

Editorial *Pat Pinsent*

'Humour: That quality of action, speech, or writing, which excites amusement; oddity, comicality'

Shorter Oxford English Dictionary

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This issue of *IBBYLink* is devoted to a quality which, paradoxically, is much sought after by child readers but very little discussed in critical literature. The etymology of the word 'Humour' relates it to the four bodily fluids that were once thought to dictate a person's mental and physical disposition, but the articles which appear here are all concerned with what makes a children's book funny. It is much more difficult to isolate what that is than to recognise it when reading- and children are probably the readers who are most alert to it. The Survey of Children's Reading carried out by the National Centre for Research in Children's Literature in the year 1996 BHP [before Harry Potter] revealed more children of all ages up to 14 as saying that they 'often' or 'very often' chose to read 'funny stories,' than any other, including adventure stories. The numbers choosing this category were only superseded by those for mystery and (among the girls) romance with the 14-16 year olds, and even then humour was still high. The choices Roald Dahl's books as favourites by young people of all the age groups, and of Quentin Blake as preferred illustrator, also provided evidence of their taste for humour.

Publishers, and those children's authors who retain something of the child in their attitude to life, have of course always been aware of this propensity, but it is difficult to find much reference to it in critical works. Sometimes it creeps in via a discussion of Bakhtin and the carnivalesque, but among endless articles about narrative, ideology, style, intertextuality, reader response, etc., references to humour are few. Perhaps this is because what children find funny is often very

different from what amuses adults (though I suspect there is also a paucity of scholarly treatments of humour as such in adult literature, though not of individual comic texts). Alternatively, it may be that there are so many varieties of texts which amuse: parody, caricature, nonsense poetry, slapstick, satire, wit, wordplay, puns, etc, and it isn't easy to draw the line between them.

Some qualities however seem to recur frequently: unlikely names (from J.K. Rowling's Dumbledore to Terry Pratchett's Dangerous Beans and Hamnpork, in *The Amazing Maurice*); incongruity (such as the beginning of Morris Gleitzman's *Two Weeks with the Queen*: 'The Queen looked out across the Mudfords' living room and wished everyone a happy Christmas'); the impression of taking the reader into the narrator's confidence (as in Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl: The Arctic Adventure*: 'Luc didn't argue. Then again, who'd argue with a two-metre-plus Eurasian with muscles like a Michelangelo statue?'); or simple absurdity (from Dahl's *Esio Trot*: 'When he had finished, Mr Hoppy, in his enthusiasm, had bought no less than one hundred and forty tortoises and he carried them home in baskets, ten or fifteen at a time.'). These random examples could be multiplied with ease, but they all characterise writers whose appeal is recognised, perhaps particularly by the boy readers whom every educationalist is keen to captivate.

The didactic function of humour has always been appreciated, from cautionary verses to mnemonics to *Horrible Histories*, though in the past it might have been thought inappropriate to, for instance, the science textbooks, of which it now seems to be a salient feature. But there's always danger in deliberately using humour to teach- young people may feel they're being exploited, and will adults really be on the same wavelength?

But perhaps I'm getting too serious about humour!

NEIL GAIMAN TO SPEAK AT IBBY/ NCRCL CONFERENCE

In addition to the published programme for the 10th Annual NCRCL/IBBY conference we are delighted to welcome Neil Gaiman to round off an exciting day! Neil is best known as the creator of the internationally acclaimed *Sandman* comics and graphic novels. His fiction for adults includes the novels *Neverwhere*, *Stardust* and *American Gods*, and the short story collection, *Smokeand Mirrors*. The paperback of his debut novel for children, *Coraline*, and his first picture book, *The Wolves in the Walls*, illustrated by Dave McKean are just published by Bloomsbury.

Humour and Children's Books

Geraldine McCaughrean

There is nothing so unfunny as a book intended to be funny when it isn't.

That's why I vowed, early on, that I would never write one. I'd be earnest, fearless, purple, artistic... but not comic. Unfortunately, a book devoid of humour can be *almost* as bad as one that misses the mark. Humour leavens philosophy, a doughy scene or the wholegrain goodness of a 'worthwhile' book.

It is much the best way of tackling unpalatable subjects and anything political. What is more certain to put a child off than polemic rant? What more effective a political tool than satire? Humour also endears a character to the reader and, structurally, provides breathing space in between excitements.

It's just very difficult to do well.

Another reason for a *sensible* author to avoid it: humour is a matter of taste. Straightforward adventure can hold almost anyone's interest, because everyone craves a little excitement in their lives. But senses of humour differ radically, so it is very hard to write a comic story that will amuse all. My 13-year-old got her humour from listening to

tapes of Flanders and Swann, The Reduced Shakespeare Company, Victor Borge and Tom Lehrer and reading *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and Bill Bryson. She can quote prodigious amounts of all of them... and a lot of her friends don't have a clue what she is talking about. Funny? What's funny? A matter of opinion, that's what funny is.

Luckily fiction depends heavily on observation - of real places, situations and character-types. And the Human Condition is intrinsically absurd. So comedy is bound to arise naturally sometimes. Maybe as the absurdity of the Human Condition is borne in on me more and more with age, I become increasingly willing to include it in my books.

There's no denying, it does make the job of writing more enjoyable. I like *Stop the Train* best of all my novels simply because it stayed light and wry throughout instead of descending into gloom and doom. The novel I finished today has barely a laugh in it, so I shall never love it as much. Novels are like people. The ones that make you laugh are the best. The ones who *think* they can - but can't - are well worth avoiding.

