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Book Reviews

Authors
Thomas Hinckley, Afton Miner, Janet Francis, Lillian Heil, Elizabeth Wahlquist, Tim Wadham, and Janice Card

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The best part of this book is the sense of place. I have such a clear mental image of the bog, Hunger Moss, with the ancient Roman causeway across it and the later, ruined castle in the centre and of the village with its shops and early Norman church, but especially keen is the image of the farms--Guelder Rose Farm and Barleylands. It is no wonder that their mother had loved this area before World War I, nor is it any wonder that with World War II fast approaching, Alice and Adam, who have been raised in Liverpool, come to love the area, though each for different reasons. Their mother had known a boy named Reuben; Alice meets a boy named Reuben who is a nephew of the original Reuben. The war comes, evacuated refugees come, and we come away from the book with a sense of fulfillment for knowing the stories of these two generations.

Imagine my profound wonder to discover that all of these places exist only in this book: they are not to be found in Lewis's Topographical Dictionary nor in the National Gazetteer.
--Thomas Hinckley.


"...A writer should know too much..." was one of John's favorite scriptures from Ernest Hemingway's books of letters. As a latent great novelist, John not only absorbed but he acted upon such pithy bits of wisdom from his "spiritual father." Just ask his mother, who was humiliated several times a week when the neighbors complained about John snooping outside their door--with a glass up to his ear, yet. Could John help it if his neighbors just happened to be "a classic example of a contemporary couple in the throes of every social problem modern society can dish out"? As a writer, John actually had no choice. It was his duty to find out about real life--in the raw, over done, whatever. If his "literary research" at keyholes, etc., was misunderstood, it was a cross he (and unfortunately his family) would simply have to bear.

John's parents, who had come to the United States shortly after the Hungarian uprising, found it hard to understand why their American young son was not so thrilled as they when they were finally able to purchase their very own butcher shop. They wanted John to be happy, though, and didn't mind his writing aspirations as long as he stayed out of trouble.

Trouble, however, seemed to be his specialty and in just one week of literary research he became involved with a tough-looking ex-con, was accused of growing pot, and was chased down the hall by an
amorous housemaid whose English vocabulary consisted of "Yah" and "Coca Cola." Such misunderstandings soon convinced John's parents that he was heading for a life of drugs, crime and older women. Feeling duty-bound to curb his base instincts, they decreed that it was back to work in the butcher shop for him.

Ironically, it was the butcher shop he had so long avoided which gave him his opportunities to gain greater understanding of his parents, to get better acquainted with a girl he had long overlooked, and to meet a real writer who helped him understand what "real life" is and how to put it all together.

Well written and fun to read, this book also has a worthwhile message.--Afton Miner.


There have been other coffee-table game books designed to be entertaining on a long winter's eve, but this will likely be the ultimate in popularity. Each game lushly covers two pages (the book is 35 cm. by 25 cm., no small board) with gorily depicted horror games sporting such names as "Sharks," "Bogey House," "Clone," and "Dracula's Blood." Each is also accompanied by detailed instructions, employing only some sort of player markers and playing pieces beyond what is actually shown in the book. Imaginative construction of said pieces could occupy an additional scintillating hour or so.

There appears to be some range of difficulty among the choices, and though most of the action consists of moving pieces, the visual accompaniment and penalties and rewards provide continual variety. The binding, though stitched, will probably not withstand the rough usage the book could engender, so it may need to be a special circulation item.--Janet Francis.


Atterton has brought the origin of an old English ballad to life--a bit of British history. The survivors of the battles with the Vikings realize that they are in a losing situation but their friendships, courageous defense, and fruitless attempts to forge a strong alliance against the enemy make the reader feel as triumphant as Gwion, the last harper, when he realizes that he can make their names and their valor live forever through songs telling their story.
Atterton has captured the feel of the topography of Great Britain as the bands of men defending their homes travel from one end to the other. His archeological background also enables him to give the reader a glimpse of those who had inhabited the isles before, with his description of Roman ruins in mid-Britain and his description of Stonehenge to the south. It all combines to make a sad but triumphant story of a courageous group of people.--Lillian Heil.

