by Dennis Butts, was an admirable woman who, responding to personal need (a deceased first husband and an improvident second one) managed to assess public demand and produce a considerable range of both fiction and non-fiction works for children, very probably

even influencing the work of the Brontë sisters. Interestingly too, she seems at a very early date (1824) to have espoused the cause of the career woman, motivated no doubt by her own financial need to write.

The imposition of ‘popular instruction’ forms the theme of Part Three, comprising studies of science texts for children, the encyclopedic labours of Arthur Mee and his associates, and a study by Kim Reynolds of those texts ubiquitous in antiquarian bookshops, ‘reward’ books. Reynolds looks at the appearance of the books with their attractive plates and gold lettering, and at the responses of the young people who received these edifying prizes, concluding that ‘With very few exceptions, the history of books which were popular with children, and the history of the reward book industry, do not overlap’ (p. 207).

The final section of this book is devoted to ‘the famous three’: Blyton, Dahl and Rowling (who has the distinction of two chapters being devoted to her work). David Rudd provides evidence for his conclusion that Blyton worked in a very professional way to ensure the direction of her considerable talents towards success by assessing the market, ensuring that the designs of her books met appropriate requirements and skilfully influencing the policy of her publishers. A different slant is taken by Peter Hollindale, who contrasts the considerable commercial success of Roald Dahl with his relatively small output. He touches on the debatable issue of how far Dahl’s novels can truly be seen as ‘subversive’, showing how frequently an apparently anarchical surface story masks fairly conventional moral lessons.

It is inevitable that a study of popular children’s fiction should engage with the Harry Potter phenomenon, and Julia Eccleshare gives an admirable account of the way in which J.K. Rowling’s work coincided with a specific situation which could be seen as the market searching for an author just like her who would provide a readable series with so many elements attractive to the children who really impelled the first book into fame. Finally, Stacy Gillis examines the popularity of the Harry Potter series with adult readers and also analyses some of the current critical debate, concluding with her own reading of the Gothic elements in the novels.

With a subject as wide-ranging as popular children’s fiction, it would be easy to pinpoint omissions. For instance, whole areas such as twentieth-century adventure and domestic fiction are scarcely touched on, while references to C.S. Lewis and Philip Pullman are little more than incidental – a context in which two chapters on J.K. Rowling could seem overgenerous! But to do full justice to this all-embracing subject is impossible in a single volume, and the editors deserve considerable credit for assembling a book that combines scholarly research with challenging new perspectives on a wide range of material.

Pat Pinsent

Les ‘incroyabilicieux’ mondes de Ponti: Une étude du double lectorat dans l’œuvre de Claude Ponti [Ponti’s ‘Unbelievabilicious’ Worlds: A Study of Cross-Writing in Claude Ponti’s Work]

Catherine Renaud, Sweden, University of Uppsala Press, 978 91 554 6928 3, 2007, 310 kr, 312pp.

Claude Ponti’s ‘unbelievably delicious’ worlds are relatively unknown to those who do not have access to the French language, which is a great pity. Catherine Renaud suggests that this is probably because his linguistic games and the fun that he has with language would be quite difficult to translate into English. Her study of his worlds, which are a combination of both linguistic and visual humour, is the result of a PhD thesis written in French and published in Sweden. In her book Renaud makes numerous references to Anglo-Saxon children’s literature, and this makes her study fairly accessible to readers of English with a smattering of French!

Renaud’s text is highly original, exceptionally well researched and very readable. Her study posits that Claude Ponti’s fiction can be regarded as paradigmatic of ‘cross-



writing': written for a dual audience of children and adults. It comprises three sections. The first focuses on the carnivalesque nature of his work; the second analyses the numerous word games that he plays; and the third looks at the common themes and intratextuality that can be found primarily in his picture books, but also in his adult novels.

As Renaud carefully draws us into Ponti's worlds, through concentrating on his ability to appeal to a dual audience, she thanks a multitude of theorists without whom the world of children's literature, and subsequently her research, would not be in the position it is today. Reference to their work makes *Les 'incroyabilicieux' mondes de Ponti* a very powerful book in terms of setting it against previous research and established works. For example, before she discusses the work of Ponti, she prepares the ground for her discussion by presenting a panorama of Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian and French research, focusing mainly on picture books.