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Humour!

Marcia Williams

Being asked to write a few short words about the humour in my books is akin to being asked what side I sleep on. I hesitate, I struggle to remember, yet it is something I do every night... unconsciously. I never set out to make my books humorous, I would not claim to be a 'funny person,' but it is true, jokes do speckle the pages of my books and I am not entirely sure where they come from. A lot of the stories I tell or retell are both bleak and violent. I cannot tell them honestly without being moved by the plight of the protagonists: the loneliness of *Oliver Twist*, the pain of *King Lear* or the cruelty of the ancient Greeks. Perhaps humour is my shield, helping me to relive the emotions, without being dragged under. It is certainly a tool that the reader can use to help him or her deal with what Maurice Sendak refers to as, 'the vagaries of life.' (*Caldecott & Co*, p. 144, 1988)

Just as a happy ending is empowering, so is being given permission to laugh at what may be considered socially unacceptable. Death, sex, cruelty and intolerance, these can all be made less threatening by humour. But like sleeping on my right side, or is it my left, the jokes slip in unconsciously. Many are just slapstick, the quick nudge in the ribs, but others mark the place where I struggled to cope with what I was writing or illustrating. Humour does not sugar the pill, nor does it make the dark go away, but it does, just like a happy ending, lend hope - and all children should have that.

However much we would like to believe childhood is a carefree time, full of laughter and sunshine, reality tells us that mixed with this comes a tough struggle to make sense of a dark-clouded world. Whatever the mood, humour lets in light and air. It gives space for the reader, it is a spark to kindle the imagination and, if the joke hits just the right note, it can lift the reader into the book so that he or she travels courageously, hand in hand with the protagonist, through every situation.

Humour and
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Humour!

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Seriously Funny

Steve Barlow and Steve Skidmore

Reading is a serious business.

To ensure that it's taken seriously enough, the government sets targets. Careers, funding and the very existence of schools and education authorities may depend upon these targets being met, however laughably overambitious they may be. Success in attaining them must be measured by constant testing. Enthusiasm and enjoyment can't be tested, so we must have facts. Facts, facts, facts! Thomas Gradgrind would have loved it. *Hard Times* for reading, indeed. How could we not take it seriously?

And since we are exerting such monstrous efforts to ensure that all our children learn to read the same material, at the same rate (one size fits all!), it is almost sacrilegious to encourage our children to read frivolous, entertaining books rather than serious and worthy ones. Isn't it?

Yet take a look at what kids actually choose to read. Which books fly off the library shelves? The Millennium Edition titles that stand in every school library in their immaculate black and white ranks, like guardsmen on parade? No. Strangely enough, some of the most borrowed children's books in the UK over the last five years are – Terry Deary's *Horrible Histories*.

There are those (we've met 'em: some of them are in surprisingly responsible positions) who consider this a deplorable situation. Why should children waste their time on *The Rotten Romans* when they could be getting to grips with Edward Gibbon?

Well - because they're kids. Because they still see life as fun and exciting and a great adventure – unless we deliberately choose to stifle their enjoyment, by turning the act of reading into a profitless chore rather than a fascinating voyage of discovery by insisting that they read (and aridly dissect) material far beyond their intellectual and emotional capabilities. By doing so, we risk losing them forever.

This applies especially to the less committed reader: the struggling, reluctant or disaffected reader (the technical term is 'boy'), who is unlikely to be converted to the joys of reading by weekly confrontations with Charlotte Bronte or Freya Stark. The emergent reader is far more likely to

respond to reading as a fun activity. Laughter engages the reader, who is then enthused about the material and has a motive to go on reading. 'Engage and Enthuse' is our mantra. We've heard a lot worse.

And yet, the books that continue to be brought to the notice of our emergent readers, and their parents, librarians, and teachers (ie. the literary prizewinners) are overwhelmingly of the type we call 'crossover' – complex books for the committed reader. And to concentrate critical attention exclusively on such titles implies that other work is comparatively worthless.

We believe that funny books have enormous value – and not only in promoting reading, because the ability to read is necessary to all areas of the curriculum, and a humorous introduction to any subject area can only be positive. We believe there is more PHSE value in a single Maurice Gleitzman title than in a sheaf of DFEE directives. In our own

work, we explore different areas of the curriculum: Science (the *Vernon Bright* series), History (the *Last Diaries*) and ICT (*The Outernet*) – and, hey, sometimes we just want readers to have fun (*The Dark Forest*).

In all our years of writing, we've come to realise that comedy is a difficult trick to pull off. A moderately suspenseful mystery title can still be successful. So can a moderately gripping adventure yarn or a moderately interesting work of literature, if its pretensions are lofty enough. But a funny book is either funny – or it isn't. And if it isn't, it's a dead duck.

So why do we choose to walk the comedy tightrope? Because comedy balances tragedy. Because making our readers laugh and enjoy their reading is a worthy goal. Because the most profound thoughts can be conveyed as effectively with a smile as with a sermon.

Like reading, humour is a serious business. We kid you not.

"A funny book is either funny - or it isn't. And if it isn't, it's a dead duck."

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Seriously Funny

**Steve Barlow
and Steve
Skidmore**

It Makes Me Laugh

Prue Goodwin

My sense of humour gets me into trouble all the time.

What makes me laugh? The usual things – authority outwitted, pomposity pricked, the unfairness of life and anything that points out the nonsensical nature of orthodoxy. For all these and more, I need look no further than the work of author/artist Tony Ross. His artwork is always amusing and often makes me laugh out loud. Ross writes and illustrates his own books but also collaborates with other authors – notably Jeanne Willis – to produce some of the funniest picture books available.