Barrett's penchant for looking at the world in new ways surfaces as she focuses on the distinctive characteristics of each animal in A Snake Is Totally Tail. Her alliterative descriptions will make them memorable to the reader. Who can forget that a duck is quantities of quacks, a fish swells of scales, and a crocodile mostly mouth? In fact, readers will probably catch the disease and start making up their own descriptions--a camel is huge humps, a grasshopper is jubilant jumps or an elephant is essentially enormous.
Johnson's illustrations are a pleasant and amusing accompaniment to language ideas that children can use for animal study, for play and as a springboard for their own creations.--Lillian Heil.

Marilyn Brown's Goodbye, Hello has real potential for a young readership. I found elements with which I find adolescent readers identifying. They are concerned in their own way with life, death, independence, love, old age, memories, family, right and wrong--all found here. Teresa (Trissy) McQueen, on her death-bed with loving children and grandchildren around, wanders in and out of awareness of the present and back to her childhood with parents, brothers and sisters, cousins.
The primary time in the past is the year Trissy turns five. She tries very hard to learn what's right from wrong and to accept punishment for the wrong, like cutting all the lovely apple blossoms off. She tries to understand love with all its conflicting pains and joys as she watches Til and Rye and her father's attempts, with love and authority, to do the best for his daughter in what he feels is an unwise love. Til is "too pretty for her own good... The pretty ones get plucked before they're ripe, like a green apple." Trissy copes with the deaths of her cousins, Katy from a fever and Pauline from a fall while getting birds' eggs for Katy. She tries to understand what happens when people get married, as the older
kids watching the sewing of lacy underthings howl with laughter and say, "Them little things won't keep Rye Hadley out." She tries to understand about being sealed up forever and where loved ones have gone when they die and when they'll be together again.

The present dying Teresa is concerned with who will be waiting for her as she says goodbye to her children and grandchildren and hello to parents, husband, aunts and uncles, cousins, brothers and sisters. She's very occupied with whether Rye and Til who went off to California and left the Mormon church will be there. The family has done their temple work. A figure she feels might be Rye has been coming in and out of her awareness and her hope grows. A peace and a letting-go come as the figure seems to say, "I said I wanted you to know it took us a long time, but finally we have come together with your mama and papa. I wanted to ask you if you forgave us. They weren't much of an example."

It's a very readable story with realities of its time, the end of the last century and into this in rural Utah, with many of the realities just as relevant right now. I think many readers will find enjoyable romance, authenticity and depth. The book may find a real place with younger readers. --Elizabeth Wahlquist.


It isn't easy to be the 'before' baby when the new one comes along, even if it is only a cousin, and Kate retreats to a safe point of objection from inside a large box when Aunt Betty brings Otto over. However, all ends well when Otto and Kate turn out to speak the same language and seek the refuge of the box together. Probably too small in format for large group read-aloud, the charming elephant family should be a great hit for one-on-one or recommended parent sharing. --Janet Francis.


This handy little book should be tucked in the glove compartment of every car sold--new or used! With clear, concise sentences and a minimum of technical (and undescriptive) jargon, Joanna Cole has created the Cat in the Hat of the automotive world, and the next generation of drivers should erect roadside shrines to her (and her able illustrator, Gail Gibbons) at each place they can repair a minor car ailment that used to leave the unwary at the mercy of the tow truck!
The book format is picture book, the text somewhat less brief than that--though far from unwieldy; the illustrations are bright, realistic, and well-labelled, with the more complicated general areas described, and then broken down into the simplest components and illustrated again. Ms. Cole calls a spade a spade and a carburetor a carburetor--there's no beating around the piston here--but when an adamantly unmechanical driver like me can (after some thirty years of driving) suddenly visualize the innards of a vehicle, an extraordinary book has been born!

