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Editorial *by Pat Pinsent*

When I was attending the conference of the Federation of Children's Book Groups at Marlborough in March this year, the question arose as to why religion as a topic was relatively sparse in mainstream children literature in Britain today. There are of course books intended to help children gain in knowledge and practice of their religion, Christian or non-Christian, but religion is seldom seen as an important theme in realist children's fiction, nor do many characters in such books seem to be motivated by a religious impulse. This is particularly the case with respect to Christianity. There are books (such as Berlie Doherty's *Tough Luck*, 1987) which touch on the subject of the Islamic code of conduct, while others, especially from the United States, mention Jewish religious practice, often in the context of the Holocaust. But relatively few characters in books published in this country and dealing with contemporary life include characters for whom church going is an important part of their life.

There are of course notable exceptions to this, such as Aidan Chambers' *Now I Know* (1987) and a recently published book by Linda Newbery, *The Shell House* (2002), both of which focus significantly on the question of belief. Robert Cormier, who died recently, seemed to have no reservations about portraying both the negative and the positive sides of religion, in *The Chocolate War* (1974) and *Darcy* (1990) respectively. But on the whole, such issues if present at all, tend to be treated within an historical context. The situation is different within fantasy; in their very different ways, both J.K. Rowling and Philip Pullman tackle questions of belief and morality in their hugely popular sagas. Indeed it may be that the

fantasy mode is rapidly becoming the only one appropriate to topics transcending everyday reality.

Several reasons might be adduced for this reticence about treating religious themes within the genre of social realism. Fear of offending those of different religious persuasions must be among these, together with caution about accuracy when treating a faith different from an author's own. The decline in attendance at religious services means that material is likely to need to be 'translated' to become intelligible to child readers. I suspect that among the many possible reasons is a fear of being seen to 'preach' at a child audience, a fear resulting from the notoriety of so much nineteenth century children's fiction with its over-insistent religious message, and possibly its cultural imperialism about the superiority of Christianity to other religions (see Ann Dowker's piece about the hymns of the Taylor sisters). In this context it is particularly interesting to have short pieces from two distinguished authors, Geraldine McCaughrean and Gillian Cross, musing about this subject and their own practice.

What is apparent is that however much religious belief and practice may seem irrelevant to certain sections of the population, it isn't fading away as a motivation for action. On the one hand, what seem to most people in the West, including adherents to Islam, to be distorted ideas about martyrdom and holy war, have provided motivation for intensely destructive actions. On the other, there seems to be a real thirst for what is loosely termed 'spirituality', even though definitions of this quality vary. Maybe we should have a future issue of iBBYlink devoted to that theme!

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The Representation of Islam in Some Recent Children's Books *by Ann Lazim*

In an article in *Books for Keeps* (September 2002), Shereen Pandit comments: 'The preponderance of books purely about the religious aspects of Muslim life presents the danger of another stereotype—that of the Muslim child, its family and community, as purely practising Muslims, disengaged from the world around them.'

For some years mainstream non-fiction publishers for children have produced books about the world's major religions, focusing on festivals, beliefs and customs. A new series from Hodder Wayland provides an interesting variation on this theme. 'Celebration Stories' give information about festivals through stories. *A Present for Salima* by Kerena Marchant takes place in Morocco during Id-ul-Fitr. The focus is more on how the central character Ibrahim has followed the teachings of the Qur'an through his generosity towards others than on details about the customs associated with Id. How religious belief can assist with moral guidance in a difficult situation is at the heart of *Umar and the Bully* by Shabana Mir, a short novel published by the Islamic Foundation. Umar has to decide whether to confront a bully who is causing grief to younger boys in his school.

Islamic Foundation also distribute *A is for Allah* by Yusuf Islam, based on the Arabic alphabet and giving insights into many aspects of the religion. The book is illustrated with photographs and surahs from the Qur'an. The significance of calligraphy in the Arabic language and in Islam is apparent.

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Another Person's Suffering

The Moral Imperative in Two Children's Novels

by Irene Wise

This brief article looks at two novels where the Jewish community interacts with another group, and where the experience enhances the moral development of the Jewish child protagonist.

'What does another person's suffering have to do with my life? And what do I do about it?' These are questions posed by children as they develop a spiritual life, claimed Sybil Rosen in a recent talk to MA students at Roehampton about her novel, *Speed of Light* (1999). In this book, the young Audrey comes to understand her aunt, a survivor damaged and traumatised by the Holocaust: the author is exploring 'the potential for healing in that relationship' (from an interview in *Jewish Renaissance*, Winter 2002, p.44). Set against the Civil Rights movement of American southern states in the 1950s, the book also charts Audrey's growing awareness of racial issues: the second plot deals with the struggle for Mr Cardwell to become the town's first black policeman. The connection is made clear: Audrey asks her father:

'What does that have to do with you being Jewish?'

'Nothing,' he agreed. 'But if a person hates, Audrey, they'll fling that hatred at whoever's in their way. Whether it's me or Mr. Cardwell, it doesn't matter.' (page 19)

In her talk, Sybil Rosen also referred to 'the necessity of the imagination as a tool for identifying with another person'. The reader is led into this process of empathy as the narrative charts the development of Audrey's perception and maturity, her identification with the other. The book closes with Audrey's flash of insight:

'I was people too, with all their joys and sorrows.' (page 169)

Marilyn Taylor's *Faraway Home* (1999) follows the

lives of children brought by the Kindertransport to County Down in Northern Ireland during the last war. The circumstances of the book are true and most of the characters are based on real people, former refugees. The vicissitudes of the Jewish children are set against those of the Irish community: the young exiles are befriended by Peewee and his family. Both groups suffer loss. The youngsters witness the blitz on Belfast, where the sky over the city had turned a strange, dull red.