A regular theme of Ross' work is the individual versus the establishment. Perhaps the most 'powerful' character who takes on authority is the Little Princess who first appeared in 1986 in *I want my potty*. This book set the trend for some uproarious tales of early childhood. They depict a royal household where the urgent needs of a toddler demand the attention of the monarch, leaders of the armed forces and ministers of state. The needs of a child versus government? How ridiculous! How funny! How true!

Pomposity pricked is best illustrated by *Super*

Dooper Jezebel where the eponymous lead character is unbearably GOOD at everything. She refuses to run in school because, as she points out, 'It's against the rules. And I always walk nicely. If you run your socks will come down.' Fine sentiments – except when an escaped crocodile is around.

Zoo keeper: 'You naughty boy, you've eaten the best girl in the world.'

Crocodile: 'I've tasted better!'

Characters who are too good are vastly outweighed by those who are bad (*Naughty Nigel*), aggressive (*Big, bad Barney Bear!*) or idle (*Lazy Jack*). Human fears and weaknesses are explored in *I'm coming to get you* and *Don't do that!* while individuality is celebrated in *Michael* (written by Tony Bradman).

Some of Ross' funniest and most effective books have been created in collaboration with Jeanne Willis: the Dr Xargle series, for example, and the award winning *Susan laughs*. Their latest collaboration *Tadpole's promise* is my current favourite. It is the story of a doomed love affair between a caterpillar and a tadpole. Romantic, heart-wrenching stuff – but beware, it pulls no punches. The denouement is hilarious – well, it is if you have a sense of humour like mine.

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"...some of the funniest picture books available."

Here are just a few of Tony's books

I want my potty 1986

Super Dooper Jezebel 1988

Naughty Nigel 1982

Big, Bad Barney Bear! 1992

Lazy Jack 1985

I'm coming to get you 1984

Don't do that! 1991

Michael (Tony Bradman) 1990.

Dr Xargle's book of earthlets (Jeanne Willis) 1988

Susan laughs (Jeanne Willis) 1999

Tadpole's promise (Jeanne Willis) 2003

All published by Andersen Press
www.andersenpress.co.uk

Tony Ross is the British nomination for the Hans Christian Andersen Medal

Tony's newest book with Jeanne Willis is
I Hate School 2003

Resource tip: Humorous Picture Books

Templar Publishing (Pippbrook Mill, London Rd, Dorking, Surrey, RH4 1JE, www.templarco.co.uk) have published several books designed to amuse young readers, including *The Snoops* by Miriam Moss and Delphine Durand, about nosy neighbours who get their come-uppance, and *The Race*, an up-to-date version of the hare and the tortoise, by Caroline Repchuck and Alison Jay.

It Makes Me Laugh

Prue Goodwin

Robert Westall's Writing For Children

Kevin McCarron

Although Robert Westall is generally perceived as a writer of ghost stories for adolescents, his work contains a considerable amount of humour.

The nature of the humour, however, and, connectedly, the intended audience for it, are problematic issues.

Overall, there is considerable humour of a predominantly intertextual nature, which, it must be assumed, is rarely recognized by Westall's adolescent readers. In *The Machine Gunners* (1975), for example, the gang draw up a list of thirteen Standing Orders. These are amusing in themselves but they also clearly parody similar regulations in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*.

Similarly, *Fathom Five* (1979) has many comic moments that are unlikely to be appreciated by the adolescent reader. Much of the humour in the opening chapters is satirical, and is generated by an artful shift of narrative perspective, from a conventional omniscient voice, to one which is actually the 'voice' of the respectable people of Garmouth: 'They [the riffraff] were harmless enough – except the Maltese. The Maltese kept cafes; and Women. The Women lured drunken sailors into the cafes, where the Maltese knifed them and lifted their bulging wallets'. The use of uppercase for comic effect is replicated later: 'Mam dreaded gambling. One of her brothers had Ruined Himself at Cards and Died Young.' This latter phrase may allude to Hardy's famous poem 'The Ruined Maid', while its use of upper case, as earlier, evokes the portentousness and exaggerated anxiety of, this time, the mother's

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voice. However, it is unlikely that in either case the adolescent reader will perceive the comedy, or even recognize that the intent is comic.

Much of Westall's humour centres upon the vicissitudes of married life; again a subject that seems unlikely to amuse adolescents. In 'Sergeant Nice' (1982), for example, Westall writes: 'But Constable Hughes had orders to keep his eyes open for a streaker... "Any description?" [he] asked hungrily; he was a badly over-married man'. The adult reader, even when amused, would find it difficult to paraphrase Westall's superb phrase "a badly over-married man"; the bemused adolescent is likely to remain unamused.

Westall's most successful comic story is probably 'The Dracula Tour' (1983), which focuses specifically on a married couple - and the man's best friend. Epistolary in form, it is addressed to an agony aunt by a female writer, Sheila, and utilises one of Westall's favourite oppositions: Romantic female/Pragmatic male. Compared to George, who, as his name indicates, is a bluff, practical Englishman, Sheila is Romantic, comically so: 'I imagined us riding through the snow on a sleigh drawn by horses and being chased by wolves but George stopped them getting me though they ate some peasants. Including Duggie (who was coming with us as usual).' Sheila's lack of punctuation here is comic, as is her sentence structure, but the contemporary adolescent reader is likely to be even less aware of grammatical rules than of the complex nature of married life.