Better have two copies of this--one for limited check-out. The other will always be gone!--Janet Francis.


The characters of *The Song of Pentecost* are both its strength and its weakness. The snake who wants his pond back, the complaining Uncle Mouse, the Cockle Snorkle bug, the fox, Pentecost, the cowardly frog, the owl--all of these are vividly brought to life. The difficulty is that these characters don't grow anywhere. The snake who won't stand up to his cousin still is being outdone at the end of the story, the uncle is still complaining, the Cockle Snorkle bug is still double-crossing, the owl has discovered he's not a killer, the cowardly frog is still cowardly, Pentecost is so perfect he dies and a new Pentecost begins, and the Fox who had gained a friend now understands that the new Pentecost is his friend.

This story supposedly goes on "unendingly" but what's the point of it if the owl is the only one who changes? And he didn't really change--he just discovered that he needn't feel guilty. If Corbett's characters were less powerful, the reader would expect less of them. Because they are so vivid and the suspense of getting to Lickey Top is so well developed, there grows within the reader a feeling that something grand and great will happen. This expectation gradually fades and then leaves, as no one shows any signs of learning more about himself and a wise young Pentecost replaces the one who was killed. If the good arrive on the scene of life already "practically perfect," and the stupid, silly and mean stay that way, what is the purpose for living? Corbett's characters are too vital to leave to that fate.--Lillian Heil.


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Camp Allegro again furnishes the ambience for a story of violence, inter-girl conflict, and all-around healthy camp fun. Corcoran writes a good juvenile mystery with excitement, enough character development to hold interest, and adequate action. As in any traditional murder mystery, the reader is not invited to become attached to the victim, and right does triumph... or more or less.
However, there seems to be a dichotomy in Corcoran's mysteries, possibly arising from her determination to rise above the Carolyn Keene genre—moral issues are oftentimes involved, though granted only a passing glance in the story and left unresolved. In this book, the murder is not solved, and the twin girls most likely responsible are disposed of with the comment of one of the heroines that "The twins themselves will know all their lives... I'm glad I'm not them." Since the twins have been portrayed as amorality incarnate throughout the book, this hardly seems to promise a deterrent to repeated crime. Nit-picking probably, but it left a bad taste in my mouth.—Janet Francis.

Given my druthers, I would spend the next three months on a deserted island. I hate the high-pressure sell, despise the expensive cheap junk, abominate a saint who is patron solely to the rich, and loathe the sentimentalisation of all that is sacred. Before you scream "Scrooge," understand that I love Christmas too intimately to be able to tolerate the merceritical.
With so few expectations, I opened to the title page of this book and found a beautifully embroidered seraph. But she is wearing glasses, and that stopped me. So I looked at all the pictures and when I came to the back dust jacket flap, there was the same face: it is the author as seraph, making a personal declaration of the greater glory of God.
Cusack says that all the people in the book are dear to me. Then the reader starts looking at every collage carefully, wondering how each person is related to the author. There is adoption in Of Child by Child; there are wise men, all stitched so carefully, and each accompanied by a carol transposed to a singable key and simplified to be more accessible. The only reminders of the non-personal aspects of Christmas are the faceless black silhouettes of the merry gentlemen in Merchantville (may God bless them).

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And by the time I have come to the child, the lamb, the lion, and the ox, even I am singing in anticipation:

Then peace was spread throughout the land.
The lion fed beside the lamb.
And with the kid
To pasture led
The spotted leopard fed.
In peace the calf and bear,
The wolf and lamb repose together there.

In that anticipation, thanks to Cusack, I shall keep Christmas—a warm, personal, sacred and private celebration.—Thom Hinckley.