'Like the sky on Kristallnacht, thought Karl, when the synagogues were burning.' (page 197)

Karl learns that his parents in Germany have been transported to Dachau; whilst in Ireland, Peewee's older brother Billy is killed in an air-raid:

Glancing at Peewee's face, frozen in shock and misery, Karl told himself, now it's my turn to stand by him, to be his friend as he's been mine. (page 204)

It is this incident that makes Karl see that he had to let go the burning anger and bitterness that had possessed him... one of the first things he had to do in that new life, in this new country, was to help his friend Peewee through the dark times ahead (page 209). Karl, like Audrey, is brought to maturity through the development of empathy for the other, the identification with a friend from a different community whose suffering reflects his own. Through this friendship, Karl recognises his own responsibilities, he has found an answer to Sybil Rosen's moral imperative: "What can I do about it?"

Rosen, Sybil (1999) *Speed of Light*, New York: Atheneum (reprinted as p/b 2000 by Aladdin)
Taylor, Marilyn (1999) *Faraway Home*, Dublin: The O'Brien Press.

* * * * *

Hood Hood Books (46 Clabon Mews, London SW1X 0EH. www.hoodhood.com) publish a good range of books on themes related to Islam, as well as related cultural material. Their *Heroes from the East* series includes lives of Hannibal, the female Pharaoh Hatshepsut, the philosopher Averroes, and the navigator Ibn Majid. Their *Lives of the Prophets* series features Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), Maryam (Mary) and Isa (Jesus). Among other attractive titles is *The Animals of Paradise*.

Iman Publishing Ltd, 113 Rickmansworth Road, Watford, Hertfordshire WD18 7JD. Tel: 01923 251490
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Islamic Foundation, Markfield Conference Centre, Ratby Lane, Markfield, Leicester LE67 9SY. www.islamic-foundation.com

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Another Person's Suffering

Irene Wise

Religion in My Fiction

by Geraldine McCaughrean

I have never consciously given God a major role in my fiction. I had not even noticed Him insinuating His way in, until a young interviewer asked me one day, 'Why does religion always feature in your novels?'

I like to paint on a grand scale, I suppose: to deal with things of enduring interest to man, woman and child alike. Myths feature for much the same reason.

Writing about the Past, of course, the one sure thing I know about my characters is that they will have a religious dimension to their thinking. So I've had a Chinese boy searching the sky for his father's spirit; a vicar's son clinging to Christianity amid Malagasy ritual; a priest succumbing to the temptation of riches; and a boy trying to distinguish Angel from Devil among a company of Mystery players.

I also like to draw, for richness, on religious imagery. Sadly I shouldn't really do this. Children these days often know no Bible stories at all. But I can't help it. My own Sunday Schooling filled my imaginary tanks brimful of toppling towers, sacrificial altars, snakes in the garden, calling voices in the echoing dark... (I comfort myself that young readers are well able to ignore a Biblical metaphor if it baffles them; after all, they are continually discarding unfamiliar words as they read.)

When it came to adapting the Bible, I have to admit, I was deeply inhibited, in handling the New Testament, by the fear of giving offence—'for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.' I had no such qualms about getting a grip on *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Great story but inaccessible: those are the

best grounds for adaptation. There are parts of the original *Pilgrim* suitable for use in schools—I remember listening to them in assembly 40 years ago. But as a whole, it's heavy going. I may have to answer to Bunyan on Judgement Day for excising his anti-papacy and changing the sex of various characters; there again even he may have revised his thinking by then. Proof of the story's unfading power is that it could be voted *Blue Peter Book of the Year* by a panel of child judges—to the astonishment of every adult in the TV studio (including me).

Since then I have discussed the possibility of a stage version for children. A real multi-cultural no-no, I would have thought... but I would *love* to be proved wrong. What do you think? Would schools take

children to a stage production of *Pilgrim's Progress*?

Ron Heapy and I once worked up a picture-book version of *Everyman*... until a 'reader' reacted with an apoplectic: 'Who's going to buy their kid a picture book about *Death? You're out of your minds!*'

Ron was undaunted, but I'm afraid I easily get cold feet. (It must be all that trespassing on holy ground).

Now I think of it, I *did* begin a novel last year with God as a main

player. It was going to be set aboard the Ark, sans cuddly animals and avuncular Noah. My hard-drive burned out, destroying several chapters. Then a torrential rainstorm found my car sunroof open and washed all the writing off my notebook. It's not that I believe in Divine Wrath, you understand, but I can take a hint... I abandoned justifying the ways of God to Man and settled for adapting Spenser's *Faerie Queen* instead. You know? The one with St George the dragon-slayer defeated twice then triumphantly resurrected on the third day?

"My hard-drive burned out, destroying several chapters. Then a torrential rainstorm washed all the writing off my notebook ..."

* * * * *

Jim Riordan (jim@riordanj.freereserve.co.uk) sent a copy of a recent beautifully produced compilation of creative work by Portsmouth school children, *Writing changes lives*. He also mentions a grant which has been given to encourage young people inspired by football to read, by running events featuring footballers talking about their lives and favourite books.

* * *

Additionally, in response to Patricia Crampton's **question about books translated from Russian** in the last IBBYlink, Jim Riordan lists a number of such books which he himself has translated, including Tolstoy's *Stories for Children* (Canongate), Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* (OUP), Yershev's *Little Humpback Horse* (Hamlyn), *Tales from Central Russia* (Kestrel) and *My Gr-Great Uncle Tiger* (Orchard).

Religion in My Fiction

Geraldine McCaughrean

Lorenz Graham's Religious Books

by Ruth Graham Siegrist

When the American Library Association's Booklist Magazine named Lorenz Graham's *How God Fix Jonah* one of the Top 10 Religion Books for Youth in 2001, the reviewer wrote: 'These biblical story-poems, great for reading aloud, have the simplicity and rhythm of West African oral tradition.' *How God Fix Jonah* was also named an ALA Notable Book for 2001, announcing: 'Breath-taking blockprints, the vibrant vernacular of West-Africa and lyrical retellings showcase twenty-three Bible stories in this pioneering collection.'