Who does actually laugh, I often wonder, at Robert Westall's humour?

**Robert Westall's
Writing for
Children**

Kevin McCarron

STOP PRESS! IBBY HONOUR LIST ANNOUNCED

The committee of IBBY British section are pleased to announce the books selected for the IBBY Honour List 2004.

For translation:

Sarah Adams' translation of *The Eye of the Wolf* by Daniel Pennac (Walker).

For illustration:

Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book? by Lauren Child (Hodder).

For writing:

Naked Without a Hat by Jeanne Willis (Faber).

Watch for more information on all three titles in the next issue of IBBYLink!

Review: *Lines in the Sand* - eds. Hoffman & Lassiter

Chris Lewis-Ashley

Review: *Lines in the Sand*

Chris Lewis-Ashley

Lines in the Sand is an impressive anthology of poetry, prose and illustrations for children (perhaps aged 8+) that counts the cost of slipping into wars in different locations across the centuries and promotes the fight for peace. Stimulated by this year's events in Iraq, nearly 150 international writers and illustrators, many well known, responded to the editors' appeal for contributions of new or recent work. Royalties and profits go to UNICEF's emergency appeal for the children of the Iraq war.

The message is necessarily profound and disturbing as illustrated by Michael Morpurgo's *For Carlos*, a farewell letter from an Argentinean soldier to his son; or Nigel Gray's comment on the N Ireland conflict, *The Butcher*. Yet guided through this collection with sensitivity, children will come to appreciate the injustices of war. The positioning of items did not necessarily run true to section headings but the collected material is impressive in both range and depth.

Altruistic reasons for igniting wars are compared to the harsh reality of combat from many perspectives, male and female, young and old, east and west, materially rich and poor. The voices of those enduring the horrors of war are juxtaposed with those observing via television sets from the comfort of their living rooms, conveying the message that what is commonly thought of as 'reality television' is little more than fantasy. The likelihood of a hopeful future seems bleak until the 'Seeds of Hope' section within which Laurence Anholt offers a lighter touch with 'Eco-Wolf and the War Pigs' (a play-reversal on the familiar folk tale). The youngest of readers would appreciate the tiniest bunny's 'No fighting!' stance.

War offers little opportunity for amusement. However, there is black humour in Maggie Pearson's retelling of a gypsy folktale in 'Those Darned Flies!' and also in Anna Levine's 'Yield! Narrow Passage Ahead' where two boys, Palestinian and Jewish, are thwarted from fighting when wounded by an explosion. Their appreciation of survival is coloured by the observation that 'When I get home, my mom's going to kill me!' Bruised and bloodied, reassuringly, the boys reach across their once insurmountable cultural divide.

Lines in the Sand cannot fail to raise children's awareness and understanding of the reality of war and the benefits of peace. Its publication alone offers us hope for the future.

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Review: *Art, Narrative and Childhood* - Eds. Styles & Bearne

Patricia Crampton

Review: *Art, Narrative and Childhood*

Patricia Crampton

Like all compilations of papers from conferences (in this instance from the symposium 'Reading Pictures' held at Homerton College, Cambridge, in September 2000), this collection is varied in its perspectives, though in both its organisation and its extended introduction, the editors have created a rather greater degree of coherence than is sometimes the case. The sections, 'The Texts', 'Cultural Concerns', 'Young Readers Responding to Image' and 'Reading in the Future,' represent some of the strands of the conference.

A major problem in a book derived from papers all of which focused on the visual, is that to reproduce illustrations in the quantity (and in the colours) really required to support the text would have made it prohibitively expensive. The chapters differ in the number of illustrations provided; for instance, Jacqueline Labbe's 'Illustrating Alice: Gender, Image, Artifice' has four (two Rackham, one Tenniel, and one from a modern computer game), while Maria Nikolajeva's 'Picturebook Characterisation: Word/image Interaction' has none, which could provide a problem for readers unfamiliar with the range of classic picturebook texts to which she refers.

Many readers may find Clare Bradford's discussion of 'Aboriginal Visual Narratives for Children: A Politics of Place' one of the most interesting articles, in its challenge to the western reader to attempt to understand texts with a range of very different cultural assumptions; the three illustrations here are particularly telling. Others will be most attracted to the section which looks at children's responses to image, a particularly interesting perspective being given by Colin Grigg's chapter, 'The Painted Word: Literacy through Art,' in which he gives an account (supported by quotations from both children and from poetry) of some of the educational initiatives undertaken in recent years at the Tate in the attempt to bring word and image together.

Selecting the few chapters which I have been able to mention in a short review is not intended to devalue the others. I would certainly recommend this book to students of the visual element in children's literature- in the hope that everyone would realise how indispensable this aspect is to the serious study of the discipline.

Review: *Re-Reading Harry Potter* - Suman Gupta

Pat Pinsent

Given the place of the Harry Potter books within the comic tradition, it seems appropriate to include a review of this recent critical and theoretical analysis within the current issue of *IBBYLink*. That said, perhaps the most humorous aspect is the disclaimer which Gupta and his publishers have been forced to put on the front cover and in the Acknowledgement section: 'Not authorised or approved by J.K.Rowling.' As anyone who has written about the Potter saga will be aware, Rowling's publishers make it very difficult to quote the books at any length in any critical work- which is somewhat ironic given that making the books an object of academic discourse is surely a means of increasing, even if only in a very small way, their reputation and sales.

