Now we are 10! CBI history - part 3

Celia Keenan researches Pinocchio's Irish adventures

Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick on her childhood books

The unique style of Sara Fanelli
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SUMMER ... holiday ... relaxation ... books ... yes, I believe in getting sand between the pages. The pleasure of getting lost on an adventure with some interesting people while lying on a beach, now that can be one of the best parts of a holiday. It’s a time when young people might discover a new book or author too – or even a new genre. When you’re relaxed you’re open to possibilities: after a swim, on a flight or just on a rainy afternoon at home. Teachers and parents at this time of year often ask for recommendations so I asked some children’s book enthusiasts for some summer reading ideas. You can find the results on page 38; and the review pages of this and back issues of Inis are a good source of books for various age groups.

About age guidelines ... remember they are only guidelines, each reader is unique in what they enjoy and in what they’re able for – both in terms of reading-ease/challenge and in content. A book will be discarded if they don’t get the combination of these factors just right and ultimately the child is the best judge of this. One librarian I emailed about recommendations recently, wrote:

‘Summer promises to be a lively time in libraries as Potter and Pirates rule the day but that’s not all that’s going on. The vogue for action-packed spy thrillers continues unabated with Chris Ryan’s Alpha Force and Robert Muchamore’s Cherub titles becoming almost as sought after as the latest Anthony Horowitz offering. Although pitched at young teens aged 12+, many of the readers who are borrowing these books tend to be in the 10-12 age group.’

And for keen readers who like a varied selection of books in their rucksack, I remember reading a recommendation (but can’t remember who wrote it) to take ‘something old, something new, something borrowed, something true’: a classic, some contemporary fiction, something from another culture, and perhaps a biography or a true adventure. A nice mix, I thought.

Of course the CBI Bisto Award winners and shortlist is another source of great books to read. Congratulations to John Boyne on winning the CBI Bisto Book of the Year Award 2006 for his novel The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas, which was announced on May 14th. The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas also won two awards at the Irish Book Awards in March: the Children’s Book of the Year and the Listeners’ Choice Book of the Year. The Miramax/Disney film version is due for release in 2008. The CBI Bisto Awards are now in their 17th year and have a prize fund of €20,000. Details of all the prizewinning and shortlisted books are on pages 36-37.

Another prize which has been in the news is the Newbery Award, the most prestigious literary award for children’s books on the other side of the Atlantic. This year it was won by a book called The Higher Power of Lucky by Susan Patron. It has been in the news because of some controversy surrounding a word which is used on the first page. Turn to page 29 to find out more and read Jabberwock’s reaction. Having read and really liked an extract on the web I’ve ordered my copy and am looking forward to reading this novel.

Hoping you – and the kids – get lost in a good book this summer!

Paddy O’Doherty
This final part of the series tracing the history of Children’s Books Ireland looks more closely at the development of the organisation in the last decade: its expanding network of connections with other arts organisations, its growing professionalism and its achievements.

CBI was formed as a result of two organisations uniting, rather than as a result of a division or ‘split’ in an organisation. By the mid-1990s both of these organisations, the Children’s Literature Association of Ireland (CLAI) and the Irish Children’s Book Trust (ICBT), were feeling the weight of their achievements. The minute books of both organisations show discussions about the need for paid help at administrative and routine clerical levels.

CLAI at least had a membership base and a number of activities (conferences, seminars, summer school and publications) that brought in some income and gave it a public profile. The branches, however, played a less active role, turning CLAI into an even more Dublin-based organisation – something it had always tried to resist becoming. Even so, members’ expectations were becoming higher; at times it seemed to be assumed that those involved in running activities on behalf of both organisations were doing so in a paid rather than a voluntary capacity. At the same time it was becoming more difficult to recruit members to the CLAI committee, and to fill the officers’ posts. In 1994 there were no candidates for the CLAI presidency, and Robert Dunbar stepped in as acting president until the following Easter. In the event he continued until October 1995 when Audrey Smith was elected president.

A hiatus also ensued in the ICBT when Eilis Dillon became terminally ill in 1993. By then a number of trustees had resigned, leaving the remaining members with ambitious plans but not enough finance or personnel to carry them through. Eilis, who was a patron of the Trust as well as the chair, had been a strong figurehead, and her death in 1994 was a blow to the organisation. In January 1995 Mary Murphy became chair, largely with the intention of helping to bring ICBT and CLAI into a closer working relationship and possible unity.

Talks with the Arts Council on securing joint funding for an administrator for both organisations took place in 1994, and gradually but not without hesitations, the two groups were feeling their way towards becoming one organisation. Both were mindful of their constituencies: CLAI was protective of its membership base, concerned that changes...
might see a dilution in its activities. The Trust was conscious of its basis in the Irish Children’s Book Foundation and that it had ‘capital’ in terms of its base in the Irish Writers’ Centre, its Bisto link with RHM Foods and a growing library. By now ICBT and CLAI had a good working relationship, helped by the fact that some of their activists had been or were involved with both organisations. Co-operation on the annual summer school continued, but it was due to unpleasant events connected with the 1995 Summer School that talks could have foundered. In spite of some efforts to upset the organisers and organisation of the summer school it went ahead with great success, and in a desire by most of those involved to ensure that the successful merger of CLAI and ICBT was not jeopardised, the show was kept on the road.

The possibility of forming an Irish section of IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People) was mooted at this time, but having to take account of the international dimension of IBBY was felt to be too big, and possibly too risky, an undertaking for the new group. Subsequently, an Irish section of IBBY was formed in 1998 with CBI as an important and active constituent organisation. IBBY Ireland’s membership base consists mainly of other organisations ranging from those directly connected to children’s books and publishing to others with a more educational basis such as the colleges of education and the INTO. This structure was put in place to ensure that IBBY Ireland did not mine into the membership base of CBI, and it has been careful too to develop an international focus, leaving CBI to focus on national events. CBI has remained associated with IBBY Ireland and currently plays a major role in supporting the work of IBBY Ireland.

It was agreed in December 1995 to set up a working party to report on the feasibility of forming ‘One Organisation’. CLAI was represented by Irene Barber, Liz Morris, Helen Ryan and subsequently Joanna Finegan, and Valerie Coghlan, Alex Miller and Michael O’Brien represented the ICBT. Despite some reservations voiced by members of both organisations, the working party persevered in its intention to create a new and more dynamic group, retaining the best characteristics of both ICBT and CLAI. It was mainly CLAI members who were concerned about the changes afoot, fearing that CLAI would lose its democratic structure and a general sense of camaraderie valued by those who participated in CLAI activities. In 1995 Alex Miller had produced a position paper for ICBT, helping that organisation to see its way forward.

An interim report produced by CLAI later in 1996 and circulated to members produced a positive response to the possibility of a new organisation. Following this, an action plan was formulated, proposing the development of a constitution for the new organisation and proposing to hold a competition to find it a name. This competition resulted in fourteen entries and Children’s Books Ireland – CBI was decided on. A subsequent competition for students at DIT’s College of Marketing and Design resulted in...
The launch of CBI took place in the Irish Writers’ Centre on 1 March 1997. The familiar logo which was designed by Olwyn Dooley.

Following an autumn conference at which proposals for the new organisation were accepted, a joint committee representing both organisations met for the first time on 14th November. It had been agreed that an interim year was necessary in which to finalise the constitution and other legal and procedural matters, and that during this period the committee would consist of members of ICBT and CLAI. Following this year, a new committee for CBI would be elected and CBI would be set up as a company limited by guarantee. At the 14th November meeting there were 22 items on the agenda, many of them related to the new organisation, and others to keeping activities such as summer school and the Bisto awards in train. It was agreed that the new organisation should have the status of a limited company and that Arts Council funding should be sought both for capital expenditure on the office in the Irish Writers’ Centre and to pay an administrator. A communications working group was charged with a particular responsibility for the new organisation, including its launch.

The launch of CBI took place in the Irish Writers’ Centre on 1 March 1997. It was hoped that President Mary Robinson would be present to launch it, but in the event that wasn’t possible and an endorsement of the organisation by the President was read to the audience. Dr Patricia Donlon, former director of the National Library of Ireland, with great enthusiasm formally launched CBI, and Prof Emer O’Sullivan from the University of Frankfurt gave a keynote address, tracing recent developments in writing and publishing in Ireland.

Meanwhile, a capital grant of £3,950 was received from the Arts Council and the following April £15,000 was received. Since then CBI has been regularly funded by the Arts Council.

These grants enabled the appointment of a part-time administrator. Claire Ranson, already a committee member of CLAI/CBI, was appointed as the first administrator and an office was established in the Irish Writer’s Centre.

From 1997 to 2001 the organisation grew in professionalism and in the scope of what it endeavoured to do. It was now committed to a major role in the annual Children’s Book Festival, along with the Youth Libraries Group of the Library Association of Ireland. This involved producing a guide of recommended reading for young people, the organisation of events for children and the production of schools packs and support material for...
children's events. Since then the book festival and the annual publication of Bookfest, an annotated guide to reading, has become a major part of CBI's raison d'etre and involves the organisation in nationwide activities with libraries and schools. The festival continues to grow and in 2006 over 55,000 young readers participated in festival events.

During this time volunteers continued to play a major part in CBI activities. Sometimes the strains showed; an organisation with one part-time administrator, later full-time, and many committed and enthusiastic activists who also had full-time jobs was finding it difficult to achieve the level of service to which it aspired. Ireland too was changing, and with growing prosperity, high standards and greater professionalism were expected. The publishing industry, in particular in the UK, on which CBI mainly relied for speakers and funding for events, had become much more commercial, focused on publicity for newly released books and was less willing to support events that did not give immediate gratification in terms of sales for promoted authors.

In 2000 the Arts Council grant to CBI was €38,000 (excluding children's book festival funding) and with multi-annual funding on the cards the organisation was ready for the next step in its development. In 2000 Claire Ranson was appointed as full-time executive director of CBI and a part-time assistant was employed to help with particular events, for example, the book festival. A PR officer and a designer for the festival programme were also employed. Accommodation in the Irish Writers' Centre in Parnell Square had become cramped for the increasing administrative functions of CBI, and in March 2001 a move to larger premises in Lower Camden Street took place. Since then CBI has again moved, this time to its current home in North Great Georges Street.

The Department of Education and Science's National Reading Initiative (NRI) played a considerable role in bringing an awareness of children's books to a new level in Ireland, and in 2000 it and CBI worked together on a number of projects including the publication of Book Choice, The Big Guide 2: Irish Children's Books and the research into children's reading What's the Story?, all discussed in part two of this series. With support from the NRI all primary schools were sent a copy of The Big Guide 2. At this time CBI also pursued an active strategy of working with other arts organisations to highlight the significance of children's books. A submission to the Arts Council in 2000 seeking multi-annual funding listed fifteen organisations with which CBI was associated. These ranged from library groupings to cultural organisations to theatre groups. In accordance with the preferences of the Arts

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**Presidents of CBI**

Irene Barber
1998–1999 Sarah Webb
1999–2000 Rosemary Hetherington

**Chairpersons of CBI**

2000–2001 Julie Rowan
2001–2003 David McConnell
2003–2006 Geraldine Meade
2006– Seamus Cashman

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Julia Donaldson signing copies of Room on the Broom at the Children's Book Festival launch in 2002

Eoin Colfer having a scary moment at the Children's Book Festival launch in 2003

Theresa Breslin and Kate MacLachlan at the 2005 CBI Summer School at St Patrick's College, Dublin
Council, in 2001, the committee of CBI became a board with members elected to serve for three years and with a chairperson instead of a president.

In the early 2000s CBI went through a period of re-evaluation and assessment of its structure. This was not without stresses and strains, both on the function of the organisation and on some of those concerned with steering it from a mainly volunteer-based organisation to a professionally staffed entity. Many of the issues arising at this time are common to organisations in transition and, with a view to making what was probably a bigger leap forward than many of those involved realised, an organisational consultant, Annette Clancy, was hired to help with this. Following an extensive consultation process and an ‘off-site meeting’ at Bellinter Conference Centre in Navan, she produced a report in June 2002. While the impact of this was not instantaneous, many of Clancy’s findings were taken on board. These focused on a lack of clarity about the roles of those involved in the developing organisation, an overall uncertainty about the structures needed for what was now a national organisation, and engagement with more activities than the board/administration could reasonably address.

In 2003 Geraldine Meade became chairperson of CBI and Paddy O’Doherty stepped in as acting director prior to the appointment of the current director, Mags Walsh, in 2004. In the same year CBI recruited a full-time events/programme officer. CBI now had (and continues to have) an enthusiastic and energetic full-time staff of three led by Mags Walsh, who already has done much to develop the role of CBI, and the organisation receives regular substantial funding from the Arts Council. Activities consist mainly of involvement with the book festival and production of Bookfest, the annual summer school, publication of Inis, the Bisto awards, awards for services to Irish children’s books, maintenance of a reference library of children’s books of Irish interest and related resources, serving as an information centre for Irish children’s books, and working in partnership with other organisations such as CICE Publications to produce the recent publication, *Irish Children’s Writers and Illustrators 1986–2006*.

Without CLAI, ICBT and CBI, much that has happened on the children’s book front in Ireland during the past twenty years would not have taken place. It prepared the ground, for example, for the introduction of children’s literature as an academic discipline in universities and colleges,
and for the formation of the Irish Society for the Study of Children’s Literature (ISSCL). Through attending conferences, summer schools and seminars presented by CBI and its progenitors many learned that there was a lot more than they imagined to the texts that they presented to children as parents, teachers, librarians. The informal contact with those of like interest provided by CBI was important for many who now regret the dropping of the annual conference and spring seminar. There is quite a sizeable constituency which does not necessarily want

Other organisations now hold conferences and events around children’s books, but the great strength of CBI is that it brings together people from across professional disciplines to discuss an area of common interest, and to learn from each other to engage with a purely academic approach to children’s literature, but which is interested in the critical appraisal and discussions which took place at the events mentioned. These adults feel better informed and more confident to select and discuss books organisations now hold conferences and events around children’s books, but the great strength of CBI is that it brings together people from across professional disciplines to discuss an area of common interest, and to learn from each other too.

At CBI’s 10th birthday party in Dublin’s City Hall on 1 March 2007, Children’s Books Ireland: The Continuing Story. A Strategic Plan 2007-2010 was launched. This ambitious plan follows a process of consultation with activists and enthusiasts in the children's book world. It lays out CBI's future engagement with young people and books, its continuing role in advocacy for children’s books, and an intention to continue playing an active part in furthering the development of a children’s book community, both on its own and through partnership with other organisations. At the birthday celebrations author Siobhán Parkinson publicly remarked that CBI has provided a home to writers (and illustrators) over many years. Her words could be echoed by others in different areas of the field. This essential function of CBI has played a huge role in developing, promoting and encouraging a professional and informed approach to a literature which is not always appreciated for its true worth in this country.

The launch of Children’s Books Ireland: The Continuing Story underlines the commitment by the board and the executive to the furtherance of the development of the organisation as a very professional and effective means of raising the profile of...
children's books, both nationally and internationally. CBI is now becoming a major national organisation. It has come a long way in the past twenty years since its predecessors were formed and in the ten years of its own life, and there can be no doubt that its future will be interesting. Happy birthday CBI. Long may you flourish!

Note
While my memory has guided me

Valerie Coghlan is librarian at the Church of Ireland College of Education, Dublin. She lectures on visual literacy and on picturebooks and school libraries on postgraduate courses at St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin and at University College Dublin. She co-edits Bookbird: An International Journal of Children’s Literature with Siobhán Parkinson and is a former review editor of Inis.


She is a founder member of the Children’s Literature Association of Ireland and of Children’s Books Ireland, of the Irish Society for the Study of Children’s Literature and of IBBY Ireland, of which she is the current president. She is a former board member of the International Research Society for Children’s Literature.

Irish Children’s Writers and Illustrators 1986–2006
A Selection of Essays
Edited by Valerie Coghlan and Siobhán Parkinson
Children’s Books Ireland and Church of Ireland College of Education Publications

Contributors: Valerie Coghlan | Robert Dunbar | Lucinda Jacob | Celia Keenan | Liz Morris | Ciara Ni Bhroin | Lucy O’Dea | A| Piess | Carole Redford | John Short
Writers: Eoin Colfer | Maeve Friel | Sam McBratney | Elizabeth O’Hara | Mark O’Sullivan | Siobhán Parkinson | Matthew Sweeney | Kate Thompson | Martin Waddell | Gerard Whelan
Illustrators: Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick | PJ Lynch | Niamh Sharkey

A unique collection of essays about contemporary writers and illustrators for children, this publication offers an authoritative yet accessible commentary about thirteen of Ireland’s most successful writers and illustrators for children. This collection is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in contemporary Irish children’s books and highlights the wealth of Irish-based children’s books talent. The articles were originally published in Inis magazine between 2001 and 2004 and have now been revised and updated for this special publication. Illustrated in full colour, it is indexed and contains references to many useful articles and monographs about Irish authors and illustrators and Irish children’s literature.
Pinocchio’s Irish adventures

Celia Keenan

The reasons that lie behind the decision of Ireland’s premier publisher of Irish language books in the 1930s to publish *Eachtair Phinoccio* are varied and interesting, as Celia Keenan’s research shows.