Lorenz Graham was the son of an African Methodist Episcopal minister, born in New Orleans. While a college student, he accepted a teaching position at a mission school in Monrovia, Liberia. There he encountered unusual retellings of the stories of Jonah, Ruth, and other biblical figures. He discovered that the familiar tales had been transformed into a new literature when told in the idiom of West Africa. Capturing the stories in the voices of West African storytellers, Graham set them down in a collection, *How God Fix Jonah*. The book of twenty-one stories was published in 1946 and was well received. The stories were read and recited in churches, schools, and libraries. Stories about David, Solomon, and Esther were dramatized in church schools. Storytellers carried them to audiences everywhere, even on the radio.

When Lorenz Graham died in 1989 storytellers and librarians inquired about obtaining copies of his beautiful stories, which by then were no longer

available. Children's book publisher Boyds Mills Press reissued the book in 2000 in a handsome special edition, with powerful new artwork by Ashley Bryan. The new edition added two stories to the collection. The African oral tradition resonates through the stories, as in the following excerpt:

*Jonah was a prophet.
God put Him hand on Jonah
But Jonah head be hard.
Jonah head be hard too much.
Lord God Almighty can fix the thing.
Hear how He fix Jonah.*

Kweisi Mfume, president of the NAACP, said, 'The rich rhythms and complex cultural texture... are a delight for children of all ages. What a wonderful way to develop a child's interest and long-term spiritual relationships with the Bible and the lessons it holds for our times.' Many readers say that the stories, retold in new words and a new flavor, open the eyes and ears of the reader to a new culture.

Graham was a pioneer in African American literature for young people. In addition to *How God Fix Jonah* he wrote several award-winning novels. His Town book series, which will soon be reissued, deals with the plight of African Americans who are faced with racism and hardships. Graham's positive message throughout his books was that people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds have the same basic needs, hopes, and dreams for the future and that an abiding faith in God will ensure the survival of mankind.

"People of all racial and ethnic backgrounds have the same basic needs, hopes, and dreams for the future ..."

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CLISS 2 - Children's International Summer School is to be held at the University of Surrey Roehampton from 25-30 July 2003. Well-known figures in the world of Children's Literature, including Anthony Browne, Aidan Chambers, Adele Geras, Lissa Paul and John Stephens, will be taking part. There is an opportunity to join in current debates and to choose from a wide range of modules, including a new masterclass on Creative Writing. Contact NCRCL, University of Surrey Roehampton, Digby Stuart College, Roehampton Lane, SW15 5PH, email ncrcl@roehampton.ac.uk

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Lorenz Graham

**Ruth Graham
Siegrist**

The Green Man: Modern Paganism in Children's Literature

by Peter Bramwell

The core beliefs of modern paganism are animism, pantheism and polytheism. This polytheism is frequently resolved into the duotheism of Goddess and God, of whom other deities are seen as aspects. (See Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, Chapter 3 and Vivianne Crowley, *Principles of Paganism*, Chapter 2.) The Green Man is today perceived as an aspect of the great God, or even as the God himself. The disputed antiquity of the appellation "Green Man" (see Simpson & Roud, *A Dictionary of English Folklore*, pages 154-155) need not, I think, detract from his current resonance.

The Green Man was reawakened in children's literature in 1968 in John Gordon's *The Giant Under the Snow*. Now he is often to be found in children's books.

In both the text and pictures of Bel Mooney and Helen Cann's *The Green Man*, he is discovered in such things as a supermarket lettuce, the moss on a tree, the green paint on a shed. He bursts out of a road, and out of the frame of Cann's illustration. When Luke meets colourful old Lily, she tells him that the Green Man helps with her allotment and that 'He's the oldest spirit in the world.' With Lily's help, Luke brings green life to his grey inner city world.

Jane Gardam's story "The Green Man" originally appeared in a collection for adults, but has since been published separately in an edition illustrated by Mary Fedden, which can be found in children's sections of bookshops. This tale of the cycle of the Green Man's year is, like him, lyrical and ludic, earthy and elusive.

His refrain is, 'Each to his element.' He says, 'I'm all over the place, yet nobody knows who I am.'

Theresa Tomlinson's *The Forestwife* is a reimagining of the Robin Hood legends, with the focus on Marian as wise woman. When she first discovers Robert (Robin), Marian takes him for the Green Man. Later it is she who gives Robin the green hood. At the climax of the sequel, *Child of the May*, the characters Magda and Tom are joined together at Samhain as Green Lady and Green Man.

The cover art by Paul Young for *Child of the May* is magnificent, and equally striking is David Wyatt's Green Man glaring out from Geraldine McCaughrean's *The Stones are Hatching*, the protagonist of which, Phelim Green, is hailed as 'Jack o' Green'. Phelim develops from insecurity to confidence to arrogance, but he is chastened by Alexia's sacrifice and the morally ambiguous defeat of the Worm. McCaughrean presents a striking array of spirits and mythical creatures, and her take on the Old Ways is complicated—rueful for their passing, yet aware of their harshness, and of how distorted artificial revivals are. It is difficult to know how to take McCaughrean's note about a bygone 'civilised and Christian Europe', but conjuring this up will hardly prevent pagan readings of her novel.

However authors are presenting the Green Man, his appearances in contemporary children's literature testify to an increasing understanding and tolerance of modern paganism, and to young people's interest in it.