Gupta, a senior lecturer at the Open University, has as his main objective what he terms a 'text-to-world' analysis of the social and political implications of the Harry Potter phenomenon. In Part I, he presents a variety of factors and definitions which govern his chosen mode of approach to the text. For instance, he rejects looking at the appeal of the books to children, since he claims that this would take us 'out of the sphere of the text and reader as a closed relationship... or rebound into adults speaking on behalf of children,' whereas his interest is rather in what the phenomenon tells us about ourselves 'and the social and political world we inhabit' (p.12-13). He justifies the fact that he has little to say about the author herself, by the fact that the 'real-life' Rowling has done nothing which clashes with the persona of the 'constructed' author who is to be found in the texts, a construction which, like that of the 'constructed' child audience addressed, is 'integral to the Harry Potter phenomenon' (p.36). Nor has Gupta much to say about Children's Literature as such, or the various sub-genres of fantasy literature.

By the time that Gupta has expressed all these exclusions from his critical perspective, readers may well be wondering when he will arrive at his own 're-reading' of the text and his explanation

of its popularity. For many, Part II of the book will have a greater appeal than the more theoretical first section; in it he deals with such subjects as the relationship between the 'Magic' world, the 'Muggle' world and 'our' world (which, in providing the 'real' source for Rowling's portrayal of areas such as class, advertising and racial prejudice, is not to be identified with the Muggle world of the books). It is not, however, until the final chapter, intriguingly named 'The Beginning,' that Gupta makes his explanation for the Potter phenomenon explicit. Central to this is his contention that the Magic world is 'fundamentally antithetical to our world,' being presented as 'essentially anti-rational' (p.151). In our world, he claims, 'there is still some longing for the assurance and comfort that

magic had provided in the past' (p.155): Perhaps... the *Harry Potter* phenomenon is such because these books offer exactly what we unthinkingly desire *within* our world and *because* of the current condition of our world and *despite* the constitution of our world. These are desires born in our world; these are not created by the *Harry Potter* books, merely realized in them in a certain (attractive, readable, undemanding) form' (p.162) [italics Gupta's].

Serious students of children's literature will find this book essential reading, not only for its well-supported conclusions about the texts themselves, but also for Gupta's very careful justification of his theoretical approach and his consideration of the essential critical texts which would have offered alternative routes for analysis. Throughout, his findings are expressed in an attractively ironic and occasionally self-deprecatory mode which belies the authority which he sometimes seems to claim. It is very much the work of an academic who makes no concessions to readers lacking his consuming interest in philosophy. In its appeal to a select minority, Rowling's publishers need not worry that it will present any competition to the Potter books within the popular market!

"...these books offer exactly what we unthinkingly desire within our world..."

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Editor's note: Apologies! The article in the Summer 2003 edition of IBBYLink on 'Writing and Human Rights' was mistakenly attributed to Liam O'Carroll. It was in fact by Liam Gearon, Director of the Centre for Research in Human Rights at University of Surrey Roehampton. (The confusion arose from the fact that I only know two Liams! Had it been Michael, for instance, I would have been more careful in selecting the right one!)

**Review:
Re-Reading
Harry Potter**
Pat Pinsent

Humour in Children's Literature: IBBY Recommends

Pam Robson

Humorous fiction for children ranges from zany slapstick through the downright hilarious to subtle innuendo and irony, while the comedy may be carried by the text and/or the illustrations. John Stephens talks about 'the social concept of humour,' by which he means that through children's stories young readers learn that it is acceptable to laugh at certain situations. Below is a random selection of children's titles which illustrate the multifaceted nature of the expression of humour.

Picture Books

Nicky by Tony and Zoe Ross (Andersen Press)
In this delightful small format picture book the eponymous central character, Nicky, is a small girl about to experience her first day at school. The minimal text is a series of hilarious exchanges between Mum and Nicky. Mum's imagination is seen to run riot through the pastel cartoon style illustrations as Nicky describes her new friend.

Baloney (Henry P.) by Jon Scieszka, Illus. Lane Smith (Viking)

The title, a witty play on words, hints at the content of this unusual title. The eponymous Henry P. Baloney is not your average boy - he is also a green alien from outer space! The author cleverly inserts words from many languages, including a spoonerism and a transposition (listed in the glossary) with success. The result is a story that works on many levels with a superbly ironic ending.

If You Give a Moose a Muffin by Laura Joffe Numeroff, Illus. Felicia Bond (Collins)

First published in the USA in 1991, this delightful book provides even a very young reader with a highly entertaining romp through the zany situation that arises when a young boy throws a muffin through the window.

Poetry

Juggling with Gerbils by Brian Patten, Illus. Chris Riddell (Puffin)

This collection of rhythmic rhyming verses by Brian Patten is complemented by the inimitable artwork of Chris Riddell. Patten often plays with word meanings for his humour. 'This is an excellent collection, thought-provoking and humorous, with an index of first lines.'

Wish You Were Here (and I Wasn't) by Colin McNaughton (Walker)

This is a slapstick collection of poems and rhymes relating loosely to the theme of holidays, illustrated in full colour by the author. Like Patten, McNaughton likes to play with words, especially made-up words. He makes clever use of the saying 'fishing for compliments.' Teachers will enjoy his poem 'Teachers Holiday Lament.'

Dragon Poems selected by John Foster, Illus. Korky Paul (Oxford University Press)

The hilarity conveyed by this large format picture book anthology is extended and enhanced by Korky Paul's full colour illustrations which are packed with humorous detail. The poets featured include Jack Prelutsky, Tony Bradman, Judith Nicholls and Charles Thomson. The humour occasionally becomes a vehicle for some serious messages, as in the title poem by Ian Larmont which serves as sharp reminder to developing minds of the harsh reality of extinction.