Later, when looking at the carnivalesque, she cites Mikhail Bakhtin as she develops her argument succinctly, making practical reference to Ponti's work. Much of this section focuses on *Le jour du mange-poussin* [The day of the wolves], a Ponti classic, and the ways in which a dual audience is addressed. It is a carnival and the *poussins* (baby chicks) put on masks to disguise themselves, whilst the adult chickens pretend to be the *mange-poussins* (wolves). Children, she suggests, can enjoy the grotesqueness and clowning of the baby chicks; whilst adults can return to their childhood, enjoy the obvious references to classics such as 'Little Red Riding Hood', and reflect on the nature of the world turned upside down.

Some of the word games that Renaud cites focus on the way in which Ponti makes up names for his characters. She suggests that he often intertextualises linguistically, leaving adult readers to make the links. For example, Ponti pays homage to classics such as *Alice in Wonderland*, by using *Adèle* instead of Alice for his protagonist, while he makes oblique references to other languages as with his character *Tifortou* [Tea for two]. Most of his linguistic jokes, however, are when he plays with his own language, creating names that sounds like words or phrases which are well known to most children. His character *Anne Hiversère* is probably one of the most obviously easy to recognise as *anniversaire* [birthday], but *Okilélé* needs to be read within the context of the story *Oh qu'il est laid* [Oh how ugly he is!].

Renaud points out that the personification of animals, objects and plants is an important elements of Ponti's work and the theme of friendship is paramount. This friendship is often in relation to nature, and Ponti enjoys personifying nature itself – sometimes giving clouds and water their own personalities. Moreover, he is not afraid to tackle difficult subjects; some of his picture books have quite violent themes, occasionally within dysfunctional families – as in *Okilélé*.

In conclusion, Renaud explains that she has called her thesis *Les 'incroyabilicieux' mondes de Ponti* because the title suggests a multitude of amusing and astonishing stories that would take readers on incredible journeys to unforgettable worlds. This it certainly does and, in suggesting that Ponti's work can be regarded as 'cross-writing', Renaud has created a strong argument for the value of picture book analysis. Her work will add to the existing body of research that strives to heighten awareness of its place in the world of children's literature. This study on Claude Ponti opens our eyes to the complexity of his work and the importance of the interplay between his visual and textual humour. Renaud has given us fascinating insights into an amazingly complex picture-book creator who deserves to be translated more widely.

[Renaud's keywords may well help clearer navigation of this book: French literature; children's literature; picture books; cross-writing; carnivalesque; word games; metafiction; metatextual elements; intertextuality; peritext; intratextuality; recurrent themes; fairy tales; violence; nursery rhymes.]

Penni Cotton

Children's books

A Fistful of Pearls and Other Tales from Iraq

Elizabeth Laird, illus. Shelley Fowles, London, Frances Lincoln, 2008, 978 1 84507 641 2, £4.99, 90pp.

We all know that present day Iraq is struggling to recover from its recent tragic history of conflict and tyranny and to re-establish itself as a nation and democracy. Civil war, war with neighbouring Iran, and two periods of international intervention have caused terrible suffering to the people and destruction to the country. In this delightful collection of Arabian folk tales, retold for Western readers, Elizabeth Laird makes her contribution towards the process of the country's restoration and reminds us of some of the qualities that are unique to Iraq's literary tradition.

Elizabeth Laird has lived in Iraq. In her foreword to this book, she recalls much that conjures up the country as it once was, in order to set the scene for the reader: the green hills of the north region with the backdrop of spiky mountains where villages are built on stone terraces and in spring there is a profusion of wild flowers and birdsong; the watery spread of marshlands in the south covered by tall waving reeds where the Marsh Arabs and their way of life were established for centuries; and the desert, the habitat of Bedouin nomads, which extends for miles, a landscape sporting only a sparse scattering of villages, where the occasional flocks of goats and sheep are tended by little shepherd boys, and the spectacle of a shimmering mirage on the horizon can deceive the passing traveller. In the old cities, she describes the cool, roomy old houses and shady courtyards, narrow alleyways, markets (souks), and, rising above all these, the minarets and domes of the ancient mosques from which has come the five-times-daily call to prayer. She does not omit to acknowledge the process of modernisation that is making a dramatic impact on the landscape and also on the people's way of life – lorries transporting goods along motorways, replacing the camel trains across the desert – and how the increasing habit of watching TV is eroding the age old tradition of oral storytelling.