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Islam - Continued from page 1

Two UK based publishers which focus on Islam are Hood Hood Books and Iman Publishing. Hood Hood have produced retellings of *Stories from the Quran* for young children, including Noah and Muhammad's Revelation; a series about Heroes from the East, including *Razia Warrior Queen of India* and the poet *Rumi*; and a series about the medieval traveller Ibn Battuta. Iman publish a variety of material including board books of the *Stories of the Prophets*. Newly published is *Faisal and Friends and the Litter* by Anne Eccleshall and Rachel Verity, a picture book about being socially responsible concerning the environment.

The Swirling Hijaab by Na'ima bint Robert (Mantra) is available in 20 dual language editions. The brief rhyming text and Nilesh Mistry's imaginative illustrations portray a small girl envisioning the ways in which her mother's hijab could be used in her games. She concludes that 'covering my mum as part of her faith/Is what the hijab does best.' The part Islamic faith can play in family life is incorporated naturally into *The Stars in My Geddoh's Sky* by Claire Sidhom Matze and Bill Farnsworth (available from Letterbox Library). Geddoh (grandfather) visits his family in North America from his home 'by the Mediterranean Sea, in a large city where there are ancient fortresses and bustling markets.' He describes the call to prayer from the mosque five times a day at home, and prays on the beach on an outing with his grandson.

Islam is most often associated with Asia where it originated. However, it is also widely practised across Africa, including Somalia, from where the refugee family in Mary Hoffman & Karin Littlewood's picture book *The Colour of Home* (Frances Lincoln) come. The importance of Islam to this family is revealed in the description of their escape: 'We had no luggage, only my father's prayer mat and *qu'ran*, hidden in Naima's bag of nappies.' Hassan is reassured by the fact that the lady who comes to school to interpret for him wears 'a black *hajib* like his mother's.' These details are woven into the story.

Addresses of the publishers mentioned can be found on page 2.

The Green Man
Peter Bramwell

Religion in Ann and Jane Taylor's *Hymns for Infant Minds*

by Ann Dowker

**Hymns for Infant
Minds**

Ann Dowker

Ann and Jane Taylor's *Hymns for Infant Minds* (1810) are much less well known than their other works of verse for children: *Original Poems for Infant Minds* (1804) and *Rhymes for the Nursery* (1806). Yet this work was extremely influential throughout the 19th century and went through many editions: the edition that I possess is the 47th, published in 1868. The poems (not all of them strictly speaking 'hymns') were avowedly influenced by Isaac Watts' famous *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (1715). They resemble these earlier religious poems in their emphasis on thankfulness to God; and in their emphasis on the need to prepare for death, and on a literal Heaven and Hell. They differ in being seemingly aimed at younger children; in their emphasis on emotional relationships within the family; and in their emphasis on the need to conquer spiritual sins, where Watts placed more emphasis on specific transgressions such as lying, quarrelling and swearing.

Many of the Hymns emphasize the need to thank God for the favours and mercies that he has bestowed: natural beauties; the wonders of the seasons; the gift of the Bible; and as stated in the hymn 'Praise for Daily Mercies' (Hymn No. 65):

'The food I eat, the clothes I wear... My health
and friends and parents dear.'

Gratitude is repeatedly expressed to the great and powerful God for His willingness to 'condescend' (a word frequently used in these hymns) to lowly and sinful children.

Like Watts before them, the Taylors emphasize the need to thank God for having been born English and not a heathen:

'I thank the goodness and the grace
That on my birth have smiled
And made me in these Christian days
A happy English child.
I was not born as thousands are
Where God was never known
And taught to pray a useless prayer
To blocks of wood and stone' (*Hymn No. 1*)

Thus, not only is there an assumption that Christianity is the one true religion, and that followers of other religions are 'heathens': religious truth is also seen as closely linked with nationality and culture. It is implied that God smiles on the English and pities the inhabitants of many other countries: several hymns imply that the best hope for the latter is to be converted to Christianity by an English missionary.

Death, and the need to prepare for it, are themes of many of the hymns. The happy death of an 'Aged

Christian' (No. 49) and the sad and anxious death of an 'Aged Sinner' (No. 50) are contrasted. But death is not seen as reserved for the aged: it is taken for granted that children often die. Hymn titles include 'A Child's Grave' (No 57) and 'For a Dying Child' (No. 65). In 'About Dying' (No. 28), the child's first introduction to death is through the death of an infant sibling:

'Tell me, Mamma, if I must die
One day, as little baby died.'

It is emphasized that death is not the end: that our soul shall live eternally in a literal Heaven or Hell.

The need for right feelings and thoughts, as well as for right actions, is a strong feature of these Hymns: much more so than those of Watts. An entire hymn (No. 11) is written 'Against Wandering Thoughts' [during prayer]; but the spiritual sin which attracts the most attention is pride (Nos. 14 and 15, and elsewhere). One must be 'for ever on .. guard' against pride in its many forms, which include, in particular, a reluctance to confess faults, a reluctance to submit to others, and a resentment of real or imagined insults and injustices.

Devotion, gratitude and obedience to parents are major themes of the Hymns:

'When I am bid I'll freely bring
Whatever I have got
And never touch a pretty thing
If mother tells me not' (*No. 23*)

Rather than, like Watts, threatening Divine punishment for those who disobey their parents, the Taylors describe the parents' kindness to their children, and the guilt that should and will be felt for grieving such kind parents:

'I'm sorry that ever I should
Be naughty and give you a pain;
I hope I shall learn to be good
And so never grieve you again' (*No. 36*)

At the extreme, separation from good parents is seen as one of the important features of the punishment of those who are condemned to Hell.

'Think, dearest child, with what suspense
Thy mother risen, shall watch to see
If all her children, rising thence
Come forth, with Christ the Lord to be...
With one last sigh she takes her flight
And leaves him to his endless doom.'