Short Stories

The Family Who Won a Million, compiled by Alison Sage, Illus. Tony Ross (Red Fox)

This collection of ten short stories and excerpts about families by familiar authors is for younger readers and includes 'Nothing to be Afraid Of' by Jan Mark, an excerpt from *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* by Judy Blume and 'A Pudding Like Night on the Sea' by Ann Cameron. Other contributors include Anne Fine, Gene Kemp, and Margaret Mahy. Tony Ross enhances this exceptionally good collection with the skill of his familiar black and white cartoon-style artwork.

Chuck and Danielle by Peter Dickinson, Illus. Robin Lawrie (Yearling)

Peter Dickinson is not best known for humorous stories but this collection of seven for younger children, about a very nervous whippet called Chuck and his young mistress, Danielle demonstrates Dickinson's dexterity. Each story is a light-hearted insight into the mind of Chuck, whose timidity is the cause of various hilarious situations. There are many layers to these apparently carefree tales.

Sniff by Ian Whybrow, Illus. Tony Ross (Hodder)

This is the first title in a series of extremely funny short story collections about a dog named Sniff that will keep young readers giggling. Each story is yet another zany incident in Sniff's chequered career. The familiar cartoon style artwork of Tony Ross adds to the general hilarity.

Novels, 7-9 years

Six Storey House by Geraldine McCaughrean, Illus. Ross Collins (Hodder)

A slapstick tale in which the central characters are the various families who share the eponymous six storey house. Each storey is a separate flat with a variety of characters, each with their own problems and quirks, but together they find they can achieve great things and bring about change in their lives. This is a small story with a great big moral. The humour is enhanced by the black and white cartoon-style artwork.

Humour in Children's Literature: IBBY Recommends

Pam Robson

Sammy Keyes and the Sisters of Mercy by Wendelin Van Draanen (Scholastic)

This title is from a series of stories set in the USA about the eponymous Sammy, a girl sleuth. Although Sammy creates mayhem whenever she sets about solving another crime, she always succeeds. In this tale, Sammy is sent to the local church to help out as part of her punishment for her bad behaviour but when the seemingly carefree Sisters of Mercy turn out to be seasoned criminals, everything changes! This is a good read with some strong moral messages.

The Blurred Man by Anthony Horowitz (Walker)
Nick is 14 years old - he is the brains behind their private investigation service. Nick's big brother, Tom, is incredibly stupid and becomes the butt for most of the clever repartee that ensues when a rich American asks the brothers to investigate the sudden death (by steamroller) of Lenny Smile, the recipient of millions of dollars... Murder follows before Nick realises that Lenny Smile never existed. A slight title but lots of fun.

Novels, 9-12 years

Pure Dead Wicked by Debi Gliori (Corgi)

This is the second title in this hilarious series by the author/illustrator well known for her picture books. The somewhat unusual Strega-Borgia family have three children and talking pets including a dragon, a gryphon, a crocodile and a yeti. When family and pets are tricked into moving out of the ancestral home by villainous property developers, Christmas is spent at the local hotel and hysteria begins when Titus manages to clone miniature versions of himself and Pandora. Wildly implausible but outrageously funny.

Freewheelers to the Rescue! by Eric Johns (Walker)

That the title of this story has resonances of Enid Blyton hints at what is in store for its readers. The Freewheelers is a group of girls intent upon seeking adventure and saving those in danger. They begin their adventures by 'rescuing' a kidnapped girl who has not been kidnapped at all and ironically, when they finally effect a real rescue by saving two small children from drowning, they choose anonymity because at the time they were out in a boat without permission. Much evidence of dysfunctional families here, while the viewpoints aired are very much those of the children, but plenty of wry humour.

Simone's Letters by Helena Pielichaty, Illus. Sue Heap (Oxford University Press)

The device of a series of letters exchanged between Simone, Jem - an aspiring actor - and her friend Chloe is used to create a hilarious situation. Simone's letters are the catalyst that unites Jem with her single Mum. Simone and Chloe resolve their differences long distance when Chloe goes on a visit to Australia. There is an abundance of

humour and much word play here. This is an excellent language tool for the classroom.

Boy Overboard by Morris Gleitzman (Puffin)

Morris Gleitzman has a great talent for combining humour and pathos. The narrator of this story is Jamal; the setting is Afghanistan prior to the overthrow of the Taliban. Jamal and his sister Bibi love to play football, though girls are forbidden to do so. When their mother, a practising teacher (despite the Taliban) is arrested and sent for execution, the family flees the country for Australia only to find that the Australian government does not want refugees... To find wry humour within such tragedy is talent indeed.

Vernon Bright and the Magnetic Banana by S. Barlow & S. Skidmore, Illustrator Geo Parkin (Puffin)

This book manages to cleverly sandwich lots of fascinating facts about magnetism between its humorous episodes. John Watt and Vernon Bright - note the clever choice of names - are friends but when Vernon's latest invention turns him into a walking magnet life becomes somewhat trying for them both. Warning: this should not be read in public places!

Novels, 12+

Heathrow Nights by Jan Mark (Hodder)

The sheer subtlety of Jan Mark's wry humour is her trademark, even when dealing with serious issues. In this story a boy named Russell, distressed by the sudden death of his father and his mother's second marriage, runs away to London one night with his friends. Mark uses parallels between the story of Hamlet and Russell's story to explain his motives. This is a powerful thought-provoking story with some wry humour.