AN GÚM, the publication branch of the Department of Education, was established in 1926 by the Irish Free State (at that time, Cumann na nGaeilge) government. It was created to supply textbooks and popular fiction in the Irish language with a view to reviving the Irish language in a newly independent Ireland. ‘An Gúm’s mission was to produce a national literature that created its own heroes drawing on the new nation’s mythology, folklore and its patriotic struggle. It cultivated original authors and translators.’ It is clear from this that An Gúm’s task was a continuation of the work of the Irish Revival begun in the 19th century. In the 1930s it increasingly translated classics and popular fiction from English and other languages, titles that were seen to be appropriate given its mission. In 1933, An Gúm published a translation by Pádraig O Buachalla of Carlo Collodi’s (Lorenzini) *Le Avventure di Pinocchio*, illustrated by Carlo Chiostri and published in Florence by Bemporad and Sons. It was titled *Eachtair Phinoccio*. The choice of Pinocchio for translation at that time struck me as an interesting and unusual one since most of the other young people’s titles translated by An Gúm in the 1920s and 1930s were retellings of Irish myths, legends and folktales or retellings of heroic stories and fairy tales from other countries or were in the genre of the adventure story and were translated from English into Irish: such stories as Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Kidnapped*, Jack London’s *The Call of the Wild*, Captain Marryat’s *The Children of the New Forest*, Captain Mayne Reid’s *The Boy Hunters of the Mississippi*, RM Ballantyne’s *The Coral Island* were all translated into Irish and published in the 1930s. The broad thrust of An Gúm’s translations in those years, with a few exceptions, was more towards adventure novels than fantasy and seems distinctly boy-centred. Paradoxically, in view of the nationalist aim of the new state to cast off the

There are some very striking comparisons to be made between Italy in the late 19th century, and Ireland in the years following independence, the late 1920’s and 1930’s

vestiges of colonialism, tales that had served the British Empire well were by no means excluded, as can be seen in some of the titles and writers listed above. This paper set out to find answers to two questions. One is why Pinocchio was chosen for translation in 1933. The second and related question is why
there are two recent editions' of Ó Buachalla's translation in print at the present moment, neither of which is published by the original publisher, An Gúm. The answer to the first question must be tentative. The answer to the second is relatively dear.

The first thing to be said about Collodi/Lorenzini's original and Ó Buachalla's translation is that they are both postcolonial texts. Each is a direct response to the expressed need for a literature that will shape a new nation. There are some very striking comparisons to be made between Italy in the late 19th century and Ireland in the years following independence, the late 1920s and 1930s. A brief summary of the chief similarities includes the following. In both countries the continuation of 'Risorgimento' in Italy and 'Revival' or 'Athbheochan' (in the Irish Language) were political and cultural imperatives. These terms carry virtually the same accretion of meanings, from history through language, culture and politics to physical revolution. They point forward to a glorious future as well as back to a noble or heroic past. At the same time there was an acute consciousness of relative failure to achieve the grand goals envisaged by the revolutionaries in both nations. Italy in the last decades of the 19th century fell far short of the noble republic envisaged by its revolutionary leader, Mazzini, and ended up with a constitutional monarchy. Ireland experienced similar disappointment with regard to the republic which the Volunteers had fought for in the War of Independence and the bloodier Civil War. It ended up with a limited form of independence for only 26 of its 32 counties, with Dominion status, nominally still under the British Crown. In both countries, following on political failure, the burden of continuity, of creating an independent nation, fell to education and the hope of the next generation.

In Ireland the aim of reviving Irish became a crucial focus for identity in the new state, ironically prompted at least in part by Mazzini, who had said that essentially the lack of a native Irish national language disqualified Ireland from nationhood.

As well as having to invent a country, Italy and Ireland each had to invent a national language, Italian and Irish respectively. In Italy the debate was about which of the regional dialects would become the official language. In the end the dialect chosen, because it was that of Italy's greatest literature, of Dante and Boccaccio, was the dialect of Tuscany, of Florence, the dialect of Collodi/Lorenzini himself. In Ireland the national language, the first official language of the new state, was Irish, and as in Italy, the question of dialect, of regionalism intrudes, because Irish had three main dialects each quite
As well as having to invent a country, Italy and Ireland each had to invent a national language distinct from the other. It was agreed that a 'caigdeán', or standard, had to be created and agreed. Initially, a west Munster dialect was seen as the best model for a standard, however this was not to last as Connemara Irish began to take centre stage and formed the Hungarian forces, an intellectual, and a propagandist for the new Italy. Even though the new state fell short of the republic desired and worked for by Lorenzini, he continued to labour to create the New Italy, especially in his educational writings. His educational case of Pinocchio that making of an Italian takes the most literal form imaginable. From a piece of wood emerges a male puppet. This puppet, capricious, selfish, lying, greedy, ignorant, lazy, fun-loving, lacking in all loyalty and discipline, embodies common colonial subject stereotypes. He must, by dint of experience and suffering, become a real boy, taking responsibility for himself and for his aged father. Of course that real or perhaps true boy becomes in fact a real man, a real Italian man. The basis of the standard that was to some extent finalised in 1948. The issue of dialect becomes particularly important in the story of Pinocchio in Ireland.

As is very well known in children's literature circles, but seems almost entirely ignored in English language studies of the Risorgimento, the creator of Pinocchio was a loyal follower of Mazzini. He was a revolutionary soldier who fought against the Austro-work in the late 1870s encompassed the literal creation of geographical and linguistic Italy for children in his three volume Gimmetto's Journeys Around Italy. In 1883 with the creation of Pinocchio, in fulfilment of D'Azeglio's exhortation at the first sitting of the Italian parliament in Turin 1861, 'We have made Italy, now we must make Italians;' he undertook the extraordinary and daring task of creating the Italian man. In the road ahead for Pinocchio is not one of pleasure but of duty. Given An Gúm's mandate to produce heroes for a newly independent Ireland, it seems to me that both in terms of its revolutionary pedigree and its moral relevance, Pinocchio was a much more appropriate text for An Gúm than a text like The Coral Island, which privileges empire and dominion over subject peoples. One overwhelming social fact also gives the text particular and somewhat poignant relevance. Because of the widespread burden on young people to care for aged parents, rural Ireland in this period had a remarkably late marriage age. Many Irish men and women shared the lot of the reformed
Pinocchio, celibate, growing old, caring for aged parents.

It is evident from the correspondence at An Gúm and from the early reviews of the translated work that in spite of the fact that it was first translated into English in 1891, *Pinocchio* was not particularly well known in the Ireland of the 1920s and early 30s, as there is a sense of excitement, of having discovered something new in much of the comments. Of course Disney had not at this stage offered the world the definitive infantilised Pinocchio, which dominates our popular culture. Emer O’Sullivan in her essay ‘Does Pinocchio have an Italian Passport’ examines the Disney effect in detail when she says of the film: ‘His becoming a real live boy at the end is not motivated, as in the original, by Pinocchio’s desire to grow up. Here the goal of the child is ... to be a good child and to celebrate family unity and harmony.’ O’Sullivan’s interpretation of the narrative shape of the original Pinocchio story and her critique of the infantilised Disney version is relevant here because Ó Buachalla’s translation has nothing of the Disney quality of infantilism.

The world of Pinocchio, both Collodi’s and Ó Buachalla’s, is one dogged by poverty, hunger, ignorance and death. The need for frugality is constantly emphasised. There is a constant concern with literacy and with education. Both Ireland and Italy had felt ashamed of their notoriously high levels of illiteracy in the years following independence. Increasing emigration and unemployment dogged both states. In the end the reformed and humanised Pinocchio must stay at home and care for his elderly father. Of course there is yet another possible political context for Ó Buachalla’s translation, and that is 1930’s Fascist Italy and its influence in Ireland. There was at the time ‘much admiration in Ireland for Mussolini’s Italy’.

And of course as is clear from J Zornado’s remarks about Disney’s Pinocchio, ‘The fascist agenda of Pinocchio should come as no surprise, though for many it does ... the moral forces that conspire against Pinocchio are, among other things a short-list of the enemies of Hitler’s Germany’.

Though in my view Zornado vastly overstates the claim for Disney’s Pinocchio as a Nazi film, the fact that the story can be co-opted by the conservative right as much as by the humanitarian left illustrates its flexibility as a text, a quality stressed by Lindsay Myers. At any rate it is not difficult to see how a children’s text that endorsed the need for discipline and respect for elders would have seemed appropriate to the moral climate of a conservative Ireland, perhaps overconcerned with respectability.

The editor at An Gúm who first examined and responded to Ó Buachalla’s translation in 1929 was Pádraig Ó Siochfradha. Ó Siochfradha had been a Volunteer in the 1916 Rising, and had been interned for a period during those troubles. He then became a civil servant in the Department of Education. As a nationalist revolutionary, writer and educator he had much in common with Collodi. He wrote...
fashion under the pen name ‘An Seabhac’ (The Hawk). He had published a comic classic work for children in Irish in 1922, entitled Jimín Mháire Thaidgh. That story is of a wayward, thoughtless, selfish boy, Jimín, who causes endless worry in particular to his mother. His story ends when he leaves his Kerry home to train to become a priest. Even though this story is in the realist tradition, the parallel with Pinocchio’s pattern is striking. The narrative is underpinned by the same concern with a boy’s growing up to take responsibility. The future envisaged in both cases is a celibate one. Jimín too reflects the needs of a post revolutionary, postcolonial society. It depicts the daily life of a rural community, farming, fishing, caring for animals. It also depicts the rough justice and casual cruelty meted out to boys and animals alike.

It is notoriously difficult to find out how An Gúm selected particular texts for translation, as no detailed policy or procedure seem to have existed. Stories abound about translators selecting books that appealed to them from tables piled high with books which I have been told by two separate reliable oral sources. My examination of the ‘Pinocchio’ file suggests that the initiative was taken by Pádraig Ó Buachalla himself. He sent samples of his translation to An Gúm, suggesting that they might like to publish Pinocchio. Indeed Ó Buachalla’s biography itself has many features in common with Pinocchio’s and might be as good an explanation as any other as to why this text was chosen. He was born into a large, very poor family in Ballyvourney in West Cork in 1880. His father died when he was very young. His widowed mother and her children were evicted from their home because they could not pay the rent. He and four of his brothers emigrated to America, to San Francisco, where he managed to educate himself and learned Italian, French and Spanish. It seems he taught English and those other languages there. He returned to Ireland in the years after the Irish Civil War, but led a wandering life with no settled employment, apart from his occasional work of translating for An Gúm. However, he inspired great personal and local loyalty and affection in those that knew him. That is why there are two very beautiful versions of his translation in print today. One volume, the reproduction, of the 1933 edition, published by the Goldsmith Press is edited by Ó Buachalla’s nephew, Dónal Ó Buachalla, who had lived for some time with him and remembered him with great affection and who worked tirelessly to get the book republished in 2001. The other volume, with Roberto Innocenti’s illustrations, was published by a local West Cork publishing group, Coiste Litríochta Mhúscraí, in 2003, edited by two people dedicated to the preservation of the West Cork Irish dialect, Seán Ó Súilleabháin and Dáibhí Ó Chróinín. This edition begins with an elegiac dedication to the Irish (Gaelic) fellowship of Ballyvourney, West Cork, long ago (‘I gcuimhne ar chuallacht Ghaelainne Bhailte Mhúirne fadó’). Hence both volumes are acts of familial, cultural and linguistic retrieval. The dialect of West Cork is more strongly and assertively reproduced in the second than in the first, but it is there in both.

It is because of the strong regional dialect of the text that An Gúm, though it co-operated with both publications, could not republish it in the 21st century. An Gúm is under an obligation to provide young readers of today with accessible texts in standard Irish (the Cathach). It is clear that the Ó Buachalla translation would create problems for such young readers. For this reader
who was educated first in Munster Irish, this seems an eminently readable beautifully written translation. It is a classic text. From my reading of several different English language translations I think it qualifies as what Emer O'Sullivan classifies as ‘a literary translation attempting to do justice to the complexity of the source text’. Even where descriptions of food are concerned, in for example chapter 13, Ó Buachalla captures the flavour of Italian food such as mullet in tomato sauce and tripe with parmesan cheese. However,

"With the notable exception of DCU's Prof Michael Cronin, there has been a tendency to either ignore or be dismissive of the achievement of An Gúm in English language studies of Irish history and culture"

he also uses familiar Irish images from a wild landscape to evoke the strange and frightening world of the darker moments in the novel. For example at the end of chapter 15 where Collodi uses the image of a bell to describe the plight of Pinocchio hanging from a tree: ‘A stormy north wind ... blew the poor puppet ... as fast as a bell-clapper on a wedding-day’. Ó Buachalla describes a terrible wind ‘a leagfadh cladhthacha agus cruacha móna’ (that would flatten fences and ricks of turf – my translation.)

It is clear from the An Gúm file that great care was taken with the publication. A letter dated 12 December 1929, from the secretary to the Minister for Education in Ireland to the Italian publishers promised that ‘every possible care will be taken to ensure that the translation is a faithful and accurate rendering of the matter and spirit of the original’.

With the notable exception of DCU's Prof Michael Cronin, there has been a tendency to either ignore or be dismissive of the achievement of An Gúm in English language studies of Irish history and culture. In three important modern survey histories of Ireland (those of Joseph J Lee, RF Foster and Diarmuid Ferriter), all of which discuss Ireland's efforts to revive Irish in
the 1930s, ‘An Gúm’ is not even mentioned in the index. It receives one dismissive sentence in Terence Brown’s *Ireland: A Cultural History*. Declan Kiberd’s *Inventing Ireland* surprisingly omits any reference to the publisher. Robert Welch in *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* includes an entry on the publishing house, but surprisingly says ‘Publishing was slow ... Publishing standards were low, with poor quality paper, no binding, and monotonous dust-jackets’

In those years An Gúm fostered linguistic diversity in the different Irish dialects, a point that is particularly borne out by the story of Pinocchio, published in the dialect of West Cork. Enthusiastic reviews were published in the *Irish Press*, the *Cork Examiner* and the *Cork Examiner*. Pinocchio sold very well. Its print run of 1000 copies quickly sold.

The file on *Pinocchio* at An Gúm is still in An Gúm headquarters rather than in the National Archive of Ireland, because thankfully, after almost a century it is still described as a ‘live’ file. However, it might be time to consider a new Irish translation for the 21st century, offering something like the darkness of Lars Ghiuselev’s illustrations which seem to encapsulate the whole darkness of the 20th century, or the radical playfulness of Sara Fanelli’s illustrations which draw attention to the artistic of Collodi’s text, substituting paper for wood in Pinocchio’s construction. I am sure there are many well-qualified translators; Máire Nic Mhaoláin, who enriched *Under the Hawthorn Tree* as *An Scath Gheal* and who has recently translated *Harry Potter* and *Artemis Fowl* into Irish comes to mind. Alan Titley singles out her translations from the Italian as particularly subtle and artistic. Indeed the comic or graphic novel form might also provide the opportunity for something new and fresh. Gianni Rodari in Italy has already given an example of the latter. Let us hope that Pinocchio’s adventure in Irish is not yet at an end.

I am grateful for the help of Seosamh Ó Murchú, principal editor with An Gúm, for his assistance in making the Pinocchio file available to me, and to the other members of staff there for their courtesy and help. CK

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3. ‘Young Ireland could not define their Irishness linguistically, though Davis tripped. This was one reason why Mazzini dismissed their cause as bogus’, RF Foster *Modern Ireland 1869-1972*, Penguin, 1988, p312
5. I could find only one brief reference to Collodi, Lorenzini in all the works I consulted. Even in the recent collection of essays entitled *Making and Remaking Italy. The Cultivation of National Identity*...

Collodi/Lorenzini is not mentioned, not even in the index.


RF Foster Modern Ireland p521


3 An English translation titled Pinoccio is in print, published by The O'Brien Press.

4 See Gemóidín Uí Laighléis, ‘An Gúm: Sochluigheacht’ in An Íosa ag lúifir Scéil, ed Breandán Ó Conaire, for a detailed analysis of changes in An Gúm’s publishing in these years.

5 See Dónal Ó Buachalla’s introduction to the Goldsmith Press edition for these details.

6 Emer O'Sullivan, Comparative Children’s Literature, Routledge, 2005, p144

7 The Adventures of Pinocchio, E Harden translation, 1944

8 Goldsmith Press, p75

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10 An Gúm file A51, letters to printers with instructions regarding colour of cloth, lettering, etc. dated 23/5/32 and 31/4/33

11 See Michael Cronin, Translating Ireland, Translation, Languages, Cultures, Cork University Press 1998 p156-161 for a detailed and measured discussion of these criticisms. In particular Cronin quotes the view of Alan Titby that Irish creative writers learned much about form, style and the possibilities of language from those translations, and suggests that the later flowering of creative work in Irish in the postwar period might not have been possible without An Gúm.

12 Pinocchio, Carlo Collodi, Illus Jassen Ghiosele, trans Helga Legerski, Rowohlt, Reinbek Bei, Hamburg 1997

13 Pinocchio, Carlo Collodi, Illus Sara Fanelli, Walker 2003


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Inis 20

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Born in Florence in 1969, to an American mother and an Italian father, Sara Fanelli has always had a passion for other cultures. Growing up in the historical city of Florence, she was particularly aware of her own artistic heritage, of the passing of time and of the sense of beauty contained within even the tiniest of details. Her favourite school subjects were literature and art as these subjects stimulated her imagination and fuelled her capacity for daydreaming, and after she completed her schooling at the Liceo Classico Michelangelo she chose to go to England to continue her education. She first completed a City and Guilds Foundation Course Diploma at London Art School and then went on to study for a BA in Graphic Design at Camberwell College of Art, before later obtaining an MA in Illustration at the Royal College of Art in London.

Sara Fanelli’s first children’s book, Button, was published while she was still at Camberwell College of Art, and the innovative style of this picturebook earned her the 1992 Macmillan Prize for Children’s Picture Book Illustration. Since this first award, Sara’s work has continued to attract the attention of the critical establishment; her picturebooks, Wolf! and It’s Dinnertime were short listed for a National Art Library Illustration Award, an award which Sara later went on to win in 2004 with her illustrated translation of Carlo Collodi’s Pinocchio. In 2003 Sara Fanelli was selected by Quentin Blake as one of the thirteen top children’s book illustrators currently working in the UK and her work was promi

Her favourite school subjects were literature and art as these subjects stimulated her imagination and fuelled her capacity for daydreaming.
Sara Fanelli’s favourite things are chocolate, maps, dogs, the moon, old objects and old packaging.