The title story, 'A fistful of pearls', bears some resemblance to the European fairy story of 'Beauty and the Beast'; both stories attest to the transcendent power of selfless love. However the stories differ in their details and each tale has its own unique ingredients of good and bad fortune and magic that challenge the characters within it and the reader.

The nine stories in the collection feature a colourful assortment of human characters and some animals, whose less than noble qualities include boastfulness, bullying, meanness, acquisitiveness, greediness, short-temper, laziness. It also includes some others with more sympathetic qualities such as hospitality, perspicacity and tenderness. Many of the stories have the most intriguing and enigmatic titles, such as 'The pots that had babies', 'The moon pool', 'The suit of stone' and 'I want my son'; the effect of this is playfully to invite the reader to solve a riddle. A spirit of feminine ingenuity, pragmatism and wisdom underpins many of the predicaments that need to be reversed. The tales contain plenty of humour, and a sprinkling of magic. They are a pleasure to read.

Judith Philo

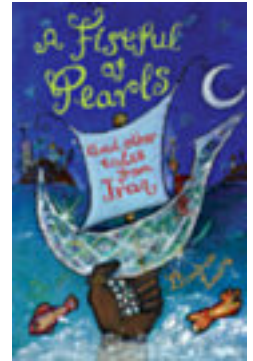
Green Smoke

Rosemary Manning, London, Jane Nissen Books, pb , 978-1-903252-29-1, £6.99, 2008, 143 pp.

Eight-year-old Susan goes on holiday to Cornwall where she meets R.Dragon, a friendly if greedy green dragon, who exhales the green smoke of the book's title. He's an expert on the Arthurian legends, having been the dragon in residence at the court of King Arthur. R.Dragon takes Susan on some fantastical adventures, visiting Tintagel and meeting a mermaid.

This book was first published in 1957. It is instantly recognisable as a book of its times. The illustrations by Constance Marshall also have a mid-twentieth century innocence.

R.Dragon is given to delivering monologues on good manners, which might be regarded



as excessively didactic by a modern publisher. Susan however hardly seems to need lecturing on manners. Like all well-brought-up girls, she carries a handkerchief even at night.

Despite belonging to an earlier generation, the book maintains a fast enough narrative pace for today's young readers. It will appeal to those children who like such books as *The Magic Faraway Tree* by Enid Blyton. The Arthurian legends are woven into the fantasy with skill and panache. In less skilled hands these yarns could easily come across as a lesson in folklore. It is to Manning's credit that they don't. The master stroke of the whole book is the inclusion of dragon charming songs, sung to the tunes of nursery rhymes.

Dragon-fairy,
Quite contrary
How does your green smoke blow?
Through my nose
And out it goes
With smoke rings all in a row. (p. 34)

I can imagine classes of seven year olds singing that song with huge gusto.

Rebecca R. Butler

Brief notes on two books

The Nostradamus Prophecy

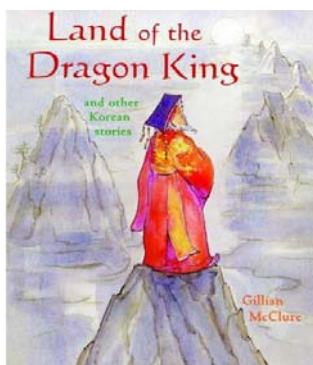
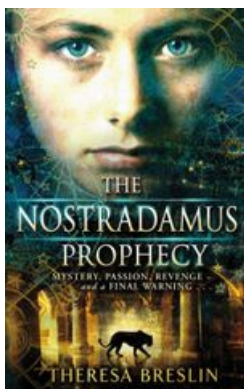
Theresa Breslin, London, Doubleday, hb. 978 0 385 61308 8, £12.99, 2008, 480pp.