Candlefasts by William Mayne (Hodder)

The subtlety of William Mayne's humour is an integral part of his writing. This title is the third in the fantasy series that began with *Earthfasts*. The narrative spans a number of years. David, now grown up, has a sister, Lyddy, who, like him, travels into another time. Lyddy learns how to pass between the Jingle Stones and brings back Alec-Edward. David continues to experience strange sensations that link him with the past, he understands that he has a task to complete. Events culminate with the final movement of the stones as David pieces together the last part of the stone puzzle - quite literally. Mayne's deliciously subtle sense of humour is to be savoured.

**Recommended
Titles**

The 10th Annual NCRCL/British IBBY Children's Literature Annual Conference BOOKS AND BOUNDARIES: WRITERS AND THEIR AUDIENCES

Saturday November 15th 2003
Froebel College, University of Surrey Roehampton

The 10th Annual NCRCL/British IBBY conference will be looking at the way in which children's books are increasingly read by adults. The workshops and plenary sessions will focus on topics such as: 'cross-over' books which transgress the boundaries between children's and adult's fiction; the phenomenon of adults naming children's books as their favourites; the marketing of books for specific audiences; the adult appeal of children's picture books; and books of this type from other countries.

- 9.30-10.0 Registration, Coffee & Exhibitions
10.0-10.50 Welcome & Keynote: Penelope Lively and Ann Thwaite
10.50-11.15 James Naughtie: Children's Books and 'The Big Read'
11.15-12.10 Panel Discussion (Publishers and Booksellers, plus Julia Eccleshare, chaired by John Dunne)
12.10-12.20 Elizabeth Laird: The Audience of A Little Piece of Ground
12.20-12.30 Ann Lazim: News of British IBBY
12.30-2.0 Lunch, Exhibitions, and chance to buy books
Wine Reception and Launch of Pied Piper Press
2.0-3.30 Parallel Workshops
3.30-4.0 Tea and Cakes, sponsored by Wizard Books to launch Nicholas Tucker's new book, *Darkness Visible*, a guide to Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy.
4.00 - 4.50 Theresa Breslin and Linda Newbery discuss the audiences of their recent books
4.50 - 5.00 Closing Remarks - Neil Gaiman

Throughout the day there will be conference bookstalls selling children's and adult's books, and critical works about children's literature, together with second-hand bookstalls and relevant exhibitions.

It's not too late to book - ring 020 8392 3008 today!

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CLPE News Autumn '03

The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (formerly known as the Centre for Language in Primary Education) was relaunched as an independent charity in November 2002 after 30 years as a local authority organisation. CLPE continues to provide courses and consultancy for teachers and other education professionals and develop its large library of children's books and related literature. Its publications list also continues to grow.

As a mark of the centre's increasing involvement with parents, in October two annotated booklists will be published to help them choose books for and with their children. Entitled *Simply the Best Books for Children*, the lists cover the age ranges 0-7 and 7-11. The booklists will be published during Children's Book Week and are linked with The Children's Bookshow, a national tour of writers of children's literature in October and November. During this time, CLPE will be running conferences around the country, in Gloucester, Leicester, Sheffield, London and Newcastle on The Power of Texts: Creative literacy approaches to some of the best books for children. To find out more about the The Children's Bookshow, contact Sian Williams: sianwilliams2000@hotmail.com tel: 020 8690 0602

A recent initiative is the newly established CLPE Poetry Award, following in the footsteps of the Signal Poetry Award which is now discontinued. The first award was made in June 2003 to John Agard and Grace Nichols who edited *Under the Moon and Over the Sea*, published by Walker Books.

This Autumn/Winter CLPE will display the 2002 IBBY Honour List within the library. The exhibition will also be on display at IBBY British Section's conference at Roehampton on Saturday, November 15th. If you would like to visit CLPE's library, view the IBBY Honour List or know more about the Poetry Award, please contact Ann Lazim at ann@clpe.co.uk

For more information about CLPE's courses, conferences and publications, contact info@clpe.co.uk
CLPE is less than ten minutes' walk from Waterloo.
Centre for Literacy in Primary Education, Webber Street, London SE1 8QW
020 7401 3382/3. CLPE's newly relaunched website can be found at www.clpe.co.uk

Hans Christian Andersen Awards Nominations 2004

The Hans Christian Andersen Awards are presented every two years by IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People) to an author and an illustrator whose complete works have made an important and lasting contribution to children's literature. The British nominees Geraldine McCaughrean and Tony Ross were announced in the last issue of IBBYLink. Now IBBY National Sections from 30 countries have made their selections, submitting the following 26 authors and 27 illustrators as candidates for the 2004 Hans Christian Andersen Awards:

- * Argentina: Author: Ema Wolf; Illustrator: Istvan Schritter
- * Austria: Author: Martin Auer; Illustrator: Linda Wolfsgruber
- * Belgium: Author: Bart Moeyaert; Illustrator: Kitty Crowther
- * Brazil: Author: Joel Rufino dos Santos; Illustrator: Angela Lago
- * Canada: Author: Gilles Tibo; Illustrator: Marie-Louise Gay
- * China: Author: Cao Wenxuan; Illustrator: Wang Xiaoming
- * Croatia: Author: Visnja Stahuljak
- * Denmark: Author: Bjarne Reuter; Illustrator: Lilian Brøgger
- * Egypt: Illustrator: Helmi Abdel-Hamid El-Touni
- * Finland: Illustrator: Mauri Kunnas
- * France: Author: Jean-Paul Nozière; Illustrator: Grégoire Solotareff
- * Germany: Author: Kirsten Boie; Illustrator: Rotraut Susanne Berner
- * Greece: Author: Alki Zei; Illustrator: Fotini Stephanidi
- * Hungary: Illustrator: Krisztina Rényi
- * Ireland: Author: Martin Waddell
- * Italy: Author: Angela Nanetti; Illustrator: Roberto Innocenti
- * Japan: Author: Satoru Sato; Illustrator: Daihachi Ohta
- * Netherlands: Author: Paul Biegel; Illustrator: Max Velthuijs
- * New Zealand: Author: Margaret Mahy
- * Norway: Author: Jon Ewo; Illustrator: Svein Nyhus
- * Poland: Illustrator: Józef Wilkón
- * Portugal: Author: Luísa Ducla Soares; Illustrator: Danuta Wojciechowska
- * Russia: Author: Eduard Uspensky; Illustrator: Alexander Koshkin
- * Slovak Republic: Author: Ján Uliciansky; Illustrator: Peter Cisárik
- * South Africa: Author: Lesley Beake; Illustrator: Niki Daly
- * Spain: Author: Juan Farias; Illustrator: Javier Serrano
- * Sweden: Barbro Lindgren; Illustrator: Eva Eriksson
- * Switzerland: Author: Jürg Schubiger; Illustrator: Armin Greder
- * United Kingdom: Author: Geraldine McCaughrean; Illustrator: Tony Ross
- * USA: Author: Lois Lowry; Illustrator: Vera B. Williams

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It's not too early to start making your
plans to attend the
29th IBBY World Congress
5-9 September, 2004
Cape Town, South Africa.
Find out more at www.sacbf.org.za

**Hans Christian
Andersen Awards
Nominations
2004**

CALENDAR & EVENTS

29th October 2003, Royal Festival Hall, London

IMAGINE: CHILDREN'S LITERATURE FESTIVAL AT THE SOUTH BANK

During the Children's Literature Festival at the South Bank (featuring Quentin Blake, David Almond, animated films, Caribbean poetry, and much more) Michael Morpurgo, Children's Laureate, has arranged a reading (with James Berry, Val Bloom and Michael Rosen) to commemorate the life of Lois Beeson, who was deeply involved with the Laureateship and died shortly before the appointment was made. Full details from the South Bank website (www.rfh.org.uk/imagine) and from the Box Office (020 7960 4242)

1 November, Tate Britain, London

CARNIVAL! STORY AND ART IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Children's Laureate Michael Morpurgo joins Mary Hoffman and Jamila Gavin for workshops and readings based on their books related to Venice in a day dedicated to the Turner and Venice exhibition. At 4.30 the three authors will take part in a discussion; *Conjuring Other Worlds*, looking at the role of story and art in children's lives. All events are free.

Until 1 November, Swiss Cottage Library, London

THE COLOUR OF HOME: IMAGES FROM CONTEMPORARY CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

This exhibition is part of Camden Council's Black History Month celebration and features images from books published by Frances Lincoln and Tamarind Books. It can be viewed at the Swiss Cottage Central Library Gallery, 88 Avenue Rd., London NW3 3HA. Entry is free.

Saturday 13th December 2003, Marino Conference Centre, Griffith Avenue, Dublin

FIGHTING FOR WRITING

IBBY Ireland is hosting a one-day conference, for anyone with an interest in helping children who live in areas of conflict. The opening address will be given by Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, who is currently heading up an Ethical Globalisation Initiative. Other speakers will include Jehan Helou, Director of the Tamer Institute for Community Education in Ramallah, Palestine; Shpresa Vreto from Tirana, Albania; Donal O'Murchu and Betty Orr, who were involved in a North-South schools project, 'The Salmon of Knowledge', Terence O'Malley, who has set up schools in Afghanistan for many years; Helena Schar, who publishes books for various African countries; Tom Hyland of the Ireland East Timor Solidarity Campaign. Further information is available from: Mary Fitzpatrick ztif@gofree.indigo.ie, Liz Morris lizmorris@esatclear.ie, Michael O'Brien michael@obrien.ie or Nicola Sedgewick all@mentorbooks.ie

14-16 December, Lancaster University, Lancaster

IALIC CONFERENCE - THE INTERCULTURAL NARRATIVE

Visit www.ialic.org for more details on this conference.

3rd February 2004, University of Surrey, Roehampton,

THE CHILD AND THE BOOK

Roehampton Children's Literature Research Forum: Inaugural Postgraduate Conference Call for Papers. The conference programme will be determined primarily by those research students interested in participating and it is hoped to cover a wide spectrum of periods and themes. Abstracts not exceeding 300 words for papers of 20 minutes duration should be sent to Laura Atkins, National Centre for Research in Children's Literature, University of Surrey, Roehampton Lane, SW15 5PH, or emailed to l.atkins@roehampton.ac.uk

14th February 2004, John Moores University, Liverpool

ACTIVE HEROINES: A STUDY DAY

Please send 250 word proposals for papers to Rosie White at rosemary.white@unn.ac.uk or to her attention at the School of Arts & Social Sciences, Lipman Building, Northumbria University, Sandyford Rd., Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8ST

Like to hold your own event?

The Book Trust, Book House, 45 East Hill, London SW118 2QZ (www.booktrusted.com) has produced a resource catalogue to help people run book events. It also produces the journal, *Book Trusted*, full of lively articles about children's literature.

Calendar & Events