Pencil: Book Illustration Today’. At present, Sara is working freelance in London, but she makes regular trips back to Italy. Airplanes, in fact, make several appearances in her children’s books (one of them even contains a picture of the young Sara looking out of one of its windows). Flight, in all its guises, exerts a special fascination for the young artist, and her picturebook, First Flight, abounds with butterflies, planes and kites, many of which are mutually indistinguishable from one another.

Sara Fanelli’s favourite things are chocolate, maps, dogs, the moon, old objects and old packaging, and her picturebooks for children are clearly inspired by her love of these things. Dogs appear in A Dog’s Life. It’s Dreamtime and Dear Diary as well as in Mythological Monsters of Ancient Greece (one of the heads of the three-headed monster, Cerberus, bears an uncanny resemblance to Sara’s much-loved childhood pet, Bubu), maps are the key focus of My Map Book while old photos, scraps of papers and collected ephemera can be found between the pages of all her illustrated works. Her greatest love is books, and she enjoys the potential of the format as much as the magical content that it can carry. All her books have a handmade feel about them, and the combination of different textures, illustrative styles, photographic realism and coloured papers give her work a 3D feel, as well as a unique spontaneity and vitality. Many of the pieces of paper that she incorporates into her designs have their own historical significance; while the backgrounds are often pages from exercise books, or old sepia tinted photographs. Sometimes the fragments of papers contain snippets of half-torn words, details which add a certain mystique to the pictures. Eyes are a common motif in her books, and Sara particularly enjoys the way in which the photographic realism of these cut-out eyes contrasts with the bi-dimensional coloured papers.

In order to be successful picturebooks must have eye-catching covers, and the covers of Sara’s books are cleverly designed to invite the reader inside; the cover of Button features a huge button that can be swivelled around to reveal different characters, the cover of My Map Book opens out to reveal a thick double-sided poster, while the cover of Pinocchio features a nose which extends as the book is pulled out of its slip-cover. Endpapers too seek the reader’s participation; the inside covers of Mythological Monsters have monsters on them with dotted lines underneath them for the reader to fill in their names, while the endpapers of Dear Diary cry out for more doodles and scribbles.

While Sara enjoys illustrating the work of other authors, she prefers when she has control of the narrative as then she can bend
Different typographies draw the reader’s attention to the different narrators; the third-person narrator often writes in a typewriter font while first-person narrators speak in joined-up handwriting.

It towards events which she would enjoy depicting. One of the aspects of storytelling that most fascinates her is the use of multiple perspectives, and many of her picturebooks deliberately recount events from different points of view; Dear Diary records the significance of the events of a single day for a variety of different characters, My Map Book displays the kind of maps that normally go unrecorded (such as the map of the day and map of the dog), while It’s Dreamtime portrays three different dreams happening simultaneously.

The importance of viewing the world from different perspectives is further reinforced in these books by layout of the text. The words run in different directions, sometimes from left to right along the bottom or top of the page, sometimes vertically down the edge of the page and sometimes diagonally across its centre. The reader is thus forced to stand on his or her head or (if this proves too uncomfortable) to constantly tilt and turn the book in order to read the text easily. Different typographies draw the reader’s attention to the different narrators; the third-person narrator often writes in a typewriter font while first-person narrators speak in joined-up handwriting.

Of all Sara Fanelli’s picturebooks my personal favorite is undoubtedly her illustrated version of Pinocchio. This text, which was skilfully abridged by Emma Rose, is only a fraction of the length of the original story. The message that the book delivers, however, is totally in keeping with that of Collodi’s classic, thanks in no small way to Sara’s evocative illustrations. Sara is a master at capturing the spirit of the story she is illustrating, and her illustrations for Pinocchio are, in my opinion, some of her most powerful to date. Collodi’s Pinocchio is both a historical and a timeless tale, and Sara’s clever combination of a modern graphic style with old Italian photos and ephemera subtly hints at the tale’s dual significance. One of the most beautiful pages in the book is the double-page spread of the cat and the fox. The backgrounds of these pages are formed by a sepia photograph of the Tuscan countryside and an old hand-drawn plate of an Italian hill-top town, and together these images draw the viewer into the past, while simultaneously reinforcing the modernity of Sara’s cat and fox. The contrasting use of light and dark colours further emphasises the contradictory nature of Collodi’s story.

Sara Fanelli’s illustration of the puppet theatre scene similarly provides a magical blend of the old and the new, the Italian and the universal. The brightly
coloured tent at the centre of the page has a contemporary, timeless feel while the black and white houses that border the circular piazza call to mind 19th-century Italy (and in particular the oval piazza at the centre of the Tuscan city of Lucca, a town with which Collodi would no doubt have been familiar).

One of the most fascinating aspects of the original Pinocchio is the way in which Collodi used satire and caricature to comment on the social injustices of his time, and Fanelli’s illustration of the gorilla judge who sentences the innocent Pinocchio to months in prison cleverly underlines the text’s subversive function. The judge in Collodi’s text is a symbol of the obscurity and complications of the law, and Sara’s creative interweaving of copper-plate handwriting into the judge’s beard proves a subtle reminder of the purposefully ostentatious nature of his words. Although Pinocchio has been illustrated over one hundred times by different artists since its first appearance in 1883, Sara has still managed to bring her own personal interpretation to this book.

A combination of different techniques to provide the child reader with a brief but stimulating introduction to Greek mythology. Black and white photographs of ancient Greek ruins, hand-drawn sketches and boldly painted figures bring the old myths to life, while speech bubbles, arrows, numbers and encyclopaedic notes provide bite-size insights into different characters and places. One of the most stunning pages in this book is the depiction of Cerberus, the three-headed watchdog who guarded the gates of Hades.

"The judge in Collodi’s text is a symbol of the obscurity and complications of the law, and Sara’s creative interweaving of copper-plate handwriting into the judge’s beard proves a subtle reminder of the purposefully ostentatious nature of his words."

Like all skilled picturebook artists, Sara Fanelli tries to do something different with each book and her Mythological Monsters of Ancient Greece (2002) deserves special mention for the innovative way in which it presents quite complex information to the reader. This picturebook, which was written and designed by Sara, uses a combination of different techniques to provide the child reader with a brief but stimulating introduction to Greek mythology. Black and white photographs of ancient Greek ruins, hand-drawn sketches and boldly painted figures bring the old myths to life, while speech bubbles, arrows, numbers and encyclopaedic notes provide bite-size insights into different characters and places. One of the most stunning pages in this book is the depiction of Cerberus, the three-headed watchdog who guarded the gates of Hades.

Illustrations by Sara Fanelli from Pinocchio by Carlo Collodi, translated by Emma Rose (Walker Books 2003)
of Hades. Without taking anything from the power of the ancient myth, Sara has made this character accessible to modern children by making his middle head appear like that of a robot dog, complete with turning cogs and wheels.

How does Sara go about creating one of her picturebooks? I asked her if the words or the images come first. She told me that sometimes it is a picture or an imagined visual world that triggers the narrative, other times it is a character. The picturebook, Wolfi, for example, was created especially for the main character, a wolf that had originally appeared in Button; Sara decided to make up a story for him when she discovered how popular the wolf from Button was with her younger audience. When it comes to artistic influences, Sara notes that artists like Paul Klee, the Russian Constructivists and the Dada and Surrealist artists were a great source of inspiration to her while she was at college. The Italian artist and writer, Bruno Munari, whose radical children's books brought a new energy not just to Italian but to world children’s literature, is also a personal favourite.

Does Sara find it difficult to make a living as an illustrator? The life of a freelance artist can certainly be hard going, Sara is, however, a very versatile individual, and she is constantly looking for new ways of developing her skills. In addition to a wide range of short-term commissions, which have included book covers, magazines, press advertisements, stamps and Christmas cards, Sara has been heavily involved in the design and layout of the new displays in the Tate Modern in London. She particularly enjoyed creating the wall graphics on the four new entrance walls of the rehang, and one of her aims in the future is to work for the theatre or the opera. It is books, however, that give her the most satisfaction, and her current project, which is not aimed specifically at children, is a collection of illustrations that she has created for quotations from world literature of all ages. The book, which is entitled Sometimes I Think, Sometimes I Am (after a Paul Valéry quotation) includes quotes from Dante, Joyce, Beckett, Wilde, Shakespeare, Socrates, Pirandello and many others, and it is due to be published by Tate Publications in September.

Sara Fanelli is undoubtedly one of the most innovative artists currently working in the field of book illustration and I feel very privileged to have had the opportunity to interview her for this article. If you would like to find out more about her work, one of the best places to start is with her website www.sarafanelli.com. Like her many books, this website will take you on a journey – all you have to do is follow the arrows. You never know what you might discover, as Sara herself is quick to remind us: ‘the truth is rarely pure and never simple’.

Illustrations © 2003 Sara Fanelli from Pinocchio by Carlo Collodi, translated by Emma Rose and illustrated by Sara Fanelli. Reproduced by permission of Walker Books Ltd, London SE11 8HJ
At the moment Kate loves drawing, colouring and writing, which are usual activities in the crèche she attends two days a week. Kate very much wants to make her own mark in this 2D world and likes to draw zig-zag lines. Now she has turned two, reading with Kate is more of a ‘story event’ as opposed to a ‘let’s read all the books we can find one after another’ kind of experience. Before now, reading a book like Waddell’s Owl Babies (Walker Books 1994) would have involved talking through the pictures, with Kate asking questions like ‘Where is the Mummy Owl?’ Now the enjoyment is about carefully following the storyline, anticipating what happens next: ‘Tell me about Bill again.’ It is clear that Kate worries for poor Bill and very much wants the story to arrive at some sort of resolution. She is now engaging at an emotional level with the characters and storyline. This requires a level of patience and concentration that a younger toddler may not yet have. Knowing the sequence of events, she can listen while the story unfolds. She knows Bill’s Mummy will come back. In her favourite Spot book she remembers that Spot finds the litter of kittens, and she loves the anticipation. (Spot series by Eric Hill, Warne Books 1993).

The story has become an entity to be enjoyed apart from the pictures because she can visualise the events in her mind. Kate’s mum tells made-up stories to Kate, which probably encourages this understanding of story sequence. Kate wants to find out what happens, knowing that Mummy Owl comes home to Bill and the others.

Kate also really enjoys classic rhyming, repetitive stories such as Henry Penny (the old Ladybird version). Another rhyming favourite is Miss Polly Had a Dolly, illustrated by Liz Pichon (Ladybird Books, 2006). There are one or two pictures that Kate finds a bit disturbing, such as the image of the frog in Usborne’s ABC, and the dragon in Room on the Broom by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler (Macmillan 2002), and Kate’s mum covers these with one hand as she reads along.

Another book Kate is enjoying right now is Maisie Goes Camping, by Lucy Cousins (Walker Books 2004). All the animals can be identified in silhouette through the canvas, and when the large elephant goes into the tent and they all ‘POP’ out in their sleeping bags, she finds this hilarious! Kate gets great value from Rod Campbell’s lift-the-flap Our House, which is an all-round nursery book with songs, rhymes, stories, counting and memory games.

Kate is now able to sing the first four lines of Twinkle Twinkle, however, the most notable development at age 2 is surely her response to the story sequence itself. Most importantly, she now has an intuitive grasp of the need for the story to resolve and conclude—a level of involvement leading to the essential concept ‘happy-ever-after’.
YOU’VE got a great job! How did you get it? I could do that job! This comment has been made to me on numerous occasions, generally from adults but at least once from a schoolchild who memorably asked Malorie Blackman (whom I was accompanying on tour on behalf of Random House) if he could have my job when I ‘passed away’. It was the type of school where you could imagine being helped along that particular path so I made a speedy exit with Malorie and hailed a taxi outside which is clearly what that schoolboy thought was my raison d’être. The thing is, when someone asks a publicist what they do, it can sound like a pretty cushy deal. As a friend of mine once put it ‘So, let me get this straight. You get put up in swanky hotels, eat in expensive restaurants and then stay up drinking with writers, reviewers and booksellers till 2am? And they pay you for this?’ That was in my starry-eyed youth when, actually, I barely got paid for it, but it still seemed like such a good deal. Now I don’t have friends anymore, I have contacts. I don’t have family, I have clients. My children, treacherous ungrateful fiends that they are, tell me that I’m hopelessly inadequate as a mother – except, they say, delivering the coup de grâce to my ‘author-babies’. So, any of you out there who are tempted to embark on a career as a book publicist, be warned, this is the fate that awaits you! Not only that, but you may find out some unpleasant truths about yourself. You enter the business because of the books you love. You end up loving the books you can sell. There is nothing so gratifying to a publicist as having the literary editor of a quality national paper (one who normally pays no attention to children’s books at all, ever) phone up and ask (very nicely and politely) if they might have a quick word with the author, and could another copy (this would be in addition to the seven they didn’t happen to notice arrive by mail in the previous week) be barked round right away. Oh, the satisfaction! And nothing is so exciting as when a campaign breaks into the news pages and press, radio and TV are all fighting for first shot. That happens rarely but when it does it is the best fun. Really, for die-hard publicists, I mean the best. Shallow, see? Most publicity activity takes place at a less glamorous but vital grassroots level and involves schlepping round the country, taking authors to schools, libraries and bookshops and, ascending the glamour scale, to literary festivals such as Hay, Edinburgh and Cheltenham. Sometimes the professional smile can wear a bit thin because you continue on page 35.

You may find out some unpleasant truths about yourself. You enter the business because of the books you love. You end up loving the books you can sell.
Re-evaluating gender
The ISSCL Conference 2007

Audrey Baker

The Irish Society for the Study of Children’s Literature was founded in 2002 to promote academic research and foster an interdisciplinary approach to the study of children’s literature. It welcomes members from a wide range of disciplines: literature, history, education, psychology, sociology, women’s studies, and fine arts.

The 5th Annual Conference of the Irish Society for the Study of Children’s Literature (ISSCL) suggests that the society is going from strength to strength. It was held last February in the Church of Ireland College of Education, Dublin. The theme, Re-Evaluating Gender in Children’s Literature, created much interest and some twelve papers were read, each one dealing with a different aspect of the theme. Dr Kerry Mallan, Professor in the School of Cultural and Language Studies at the Queensland University of Technology, Australia, gave the keynote address – ‘(Un)doing Gender: Ways of Being in an Age of Uncertainty.’ This set the scene. It was a really excellent paper in which Dr Mallan examined a selection of children’s books to assess how they do and undo conceptions of gender and sexuality. She strongly believes that contemporary children’s literature and film are more than light entertainment, that they can be wonderful – and fortunate for those present – that Kerry, whose particular research interest is on gender and sexuality in children’s literature and film, was free to travel from Australia to be the keynote speaker. Her book (co-edited with S Pearce) Youth Cultures: Texts, Images and Identities won the IRSCl Honour Book Award in 2003.

During the conference, a large variety of books, authors and viewpoints were examined with papers ranging from ‘Spirituality, Gender and Ideology in Pearse’s Short Stories’ (Anne Markey) to ‘Male Subjectivity in the Science Fiction of William Sleator’ (Patricia Kennon) or from the didactic ‘prize’ books of the 19th century (Colette Epple) to ‘Nature vs. Nurture: Witchy Women’ (Jen Sattaur). They ranged from well-known, popular texts like Harry Potter (Jane O’Hanlon) to the works of Mary Martha Sherwood (Sharon Murphy). It is perhaps not surprising that there was such a spectrum of papers.

“Dr Kerry Mallan, Professor in the School of Cultural and Language Studies at the Queensland University of Technology, Australia, gave the keynote address – ‘(Un)doing Gender: Ways of Being in an Age of Uncertainty’
It is perhaps not surprising that there was such diversity as participants came from all over Ireland, from Europe with a strong contingent from the UK as well as a representative from Taiwan.

diversity as participants came from all over Ireland, from Europe with a strong contingent from the UK as well as a representative from Taiwan. Andrea Mei-Ying Wu came from the National Taitung University, Taiwan where she is an associate professor teaching critical theory in children’s literature, critique of research in children’s literature, young adult novels and literary theory and criticism. The subject of her paper was not Taiwanese, it was entitled, ‘Tough but Tender Boys: Alternative Articulations of Boyhood in Lois Lowry’s The Giver and Jerry Spinelli’s Wringer’.

There isn’t enough space here to describe all the papers and it would be unfair to pick out any one paper for special mention in detail but with the current debates in our media about ‘cross-over’ books and about ‘chick-lit’, it was amusing to hear from Naomi Hamer, a PhD student at the School for Culture, Language and Communication, Institute of Education, University of London, of a whole industry in the US based on ‘tween’ books. These are targeted at girls between the ages of 8 and 12 and are often connected to extensive media franchises. Certainly it is a world away from the one conjured up by Dr Michael Flanagan in his paper, ‘Stranger at the Gate: Imperial Anxieties and Boys’ Popular Fiction in the Fin de Siècle’.