This book, set in sixteenth-century France, is cleverly plotted and impressively researched. Focusing on a young musician, Mélisande, it really recreates both the vivid visual settings and the religious antagonisms behind the St Bartholomew's Day massacre, and also succeeds in making a link, through the renowned seer, with possible future ecological disaster.

The Land of the Dragon King and Other Korean Stories

Gillian McClure, London, Frances Lincoln, hb. 978 1 84507 805 8, £14.99, 2008, 64pp.

The author/illustrator of this attractive picture book was inspired by a visit she made to South Korea to create these atmospheric images which accompany nine traditional stories. These include 'Clever rabbit' who outwits a tiger, and tales explaining why the sea is salt (because a thief stole a hand mill) and why pigs have snouts (the result of being too lazy). The title story certainly provides a 'fairy-tale' ending to the collection with a poor girl both becoming queen and being an agent for her father being cured of blindness.



REPORTS

Deborah Ellis in conversation with Julia Eccleshare

The Guardian Newsroom, London. 9 June 2008.

Deborah Ellis, the Canadian author, was the guest at a Guardian Newsroom event organised by Oxford Children's Books in association with the Youth Libraries Group and the School Libraries Group. The event was hosted by Julia Eccleshare, *The Guardian* Children's Books Editor, who questioned Ellis on her books and writing. Ellis has been a committed political activist for many years and her books for children focus on children struggling to survive in conflict and poverty. In *The Breadwinner*, Parvana disguises herself as a boy, to try and support her family living under Taliban rule in Afghanistan. In Ellis's latest book, *The Prison Runner*, Diego is caught up in the cruelty of the South American drug trade when he tries to earn money to support his family in prison.

Ellis talked about the importance of meeting and talking with the people she writes about and her books have taken her to many parts of the world, including Pakistan and Bolivia. In spite of the desperate conditions she explores in her books, Ellis believes in the importance of hope in children's literature and that there is the possibility of a world without wars.

(Kathleen Milne)

Awards and Prizes 2008

Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award

This award in Astrid Lindgren's name aims to give children's and youth literature the place it deserves in the world.

Winner: Sonya Hartnett (Australia)

Branford Boase Award

Awarded for an outstanding debut novel for children.

Author award: Jenny Downham for *Before I Die* (David Fickling Books, 2007)

Editor award: David Fickling

CILIP Carnegie Medal

Awarded annually to the writer of an outstanding book for children'

Winner: Philip Reeve for *Here Lies Arthur* (Scholastic, 2007)

CILIP Kate Greenaway Medal

Awarded for distinguished illustration in a book for children'

Winner: Emily Gravett for *Little Mouse's Big Book of Fears* (Macmillan, 2007)

CLPE Award

In the last few years, the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) has taken over the role formerly played by the journal *Signal*. The aim of the award is to foster quality poetry for children by presenting a prize to what the judges consider to be the best volume of poetry (either single author or anthology) published during the preceding year. This year the shortlist comprised Carol Ann Duffy's *The Hat*, David Harmer's selection *Pirate Poems*, Diana Hendry and Hamish White's *Poems United: A Commonwealth Anthology*, John Mole's *This is the Blackbird*, Sam Taplin's *The Usborne Book of Poetry* and, the winner, Jackie Kay's *Red, Cherry, Red* (published by Bloomsbury and also including an audio CD).

As the descriptive leaflet observes: 'Jackie Kay is an award-winning writer of fiction, poetry and plays, whose subtle investigations into the complexities of identity have been informed by her own life. Born in Edinburgh to a Scottish mother and Nigerian father,

she was adopted as a baby by a white couple.’ The Scottish element is very significant in *Red, Cherry, Red*. Many of the poems are based on a landscape of wild coastal scenery or remote Scottish islands, and there is even one that uses Shetland dialect terms (with a glossary!). There is also a very strong sense of the value of the memories held by older people – grandmothers and great-grandmothers figure prominently, as do childhood recollections. In this volume there is no feeling of ‘writing down’ to children – all the poems have a depth that has something to offer readers of all ages.