These Hymns are of interest in that they express basic principles of Christian theology, but include emotional undercurrents that are far from present in all

(Continued on page 7)

Sikhism and Children's Literature

by Eleanor Nesbitt

Children's literature focusing on Sikh martyrs is published by Sikhs for Sikhs. Examples are to be found in series published by The Sikh Missionary Society (UK), a Southall-based organisation concerned not with mission (in its usual Christian sense) but with providing information for young Sikhs and for other enquirers such as RE teachers. Stories from Sikh History is a series published by Hemkunt Press, New Delhi. In this too martyrdom is a strong theme—with Book V actually entitled *Sikh Martyrs*. On my shelves I also have a copy of a children's book by 'Prof. Jagdish Singh', entitled *Supreme Sacrifice of Young Souls* and subtitled *Story of Martyrdom of Younger Sahibzadas*. This was published in 1977 by Giani Mohinder Singh, Secretary, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar. In other words this sort of historical literature for children is a strong, mainstream Sikh tradition.

This particular story is unusual in that the martyrs concerned were two children themselves, the younger of the tenth Guru's four sons. They preferred to die (by being bricked up alive in a wall) at Sirhind rather than to accept Islam. (Visitors to Sirhind's gurdwara can still see the site.) The other celebrated martyrs are the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev (who was roasted alive on an iron plate), the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadar (who was beheaded) and a number of seventeenth and eighteenth century followers whose deaths included being killed on a wheel, being sawn in half, being scalped as well as dying in battle. In each case the oppressor was Muslim—which makes these stories especially problematic for inclusion in any multi-cultural curriculum in a plural society.

In the early twentieth century Sikhs died (and so

were—in Sikh terms—martyred) or at least they were prepared to die, as part of the struggle against the British authorities, for instance for control of their gurdwaras (places of worship). Not only children's books but also the pictures to be found in many gurdwaras (usually in the foyer or at any rate outside the prayer hall) depict the horrific deaths of Sikh martyrs.

Not surprisingly, in the 1980s and 1990s, the struggle of some Sikhs for independence from the Indian government (usually regarded as 'Hindu') and for a separate state of Khalistan was also understood, recounted and painted as a continuing of the martyr tradition of the Sikhs. However, although so many of these retellings of Sikh 'history' have the theme of *shabidi* (martyrdom), I've not come across fiction that has this theme—or not in English. In fact the

Sikh intellectual, Bhai Vir Singh, took up the theme of martyrdom in his work, some of which has been translated into English. For example Sundri, his first novel, tells of the heroism of its virtuous heroine, Sundri, who resists the Sikhs' oppressors and dies after being wounded in battle. You can read a critique of this story in Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh's 1993 *The Feminine Principle in the Sikh Vision of the*

Transcendent, Cambridge University Press, pages 188ff.

Eleanor Nesbitt is a senior lecturer in religions and education at Warwick University. She has published an article on 'The presentation of Sikhs in recent children's literature in Britain' in (ed.) J.T.O'Connell et al, Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century, University of Toronto, 1988.

"In the early 20th century Sikhs were prepared to die as part of the struggle against the British authorities"

Hymns for Infant Minds - continued from page 6

Christian texts. To the Taylors, at least when writing for children, the relationship between child and God is not only similar to, but inextricably interlinked with, the relationship between child and parent. Temper tantrums and disobedience are the prototypes of sin:

'Poor child! you like to have your way
And will not do as you are bid!
In this one evil, who can say
How much of future sin is hid!'

Ann Dowker is a lecturer at the Department of Experimental Psychology, University of Oxford.

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The Other Side, an independent ecumenical magazine, has a special issue about Disability. Contact outreach@theotherside.org for further information.

Sikhism

Eleanor Nesbitt

Religion, Children's Literature and Modernity in Europe, 1750-2000

International Congress held at the Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, Belgium, May 22-25

by Pat Pinsent

One of the joys of attending an international event is the exchange of ideas with participants from a wide range of countries, finding what we have in common and how our approaches vary. This occasion, several years in its planning, brought together people from Belgium, Holland, Germany, France, Russia, Ireland, Austria, Spain, Italy, Slovenia and Greece, as well as a reasonably substantial group from Britain, including the keynote speaker, Aidan Chambers. Proceedings were mostly in English, though the rapid French of those who used the other conference language brought problems even to some of the multi-lingual participants (as well as to the linguistically challenged British delegates!).

Professor Rita Ghesquiere, one of the major conference organisers, opened the proceedings, together with the vice-rector of the University, the impressive central Hall of which was the main venue. The first papers dealt with the conference theme in general terms, sometimes with specific reference to different regions of Europe. Jan De Maeyer pointed out the close link between religion and the development of children's literature, which began to flourish in a period of religious revival following soon after the Enlightenment. He claimed that 'the phenomenon of religious children's literature is in itself a very good example of religious modernisation.' His talk was followed by two speakers who provided perspectives on the situation during this period in German speaking countries, where versions of the Bible for children were central, as well as the subsequent development of a number of religious magazines for children.

Peter Hunt rather provocatively suggested that not only has religion been virtually silenced in British children's literature in recent years, but also that it has taken on strong negative connotations, a phenomenon which he suggested could also be associated with the current somewhat negative associations with the role of the father (God as well as within the human family). Later the same day, Rita Ghesquiere's detection of hidden religious themes in a range of recent fantasy, historical, autobiographical and problem novels provided something of a counter vision to Hunt's negative perceptions.

My own talk dealt with my research into British Catholic fiction, an area little examined previously, in contrast to the work of Protestant writers, particularly for the Religious Tract Society (which later received attention from several other speakers, notably Mary Cadogan and Michael Taylor).

It is impossible even to mention all the speakers, so I shall simply single out some of the insights they provided into areas which had been unfamiliar to me. Annagret Volpel revealed how the period of modernisation meant that a heterogeneity developed in Jewish children's literature, ranging from a hostility to fantasy in neo-orthodoxy to a readiness on the reform side to model children's fiction on Christian authors, such as Christoph von Schmidt, a Catholic writer whose name was mentioned by several other

"All participants felt a delight that religious children's literature is taken seriously at last"

speakers.