Because the papers were so interesting, the question and discussion time after each session proved to be far too short. I think everyone who was there found the two days very stimulating and thought-provoking and the ISSCL committee should be congratulated and thanked for the excellent organisation of the event. The enthusiasm and enjoyment is difficult to convey but if anyone is intrigued by this glimpse of what is being researched in children’s literature and wishes to join the ISSCL, he or she should go to the ISSCL website: www.isscl.com

Tom Donegan joins CBI as Programme Officer

Tom Donegan has been appointed programme officer for CBI. Tom moved to Dublin in 2004 first to work with the Dublin Theatre Festival and later to undertake an MPhil in Irish Theatre and Film at Trinity College. Since graduation he has held a variety of roles within the Project Arts Centre, Project Productions/RTÉ and Special Effects (UK). He is also a regular contributor to Irish Theatre Magazine, Connected Music Magazine and indeed has been a regular reviewer for Inis since 2006. Tom joins the CBI team to coordinate events and programmes for both adults and children. He can be contacted on 01 8727475 or tom@childrensbooksireland.com
The recent controversy over the 2007 winner of the Newbery Medal, the most prestigious award for a work of American children's literature, has provided a controversial litmus test for librarians, parents, educators, writers and anyone engaged with considering the appropriate parameters and content of texts for young people. Susan Patron's novel, *The Higher Power of Lucky*, published by Simon & Schuster, has been challenged and even banned in American elementary schools and school libraries on the grounds of it containing the word 'scrotum'. The offending word appears on the first page of the book when the heroine, Lucky Trimble, overhears an anecdote about a dog being bitten on the offending body part by a rattlesnake: 'Scrotum sounded to Lucky like something green that comes up when you have the flu and cough too much. It sounded medical and secret, but also important.' The scale of the international media coverage of the debate (*The New York Times*, CNN, *Larry King Live*, *The Guardian*, etc.) and the extensive online and blog discussions have addressed the complex factors involved in the role of the traditional 'gatekeepers' of children's texts when selecting – or censoring, some argued – literature for children.

Some online contributors implied that Patron had used this word deliberately, in hopes that its shock value and the consequent attention might raise sales of the novel. While schools in several US states are refusing to stock the book, intended for an age 9-12-year-old readership, a vocal librarian critic of the novel, Dana Nilsson of Sunnyside Elementary School, Durango, Colorado, stated: 'I don't want to start an issue about censorship – but you won't find men's genitalia in quality literature. At least, not in children's literature.' However, many anti-censorship groups and children's writers, including Maurice Sendak and previous Newbery award winners, have supported the importance of freedom of speech in all genres of writing and the high quality and constructive nature of Patron's work. Susan Patron, a librarian herself, condemned the idea of stopping families from choosing reading material for themselves and has argued that many primary teachers and librarians are either afraid of parental objections or are uncomfortable themselves with discussing the word 'scrotum' with children. The fact that Patron used a correct anatomical term for this body part (which is present in every school dictionary) and not a slang or euphemistic word raises interesting questions about the concept of what constitutes 'bad language' and also to whom should be given the power of determining the acceptable level of language and content for children. Although the controversy over this novel does not seem to have occurred in Ireland so far, the presence of sexual content and an acknowledgement of embodiment in children's literature have long been considered by many adults to be problematic. Similar criticisms have been made in the US of Katherine Paterson's classic novel, *Bridge to Terebithia*, and, famously, of the Harry Potter series on the grounds that these books allegedly promote witchcraft and fantasy and also involve the death of main characters, seen to be inappropriate and disturbing for young readers. This recent debate about the Newbery has raised many interesting and provocative questions about the construction and regulation of what is considered 'suitable' for children. It also addresses the ongoing challenges for all educators and librarians to reflect on their own selection criteria in their role of serving their communities, while also being sensitive to the concept of inclusion and catering to and respecting the diversity of attitudes and responses of this community. The challenge of working out a constructive and reciprocal response falls to all of us and each of us, parent, teacher, editor, librarian, writer, publisher and reader. This debate is far from over.
Award-winning illustrator and author, Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick, recalls her earliest book and picture memories and rediscovers some of her early influences. From Granny’s lap through a difficult but short transition to independent reader to novel-hungry teen, Marie-Louise’s experiences are uniquely hers yet have resonances for anyone whose childhood included Enid Blyton!

In my first conscious memory of holding a book in my hand, I am 2 years old; I am sitting in a hospital bed with my left arm in plaster and my mother has handed me two little books and an orange sent in to me by a neighbour. As the youngest of three girls in a book-loving family, there is a fair-sized library of already-read books at home but these books are the first I recognise as mine; my books, my orange. I can see them in my hand; the little light paper covers are cut to the shape of the pictures, the little girls are wearing old-fashioned crinolines, the colours are pastel, there is a bumpy texture to the paper. I wonder how I am going to eat the orange with one hand.

I don’t remember where the picturebooks were kept at home. There must have been a shelf or a box. I only ever remember meeting them on the floor or in the hands of the adult reading to me and I met them everyday. The Story of Little Black Mingo I met on my Granny’s knee. I was taken by the book’s smallness and the knowledge that it had belonged to my mother when she was a little girl. I have a clear memory of my Gran reading me this book on a sunny day in one of the green armchairs. I remember not wanting her to read on and not wanting her to stop. I needed to know if the Mugger (crocodile), which had broken through Little Mingo’s chatty (jar), would make good his
threat and eat her up. Would she get away from the horrid old woman? Would Mongoose eat all the mugger eggs or would the eggs hatch and all the little muggers eat Mingo? The little pictures were so expressive and simple. The one of the angry mugger swallowing the old lady feet first in revenge for the loss of his baby muggers and the next of the old lady inside his tummy lighting the match so that she could see where she was, unaware that the mugger’s teeth had pierced the kerosene tin he swallowed with her, made me squeal. The resulting and pattered on the sand like rain.’ No crocodile tears, those.

Now I see that inside the cover above my mother’s name is that of Granny’s sister, Queenie, making the book at least one hundred years old.

Compared to it The Rainbow Tales were pure saccharine, but I don’t remember the stories, just the lovely pictures, the little elf boy of the title with his mop of blue hair and pictures of doe-eyed Scandinavian children, a Saint Bernard dog, kites and fountains.

Purple as violets, purple as prunes, purple as shadows on long afternoons

the colour green and along the way find pink and purple and orange. The artwork is simple, sophisticated and fresh at the same time; if the book wasn’t so battered it could pass for a product of the recent retro trend but its original publication date is 1949 – not that our copy is quite that old. The text is lovely; the coloured objects not always the old predictable ones.

‘Purple as violets, purple as prunes, purple as shadows on long afternoons.’

These were the standout picturebooks amongst the heap on the floor, the agreed favourites. There were plenty of Ladybirds, a lovely die-cut
Night Before Christmas with very American children and stockings and a clapperboard house, traditional fairy tales, annuals, comics and summer specials. But I couldn’t read any of them on my own. Much as I wanted to I just couldn’t learn to read. I was in first class and daydreaming through the endless repetitions of Peter and Jane and Pat, the bloomin’ dog. I was standing in the dunce’s corner most days for not being able to read my line when it came my turn. Not that my turn came very often in a class of 52. I remember the teacher becoming very irate one day when I slowly sounded out was for saw. My family despaired of me ever learning the alphabet and ganged up on me one weekend (mother, father, sisters and Dino, the dog), until I just about had that off, at least. But reading still eluded me. All Bernardine’s Enid Blyton’s were lined up waiting, but if I couldn’t string the painful words into sentences in the school reader how would I ever read a ‘real’ book? The Ladybird illustrations were excellent but I hated perfect Jane in her yellow dress and smarmy Peter in his red pullover. I forgave the red setter because he was a dog and he usually did his best to liven up his owners’ mind-numbingly boring exploits.

Then one day the teacher announced that special books were being sold for the advanced readers in the school. The advanced readers were to ask at home and if their parents wanted them to have this extra book, they were to bring in 2/6 the next day. Oh, how I wanted that book; it had a wizard on the cover. And, oh, how I wanted to be an advanced reader. I begged my mother, I pleaded. She shook her
head, pointing out that I couldn’t read at all, but eventually gave in. It would be the first and the toughest of the many, many times that I would beg a book. After this one, cajoling a new book out of my parents usually took all of five minutes; I honestly think they saw leaving a child with nothing to read as a form of child neglect.

I marched up to the teacher’s desk next day with my 2/6 and claimed my Green Reader. Miss Farrelly threw up her eyes. At home, that afternoon, I sat down with the book in my lap. This wasn’t Peter and Jane. There were 142 pages and very few pictures. Each page had at least a hundred words on it; I could feel the panic rising. My mother would kill me if I didn’t read it but, more importantly, I needed to read it; I needed the words to come together so badly. And, just like magic, they did. I read the first three stories one after the other, without stopping. Forty-three pages – without even thinking about it. The best story was ‘Sandy the Sailor Dog’. I was completely astonished. Only that morning I couldn’t read, now I could fly. For the first time in my life I was lost alone in the world of words, and, oh boy, did it feel good. Enid Blyton, here I come.

My family insist to this day that I read nothing but Enid until I was 13 but that’s not true. Certainly I read and reread her by the cartload; my favourites were the Famous Fives and the Adventurous Four and the Twins at Saint Claire’s.

But my sisters’ shelves held other treasures and I read them all. The Katy books, Little Women and Anne of Green Gables were Siobhán’s, and Bernardine’s shelves had Noel Streatfeild’s and Malcolm Saville’s. I don’t know who was responsible for the Patricia Lynch’s – those I had to be force-fed. Whenever I complained of having nothing to read, the family would point to her substantial section of the bookshelves and I would have to plough through The Grey Goose or The Bookshop on the Quay before I could claim another 2/6 to run across the road to Dowling’s Newsagents. Dowling’s walls were lined with jars of sweets and toys and cotton handkerchiefs, but in the middle of the floor there were some twirly white stands and one of these held children’s books, mainly Enid’s. I must have easily tripled the Blyton section of the Fitzpatrick library, I certainly hugely expanded the Elinor M Brent-Dyer Cailet School collection but I also developed a passion for legends – Irish, Roman, Greek and best of all, the tales of Arthur’s Round Table. I read every version I could lay my hands on. I cried and cried over Rosemary Sutcliff’s version of Tristan & Isolde and hugely admired (and tried to emulate) the illustrations by Victor Ambrus.

I liked my novels well illustrated or not illustrated at all. I hated when the cover illustrations
and the inside ones didn’t match up and still think it unforgivable of publishers to put a really good illustration on the cover and not-so-good ones inside. It feels like being cheated; it is being cheated, dammit. Some covers caused confusion – one of the Chalet School books had a trendy, cool cover showing Jo in polo neck and mini skirt but inside, suddenly and unexpectedly, it was World War II.

I became a very acquisitive book owner; I hated to lose books to the non-returning borrower, I loved to see my collection grow. I quietly moved some of my favourite books from my sisters’ shelves to mine. The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe and Peter Pan and Wendy jumped from the middle shelf to the bottom one joining Seven Little Australians and the Laura Ingalls Wilder books, the spines getting more and more creased with each rereading. For some reason I didn’t need to own the Doctor Dolittle books; the library did fine for those, and for Nancy Drew.

I discovered Swallows and Amazons too late to read more than four in the series; primary school was over and I was on my way to secondary school. I was 12 now, no more children’s books.

In Rang Lorcán we quickly realised that we, as a class, were collectively in the dunce’s corner! We had chosen to do Art, Home Ec. and Commerce over German, Latin and Biology, thereby bracketing ourselves as severely lacking in the academic sense. I wonder what the teachers would have said if they had known we had set up our own secret library in the classroom cupboard?

With great excitement we each brought in a favourite book and the class captain took charge of keeping tabs on who borrowed what. Someone brought in Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore and this is where I first came across the Twelfth of July books. I probably donated a Jean Plaidy; much to my family’s amusement I had jumped straight from Blyton to adult fiction in that summer between schools. I would read about a dozen of her books, then move on to Leon Uris, Frederick Forsythe, Richard Adams and the Brontës – a fairly logical progression, actually! At 15, I would hand over my Plaidy collection to a visiting American priest who had professed a passion for them. He was delighted; I was smug. I wondered at a middle-aged man having such immature reading tastes. I wondered if he was obliged to skip the bodice-ripping bits.

Looking back, I seem to have spent my entire childhood reading and yet I know full well I spent it drawing.
know full well I spent it drawing. Another whole childhood was spent playing on the road and another spent indoors, playing make-believe with a large collection of dolls. Yet another was spent daydreaming through the interminably long days of primary school waiting for the bell to ring. I was never that child who longed for the school holidays to be over because I was bored and had nothing to do, not me. There was so much to do; school just got in the way of unfinished books and games and pictures.

Two years ago I showed my sisters the artwork for i Am I. The main character is a boy with blue hair.

‘But you do know that that’s Rainbow, don’t you?’ they said in unison, referring to that favourite childhood picturebook.

I was stunned. Of course! That’s where the idea for the blue hair had come from. I unearthed the old book from the bottom of a press. Much to my surprise, and theirs, Rainbow’s hair wasn’t blue; it was all the colours of the ... rainbow! I had unconsciously recreated a character from childhood and in so doing recreated him just as incorrectly as I remembered him!


Izzy and Skunk (Bisto Book of the Year 2001) was published by Gullane, UK, followed by I’m a Tiger Too; You, Me and the Big, Blue Sea (Bisto Book of the Year 2003) and illustrations for Jasmine’s Lion (Random House, UK). 2006 saw the publication of Silly Mammy, Silly Daddy (Frances Lincoln, UK) and I Am I, (Roaring Brook, USA), and Silly School (Frances Lincoln, UK) was published in 2007. Her books are published in several languages around the world, including Dutch, Danish and Korean.

She is currently working on a picture-book called There, a novel called Ghostboy, and the graphic package for a children’s museum called ‘Imaginosity’.

Our woman in London
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know, it is tiring being nice all the time, especially if it isn’t your natural inclination. The Talent, by which I mean the Author, or, if you want to be really offensive, the Product, is a whole other challenge. The Good Publicist will, in addition to the obligatory credit cards, carry at all times homeopathic remedies (mainly for pre-talk nervous and panic attacks), Solpadeine, Neurofen and several other brands of painkillers suitable for hangovers and headaches (for both author and publicist); herbal and fruit teas (you’d be amazed how many writers like a peppermint or a camomile and spiced apple instead of a Tetley’s); tissues, for the sniffles brought on by authors having to engage with other humans and their germs (they have probably been in a writing shed for the past year); mascara (I recommend Chanel); gel pens (writers are pen thieves and you can never have enough of these); mobile phone of course (but never ever answer one while in a public loo. I made this mistake once, automatically answering and then sat on the loo talking to Author, terrified that the person in the next cubicle would flush! The other place one should never answer a mobile phone is in the bath, especially when it is a key customer and you are trying desperately not to slosh the bathwater while discussing the latest Darren Shan tour schedule, for example.) But I digress. Authors are rare and wonderful creatures and it is an amazing thing to sit down every day and keep writing, and make a book. It is a scary thing to send it out into the world to be judged. And I suppose that is what unites everyone in the publishing industry, whether author, agent, or publisher – a love of books.
The CBI Bisto Book of the Year 2006/7

THE BOY IN THE STRIPPED PYJAMAS
Author: John Boyne
Published by David Fickling

When father’s work takes the family to ‘Out-With’, Bruno’s secure, agreeable life in wartime Berlin is turned upside down. In ‘Out-With’, Bruno (aged 9) meets Herr Liszt, and later, Shmuel, a boy in striped pyjamas. Bruno is confident that he can help Shmuel find his father. This haunting, unsettling tale tells how the boys join hands and become friends – for life.

EILIS DILLON AWARD

A SWIFT PURE CRY
Author: Siobhan Dowd
Published by David Fickling

Shall is at once a disaffected teenager and a surrogate mother to her younger siblings. Growing up in impoverished rural Ireland in 1984 isn’t easy. An inept alcoholic father, a silver-tongued boyfriend and a well-meaning but naïve priest do as much damage as good. Yet alongside the gritty misery there’s redemption in this compelling, dark tale.

SHORTLISTED

THE PALACE OF LAUGHTER
Author: Jon Berkeley
Published by Simon and Schuster

Jon Berkeley’s barrel-dwelling, unwashed orphan Miles Wednesdays befriends silver-winged acrobatic Little and together they follow Circus Oscuro – he to find his stuffed bear, Tangerine, she to find Silverpoint, a thousand-year-old angel. Theirs is a classic epic adventure that takes them to the unfunny Palace of Laughter. Can they outwit the evil and danger that loom on all sides?

ARTEMIS FOWL AND THE LOST COLONY
Author: Eoin Colfer
Published by Puffin

The charismatic Artemis is back with his coterie, his magic and his gadgets in another fast hi-tech adventure. The criminal genius grapples with the tribulations of growing up, while he and Captain Holly Short track down a demon warlock before both fairy and human worlds are destroyed.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL
Illustrator: PJ Lynch
Published by Walker Books

This unabridged edition of Charles Dickens’s much-loved tale of skinflint Scrooge and the cheery Cratchit family is richly illustrated in gouache and watercolour. Soft tones of snow vie with the play of candlelight. Lynch brings fresh perspectives to bear on familiar images and phrases and makes clever use of perspective and proportion in an edition to be treasured.
HONOUR AWARDS

THE INCREDIBLE BOOK EATING BOY
Author/Illustrator: Oliver Jeffers
Published by HarperCollins
It takes Henry a while to learn that although reading makes you smart, gobbling too many books too quickly just makes you ill. And that’s not smart. Jeffers’ spare script is enhanced by witty illustration that highlights what a book-guzzler could easily miss – texture, detail, colour – and the way that reading and writing are the air we breathe.

HURLAMABOC
Author: Éilís Ní Dhuibhne
Published by Cois Life
When the unexpected happens, the lives of three cool suburban teenagers, Emma, Ruán and Colm, are thrown into chaos, and the ensuing tale highlights petty snobberies and grasping ambitions of young and old in affluent, contemporary Ireland. How the trio handles their young adult experiences, and what they learn from them, makes for a stirring satire.

SOMETHING INVISIBLE
Author: Siobhán Parkinson
Published by Penguin
Nobody blamed Jake for what happened. Except himself. You might think he had enough to deal with when first a new dad, and next, a baby sister, consume his mother’s affections. But then, tragedy eclipses everything. And the question will not go away: how far is he implicated in it?

AN TÁIN
Author: Colmán Ó Raghlachailigh
Published by Cló Mhaigh Eo
This is the story of Cúchulainn, Queen Méabh and the cattle raid in which the brown bull of Cooley was captured, and it’s told in graphic novel format. It’s an ancient, familiar tale of smouldering jealousy, greed and war, given a contemporary twist with snappy dialogue, racy illustration, high colour and high drama. Every action-packed page heaves with adventure.