At the award ceremony held at the Royal Festival Hall, London on 1 July 1, the ubiquitous Michael Rosen interviewed Jackie Kay, who also recited some of the poems in the collection. The competition judges then spoke: Ian McMillan commenting on the general lack today of single-poet collections in face of the prevalence of anthologies, and Julie Johnston, last year’s winner. Incidentally Julie Johnston’s winning text is a collection of Scottish verse – is there something poets south of the border need to learn from this?

(John Dunne and Pat Pinsent)

NEWS

The Story Vault

The Surrey Libraries Story Vault is a growing collection of stories available online.

The project was initiated by staff in Surrey County Council Libraries, who recorded storyteller Patrick Ryan telling a number of traditional stories and urban legends. The stories were then converted into 'storycasts' and made available on the children's library website Kidstuff. The aim of the project is to encourage children, as well as parents, teachers and others, to discover the pleasure of listening to stories, as well as be inspired by them.

The stories recorded come from all corners of the globe and cover all sorts of subjects; funny, wise, scary and lyrical. Currently, two stories have been added to the vault, and the other storycasts will be added, one at a time, over the coming months, until the entire collection is available. 'The big wide-mouthed toad-frog', a quirky tale from America, is the latest addition, and in August you will be able to listen to 'Truth and story', a wise fable from the Middle East.

Listen at www.surreycc.gov.uk/storyvault. For further information, contact kidstuff@surreycc.gov.uk.

(Kathleen Milne)

Old Possum's children's poetry competition 2008

For the second year running, the Children's Laureate Michael Rosen will chair the judging of this worldwide poetry competition for 7–11 year olds. The theme this year, which links in with National Poetry Day, is 'Work'. Entry forms will be available to download from the website (www.childrenspoetrybookshelf.co.uk) from Thursday 11 September when the competition opens. For those in the UK, there are cash prizes, along with books, in two age groups: 7–8 year olds and 9–11 year olds. The winners' schools (if UK based) will receive Children's Poetry Bookshelf memberships. The winners will also be invited to attend a gala celebration in London on 15 December where the prizes will be awarded by Michael Rosen. The competition closes on Monday 20 October.

Frances Lincoln Diverse Voices Children's Book Award

Frances Lincoln Limited in conjunction with Seven Stories, the Centre for Children's Books, have created an award in memory of Frances Lincoln (1945–2001). The purpose of the award is to: take positive steps to increase the representation of people writing from or about different cultural perspectives, whose work is published in Britain today; promote new writing for children, especially by or about people whose culture and voice are currently under-represented; recognise that as children's books shape our earliest perceptions of the world and its cultures, promoting writing that represents diversity will contribute to social and cultural tolerance; support the process of writing rather than, as with the majority of prizes, promoting the publication.

The award is for a manuscript that celebrates cultural diversity in the widest possible sense, either in terms of its story or in terms of the ethnic and cultural origins of its author. The prize of £1,500, plus the option for Frances Lincoln Children's Books to publish the novel, will be awarded to the best work of unpublished fiction for 8 to 12 year olds by a writer, aged 16 years or over, who has not previously published a novel for children. The writer may have contributed to an anthology of prose or poetry. The work must be written in English and it must be a minimum of 10,000 words and a maximum of 30,000 words. The closing date for entries is 30 January 2009. The winner will be announced at an award ceremony at Seven Stories in April 2009. For entry forms contact diversevoices@sevenstories.org.uk or telephone Helena McConnell at Seven Stories on 0845 271 0777. Press enquiries to Nicky Potter: nicpot@dircon.co.uk.

IBBY international

*Newsletter*33 from Basel records the fortieth anniversary of IBBY Brazil in May 2008, celebrations coinciding with a dynamic book fair at which every visiting child was given a book. In February, ThaiBBY organised the first Asian Children's Museum conference, while USBBY held a large weekend conference in November 2007, devoted to the theme of intercultural relations in children's books. The Italian section of IBBY co-organised a travelling exhibition highlighting the IBBY outstanding books for disabled young people.