Learning about the situation of religious publishers in Switzerland (affected deeply by the different language areas), Holland, Belgium, Spain, Italy and France, provoked thought about how different in some respects the situation in Britain has been. Unlike continental countries, we seem to have lacked the controlling influence of agencies outside children's literature providing censorship on content.

One of the talks which I particularly enjoyed was that by Valerie Coghlan on religion in Irish children's books; she looked at some of the organisations producing children's literature, giving particular attention to the moralising publications of the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland and their use of some American writers. She commented on the sensitivity with which religious issues tend to be addressed in Irish society today.

In his keynote lecture, Aidan Chambers provided a good deal of personal background to his own writing, in which his religious interests are evident. He focused on a number of words which he saw as significant in the area of religious writing for children; one of the most interesting of these was the Greek 'temenos', a sacred space, which is often secular. Such spaces can be found in all communities, from the area which can only be inhabited by a speaker at a conference to the place of performance of a play. The novel, he suggested, could be seen as a secular form of such a space; he saw his own novels as a way to explain to himself 'what it means to be conscious.' Another delight of the congress was the fact that it was in the old university town of Leuven, with its splendid

(Continued on page 9)

Leuven Congress

Pat Pinsent

Picture Books.

The Role They Can Play in a Child's Education Learning

by Gillian Henderson

People often have a preconceived notion that picture books are fun, pretty, humorous and nothing more than the most basic introduction to the written word. They may well be all of these things to some extent, but they are also so much more. Picture Books act as a vital key to discovering more about the world and who lives in it, as well as the start of a child's experience of books and what they have to offer.

Because Picture Books are often a child's first steps on the way to reading, getting it right has never been more important. The stories that are written need to inspire the reader and entice them to read on and again. They also need to entertain the parent of the child enough to endure repeated readings with good grace and patience. If you find the right combination of art and story you can then create a picture book that takes that extra step. . . towards educating.

Some of the most wonderful stories are often found in the foundations of religions and have been handed down orally by generation to generation through the centuries. Diwali, India's most important national festival is a perfect example. The story explains how and why the celebrations started. The

Ramayana is an epic tale with numerous variants and sub-themes surrounding the central plot. The combination of wondrous story, incredible characters and a story that can be read on many levels makes this tale perfect for a picture book reader. When brought to life with beautiful, imaginative illustration, the story stops being perceived as an educational text and

becomes a story books that children want to read.

It is for this reason that picture books are important for introducing children to faiths, traditions and religions from around the world. In present times, more than ever, picture books play an essential role in creating a greater understanding about the people we grow up alongside. An awareness of different colours, faiths, religions

and beliefs that although they may not be our own, the knowledge and understanding of them allows each generation to take us a step forward, closer to a more peaceful world.

Picture books spark the imagination and educate our children so that they have the knowledge to understand each other. Long may this particular tradition continue...

“Picture books act as a vital key to discovering more about the world and who lives in it...”

* * * * *

Leuven Congress - continued from page 8

churches and cobbled streets, where the main traffic hazard is ubiquitous students on bicycles and every other building is a college associated with some national group or religious order. Delegates were also taken on a visit to Averbode Abbey, still in use by the Premonstra-tensian order but also now the site of a major international publishing house with a particular interest in children's magazines. On our return, a visit to the university library for an exhibition of some fascinating early children's literature was tantalisingly brief. There were four sets of workshops on the final day; since I was chairing the session on bibles and missionary stories I had to miss the others: on various individual authors and illustrators, hidden religious themes, and Orthodoxy and children's literature. The illustration of the different approaches to bible illustration between different denominations and nations provided more interest than there was adequate time to discuss.

The final session (shortly before the really excellent conference dinner) raised a number of issues, and certainly supported the idea that the conference should mark a beginning to cooperation in this area, rather than being seen as an achievement in itself. I think that all participants felt a delight that religious children's literature is being taken seriously at last.

* * *

Philip Pullman reluctantly declined to contribute to this issue of *IBBYlink*, because of his urgent need to concentrate on writing another book—something we certainly don't want to deter him from! He pointed out however that the *Horn Book Magazine* of Nov/Dec 2001 carries an article in which he outlines his idea of the Republic of Heaven, 'a godless way of life that answers the questions that religion used to,' and gives examples from children's literature.

Picture Books

Gillian Henderson

The Angel in Children's Literature: Some Resources

by Pam Robson

The angel, and especially the guardian angel, features frequently as a character in children's literature, for readers of various ages. The following reviews are selected examples loosely categorised into age groups.

7-9 years

Annie Dalton, *Angels Unlimited* (Series) Collins. ISBN 0007139772

Winging It is the first title in the fantasy series 'Angels Unlimited'. The central 'angel' character is Mel, a problem adolescent who has died tragically in a road accident. Mel finds herself attending Angel School where she must learn the art of being a guardian angel. On her first assignment she is enrolled with the Time Team and travels back through time to return to Earth during the Blitz. Mel remains something of a rebel and her impulsive behaviour almost brings disaster, but despite her shortcomings she proves to be a talented angel. Good and bad are clearly defined; the Opposition is the force of evil. This is a good read which manages to retain plausibility.

In the second title of the series, *Losing the Plot*, Mel finds herself in Elizabethan London. The character of Shakespeare features and Dalton provides a fascinating insight for the child reader into Tudor London.

The third title, *Flying High*, is set in 13th century France during the Children's Crusade, an historical event that has obvious relevance for children but rarely features in British history books.