THE FOURTH HORSEMAN
Author: Kate Thompson
Published by The Bodley Head
In this tense thriller, the anxieties of these troubled times are intensified by Laurie’s personal woes. Her faith in her father is sorely tried. She struggles to come to terms with the part he plays in a scientific project that will wreak certain havoc. However, it’s her independent, enquiring mind that enables her to make sense of – and prevent – a bleak and apocalyptic future.

CBI will be accepting submissions from publishers for the CBI Bisto Awards 2007–8 from August 2007. Details of entry and eligibility are available from www.childrensbooksireland.com
Inis asked some children’s book experts for their top-of-the-head recommendations of books that young readers might enjoy over the summer. The response was a varied selection of new and old titles. For more ideas, look back at the review sections of previous issues of Inis!

**YOUNG CHILDREN**

*Monkey and Me* by Emily Gravett (Macmillan 2007)
I love Emily’s work. If you haven’t discovered her yet, seek her out. Original, witty and full of vitality. Age 3+. SW

*Penguin* by Polly Dunbar (Walker Books 2007)
*Penguin* is an absolute delight. Though warm and comforting, it avoids an overly saccharine and didactic message which characterises many books for this age group. Dunbar’s characterisation is subtle and her use of colour a treat for the eyes. NG

*The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson and illustrated by Axel Scheffler (Macmillan 2000)
Though this beautifully illustrated storybook has been out for a while, if you haven’t read it and its catchy rhymes yet, you’ll want to run to the nearest library to find out about this surprising tale of mouse and the monster. BM

*Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak. (New ed. Red Fox 2000)
The original tale of monsters in the forest. Perfect for highly imaginative children in need of a fun fright. BM

*I Am I* by Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick (Roaring Book Press 2006)
Don’t miss this and other picture-books by prize-winning Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick. MK

Joe O’Brien visited my daughter’s school during Children’s Book Festival 2006 and got her really hooked on reading for the first time. She’s read all the Alfie Green titles so far, so is eagerly awaiting the next one to bring on her summer holidays. MK

*Contributors*

Here’s A Little Poem: A Very First Book of Poetry* edited by Jane Yolen and Andrew Fusek Peters, illustrated by Polly Dunbar (Walker Books 2007)
Over sixty rhymes and poems for the youngest reader to listen to and enjoy, brightly illustrated. RD

*Horrid Henry and the Football Fiend* by Francesca Simon, illustrated by Tony Ross (Orion 2006)
The latest escapades featuring the lovably awful (or awfully lovable) Henry and full of the usual mischief and mayhem, all brought to life in Ross’s scatty illustrations. Also now available: *Horrid Henry’s Jolly Joke Book* (Orion) – but beware the warning on the cover – ‘Too Rude For Parents!’ RD

*The Legend of the Worst Boy in the School* by Eoin Colfer (Puffin 2007)
Another great book for younger readers from Wexford’s finest. Age 7+. SW

8–12 AGE GROUP

*Skulduggery Pleasant* by Derek Landy (HarperCollins 2007)
A cracking detective cum fantasy adventure book from a new Irish author. Plot whipped along at warp speed and there are some
cracking characters. I adored it. SW

Skulduggery Pleasant by Derek Landy – an action-packed comic adventure of vampires, (purple) vapour, villains, a sophisticated skeleton and a 12-year-old girl – a real treat. This is an extremely clever, complex and accomplished first book for children. Great writing, wonderful plot, characters that leap off the pages – some of those very well dressed – and not all of them alive. 11+. LM

The Thing with Finn by Tom Kelly (Macmillan 2007)
A beautifully written story for summer’s quieter moments, dealing with the memories of 10-year-old Danny as he recalls the events leading up to, and the consequences of, his twin brother’s death: Danny’s light, quirky voice lightens the sadness. Age 10-13. RD

Jacky Daydream by Jacqueline Wilson (Doubleday 2007)
A memoir in Wilson’s inimitable style. Girls will love this glimpse into Wilson’s own childhood – and how some of her favourite activities later made their way into her books. BM

Holes by Louis Sachar (Bloomsbury 2000)
One of the most perfect books in terms of characters and plot. Very accessible and truly absorbing. KF

Framed by Frank Cottrell Boyce (Macmillan 2006)
Boyce fuses art by Leonardo, Michelangelo, etc. with their namesakes in the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles in the setting of a small Welsh village against the backdrop of the Hughes’ family crisis. Unobtrusively educational, original and very funny. KF

Barnaby Grimes: Curse of the Night Wolf by Paul Stewart and Chris Riddell (Doubleday 2007)
The dynamic duo are on to another winner with the first in a new thriller-horror series. Set in a city steeped in Dickensian atmosphere where wild wolves roam at night, this is a great read for a thrilling frisson of fear. NG

Rediscover a classic for the summer! LM Montgomery’s Anne of Green Gables (Puffin Classics 1994) are enjoying a revival at the moment in the libraries as is Anthony Buckeridge’s Jennings stories (House of Stratus, new ed. 2003). The great thing about these and other classics is that once you have read one, there are lots more to read to keep you going over the summer. MK

Tove Jansson’s Moomin series (Puffin 1973) – to introduce them to a new generation. JW
**12+ AGE GROUP**

**Percy Jackson and the Titan’s Curse**
by Rick Riordan (Puffin 2007)
Brilliant, clever and witty writing with lots of mythology thrown in for good measure. My 12-year-old boy loves these books. SW

Kevin Crossley Holland’s **Arthur**
books (Orion 2001). JW

**Northern Lights** (Book 1 of ‘His Dark Materials’ Trilogy) by Philip Pullman (Scholastic 1998)
If you fancy a summer holiday in an amazing universe of witches and armoured bears, join Lyra in book one of this mind-blowing trilogy. Can’t recommend highly enough. KF

**The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas**
by John Boyne (David Fickling 2006)
If you haven’t heard of this book then where have you been? Read it. You won’t regret it. KF

**Elsewhere** by Gabrielle Zevin
(Bloomsbury 2005)
This was a wonderful, warm and very funny insight into the after-life. It is full of optimism despite the subject matter and I can’t wait to read her new book coming out in the autumn. **Memoirs of a Teenage Amnesiac** (Bloomsbury, Nov 2007) sounds just as off-beat and original. MK

**Here There Be Dragons** by James A Owen (Simon and Schuster 2006)
This is just the thing for **Lord of the Rings**. Narnia and indeed any fantasy fans. Three strangers meet in London during World War I where they are entrusted with an atlas of imaginary places, the Imaginarium Geographica. The three turn out to be JRR Tolkien, CS Lewis and Charles Williams who did in fact meet in real life at Oxford. Intriguing. MK

**OLDER TEENS**

**Finding Violet Park** by Jenny Valentine (HarperCollins 2007)
A most original and often very humorous debut novel about an urn abandoned in a shabby cab office containing Violet Park’s ashes which leads Lucas Swain, with a lot of help from his grandmother and recently acquired girlfriend, Martha, on a quest for the truth about his missing father. 14+. LM

**Waves** by Sharon Dogar (Chicken House 2007)
A mystery, beautifully written, about the events that led to Charley’s very serious surfing accident in Cornwall. The relationship between herself and her brother Hal, with whom she can still communicate, though unconscious in her hospital bed miles away, is central to one of the best novels, not to mention first novels, I’ve read in ages. 14+. LM

**Blood Red, Snow White** by Marcus Sedgwick (Orion 2007)
For teens who enjoy a literary read, the blend of history, folklore and imagination in this elegantly written novel will enthral. Superior fiction. NG

**At the Sign of the Sugared Plum**
by Mary Hooper (Bloomsbury 2003)
Travel back to the plague of 1665 and watch its rapid spread through the city of London, including threatening the livelihood of young Hannah and her sister Sarah. BM

**A Swift Pure Cry** by Siobhan Dowd (David Fickling 2006)
A modern literary masterpiece delving into the dark society that was rural Ireland in the early 1980s. Beautifully written, haunting and heart wrenching. KF

*The Bumblebee Flies Anyways* by Robert Cormier (Hamish Hamilton 1983)
Barney, a voluntary patient in an experimental clinic, sets out on a journey of self-discovery (literally) while intent on making the bumblebee fly, and all the time falling in love with the elusive Cassie. A triumph of a novel, and in true Cormier style will keep you hanging till the last page. KF

**FOR ANY AGE**

**Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows** by JK Rowling (Bloomsbury 2007 – July 21st!)
The shocking conclusion to the Harry Potter series. Already tipped to break all sales records, so get your order in early. BM
Steve Smallman (Tim Warnes illus)
**A Hug For Humphrey**
Little Tiger Press 2007 (pbk) 32pp £5.59 9781845062668

There is a new toy in the bedroom. He is soft, squishy, stripy and small. He does not know any of the other toys and, most importantly, he does not know ‘what he is for’. At first, this makes him sad but, little by little, with the help of his new friends, Humphrey discovers his own very special gift and understands just what he can do. *A Hug For Humphrey* is an endearing and uplifting picturebook lovingly illustrated by Tim Warnes. It is ideal for reading with a very young child as they will have fun joining in the actions on every page. Humphrey’s strokeable tummy will encourage little fingers to touch and feel, while the ‘Waggle waggle’, ‘Squeak squeak’ or ‘Tinkle tinkle’ of his new friends will get the giggles going. This would be a lovely bedtime read or good for anytime when a small person needs reassurance in a big world. All about friendship, trust and finding where you fit it with a lovely BIG HUG that says it all.

Jan Winter

Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick
**Silly School**
Frances Lincoln 2007 (hbk) 32pp £7.25 9781845074692

*Silly Mummy, Silly Daddy*, the last picturebook for young children by Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick, was shortlisted for the Irish Book Awards. A clever, delightfully simple tale of Beth, a toddler in a bad mood, with dramatically bright and bold artwork, it deserved the nomination.

*Silly School* is the second book featuring Beth. In *Silly School*, Beth doesn’t want to go to school, ‘silly school’ she says, ‘don’t want to go’. Various family members try to persuade her, but when she does finally settle in her classroom, they have trouble getting her to come home again. ‘But I don’t want to go home,’ she complains.

The text is perfectly pitched for 3 years olds, but it’s the wonderfully arresting illustrations that really steal the show. Fitzpatrick uses a most unusual palate in *Silly School*, muted lilacs, soft, dusky pinks, mossy greens, warm tangerine orange, cool sky blue – a visual treat. As in *Silly Mummy*, *Silly Daddy* her illustrations are full of texture, the paint confidently layered onto the pages, using lively, visible brush strokes; the characters and images framed in strong black outlines, a style that works well in these deceptively simple books. The larger-than-life illustrations strain to escape off the edge of the printed page – giving the work great energy and vitality. Fitzpatrick cleverly uses a toddler’s sense of scale and perspective, with Beth staring up at giant adult feet and legs on one double-page spread.

The whole book is carefully designed, from the colourful deckchair-striped endpapers to the clear, large and easy-to-read typeface, complete with Beth’s speech bubbles. It’s so rare to find exceptional picture books for younger children of 2+ and Marie-Louise should be commended for her fresh, original approach. More please!

Sarah Webb

Niamh Sharkey
**I’m a Happy Hugglewug**
Walker Books 2006 (hbk) 32pp £9.99 9781844280497

*I’m a Happy Hugglewug*, Niamh Sharkey’s charming and vivacious new picturebook for toddlers and
younger children is hard not to like. It’s a picture-book with a difference, an Irish Baby Catalogue (Ahlberg), if you will. Rather than the more traditional single narrative, Sharkey treats each double-page spread as a new ‘chapter’ in the Hugglewug family saga, from the opening ‘Hugglewug Song’ to my favourite spread, ‘My Hugglewug Lullaby’: ‘I see the moon, the moon sees me. Hugglewug moon! Hugglewug me!’ This charming reworked lullaby is complemented by the illustration of lush, dreamy greens and blues, and a huge, smiling Hugglewug-faced moon.

Each page brings a new surprise, and Sharkey cleverly introduces some useful concepts like numbers and colours in a natural, fun way. Sharkey has brightened and expanded her palette for this book, using vivid pillowbox reds, baby pinks, and gentle buttercup yellows, ideal for toddlers and younger children. The whole book is delightfully decorative, light hearted and safe.

Niamh’s next book is not as ‘safe’ but will, I think, be all the better for it. It’s a stunningly original treatment of a classic fairy tale and even the early sketches (which I was privileged to see) show her remarkable versatility and her extraordinary penmanship. For the moment, my lips are sealed, but watch this space!

Sarah Webb

E. Nesbit (Matt Tavares illus)
Jack and the Beanstalk
Walker Books 2006 (hbk) 48pp £7.25 9780744557985

The Jack series of tales are the most English of folktales frequently told to children, and ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’, which was composed later than the other giant-killer tales, is most popular of all. It is the most child-centred story, indeed one of the most child centred of all the folk and fairy tales. By and large we get a child’s eye view of the world (a child looking at a beanstalk could easily believe it might reach the sky), and a child that most children can identify with and most adults love: a dreamy, lazy, imaginative adventurous poor boy who by dint of courage and a good heart

overcomes all the limitations of class, family and ascribed role in life to become rich and famous. In the early giant-killer tales the setting was the English border with Wales, and the anglophobic Giant was Welsh, it seems, which explains the terrifying ‘Fee Fie Fo Fum, I smell the blood of an English Man, Be He alive or be He dead I’ll grind his bones to make my bread’, which, I recall, caused a particular frisson of guilty pleasure in my own childhood! No guilty anglophobic pleasure is provided by this version however, as the rhyme is replaced with the giant’s phrase, ‘Fresh meat today, my dear, I can smell it’. However, E. Nesbit’s retelling is in wonderfully vivid language; it is humorous (‘Jack would make up a pretty poem about the Dignity of Labour or how dear and good mothers were’) with beautiful characterisation and superb sense of suspense. Some of her comments have, understandably an old-fashioned, at times politically incorrect charm (Jack’s mother ‘took in washing’ while Jack made spearheads ‘to play at savages with’).

Matt Tavares’ illustrations are very impressive in a hyper-real style. The giant is the best figure, gross, enormous and filthy looking. The figure of Jack is less successful, however. At times it looks positively elfin, lacking the flesh and blood vigour of a real boy. The landscape, especially in its pale washed-out sand colours, avoids the English quality of the folktales, and at times look more African than European. There is no sense of the richness of an English countryside, which is beautifully depicted in Nesbit’s text. In that sense even though the illustrations are very interesting, they do not serve the text well.

For the text: recommended to read aloud with children from 3 to 83.

Celia Keenan

Chris McKimmie
Brian Banana Duck Sunshine Yellow
Allen & Unwin 2006 (hbk) 32pp £10.99 9781741147414

Chris McKimmie from Brisbane is a graphic designer, and it shows in Brian Banana Duck Sunshine Yellow. Not in any overly-designed, self-conscious manner, but in a way that emulates the pictorial style of a young child in an almost-visual stream-of-consciousness account of how Brian Banana Duck Yellow spends his weekends
with his Na-na and Grumpy Yellow.

The words, reproduced in a naturalistic-looking
font, McKimmie’s own design, echo Banana Duck’s
thoughts and have that vaguely surrealistic air of a
young child rationalising his world where the ordi-
nary may seem odd, and the fanciful events of his
imagination quite normal.

Each opening is a double-page spread represent-
ing an event in Banana Duck’s weekend. The illus-
trations are done with inks and with acrylics on MDF board.
They are characteristically flat and muted in tone
except when yellow bursts gloriously forth, high-
lighting Banana Duck Yellow’s closing words ‘I like
being Yellow’.

This is a superb picturebook: every small child
should have a copy.

Valerie Coghlan

Kellie Strom
Sadie the Air Mail Pilot
David Fickling 2007 (hbk) 32pp £7.25 9780385605069

Kellie Strom was born in
Denmark to an Irish mother and a
Danish father. He grew up in
Ireland and has worked as an
illustrator in all three countries.
Comic strips are clearly a great
love of his and his illustrations
are in that muscular, retro boy’s
adventure style. That said, Sadie
the Air Mail Pilot is a story that will appeal to girls as
much as boys, not least because the brave little cat is
the only female pilot at Air Mail HQ. Briefly, Sadie
flies off in dangerous weather, faces perils—a plenty
and, in true heroic tradition, her ingenuity and brav-
ery save the day and the mail because ‘Things look
grim, but don’t get nervous. Nothing scares the Air
Mail Service!’ Strom’s illustrations are very strong.
His use of rich colours, old-fashioned type, and
cityscapes hark back to a 1950’s vision of a futuristic
world in which pilots still wear leather jackets and
goggles in their open planes. Every page is crammed
with detail. There’s even an ‘X-ray’ of the plane and
contents including Sadie’s growling stomach!

Although you could read this with a very young
child, it would probably be a hit with children from
age 5+ who will enjoy looking for details on the page
and, I suspect, a good choice for dads too.

Jan Winter

Ian Whybrow (Russell Ayto illus)
Tim, Ted & the Pirates
HarperCollins 2006 (pbk) 24pp £5.99 9780007131242

This book is an attractively
illustrated picturebook for young children. It tells the
tale in rhyme of a boy called
Tim and his little animated
stuffed toy Ted. Tim and Ted
are taken from school on an
imaginative journey to Loot
Island and finally to a pirate ship. On the way they
are guided by a dolphin and are swallowed up by a
shark. The book’s vivid colour pictures convey a
wide range of scenes inside the shark including an
underwater world and an Aladdin’s cave. Striking
close-up pictures depict the battle that ensues
between Tim, his toy accomplices and the pirates.
Children will enjoy the victory that the small people
have over larger foes. The illustrations in Tim, Ted &
the Pirates cleverly convey the big ideas of the story
so that very young children should be able to follow
the events as they unfold without any need to read
the text. The pictures and text combined portray the
stereotypical elements of a classic pirate story, such
as battles with cutlasses, walking the plank and
language like ‘Heave-ho me hearty!’ These refer-
ences will give children a familiar context for the
story and allow them to make some inferences from
the pictures. The tale within a tale approach and the
size of the hero figure make the story novel and

Geraldine O’Connor

Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick
I Am I
Roaring Brook Press 2006 (hbk) 32pp £8.50 9781596430549

I Am I sees Marie-Louise Fitz-
patrick return to familiar themes
of identity, conflict and reconcili-
tion. Tracing an argument between
two small boys, each of whom
wishes to pose as king of the
universe, Fitzpatrick sensitively
and creatively portrays the boys’
journey from a stance of attack to one of humility.