There are three good reasons to republish a book first published in 1719. Charles Scribner's Sons have, throughout this century, published children's books with such care as to make them classics. And lately Scribner's has been reissuing these classics with such fidelity to the originals as to make them appear lavish.
The colophon says, 'The type face used in this edition of *Robinson Crusoe* is Linotype Scotch No. 1. Composition by Heritage Printers, Inc.' When I was at Heritage last summer, they were setting this book and had purchased wide spacebands for their Linotypes so that they could reset the book line-for-line identical to the original 1920 edition. While we would set the text much tighter today, one cannot help but admire the page layout and the overall effect of this careful typographical reconstruction. Yes, I did find "white rivers" (spaces between words that coincide from line to line and seem to flow distractingly down the page), but not while reading the book! Scotch is a fine face for an adventure story.
To this is added the nonpareil art of N.C. Wyeth, which has again been photographed and rescreened so as to give a range of colour and faithfulness to the original art that was not possible 64 years ago. I have examined the plates under a microscope and stand in awe.
Wyeth executed these paintings seven years after *Kidnapped*, nine years after *Treasure Island*, and to my eye brings greater maturity to these. Perhaps it is only that Wyeth subordinates his art to the story, but that in itself is unusual craftsmanship. In every painting we feel the brooding loneliness and introspection upon which the tale turns.
And then there is the tale itself. I last read *Robinson Crusoe* in fifth grade and was completely unprepared for the current impact of the book. One has to read *Swiss Family Robinson* back-to-back with *Crusoe* to appreciate how timely it is. E.A. Brayley Hodgetts, in the 1897 preface to his new translation of *Swiss Family Robinson*, says:

The woeful destruction of our birds has caused the organization of Audubon Societies all over the country; this has led to a study of the habits of the feathered songsters, and from that has risen a new interest in all branches of natural history; and the greatest and best work for popular reading on that subject is the charmingly told story of the *Swiss Family Robinson* that was written by the Swiss pastor (J.D. Wyss) to teach his own family natural history in pleasant stages.

But this is exactly what is most offensive in *Swiss Family Robinson*: the carnage. Surely birds have some other use than to be shot and stuffed for study! The colonisers who followed the Swiss family in the glib ecological transformation of this world need not be surprised at the ecological disasters that began to emerge within a century and a half.

A hundred years earlier, Crusoe lived in a world in which the earth and the life upon it was still sacred. *Robinson Crusoe* replaces what he uses (the word in that age was 'replenish'). He scarcely leaves a footprint on that island. And at every juncture he weighs the consequences of each choice. Here is an ecological tract for our times that gives me pause to think about rabbits in Australia, acid rain, Eucalyptus trees in southern California, and others. The planet Earth has become an island—as fragile, as friendly, and as fearsome as Robinson Crusoe's island. Here is as good a discussion of the man/nature/culture relationship as you will find.

When typography, art, and ideas come together as brilliantly as here, you should order a personal copy as well as an institutional copy. It is heartening to know that Scribner's will soon publish *Robin Hood* and that other treasures from the Wyeth legacy will be published if permission can be secured to photograph the original paintings. Reviewers see more new books than most people and perhaps buy fewer books, but I have purchased all of this Scribner series, which is how I can tell a star book.—Thom Hinckley.

At last--a respectable Harlequin romance! *The Wicked Marquis* will satisfy the same yearning for romantic worlds beyond reach, and will pass the same mundane hours with almost the same undemanding slush. The 'almost' is due to Ellingson's insertion of some authentic historical detail, including lengthy description of costume and conversational styles and manners. Occasionally a faint echo of Jane Austen's austere humor may be discovered in the practical Esme, the penniless niece who comes from her parents' death in Italy to find a home with her society relatives. Esme entertains no illusions about her place in regency life with no fortune, but determines to enjoy her brief exposure to the high life. With cheerful common sense, she saves her cousin Dru from a 'fate worse than death' and maneuvers Kit, another cousin, out of a hateful arranged alliance and into his true love's arms. Of course, her own romance results from her sterling character and uncommon beauty, with a satisfactory denouement. This one's for historical novel buffs in the making.--Janet Francis.