The fourth title, *Calling the Shots*, is set in America in the twenties. Mel is assigned to her first serious role as a guardian angel; she must look after Honesty, the daughter of a wealthy family plunged into poverty after the father is tragically killed whilst driving his first motor car—the newest invention of the day. The family travel to the southern states where racism is rife. Dalton introduces the reader to the social history of the time—prohibition and the first movies—a fascinating way in which to present history alongside fantasy. The gaudy jacket designs for this series will certainly appeal to younger readers; adults may be misled by such obvious commercialism. Annie Dalton is a talented author who has achieved the difficult task of creating an angelic heroine with 'street credibility'; she uses the time slip to place her heroine in a wide range of historically authentic situations whilst retaining both readability and plausibility.

Anne Fine *The Angel of Nitshill Road*, Mammoth, ISBN 074970974X

In this school story Anne Fine cleverly leaves the reader to decide whether or not her character, Celeste, is an angel. Celeste is the new girl who sorts out the

school bully whilst the teacher seems oblivious to the misery caused by the bullying.

9-12 years

Madeleine L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*, Puffin. ISBN 0140372318

First published in 1962 and winner of the Newbery medal in that year, this time travel fantasy is now a Puffin Modern Classic; it is the first title in a saga in which good is pitted against evil. The sequel is *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*; the third title in the trilogy is *Many Waters*. The children in the story travel in a fifth dimension in search of their father, aided by three amusing guardian angels called Mrs Whatsit, Mrs Who and Mrs Which; these three are able to metamorphose. Much emphasis is placed upon the power of faith in this trilogy.

Dyan Sheldon, *Undercover Angel*, Walker ISBN 0744559502 (HB)

This hilarious fantasy has a strong environmental message. Elmo, the first person narrator, is embarrassed by his mother's 'green' campaigning, especially when she confronts their developer neighbour who plans to dig up the local woodland. Then Kuba arrives—she is supposed to be the newly adopted daughter of the developer and his wife. But Kuba is really an angel sent to save the wood. Elmo has no choice but to follow Kuba's lead and he literally confronts the bulldozer. This title has a superbly witty text and conveys a powerful green message too.

Helen Cresswell, *Snatchers*, Hodder. ISBN 0340682876

In this fantasy the author makes frequent references to the fairy tale genre. Ellie Horner discovers that she has a guardian angel called Plum. It is Plum who saves Ellie when, as a baby, she is stolen by the evil 'Boss'. This implausible story somehow manages to hold the attention of the reader. Good and bad are clearly defined while fairy tale motifs abound.

12+

Lynne Reid Banks, *Maura's Angel*, Heinemann Educational (New Windmill) ISBN 0435123092

A title first published in 1984; the setting is Northern Ireland. British troops are in control and numerous terrorists are imprisoned in the Maze. Maura's Catholic father is a provo—he is absent—her brother is imprisoned. Maura rises to her feet after a bomb has gone off to find that she has a companion, a small girl, rather like herself, an unearthly creature, her guardian angel. Angela, as she is called, has no experience of real human feelings, but she is able to

Resources

Pam Robson

Resources - continued from page 10

reach Maura's mentally disabled sister, Colleen. Angela sacrifices herself to help Maura's troubled family.

Lynne Reid Banks, *Angela and Diabola*, Collins. ISBN 0006753000

This is a powerful novel, described on the cover as wickedly funny, but humour is hard to find beyond the opening pages.

The eponymous twin sisters are opposites. The reader is left horror struck by the sheer awfulness of Diabola's behaviour. She literally develops devilish powers to hurt and damage. In contrast, her angelic twin, Angela, can only do good. The two need each other and the inevitable clash leaves Diabola dead. Or is she? Life changes for the whole family after her death; now Angela's character contains both good and bad. The point being that we are all partly good and partly bad. A good read but not for the squeamish.

Narinder Dhani, *Angel Face*, Collins. ISBN 0006750214 (now out of print)

This novel sits astride the Atlantic by placing Aidan, the American narrator, in an English setting.

Aidan, now an angel, has been killed in a road accident. He is sent back to earth as guardian angel for Catherine, an unfortunate girl with a terrible burden to carry.

Whilst alive Aidan regarded himself as a great catch for any girl, and he still does. Catherine is not physically attractive, but has a great personality; she copes alone with her disabled mother. Aidan learns a

lot about himself by helping Catherine; he even falls for her.

Teens

David Almond, *Skellig*, Hodder. ISBN 034076483X

This is the hardback edition of this award-winning title which has also been published as a play script. It is a tender, moving story in which a small baby's serious illness is central to the plot. Michael's family move into their dilapidated new home at a time when the baby hovers between life and death. Then Michael finds a winged being in the old garage—this is the eponymous Skellig, a young man also close to death. Mina befriends Michael and together they save Skellig's life. Is he an angel? Skellig is instrumental in restoring the baby to health. The storyline is refreshing and goodness is rewarded. This is a gripping read with excellent characterisation.

Jostein Gaarder, *Through A Glass Darkly*, Dolphin. ISBN 1858817692

Another philosophical title by the author of *Sophie's World*. This edition is translated by Elizabeth Rokkan. The setting is Norway; an angry young girl, Cecilia, lies in her death bed. She is dying slowly from cancer. It is Christmas time when an angel called Ariel visits her. Right through the Winter months, until Spring, Ariel and Cecilia conduct profound discussions about human beings and their senses, about life and death. Slowly Cecilia's anger fades and she feels prepared for death.

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Uncharted Territory by Gillian Cross

Formal religious practice may be declining, but there is plenty of evidence to show that spiritual awareness is widespread. Two large-scale surveys, for example, indicate that around half (Gallup 1987) to three-quarters (ORB 2000) of people have had an experience which they would describe as "religious" or "spiritual". They may have seen or heard or smelt things which are, in the normal sense, 'not there', or had an overwhelming sense of an unseen presence. Typically, these events are, and remain, of immense significance to those who experience them. But they also remain private. Even among friends, people are reluctant to talk about what has happened to them. They think their experiences are unusual, and (unless they are 'religious') they have no comfortable language in which to describe them—because, currently, such things are almost entirely ignored in mainstream public discourse.