This picturebook is rich in emotional resonance and
Fitzpatrick’s style of illustration is indicative of the
mature talent of her work. Displaying a more
painterly style with deeper tones and textures than in
some of her earlier books, her illustrations are simply breathtaking. The relationship between words and pictures is fascinating, as words, redolent of barbed wire scratched onto the page, become powerful reminders of the boys’ aggression. Fitzpatrick thus cleverly weaves into her book a message of the sheer power of words to harm and yet ultimately to heal.

It is the illustrations, however, which stir us so deeply in this deceptively simple tale.

Rich in symbols, this narrative offers the older reader ample opportunity for a deep engagement. It is not insignificant that the inspiration for this book came from a Native American river symbol, thus connecting it with Fitzpatrick’s most successful book to date, The Long March.

This is a book to love and to think about. I found it intensely moving and I believe it is testament to Fitzpatrick’s mastery of storytelling.

Áine Nic Gabhann

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Patricia McAdoo (James Newell illus)
Claddagh: The Tale of the Ring
Galway Online 2007 (pbk) 48pp £9.95 9780955165202

As a child, Richard Joyce is taught to carve figures and objects from bogwood by his grandfather. When his father, a fisherman, is drowned, 12-year-old Richard must seek work, as a cook’s help, on a cargo boat. Pirates attack the boat and Richard is sold to a jeweller in Algiers. The jeweller, Abdul, is a kind man and Richard learns to carve in gold and silver. He wins a competition with his design for a ring symbolising love (the heart), friendship (the hands) and loyalty (the crown). With the abolition of slavery, Richard returns to Galway, marries his childhood sweetheart and sets up his own jewellery shop.

Though intended perhaps for the export market, this simply told story of survival has resonances today. Richard succeeds in a foreign city, through a combination of hard work, talent and a measure of good luck. The cityscapes and landscapes are generally beautiful, but unfortunately the figures are less expressive. The black and white illustrations are very good but, though vibrant, some of the colours in the illustrations are harsh and unnatural, especially the red.

Rosemary Hetherington

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John Light (Lisa Evans illus)
The Flower
Child’s Play 2007 (hbk) 32pp £7.81 9781846430718

The Flower is a quirky unusual picturebook, which is difficult to categorise. It could appeal to many age groups and would work better in a one-to-one situation than in the classroom. Each child’s response to and perception of this multi-layered story could be very different. Is it a metaphor for the flowering of the imagination through reading or our thirst for beauty or indeed perhaps the cycle of life, death and rebirth?

Brigg lives in a grey futuristic city where he works in a library ‘where dangerous books were stored’. Brigg dares to take a book from a high shelf marked ‘Do not read’. In the book, he finds a picture of a flower. He searches the city for flowers and eventually finds a picture of a flower in a junk shop in the ‘old part of the city’. With the picture are seeds that Brigg plants and watches with delight as the plant flowers. Sadly the flowers are ‘sucked away’ by the room cleaning system. Eventually after many weeks, he finds flowers growing, at the edge of the city, on a dust heap.

The text is very simple, the illustrations initially are stark with Brigg as a ‘glowing’ presence in the pictures. He is shown, in some of the pictures, walking in a different direction to the other people giving a sense of the individual against the crowd reminiscent of Wes in Welandia (by Paul Fleischman, illustrated by Kevin Hawkes and published by Walker Books). In later illustrations there is the exuberant flowering of the plant. But it is Brigg’s eyes – at times apprehensive, wistful, amazed and happy – that remains in the reader’s memory. The Flower is a book to enjoy and share.

Rosemary Hetherington
Dhá scéal déag bunaithéar ar an saol faoin tuath atá ins an leabhar *Seán agus Coisí*. Bainean ann a cuid is mó dóibh le gnáth eachtraí agus tarlúintí ar theoirn Sheáin, a bhean Mháire agus a mhadra Coisí, ach tá scéal nó dóthain freisin a thárlaíonn taobh amuigh den theoirn ar nóis ‘Picnic Sheáin’ agus ‘Fiacail thimín’.

Tá insint deas réidh ins na scéalta a oireann don atmasféar a cothaítear tríd an leabhar – atmasféar atá láin le saol agus mánachl. É sin raite, tá go leor greann i scéalta ar nóis ‘Cabhraíonn Seán le Mháire’ agus ‘Déanann Seán dearmadh’ agus corraif agus sceilindar i ‘Seán agus an fear dóitéan’.

Tá an t-aisníochtaí ó Bhéarla go Céitge deas simplí a chéile fein tá saibhreas le feicéil ins an foclaíocht agus an sráisíocht.

An gné is fearr liosa faoin leabhar ná na léaráidh atá thar cionn. Le pictíúir uiledeilte mion mar seo ar gach leathanach, mhealladh siad pósaithe ar bith agus an duine fásta seo *Seán agus Coisí* a léamh arís agus arís eile.

Oiriúnach do pháistí 5–7 mblianaí d'aos.

There are twelve stories about country life in *Seán agus Coisí*. Most of them centre around everyday experiences and happenings on the farm that belongs to Seán, his wife Máire and their dog Coisí, but a couple of stories take place away from the farm like ‘Picnic Sheáin’ and ‘Fiacail thimín’.

The stories are nicely told adding to the atmosphere throughout the book of happiness and gentleness. There is humour also in stories such as ‘Cabhraíonn Seán le Mháire’ and ‘Déanann Seán dearmadh’ and great excitement in ‘Seán agus an fear dóitéan’. The translation from English to Irish is nice and simple with a richness in the Irish words and phrases.

My favourite aspect of the book is the illustration work, which is wonderful. The detailed colourful pictures on each page would entice any child and this adult to re-read *Seán agus Coisí* many times. Suitable for 5–7 year olds.

Dairíne Ní Dhonnchú

Steve Voake (Jessica Meserve illus)

Daisy Dawson

Walker 2007 (pbk) £3.99 9781406300802

Carefree Daisy Dawson is so enchanted by nature and the wonderful creatures around her that she is often late for school. Miss Fink and her mother can’t understand how a simple short journey can take FOREVER. In Daisy’s eyes her trip to school is filled with lots of amazing things to see, smell and hear: ‘buzzing bees amongst the foxgloves ... a beautiful yellow butterfly stuck in a spider’s web ... the white mare tugging at the tufts of grass by the beech tree.’ But no one is more surprised than Daisy herself when she realises that animals can talk to her. At first she is shocked and thinks *this cannot be happening*. But before long she enters a myriad of conversations with (to name but a few) dogs, mice, gerbils and cats. Daisy befriends Bam, a grumpy-looking bloodhound, who later attempts to rescue with the help of a collection of creative creatures. Meserve’s soft black and white illustrations are full of fantastic expressions and portray Daisy’s array of emotions perfectly.

*Daisy Dawson* is a charming and amusing story; suitable for naturalists of any age – especially ones who find themselves absorbed by the marvel of insects and small creatures or who have been late for an appointment due to admiring the wonders of nature!

Síne Quinn

Tony Mitton (Peter Bailey illus)

The Tale of Tales

Picture Corgi 2007 (pbk) 112pp £4.99 9780552548878

*The Tale of Tales* is a striking book; square in shape with a dramatic cover featuring a silhouette of a parade of animals set against a vivid orange background. Initially I was very excited by Bailey’s arresting illustrations (reminiscent of Edward Gorey) and by Mitton’s rhymes. The jungle setting and the mysterious riddles and rhymes reminded me of Kipling. As I read though the book I began to be exhausted by the tales within tales and the constant meeting of another animal with a
story to tell. This all occurred without much respite back to the original story. I feel that what began as a wonderful idea – about the gift and celebration of storytelling – somehow got lost along the journey as the author tried to incorporate too many tales, thus losing the initial quest along the way. Unfortunately the tales are too long to hold a young or reluctant reader’s attention and don’t achieve what Aesop’s fables managed: the right mix of simple and entertaining short story with a moral. Mitton is an award-winning poet, who might have either been a little too ambitious or overcomplicated the basis of a good and simple tale.

Síne Quinn

Bob Wilson

**Fearless Dave**
Frances Lincoln (hbk) 2006 39pp £7.25 9781845074908

Wilson’s familiar cartoon-strip style of illustration gives us the story of *Fearless Dave*, a humble lad who (with the help of his mum) captures the heart of a princess.

The story of Dave is recounted by an erudite-looking guide to a group of tourists, and the reader is privileged with a visual version of Dave’s exploits in days when knights were bold and kings and queens judged suitors for their daughter’s hand by their ability to confront dragons and their like. Never mind that there isn’t an actual cragon, only a mouse, and Dave is afraid of mice. With the help of his mum, the mouse is put to flight and the princess, a pragmatist, persuades her parents that this down-to-earth member of the proletariat is well deserving of her hand. And they do, we are told, live happily ever after, and so does Dave’s mum in ‘unbridled luxury’ in the palace.

Valerie Coghlan

Damian Harvey (Korky Paul illus)

**Snail’s Legs**
Frances Lincoln 2006 (hbk) 24pp 9781845071123

This delicious tale tells in words and pictures the story of Old Frog who used to be the fastest runner in the world and Young Snail who now holds that distinction. When a Gallic looking chef (reader take note) comes to the woods on the king’s behalf in search of the runner with the best legs, a race ensues between the friends. Snail is set to win with his long youthful limbs, but, because he loves Frog, who so desperately wants to see the king, he hides and allows Frog the victory. Frog in triumph goes to the palace in the backpack of the chef. Unfortunately he never sees the king, but the king agrees that his legs were very good indeed. Snail, hearing of this, takes to wearing his shell-like hat on his back instead of his head and hiding his legs within it.

This tale of why Snail hides his legs is brilliantly illustrated with all of the Paulinese detail we now expect from this genius with pen and ink. Witness the scene in the palace as the king polishes off his frog’s legs in solitary glory at a long table surrounded by bric-a-brac, or the detail in chef’s pointy-toes shoes. Each page turn is a surprise in terms of how the images are disposed. Harvey’s tone is just right for this story and it is given a whole other dimension by the illustrations. *Snail’s Legs* is an excellent example of words and pictures coming together to provide a treat for anyone picking up the book.

Valerie Coghlan

Áine Ní Ghlinn (Olivia Golden illus)

**Madra Meabhrach**
Cois Life 2007 (pbk) €8.49 9781901176704

Scéal clisté é seo, díreach ar nós an príomh carachtar Reics, madra atá thar a bheith éirimiúil. Is féidir le Reics sumal Róise a thuiscint agus bionn sé ag tafann na freagraí di. Is bréa leis na leabhair scoile atá aici freisin. Nuair a fhágheann Róise cead Reics a thabhairt ar scoil, taispeánann sé do na páistí agus na múinteoirí cé chomh clisté agus atá sé.


Ansin nuair a shabháilann sé a mhaim agus athair Róise ón tine sa teach tríd glach ar chur ar an uimhir éigeandála, 999, déantar laoch as. Imiónn sé ar ais ar scoil sona sásta.
Plcann an scéal seo téamaí móra i saol an pháiste ar nós an tábhacht atá le buanna a thurbaírt, indíhidiúlacht agus maístreachtaí. A bhfuil do scileanna agus buanna an t-údar tá sé deanta i mbéalach simplí, díreach agus cliste. Tá an foclóir soléir agus casca le léamh agus an rud is tábhachtait faoi ná go bhfuil sé thar a bheith taitneamhach. Bhílú go mór cóip a cheannach.

Oíríúnaí dao pháistí 6–10 bliana d’aois.

This is a clever story as is the main character, Reics the cöig, who is highly intelligent. Reics can understand Róise’s sums and barks the answers to her. He also loves all her school books. When Roise gets permission to bring Reics to school he shows all the children and teachers how clever he is.

However, the dog’s family is not one bit happy that he is going to school. They are ashamed that he is different and that he doesn’t want to do things dogs normally do. The other dogs won’t talk to him and he gets teased and bullied. Because of this pressure Reics leaves school, but he is not happy. After he saves his own mother’s life as well as Róise’s father’s life from a house fire, by dialling 999, he becomes a hero for being so clever. He then returns to school delighted.

This story features major themes in a child’s life, such as the importance of developing talents, individuality and bullying. Thanks to the skills and talent of the author these themes are dealt with in a simple, direct and clever way. The vocabulary is clear and easy to read, and most importantly, this story is entertaining. It is well worth buying a copy.

Suitable for 6–10 year olds.

Dairíne Ní Dhonnchú

Heels. Instantly you know this kid is in trouble in a metropolis and you want to know why. The first line: ‘The flight left in an hour. In a few minutes they would be called to the gate. If he was going to do it, he had to do it now’ grabs your attention. If the clichéd ‘rollercoaster ride’ wasn’t overused, then here’s the book to coin the phrase.

The story begins in the middle when Tim Malt abandons his mother in the departure lounge of JFK airport and heads back to the city with Grk, his dog, because something needs sorting. Skip to the beginning when Mr and Mrs Malt, Tim, Grk and two young friends, Max and Natascha Raffi, attend the grand opening of the Slavic Art exhibition at the National Museum. When the main exhibit, the priceless Golden Dauchund, goes missing, Tim sets out to find the stolen artefact. The engagingly eccentric characters he meets on his search are vibrant elements in the adventure.

If there has to be a quibble, then it’s the early dismissal of the Raffi youngstroms from the story. We’re briefly told that a Colonel Zinfandel, cruel dictator who ousted King Jovan’s family from Stanislavia, murdered the Raiffies’ parents. But even if that’s part of a previous story in the Grk series, it fizzes out like a damp squib here and has no bearing on the plot. Apart from that, the intimate author-to-reader style narrative and the sparkling nuggets of humour blend together in a delightful read for age 8+.

Mary Arrigan

Tony Kelly

The Thing with Finn

Macmillan 2007 (hbk) 232pp £9.99 9781405090216

The Thing with Finn introduces the reader to a troubled young vandal on a path to self-destruction. Although not apparent from the outset, Danny, the protagonist, is suffering from the loss of his identical twin Finn and failing to cope with his feelings of responsibility for his brother’s death.

However, as the story progresses, Danny embarks on both a physical and emotional journey of self-discovery, which mirrors that of Danny’s favourite

Joshua Doder

Grk and the Hot Dog Trail

Andersen Press 2006 (hbk) £4.99 9781842705537

Let’s face it – purists aside – it’s the cover, title and first line of a book that seduce. This book immediately hooks with its cartoon-style cover depicting a sweating boy pedalling furiously on his bike through a cityscape of menacing skyscrapers, a dog at his
fictional character, the eponymous herc of the book Danny carries with him throughout his journey, Huckleberry Finn.

The first-person narrative voice is believable, engaging and immediate – the short, snappy chapters lending to this immediacy. The author’s use of lists, which appear sporadically throughout, draw attention to Danny’s need to put some sort of order on his reality. This is nicely paralleled in Danny’s father’s need to obsessionally count after the death of his son. Despite its morbid content, the author makes good use of mild toilet humour, which makes it alluring and less gloomy for young readers – especially boys.

On a downside, however, the reader does encounter a problematic ending. The final chapter deliberately confuses the identity of the narrator when Danny’s father salutes Danny as Finn; to which Danny thinks ‘Yes, yes that’s me’. This is unsuccessful as this issue of identity had not previously been clearly introduced or addressed in the novel. Overall, though, The Thing with Finn is a moving and emotional story imbued with the humour of a 10-year-old boy’s way of looking at life.

Jennifer Carpenter

Jean Ure

Gone Missing

HarperCollins 2007 (pbk) 192pp £4.19 9780007224593

Fans of Jean Ure and new readers alike will love this fast-paced, action driven new novel. The cover, the title and a series of witty and pertinent illustrations throughout the text reveal the plot that follows best friends, Jade and Honey, as they run away from home. Honey’s situation is the more desperate as her alcoholic mother constantly puts her down. Though 16-year-old Honey is the elder of the pair by two years, she is far more naïve. As the story develops she grows in confidence, and at the end readers will not be too surprised at the decision she makes.

The novel realistically portrays the various obstacles the girls encounter on their trip to London and their efforts to hide from the authorities. It shows a world of school drop-outs, single mothers and, unfortunately, many broken homes. However, as Jade comes to realise, education and family life are very important.

The author deals with these subjects without preaching. Darcy, the girl who puts them up for a couple of days, is reckless, has left home, has got in with a gang and lives for the present. Joe, who runs the café ‘Soup and Sarnies’ with his gram, is kind, caring and responsible. Parents may worry over the life choice Honey makes at such an early age but the story demonstrates that it is possibly the best and only one for her. Age: 14+

Kathleen Ryder

Derek Landy

Skulduggery Pleasant

HarperCollins 2007 (hbk) 368pp £12.99 9780007241613

When 12-year-old Stephanie Edgley is the recipient of an unanticipated inheritance following the mysterious death of her quirky uncle (a successful writer of horror novels), she is plunged – without warning – into an alien world of sorcery and occult warfare. Battling to tell friend from foe amongst the age-old factions and under siege from mysterious assailants, her only lifeline is a burgeoning friendship with Skulduggery Pleasant. Skulduggery is an eccentric, wisecracking private detective with a penchant for magic. Oh – he’s also dead and has a (stranger’s) skull where his head should be. What ensues is a manic race against time across Dublin to prevent an ancient artefact of immense power from falling into the hands of the forces of darkness.