When Bastian Balthazar Bux blunders into the bookshop, sees the copy of *The Neverending Story* bound in copper-coloured silk, steals it, hides in the school attic, starts to read the book, finds that he is in the story, that he must save Fantastica, that he must do this by giving the Child-like Empress a new name--well, we are as hooked on *The Neverending Story* as Bastian is in the lonely attic. But it turns out that the real trick is to get back out of Fantastica; and it is critical for Bastian to bring certain things back to our world.

Even in poor translation, this is a compelling book, rich in symbolic meanings. Underlying all of this is a fantasy geography richer than any other: lush rainforests by night and burning desert by day, towns that do not have fixed places, and the fearful advance of timespatial 'nothingness' all make the name of Fantastica especially deserved.

Ende confronts us with many of life's paradoxes and any of these tales is worth reading, but it is the end that makes this book unforgettable; what happens to Bastian when he finally returns to our world makes the whole point of the story.--Thom Hinckley.

Many adults will remember with fondness the Moffat books by Eleanor Estes. These books captured small town life in America in such a truthful way that many children took them as their own. What a joy it is to see that Estes, now in her 80's, is still writing. In *The Moffat Museum* she resolves the lives of the memorable characters she first created in *The Moffats.* She also introduces a new generation of children with her work.

To read *The Moffat Museum* is to feel very nostalgic. Estes creates nostalgia right from the start as the Moffat children, Jane, Joey and Rufus, decide to create a museum where they can display the things that have been most precious to them. Estes includes a lot of humor along the way as the children all experience turning points in their lives. Joey is now old enough to work, and Sylvie, the oldest Moffat, is getting married. There is a sense of "this is the way it really was" in the book, and that is a great plus.

Children who read this book will get a good idea of what it may have been like in their parents' grandparents' day. It's nice to know that Estes's style hasn't changed in all these years.—Tim Wadham.


There are still many things we do not know about Pocahontas, but Jean Fritz, using traditions of the Indian culture, makes plausible the story of Pocahontas's rescue of a strange white man 16 years her senior. Carefully worded so that the reader knows which are researched facts and which are "maybes," Fritz has brought to life the girl caught between two cultures who grew to a troubled womanhood and died in England at the age of twenty-one. This book will help the young reader to see how complex the relationships between white man and Indian were, and objectively describes some of the wrongs the Indians suffered at the hands of the settlers from across the ocean.—Lillian Heil.


Why did the dog leave the animals in the "deep dark woods" and become man's best friend? According to Gackenbach, it was a matter of pride. The animals in the woods laughed at his explanations of a plate, a teakettle and a boot. Gackenbach's animals really couldn't help it. How could they believe that anyone needed
something to eat on (a plate) or that anyone would want water heated (in a kettle)? But what really caused hysterics was the idea that anyone would wear something on his feet (boots). With that laughter ringing in his ears, the dog had to leave the "deep dark woods."

Gackenbach's illustrations are as hilarious as the dialogue and make this view of man through the eyes of animals an amusing explanation of the dog's change of allegiance.--Lillian Heil.

"This room is almost completely white. The curtains and the bedspread are blue, the linoleum is brown, but apart from that, everything is white..." And so it is with Other Echoes, by Adele Geras. She tells her story in bold, solid colors. There is nothing wrong in this, and yet we miss the subtleties that a little color-mixing might have given the story.

Flora sits in a sanitorium, remembering. Her memories center around her childhood when she lived in Borneo with her family. While in Borneo she had to learn to get along with the kids at school, and she also had to learn how to face ghosts--the ghosts in the mansion up on the hill, and more importantly, the ghosts within herself.