By and large, they are ignored in fiction, too, especially in fiction for children. This is surprising. Storytellers have always been drawn to mystery and to uncharted territory, and stories often express aspects of being human which society neglects. Good fiction is a kind of exploration. In struggling to express things for which there are no easy words or images, writers develop language for what would otherwise remain unspoken.

So why does children's fiction refer to religious practice but rarely to religious or spiritual experience? Why is it easier to write about sex than about praying? Are writers worried about accusations of indoctrination or of fostering divisions between people from different religions? I don't think it's that. Exploring has nothing to do with the ugly certainties of the didactic. I think writers hold back because breaking new ground is very difficult and frightening. It inevitably involves self-exposure, and the fear of ridicule.

And after all, we're *only writing for children*, aren't we? Why take the risk?

**Uncharted
Territory**

Gillian Cross

CALENDAR & EVENTS

Michaelmas Term 2002, 15 October through 3 December, Centre for Christianity and Culture, Oxford

WHAT'S IN A STORY? CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE SPIRIT

Guest speakers include Aidan Chambers, Elizabeth Laird, David Almond, Gillian Cross.

Further details from Dr. Nicholas Wood, Centre for Christianity and Culture, Regent's Park College, Oxford.

Phone 01865 288129, email nicholas.wood@regents.ox.ac.uk

Saturday 9th November 2002, Bovington Middle School

DORSET READING CONFERENCE, DESTINATION INSPIRATION

Guest speakers Michael Morpurgo, William Nicholson, Philip Ridley, Katharine Holabird and Helen Craig, with Julia Eccleshare who opens the proceedings and Allan Ahlberg whose talk is the culmination of the day.

Further details from Philip Browne, The Dorset School Effectiveness Centre, Bovington Middle School, Bovington, Wareham, BH20 6NU.

Phone 01929 405060, email p.browne@dorset-cc.gov.uk

Saturday 16th November 2002, Froebel College, University of Surrey Roehampton

9th ANNUAL NCRCL/IBBY CONFERENCE: PERFORMANCE AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

The 9th annual NCRCL/IBBY conference will be looking both at the way *Children's Texts* have been turned into performances (stage, screen, musical, audio, dance) and the way *childhood* itself has been performed.

Details from NCRCL, Digby Stuart College, University of Surrey Roehampton, SW15 5PH

Phone 020 8392 3008 Email ncrcl@roehampton.ac.uk

21-23 November 2002

YOUTH FESTIVAL: BOOKS, TALKS, FILMS IN FRENCH AND ENGLISH

A three day festival celebrating children's books with some of the greatest authors and illustrators in France and the UK, catering to young people aged 6 to 18. This year participants are Quentin Blake, Michael Morpurgo, Jamila Gavin, Julia Jarman, Satoshi Kitamura, Caroline Lawrence, David Roberts, Michelle Nikly and Jean Claverie, Mario Ramos, Daniel Pennac, Lionel LeNeouanic, Frédéric Pillot, Jean-Loup Chiflet, Véronique Lenormand, Antonin Louchard and Katy Cuprie,... and Peter Rabbit.

On **Thursday 21 November**, a special evening tribute to Quentin Blake at 7pm.

On **Saturday 23 November**, Peter Rabbit celebrates his 100th birthday at 11.30 am. Stories for young children with Lauren Child at 1pm, Caroline Lawrence on Roman artefacts at 12, Christmas decoration workshop at 2.30, Jean-Loup Chiflet juggles with French and English at 2.30 and Daniel Pennac talks about the joys of reading at 4pm. And for grown ups, a special cafe folio at 11am to remember those children's books you loved. *For more information and bookings, contact Géraldine D'Amico on 020 7073 1307 or geraldine.d-amico@diplomatie.fr; Box office : 020 7073 1350 Website : www.institut-francais.org.uk*

1 - 6 December, Derbyshire

CHILDREN AS READERS: how library services help young people discover the pleasures of literature

This event is being organised by International Networking Events to take place in December under the direction of Annie Everall OBE and Teresa Scragg. It will provide an exciting and stimulating opportunity for children's and education managers to come together, to explore the role of library services in helping children and young people discover the pleasures of literature and develop as readers. It will enable participants to discuss key issues with experts in the field, to increase their awareness of new developments, and to share and explore best practice and innovation. It will also enable participants to interact with key UK children's authors and publishers and to go away with new ideas and plans for the future development of their own services. It will be of interest to senior children's and schools library policy and decision makers, to those working in the field of education whose responsibilities include supporting and improving children's reading development and to children's and schools librarians responsible for delivering library services and promoting literature to children and young people.

For further information, please see full details at www.britishcouncil.org/networkevents/2000/0232p.htm, as well as an application form for this seminar, or contact Ian Wilde, Tel: +44 (0) 1865 302713; Fax: +44 (0) 1865 557368; email: ian.wilde@britishcouncil.org Please note that this event carries a fee.

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THE NEXT ISSUE

The next issue of *IBBYlink* will be devoted to 'Children's Literature and Literature in Performance,' the topic of the ninth annual NCRCL / British IBBY conference, to be held at Roehampton on Saturday November 16th. While I hope that many of the speakers will let us print material from the papers they are giving, other people who would like to submit short pieces for *IBBYlink* (by 1st February 2003) should not feel inhibited simply because they are not giving papers at the conference! Send to me at:

23 Burcott Road, Purley, Surrey, CR8 4AD or by email at PatPinsent@aol.com

We also hope to carry a report on the 50th Anniversary IBBY Congress in Basel September 2002.