Written by Derek Landy, a former martial arts instructor and horror scriptwriter, who has ably drawn on his prior experiences of both disciplines to create a frenetically paced, genre-busting hybrid of thriller, fantasy, comedy and horror novels that’s sure to delight. Every page fizzles with an effervescent, literate sense of humour and is crammed with sarcastic, witty dialogue of the kind familiar to any aficionado of TV series such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer.

One very minor quibble is that some of the ancillary characters could have benefited from being fleshed out a little more, but this sole detraction is more than compensated for by smooth plotting and an abundance of clever twists and turns. Given the sheer intelligence of the writing and the immensely likeable pairing of the two central characters, this is a hugely enjoyable and accomplished debut. Age 10+. 

Eoin Kelly
Mary Arrigan
**Hard Luck**
Barrington Stoke 2007 (pbk) 96pp £4.99 9781842994481

*Hard Luck* tells the story of a troubled teenager who, since the age of 6, has had to endure the neglect of a foster mother, who sees him only as a ticket to welfare payments. When her current partner starts behaving violently to the boy, he decides that he has had enough and takes to the streets. There he encounters even more harsh realities of life: cold, hunger and exposure to drugs and mugging.

*Hard Luck* is told in the first person, and the author succeeds well in entering the teenager’s unsettled world. The story throws a sharp light on his anxieties and fears, and also on his grit and firm resolve to make it through. In the course of the book, the boy goes through a number of disturbing experiences before finding happiness and security far beyond his expectations – something that will greatly appeal to the reader.

The author shows great deftness in bringing her characters to life, from the eccentric old man who befriends the boy – his elegant, sophisticated speech contrasting poignantly with the harsh world he now inhabits – to the teacher who sees worth and talent in the boy’s work.

The story (as to be expected from Barrington Stoke) is told in a simple style and features many elements that make it suitable for the older (12+) struggling reader: large type size, wide spacing, measured control of vocabulary and syntax, and short manageable chapters. When reading the book, however, the reader is not aware of these restrictions, but rather is carried along by the fluid writing and strong narrative. *Hard Luck* deals with topics that will resonate with young teenagers and will act as a springboard for much discussion.

John Hartnett

Anthony Horowitz
**The Power of Five: Nightrise**
Walker Books 2007 (pbk) 435pp £6.99 9781844286218

With his most famous creation, Alex Rider, recently debuting on the big screen, Anthony Horowitz could have been forgiven for perhaps resting on his laurels in 2006. Instead, he spent much of last year visiting some of the least salubrious quarters of the USA – including several young-offenders detention centres – collecting material for his latest novel, *Nightrise*. With such authentic experience coursing between its lines, it is no surprise that this third instalment of *The Power of Five* series is amongst the best work the author has produced to date: vivid, exciting and intelligent.

As ever, Horowitz is expert at placing his young heroes at the centre of the action, making it entirely believable that the fate of mankind should lie in their hands. This time it is the turn of 14-year-old telepathic twins, Scott and Jamie Tyler, to discover the true purpose of their unique ability and join up with the other members of ‘The Five’ in their continuing fight against the Old Ones. When Scott is kidnapped by the evil Nightrise Corporation, Jamie finds himself at the centre of an international conspiracy, sparking a sequence of events that take him deep beneath the surface of everyday normality.

Featuring razor-sharp dialogue and concise description, the narrative pace never lets up, cleverly blending contemporary life with supernatural; prison breaks and car chases with time travel and historical battle sequences. The result is typically exhilarating, but there’s also plenty here to get readers thinking. If anything, success seems to have given Horowitz the confidence to tackle what might be seen as ‘risky’ subject matter for young people’s fiction, with Jamie’s pursuit of the truth bringing him face-to-face with issues of criminal justice, corporate greed and political corruption. Amongst a character population that includes a refreshingly diverse range of ethnic backgrounds, there’s also the welcome addition of several strong female protagonists, helping to broaden this title’s appeal still further. Age: 12+

Tom Donegan

Kristin Kladstrup
**The Book of Story Beginnings**
Walker Books 2007 (pbk) 368pp £3.99 9781844282821

*The Book of Story Beginnings* is an enchanting tale of magic, time travel, love and adventure. From the dream-like opening sequence with its powerful image of the great black sea surrounding the farmhouse on the hill in Iowa, the reader enters a strange world with many unanswered questions. What happened to young Oscar Martin when he rowed out on this very sea in 1914
and was never seen again? What potent spell does the *Book of Story Beginnings* cast on those who write in it? Move on to a century later when, Lucy, another member of the Martin family has arrived in the family home and things begin to happen. The mysterious book propels the characters backwards and forwards in time, in pursuit of a worthwhile story and a successful conclusion to the tale.

The author convincingly portrays the complexities of family relationships: the arguments and misunderstandings: albeit the strong love that underpins many of the parental relationships. The impact of disharmony is reflected in the writings of the young protagonists throughout the narrative. At times the intergenerational parallels seem too neatly contrived and the resolution on the Island of Cats and Birds appears somewhat simplistic. However, the author has a keen understanding of young people and captures their spirit of adventure with skill.

Overall the book is a most enjoyable read, suffused with warmth, humanity and a sense of humour. The magical elements ring true for the story but the action on the Island of Cats and Birds and with the pirate Captain Mack are pitched at a younger audience than is suggested by the mood earlier in the book. Part Wonderland, part fairy tale, these characters needed to be more nightmarish and terrifying to bring about a truly satisfying conclusion to its haunting and elegiac beginning.

**Marian Keyes**

**Sally Grinley**

**Saving Finnegan**

Bloomsbury 2007 (pbk) 246pp £5.99 9780747586173

It is often the case that the simplest stories can be the most profound. And as island life often represents a microcosm of the world, so this simple story reflects the profound story that is life. The blurb tells us that it is a novel about death, but it is really about life: about living, growing, maturing, self-realisation, empowerment, self-assertion and yes, death.

Waking on her island home early one morning, Finola discovers that a whale has washed up on the beach. She is determined to save the whale but when her best efforts fail and the whale dies, she is more determined than ever to keep the whale's skeleton on the island.

The events surrounding what to do with the whale are symbolic of the fight of the small man. The islanders resent the mainland assuming that it can decide for the minority. The island people want autonomy and Finola is suddenly empowered to make a difference. She is aware of the cautionary notes; she may not succeed. But believing in her cause, she must see it through.

She leads the people of the island on a journey that draws them together and in the process of fighting for their right they come to the realisation that their seemingly disparate group is united in its cause.

Cleverly portrayed is that seminal moment in life when Finola realises that she has a voice and can influence the world around her. This turning point in the journey from youth to maturity is something which makes this story so worthwhile. All the characterisations in the novel are precise and each role has a particular relevance to the story's completion. A powerful and well-crafted tale, a definite read for 9+.

**Judy Deacon**

**NM Browne**

**The Spellgrinder's Apprentice**

Bloomsbury 2007 (pbk) 298pp £6.99 9780747579250

Browne's novel is absolutely conventional in its structure but highly imaginative in its details. This combination is unlikely to convert newcomers to fantasy writing, but very likely to please already existing fans of the genre looking for a new adventure. The story features an underdog hero, a feisty heroine, and a world that is basically medieval, with power struggles going on over the control and use of magic. It is obvious from the beginning that the two protagonists will go on a quest through a series of mortal dangers, eventually discovering their inner strength and power. Despite the formulaic nature of this outline, it is enjoyable to make that journey with characters whose personalities are vividly drawn, and who survive by sheer bloody-mindedness and refusal to lie down.

The story would have benefited from more exploration of the mechanics of the world Browne has created: the spellstones are pivotal objects, everything rests on who possesses and controls them, and who has the ability to wield their power; unfortunately this ability is explained in a patchy way. Also there are some apparent problems in the
internal logic that could use more description. All the same, the story is always engaging, and frequently gripping, and offers some amusing twists on conventional figures. I particularly liked the beautiful princess, who is enchanted so she can only think about flowers and clothes, when in reality she is shrewdly political and hard as nails. This book would be best suited to children aged 12+.

Anna Kamaralli

Brenda Maguire

The Drummer Boy's Story

Boyne Valley Honey Company (pbk) 92pp €7.95
9780951782398

Historical fiction provides an opportunity for children to get to grips with what can sometimes be impersonal and difficult historical information. This slim novel portrays the complex event of the Battle of the Boyne of 1690 through the story of fictional characters. Its main protagonists are David Peavoy, a 12-year-old drummer in the Jacobite army and two children he meets called Steph and Harry. Much of the story deals with setting a context for the battle. Information is given about the religious divisions in Europe at the time and the reasons why this battle for the crown of England was fought in Ireland. The child characters act as witnesses (at a safe distance) to the advancing conflict between the Williamite and Jacobite armies. The description of weapons, battle clothing, encampments and the role of drummers, infantry and cavalry convey a feeling of the conditions of battle then. The last two chapters describe the battle and its aftermath. The story helps to portray the variety of backgrounds of the soldiers in the battle. Some indication of the motivation on both sides is given, particularly when David, a Jacobite, meets his brother Oliver, who has enlisted in King William’s army.

The Drummer Boy’s Story is not a gripping read but it carries a sufficient storyline to engage the reader. Considerable effort has gone into giving detailed historical information throughout and this for the most part is successfully interwoven into the plot. A very useful feature of the book is the ‘Story behind the story’ section added at the end. This gives additional information about aspects such as: the warring kings, the categories of soldiers and their weapons, as well as the war paintings of the time.

Children with an interest in history and famous battles would enjoy this book. Teachers might also read the story to children to stimulate an interest in the Battle of the Boyne and also to develop an understanding of chronology, evidence, cause and effect and the varied perspectives in conflicts such as this. Suitable for children 11+.

Geraldine O’Connor

Anna Heussaff

Vortex

Cois Life 2006 (pbk) 92pp €8.00 9781901176674

‘Ní raibh Oisín sa seomra. Ní raibh sé sa teach, ná sa ghairdín ach oiread.’ Léiriú is ea loime agus – san am gcéanna – bagairt na línte seo ar an ngaisce atá déanta ag Anna Heussaff in Vortex. Is é sin mistír, teanna, agus dainséar a chur in iúl i nGaeilge shimpli shothuigthe a chuirfeadh fonn ar dhoagóirí ní hamháin tabhairt faoi scéal, ach coinneáil leis. Faigheann Síofra leagan trialacha de chluiche riomháireachta ón huncail, ach is léir go bhfuil cúpla fadhb aig baint leis an gcluiche go folli – ceann amháin acu ná go n-alpann sé imreoirí, á bhrioisúnú i ndomhain scarrúil chibearspsais ina bhfuiltaingitear píon agus gortú mar a fhulaingitear sa saol amuigh iad; domhan ina bhféadfaí bás a hfháil, fu. Ar nós Vortex an teidil, éiríonn leis an leabhar an léitheoir a shlogadh ón gcéad leatanach agus ní scealtear é (nó i) go dírí críoch an leabhair – nuair a éalaonn Oisín ón gcluiche ar deireadh thiar le cabhair nach beag ó Síofra. Ní ligeann an t-údar do rud ar bith baint de ghluaiseacht an sochail ar a leiriú na gcaraachtar comh lom simpli leis an teanga féin. Acht oibríonn an cur chuige seo ar chionn – murab ionann agus an diabhal sin de chlúiche!

‘Ní raibh Oisín sa seomra. Ní raibh sé sa teach, ná sa ghairdín ach oiread.’ The starkness – and at the same time the menace – in these lines serve as an illustration of what Anna Heussaff has achieved in Vortex: the portrayal of mystery, tension and danger in
uncomplicated, accessible Irish that will persuade teenagers not only to begin the book but to stay with it. Siofra receives a trial version of a computer game from her uncle, but it’s clear that there are still a few problems with it – one being that it swallows players, imprisoning them in a frightening cyberspace world where pain and injury impact as they do in the world outside. One could even die there. True to the Vortex of the title, the reader is sucked in immediately only to be released on the last page as Oisín finally escapes from the game – with no help from Siofra. The author allows nothing to detract from the momentum of the story to the extent that character portrayal is as bare and simple as the language itself. Unlike the computer game, however, it works admirably!

Ruaidhrí Ó Báille

MT Anderson

The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing: Traitor to the Nation

Walker Books 2007 (pbk) 368pp £7.79 9780763624026

The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing is a demanding yet most rewarding novel. Acknowledged by the author, MT Anderson, to blend elements of the gothic or fantastic with fact, it is set in the 17th century and its main concern is the theme of experimentation on the protagonist, Octavian, a young Negro boy. Both he and his mother reside at the Novanglian College of Lucidity where Octavian is subjected to rigorous testing and experimentation. Exposed to a wide range of learning, Octavian is noted for his musical ability and is often called upon to perform for guests.

The novel charts the effects of captivity and constant experimentation on this young protégé. Embedded within the narrative is the individual’s need for imaginative and artistic expression: it poignantly traces the brutalising effect on Octavian when he is denied such fundamental rights.

Anderson’s probing novel raises universal questions: Octavian’s journey becomes a metaphor for all who are denied freedom of expression. It is hauntingly moving and deeply disturbing, particularly having read the author’s note that renowned colleges such as Harvard University engaged in experimentation with Native American boys in the 17th century.

Strongly recommended for the young adult reader.

Áine Nic Gabhann

Kate Hubbard

Rubies in the Snow

Short Books 2007 (pbk) 188pp £5.99 9781904977731

This is purportedly the diary of Anastasia Nikolaevna, the youngest daughter of the last tsar of Russia, begun on her tenth birthday and ended seven years later. It records the exploits of a child in a loving, stable household, albeit one with a semi-invalid mother and a brother suffering from haemophilia. Her life was on the one hand characterised by the normality of sibling rivalry, petty rebellions and insubordinations, but on the other underpinned by seemingly unlimited wealth and power, largely taken for granted by Anastasia and contrasting markedly with the want and poverty of the general population, a population which in the early entries is portrayed as loyal and adoring.

The onset of World War I coincided with the diarist’s mid-teens and the embracing of public duties which led to a widening of her experiences. The growing disquiet of the proletariat and the critical remarks of injured soldiers, which she helped care for, form the voices of dissent and the first indications of a revolution that will result in the execution of Anastasia and her family.

Hubbard has written several historical biographies for the young and while in this work she successfully charts a rapidly changing and progressively explosive society as seen through the maturing consciousness of her protagonist, her characterisation is weak and her narrative ultimately fails to compel, fails to excite. One only has to turn to Anne Frank, that other girl, albeit not fictional, given a diary as a present, to see how this format can rivet, can lend an intimacy to the writing which continues to haunt the reader decades after the first reading.

Carole Redford

Jackie French

Slave Girl

HarperCollins 2007 (pbk) 282pp £4.79 9780007216598

‘The tears were blinding her now but it didn’t matter. There was nothing she wanted to see.’

Torn violently from her village by Viking raiders and forced into a life of slavery, Hekja is torn between the need to blot out the day her village was destroyed and her desire to see
every new experience as it unfolds around her. With only her faithful dog Snarf beside her, she awkwardly, yet eagerly, becomes a part of the wild, exploring world of the Vikings who have enslaved her. Taken far from her home, she visits Iceland and Greenland before finding herself on an expedition to the unexplored land of America.

From the start of *Slave Girl* Hekja’s character feels like an outsider in her own world. One of the central and most gripping conflicts in the story is not the savagery of the new world in which she finds herself, but the fact that she is clearly more at home in this world than in her own.

The book contains some beautifully descriptive moments that allow the reader to almost see and smell Hekja’s new world, including a scene in which the ship floats through an impenetrable sea of fog. Unfortunately, the ending feels rather rushed. Having built up a deep connection between Hekja and the reader, I couldn’t help feeling disappointed that her newfound freedom felt too neatly tied up. *Slave Girl* is an entertaining look at the adventurous life of roving Vikings for age 8+.

Ruth Coleman

Catherine Webb

**The Obsidian Dagger: Being the Further Extraordinary Adventures of Horatio Lye**

Atom Books 2007 (pbk) 330pp £5.99 9781904233794

Set in Victorian London, the second book in Catherine Webb’s Horatio Lye series sees the scientist and former special constable called upon by her Majesty’s Government to unravel yet another extraordinary mystery. Lyle’s investigations into a double murder committed on a mysterious ship at London docks lead him and his two young protégés, Tess and Thomas, into a web of intrigue with supernatural dimensions as they uncover a sinister plot and struggle to save London from destruction.

This is in many ways a remarkable book – a strange mixture of fantasy, horror, adventure and old-fashioned detective story. Lyle is a detective in the Sherlock Holmes mould and there is a humoral nod to Conan Doyle in the naming of one of the novel’s very minor young characters. Webb, who was only 14 when she wrote her first novel *Mirror Dreams*, has previously been compared to Pullman and Pratchett.

This novel also has echoes of *Frankenstein*, *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, *The Da Vinci Code* and, in some places, Wilde’s ‘The Happy Prince’. It is Dickensian in its atmospheric evocation of Victorian London. The teeming life of the city is wonderfully evoked. Its numerous inhabitants and their various occupations, its sounds and smells, its boroughs and streets, its bridges and buildings pulse with life. The songs and rhymes of Old London Town are hauntingly interwoven with the plot and, together with the constant fog and recurring gothic imagery, create a menacing sense of doom. Indeed London takes on a life of its own in this novel – arguably becoming its central character.

This strikes me as a novel particularly suited to adaptation to film. Indeed reading it felt like watching a film most of the time. The prose is lyrical and witty, if verbose in places, and the narrative is action packed and pacy. However, while there is much to commend this novel, particularly in light of the young age of its author, the plot is overcomplicated and, for me, ultimately unsatisfying. Suitable for readers 12+.