Geras tells this story, which is partially autobiographical, in a choppy conglomeration of memories. Much of the writing is quite artistic, yet the magic of childhood is lost to us. Perhaps part of the problem lies in the story's frame: Flora is writing the memories of her childhood as she sits in a sanitorium. We don't know how she got there, and at the end Geras fails to pick up what happened to Flora. We are left with her memories, but the manner in which they affect her is unclear.--Tim Wadham.

Tom Cook (1738-1827) is a historical character who, like Robin Hood, stole from the rich and gave to the poor, earning the title of The Leveller. When he was only three years old, Tom was desperately ill with a fever. When he recovered miraculously, it was rumored that his mother pledged his soul to the Devil to spare his young life. Because of this belief, the superstitious town folk shunned Tom. But he did not let that bother him.

In her novel the author presents the age-old battle between good and evil with a nice blend of reality and fantasy. Beelzebub
watches for his chance to snatch Tom's soul, but Tom reads the Bible and does good deeds--determined to thwart the devil.

Chapters are short and episodic--a nice combination for a read-aloud book. Children should enjoy Tom's adventures and find him a lovable character. They should also get a nice feel for the time (1779) and the place (Westborough, Massachusetts).--Janice Card.


Hopkins has collected twenty very nice poems about cities--very large ones like New York and Chicago. Children and adults who've not lived in a metropolis may find it difficult to visualize the intensity and bustle produced when millions of people are all trying to get to the same place at the same time. They may miss the irony of Merriam's "A Lazy Thought" and her final statement that "It takes a lot of slow to grow." They will not hear a city roar in their memory as they read "A Time for Building" or "Catching Quiet" but country-born adults and first graders can understand why rain is "sidewalk measles" and umbrellas are giant flowers blossoming on city streets. The photographs for each poem will help all readers to understand the feelings that city dwellers experience amid the "stones" that make up large cities. But missing from this collection are poems about flower markets, the mingling of thousands of smells, green grocers, playgrounds, and museums--all of which would be causes for delight and curiosity for city children. The emphasis seems to be a bit toward the negative and, at least for happy youngsters, it is doubtful that they would view the city with quite such a melancholy eye.

--Lillian Heil.


Horwitz captures the frantic pace of big-city food suppliers who work all night to transport green produce, fish, meat, fruits, bread and flowers to grace the tables that feed New York City. Although the emphasis is on the huge wholesale markets that are gathering points for retail stores, information is also included about planes, ships, trucks and trains which bring food from all over the world to central distribution places for this metropolis. Black-and-white photographs show the workers in action, and the narrative personalizes their service to a city with phrases like "In a few hours they'll wake up to face another day in the big city--and they'll be hungry."

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This book shows in very dramatic fashion how dependent the big city is on the workers who serve it, and could be used with many grade levels to show the highly specialized way that services to a city are interwoven.--Lillian Heil.


Those who have read Hunter's Sound of Chariots will recall that Bridie McShane was the stormy, determined heroine who wanted to become a writer. Hold on to Love continues her story into young womanhood as her singleness of purpose threatens to push out love altogether. Set in the unsettled days before and during World War II, this story captures the intensity of Bridie and her dawning realization that writing and love for someone else are not mutually exclusive.

For some modern readers the romance may sound old-fashioned and naive because Peter accepts the code that applies to "nice girls"--that courtship had to lead to marriage--or to nothing at all! This aspect is necessary in creating the feeling of the times in 1939-1940; Bunty's unwanted pregnancy spells out the social consequences of breaking the code for nice girls. (Other readers may find the book a welcome change to today's liberal standards.)

The lack of family support given to Bridie's ambitions and the well-drawn characters in Bridie's world provide dramatic opposition to her intense desire to write. Readers will finish the story feeling they've won a triumph along with this stubborn Scottish teenager.--Lillian Heil.


David Kherdian wrote the Newbery Honor Book The Road From Home, and Nonny Hogrogian is the Caldecott Award winning artist of the classic One Fine Day. Together this husband-and-wife team create a truly memorable picture book.