As readers will know, the thirty-first IBBY world congress is due to take place in Copenhagen, Denmark, in September, and we hope to bring you reports from participants in our next issue. Its title 'Stories in History – History in Stories' reminds us of the renewed popularity of children's historical fiction in recent years. In October, IBBY will be participating at the Frankfurt Book Fair.

See www.ibby.org for further information.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

IBBY/NCRCL MA conference on children's literature and the environment

Froebel College, Roehampton University, Saturday 15 November 2008

The title of this year's conference is 'Deep into Nature: Ecology, Environment and Children's Literature'. A booking form and provisional programme are enclosed with this newsletter. Further detail requests to Laura Atkins: l.atkins@roehampton.ac.uk; +44 (0)20 8392 3008; NCRCL, Roehampton University, Roehampton Lane, London SW15 5PU.

Children's literature in Canada

The Children's Literature Association of India are seeking articles of between 4000 and 8000 words about children's literature in Canada for their *Journal of Children's Literature*. Articles must be submitted by 15 October 2008 to michelle.superle@ucfv.ca.

The Children's Bookshow: Picture books and poetry

Various venues, see below, 26 September – 17 October 2008

Speakers include Michael Rosen, the Children's Laureate, and Anushka Ravishankar, one of India's top children's authors whose work carries on the nonsense-verse tradition of Lear, Carroll and Dr Seuss.

De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill, Friday 26 September 10.30 a.m. Michael Rosen and Anushka Ravishankar. Children £2, teachers free. Tel. 0774 025 6330. www.dlwp.com.

Purcell Room at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, Monday 29 September 11.30 a.m. Michael Rosen and Anushka Ravishankar. Children £4, adults £5, teachers free. Tel. 0871 663 2500. www.southbankcentre.co.uk.

The Oxford Playhouse, Beaumont St., Oxford, Wednesday 1 October 11.00 a.m. Michael Rosen and Anushka Ravishankar. Children £4, adults £5.50, teachers free. Tel. 01865 305305; www.oxfordplayhouse.com.

The People's Theatre, Stephenson Rd., Heaton, Newcastle, Friday 3 October 3 10.30 a.m. Daniel Morden and Anushka Ravishankar. Children £2, teachers free. Tel. 0191 2655020; www.plat.org.uk.

Ilkley Literature Festival, Wharfeside Theatre, Ilkley Playhouse, Ilkley, Wednesday 8 October 1.30 p.m. Anushka Ravishankar and Catherine Rayner. Children £3.50, teachers free. Tel. 0774 025 6330; www.ilkleypayhouse.org.

For more information about the workshops and tour: www.thechildrensbookshow.com.

Visual Narrative Media in Britain from Ally Sloper to Judge Dredd

Liverpool John Moores University, 10 and 11 July 2009

Call for papers for this conference. Covering the period from the early 1880s to early 1980s, this interdisciplinary conference will look at the histories, methodologies, archives, readers and cultural practices surrounding a range of visual texts, with a particular interest in material for children and young adults. Proposals (no more than 250 words) should be sent by 15 December 2008 to mel.gibson@unn.ac.uk.

The Fairy Tale after Angela Carter

University of East Anglia, 22 to 25 April, 2009

Call for papers for this conference. Keynote speakers include Marina Warner and Jack Zipes. The thirtieth anniversary of the publication of *The Bloody Chamber* is the starting point for an assessment of the state of fairy-tale studies today. The deadline for submission of proposals is 3 November 2008. Send abstracts (200 words, plus brief biographical details) to fairytales@uea.ac.uk. Further details from s.benson@uea.ac.uk.

The next issue of *IBBYLink* (copydate 12 December) will be on children's literature and the environment and will contain summaries of the papers presented at the forthcoming IBBY/NCRCL MA conference in November. Articles on other subjects, reviews, reports, information about conferences and similar items are also welcomed.

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

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To sponsor a future issue of *IBBYLink*, contact PatPinsent@aol.com.

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