Ciara Ní Bhroin

Dermot Somers

**Buaic**

Cois Life 2006 (pbk) 164pp €12.00 9781901176667

Focal amháin – Buaic – atá mar an ceannard ar an leathar a dhiadhúthachadh a bhaintear buaic amach gan choimhlint. Is cosúil le meafar don teannas a leirítear sa scéal iad an domhain a bhalach le tabhairt faoi Everest. Scéal eachtraíochta é éifeachtaí siupa elé. Buaic amach a bhí linn an deacair lena Mhad agus ní mó ná sásta atá sise é a bheith ar an turas seo. Beagán eapais muinseine as an athair ar Lian agus é féin ceannadú go leor mar is dual dá aois.

Cuireann Dixon agus Max, beirt sléibhteoirí éile, leis an teannas. Tháinig Dixon, sléibhteoir cáilíúil, síos na gceol eachtraí ina shaol. Tá fadh bhóil aige áfach agus dhíon aige mullach suntasach a bhaint amach ar an turas seo. Tá a ghníomh sléibhteoiríche féin ag Max agus suim aige Dixon, a chur ar mhullach an tiléibhe.
This book has a one word title *Binti* or Summit, but a summit is not reached without strife and these two strands are central to this story. The two approaches to Everest are a metaphor for the tensions throughout the book.

Set in the Himalayas, this adventure describes how Liam, a 16-year-old boy taking time out from transition year in school, and his dad, Mike, fare on a mountaineering expedition. Liam’s parents are separated. He lives with his mum, who is not very pleased about the trip. He lacks confidence in his dad and, typical of his age, he is a little petulant.

Another group of mountaineers, Dixon and Max, bring more tension. Dixon, a renowned mountaineer, has survived many adventures but has a drinking problem. His ambition is to reach a significant summit. Max, who manages his own mountaineering business, has an interest in Dixon’s success. A tension also exists between the Sherpas and the Rai people, both of whom are central to mountaineering in the Himalayas. Liam befriends Pravidhan, a Rai of his own age, and their friendship is central to the story.

The real strength of this book lies in the author’s wonderful ability to convey tension, fear, terror, depth of feeling, worry, cold and lots more. This, coupled with his descriptions of the adventures and incidents that occur, make a very good read. It is a pity that a glossary was not included to deal with the unfamiliar vocabulary of mountaineering, but the effort was well rewarded.

**Déirdre Úí Ghrádaigh**

Nicola Morgan

**The Highwayman’s Footsteps**

Walker Books 2007 (pbk) 370pp £6.99 9781406303117

Inspired by Alfred Noyes’s famous poem ‘The Highwayman’, Nicola Morgan’s novel is a fine example of what is termed a ‘ripping yarn’. With short, breathless chapters and concise, accurate prose she tells the story of young, high-born William de Lacey, who is on the run from his cruel father and jealous brother. His story is set against the harsh and ghostly landscape of the moors and the corrupt, violent and treacherous underside of 18th-century England, represented by the town of Scarborough, the redcoats and landlords such as William’s father.

The book opens with William being held up by a highwayman. When the tables turn and William finds his assailant to be injured, and in fact female, there begins the central relationship of the story and William’s adventure. Bess is a highwayman’s daughter and a skilled highwayman herself with an agenda to avenge her parents’ deaths. Through William’s friendship with Bess, her story of how her parents came to their deaths at the hands of the redcoats and his own new experiences of poverty and injustice, William begins to question what he previously thought to be right. His life with Bess as a fugitive and a highwayman is a choice that reflects his need to survive and his revised notion of what it means to be worthy and honourable.

The relationship between William and Bess develops from mutual distrust through wary respect to strong friendship. Morgan chooses not to muddy the water by introducing any romance, allowing the themes of revenge and justice to drive a story brimming with muskets, galloping chases, hold-ups and ghosts. *The Highwayman’s Footsteps* is a truly captivating read for boys and girls in the 10+ age group.

**Elizabeth Brennan**

Michelle Paver (Geoff Taylor illus)

**Chronicles of Ancient Darkness, Book 3: Soul Eater**

Orion 2006 (hbk) 272pp £9.99 9781842551721

In a world very much like our own but six thousand years ago, the Ice Age is coming to an end and people live in small clan groups, relying on their intimate knowledge of the natural world to guarantee their survival.

Thirteen-year-old Torak knows he must help when his beloved Wolf is kidnapped and
taken across the ice by the evil Soul Eaters, and this lead himself and Renn, his friend, into a series of heart-stopping adventures in their attempt to rescue Wolf and prevent the Soul Eaters from unleashing Demons upon the world.

This is the third book in the series: it stands alone, but snippets gleaned from the story alluding to previous books should serve to incite curiosity and a desire to become more fully acquainted with Torak’s history.

Like the fire opal at the centre of the plot, Paver’s writing shines like a rare jewel. Her characters are fully realised and her descriptions of Torak’s world so detailed (and yet concise) that it is impossible not to become totally immersed in the spellbinding story.

There are some ‘gross-out’ moments in the texts that may disturb a more sensitive reader, for example, when the demented character of ‘The Walker’ cuts off his frost-bitten toes and attempts to eat them in an effort to ward off starvation. The fact that this and similar episodes have such a powerful impact is testimony to the power of Paver’s writing.

Fantastic illustrations head every chapter, with a single striking image that manages to convey, in miniature oval black and white, the essence of the chapter. Taylor’s drawings of Wolf and of the icy landscape are particularly detailed and wonderful.

*Soul Eater* is far more than the sum of its parts (a good–evil dichotomy, relationship between boy and dog, between boy and community) – fine writing combined with a sense of morality and an unput-downable story – in my opinion, one of the best books of the year.

*Paula McGeever*

Conor Kostick  
**Saga**  
The O’Brien Press 2006 (pbk) 320pp €7.95  
9780862789794

Conor Kostick established himself as an exciting new voice in young adult fiction with his acclaimed debut novel *Epic*, which was awarded a place on the Honours List of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) for 2006. *Saga* confirms his talents, and can be read as a sequel or as a stand-alone novel. The story takes place in the fantasy future world of New Earth, where we follow Ghost, a 15-year-old mall-raiding airboardsman who has no memory or past life. She gradually begins to question whether she is really alive or merely a character in an elaborate computer game.

Kostick’s achievement lies in the duality of the book, which can be read as both an excellently fast-paced action thriller and a commentary on very real modern issues. The engaging characters and the compelling plot allow for a great read, but at the core of the book lie deep questions concerning such grand issues as self-realisation, citizenship and societal inequality, conformism and the abuse of power. Kostick has made these accessible while never compromising the seriousness of the issues. It is a constant battle for authors of young people’s literature to balance this depth of writing with a gripping story, but Kostick has once again succeeded in creating a superb novel that can be enjoyed by older teenagers and adults alike.

*Donal Cumiskey*

Markus Zusak  
**The Book Thief**  
Bodley Head 2007 (hbk) 584pp £12.99 9780370329215

This is a memorable piece of work – beautifully written, rich and poetic in language and peopled with wonderful characters. It’s a haunting tale, a strange mixture of ugliness and beauty, of cruelty and kindness, heart-warming and heart-rending, full of vivid metaphor and an absolutely compelling read.

The basic story is that of a young girl growing up in Germany during the Nazi regime – a subject and setting for countless books but this is unlike any other. Death is all around of course but here Death is the narrator. At first he seems similar to Death in Emily Dickinson’s ‘I could not stop for Death’ – urbane and courteous. However, he is not sinister and he is very unobtrusive. Indeed, the reader is not always aware of him because much of the story is seen through the girl’s, the book thief’s, eyes. Death
founds her story in the rubble from the bombing of Munich and is recounting it. He gives a resume:

It's just a small story, really, about, amongst other things:

- a girl
- some words
- an accordionist
- some fanatical Germans
- a Jewish fist-fighter
- and quite a lot of thievery

It can be read on several levels and without a doubt will be enjoyed by adults as well as older teenagers.

**Audrey Baker**

**Sarah Singleton**

**Sacrifice**

Simon & Schuster 2007 (pbk) 310pp £6.99 9781416917083

Sarah Singleton was the winner of the Booktrust Teenage Prize for her debut novel *Century* and it's easy to see why when reading her latest offering, *Sacrifice*. Once again, Singleton has written a tight, structured compelling thriller that not only entertains with the fascinating quest that makes up its core but is full of wonderful imagery and an eerie atmosphere that prevails through every page.

*Sacrifice* is concerned with a legend during the time of the Crusades, in the desert of North Africa; a band of knights received a lily from an angel to help them defeat their enemies in a holy war. After the Crusades this same band of knights set up an order with strongholds all over Europe and North Africa and became very powerful. However, over the years the lily's mysterious power warped and darkened, and left instability and death in its wake.

Now in 1890, three children, all unknowingly connected to one another and linked with descendents of the knights, must combine forces and unravel the true secret of that lily which bestowed such magnificent powers on the knights all those centuries ago. But in doing so they face great danger from a renegade ancestor who is determined to retain the lily's power and influence, whatever the cost.

What gives this fantasy tale its original touch is the characters and their relationships, which play such a vital part in creating the story. The friendships that build up between the three children and the personal hardships they face means the reader invests much emotion and cares deeply about what ultimately happens, not only in the battle of good overcoming evil but because of the personal demons the children must contend with. However, Singleton has also successfully crafted a clever and gripping tale that convinces far better than anything *The Da Vinci Code* author Dan Brown could ever produce – but of course will never get the same kind of attention or credit it so deserves. Ten to 14 year olds will devour this book.

**Amanda Fenelly**

**Alison McGhee**

**All Rivers Flow to the Sea**

Walker 2007 (pbk) 176pp £3.99 9781844282517

A winter night … a curved road … blue truck … and an accident: one simple tragic event and its aftermath are the core of this slender lyrically written novel for young adults. One sister, Ivy, is left in a coma, the other – her younger sister, 17-year-old Rose – is plunged into grief and self-destructive depression.

Alison McGhee's simple tale set in rural America – the Adirondack Mountains of northern New York State – may be a tad too reflective for young audiences reared on soaps and teen melodramas like *The OC*. The elements for soap drama are all there, as Rose tries to cope, moving between home, high school and the hospital where Ivy lies unconscious. Her numb grief is conveyed well as she tells her story: it is as if she is trapped underwater, muffled, distant. The effect, however, is also to distance the reader emotionally. There is a satisfying, perhaps too-tidy resolution to the tale as Rose learns to let go and move back into life. On the whole, though, it's a quietly moving story about the aftermath of the kind of everyday accident that we hear on the news all the time.

One curious postscript, however: Rose's main supporter, a kind neighbour who encourages her, insists that she learn to drive because 'to live in this world you must drive'. It's a metaphor, of course, for moving on but it's obvious that it is also literally meant – a curious concept for us, living in a society where even rural teenagers can still get on without owning or driving a car. Age: 12+

**Frances O'Rourke**
Sharon Dogar
Waves
Chicken House 2007 (hbk) 352pp £9.99 9781905294244

Dogar’s very assured debut opens as the Ditton family return to their Cornish holiday home for the summer. It has been a year since Hal’s sister, Charlie, lapsed into a coma following an unexplained surfing accident. The summer break is full of family tensions and emotions as Charlie’s absence is heightened by the memories contained in the holiday village. Hal’s and Charlie’s close connection opens up a fragmented supernatural communication between the siblings that both alarms and reassures Hal.

Hal’s discoveries about Charlie’s life the previous summer both lighten and compound his anxieties. Through his tentative relationship with the tomboy, Jack, he learns of Charlie’s romance with the charismatic Pete. Hal wants to know more, to apportion blame for Charlie’s vegetative state, but Jack, who is also Pete’s sister, reins in Hal’s reactions and helps him reach more comprehensive conclusions.

Dogar chooses to tell the story in the first person by the two characters in turn and this moves the story forward elegantly. Hal, a likeable teenager, is wonderfully portrayed as a confused and grieving young man struggling with the situation. The Ditton family tragedy is realistically and sensitively handled as each family member spins into their own world of sadness and anger. Waves is an intriguing and very successful mix of coming-of-age story, family drama and accomplished thriller to be enjoyed by anyone over 12.

Mags Walsh

Jenny Valentine
Finding Violet Park
HarperCollins 2007 (hbk) 208pp £10.99 9780007214457

Lucas is 16 and lives a perfectly normal life, except that he is convinced that an old lady called Violet Park is talking to him... through the wood of the urn where her ashes are preserved. Soon he comes to believe that he must ‘rescue’ her, as he puts it: first from the cab office where she has been abandoned by a careless passenger and then from the wooden box where she feels she’s a bit cramped. From then on, Violet becomes part of his life, somebody to talk to and to look after. Violet’s presence results in Lucas thinking about his family, about himself and about his ‘absent-possibly-dead’ father.

This is terrific stuff and quite unlike anything else I’ve come across. It reads like a whodunit, where the detective ends up investigating more about himself than the mystery he set out to solve. All the characters are great, each having his or her own voice, his or her own take on the story and Valentine describes their relationships with intelligence and sensitivity. Finding Violet Park is a powerful and compelling story written in a very sober, unpretentious way. There are no ghosts springing out of funeral urns, no big drama of any kind. Quite the reverse, as Lucas is a rather humorous narrator. The novel depicts life with its ebbs and flows and manages to give every question, every problem, every doubt its right weight – no more, no less.

Juliette Saumande

Kaye Umansky (Doffy Weir illus)
The Dressed-up Giant
Barn Owl Books 2006 (pbk) 32pp £4.50 9781903015605

This is the third of Umansky’s early readers about Waldo the giant and his best friend Heavy Hettie the female wrestler. They have been invited to a wedding and Waldo has to buy a new suit. Many boys (and girls) who have been forced to wear ‘good clothes’ will identify with him as one suit after another is pulled out, each, to Waldo (though actually they’re all quite snazzy, thanks to the brilliant colour illustrations of Doffy Weir) more horrendous than the last. To please Hettie, he agrees to wear the blue-and-yellow one. However, a chivalric deed leads to the suit getting ruined and he has to wear his old, brown, too-tight clothes after all. Of course, the other giants turn up in old, brown, too-small suits as well, so all ends happily.

This is lovely cheerful story with larger-than-life characters, beautifully visualised by Doffy Weir and printed in clear type with plenty of white for easy-reading. (Waldo at times bears a strong resemblance to Michael Rosen, but perhaps this is purely coincidental?)

Margrit Cruickshank
Margaret Mahy
**The Changeover**
HarperCollins 2007 (pbk) 288pp £4.79 9780007243525

Laura Chant’s little brother, Jacko, is having his life sucked out of him by the evil Carmody Bruque. Laura, at 14, is at the ‘changeover’ between child and woman and is attracted to one of her school prefects. That’s not the only thing happening in her life: her father’s girlfriend is expecting a baby; her mother has met a new man; her strange ‘warning’ power tells her that the prefect, Sorenson, is a witch; and soon, in order to save Jacko’s life, she will have to endure the dangerous and terrifying changeover from normal to witch herself. Add to this child abuse, Greek mythology, fairy tales, and you would be forgiven for suspecting an attack of over-the-top-itis. Not in the hands of the acclaimed New Zealand author Mahy.

After a rather bland beginning, the book takes off. The characters are believable, the dialogue sparkles, detailed descriptions hold our attention, there is a nice sense of menace and the structure drives the novel to a convincing conclusion. Mahy controls all with a firm hand, avoiding cliché and underpinning her supernatural tale with a strong but never in-your-face morality. First published in 1984, *The Changeover* has lost nothing of its power. Try the rest of Margaret Mahy’s works.

Margrit Cruickshank

Most of its 128 pages are devoted to some 200 brief reviews (about 150 words each) of poetry collections and anthologies, divided into those seen as suitable for the ‘Under 5,’ ‘6–8,’ ‘9–11’ and ‘12+’ age-groups. Individual reviews are anonymous, but all reviewers – ‘poets, teachers and critics’ – are listed in the book’s final section. Of the titles annotated, many will be already widely known, but the great joy of the book, as with poetry collections and anthologies themselves, lies in the unfamiliar. Jose Jorge Letria’s *The Moon Has Written You a Poem: Poems to Read to Children on Moonlit Nights*, translated from the Portuguese by Maurice Riordan (Winged Chariot Press, 2005), certainly jumps – among many others – into my own ‘must see’ list. Although there is no formal statement as to the specific criteria which have guided this particular selection of titles, the overall principles would seem to have involved eclecticism, originality, current availability in print and the inclusion of ‘both classic and contemporary verse’. It is, incidentally, gratifying to note that these considerations allow for the inclusion of Seamus Cashman’s *The O’Brien Press Something Beginning with P*, ‘a collection that will be appreciated not just by Hibernophiles but by anyone who likes their poetry a little off the wall’. By way of introduction there are five essays by such recognised poetry authorities as Morag Styles, John Foster and Mandy Coe ‘on topics that will help to stimulate debate about poetry’, together with a typically perky and forthright foreword from Michael Rosen. Arguing against a certain (and all too widespread) sort of classroom practice, he reminds us: ‘That’s why poets write poems: to see what happens. It’s not to have our adjectives counted, thank you very much.’ By way of conclusion, Hallford and Zagbini provide several pages listing valuable resources for all interested in making poetry a vital presence in the classroom. Warmly recommended, especially to adjective-counters everywhere, and three large hoots (of approval) for Barn Owl Books.

Robert Dunbar

Deborah Hallford and Edgardo Zagbini (eds)
**Universal Verse: Poetry for Children**
Barn Ow Books 2006 (pbk) 128pp £7.99 9781903015618

It is hard to imagine a school or classroom reference library that would not benefit from having a place for this publication. While at first glance it may seem rather reminiscent of a publisher’s catalogue, closer examination reveals a book stylishly and attractively produced and illustrated: the cover is by Jane Ray.
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