"Yesterday a daisy died, but right now a whole field is blooming." The theme of this book is that children should appreciate what they have "right now," and it is beautifully portrayed in both the pictures and the art. On one side of the page is a black-and-white drawing depicting the past or the future. On the other side of the page is a color illustration of "right now."

The book avoids the peril of didacticism by using examples which are very familiar to children: "Last night my brother hit me." "Tomorrow I'm going to the Zoo." Children should recognize their own experiences in this gorgeous little book.--Tim Wadham.

King-Smith is an English author (lives near Bristol) who creates marvelous animal characters that are really people. Their animal traits add interesting dimensions to their personalities. There is the giant baby mouse (fed on Porker Pills for weight gain) who squeaks "Nasty" at cats or "Bite You" and more frequently roars "More!" and "Nice" for the food he always craves. His father Marcus Aurelius naturally gives his huge son the Latin Name Magnus and just as naturally is prone to long, rambling discourses on everything. His country mother, Madeline, is a practical parent who loves her giant son no matter what and who frequently has to translate the rambling speeches of her husband; for example when he gives his baby son a thank-you speech that uses so many euphemisms (death is the pale cold state that makes equal the high mouse and the low) that his offspring has no idea what he is saying.

Readers will be caught up by the family adventures and the unlikely human champion who saves all their lives. P.S. If you like King-Smith, try his That Pigs Might Fly, too.—Lillian Heil.


Bedrick Books are issuing a series of Kipling's Just So stories, garnished with profuse illustrations the original editions did not have. The stories are not edited and bear the unmistakable tongue-in-cheek pedantry of Kipling's folklore.

The Crab That Played With the Sea accounts for the crab's peculiar accommodation to both sand and sea, and his yearly loss of shell as well as the surging of the tide. It is illustrated by Michael Foreman with clear, bright pictures, though not up to his usual standard of lively humor.

The Butterfly That Stamped explores the wisdom of Solomon who will not control the quarreling of his multitudinous wives with his extraordinary magic because it would be showing off, but uses it to assist a butterfly to calm his fractious wife. Solomon's wise consort, Queen of Sheba, makes use of the favor to remedy Solomon's own problem. The story is illustrated by Alan Baker, but the illustrations fall short of the image with collage-like pictures in which the figures have photographic intensity and the backgrounds seem disconnected. Perhaps the intent was to reproduce the feeling of ancient plates, but the effect is more like 1920 magazines.
The books are small for picturebooks, and since they are Kipling's text, are not easy reading. At present the series includes the above and two others: The Beginning of the Armadilloes (illustrated by Charles Keeping) and The Cat That Walked By Himself (illustrations by William Stobbs).--Janet Francis.


You'll enjoy the hens in Chicken Tricks who much prefer playing to laying eggs, and you'll wonder how long the patient farmer will put up with such nonsense. Lloyd takes the reader, in rhyme, through a year of creative egg making and creative threats by the frustrated farmer until in the Christmas season everyone gets a pleasant and appropriate surprise. Farmers may not recognize chickens like these but readers will laugh at them.--Lillian Heil.


By now, Lois Lowry's Anastasia books should have a tremendous following. Her truthful and funny insights into childhood have delighted children who can see that Anastasia's dilemmas mirror their own. This new entry in the series shows that Lowry still has some very biting insight.

In this one Anastasia tries to do a science project--she will observe the mating habits of gerbils. Meanwhile she gets the idea that she is terribly maladjusted and needs to see a psychiatrist. Well, the local psychiatrist is unavailable; he died while sitting in a chair listening to a patient. The patient went on talking for an hour without realizing that his doctor had passed to the other side. ("Ultimo grosso," says Anastasia.) So Anastasia does the next best thing, she gets a plaster bust of Sigmund Freud, and pours out her problems to him. All of this makes for unencumbered hilarity as the gerbils escape from their cage and Freud gets attacked by a juvenile graffitti artist.

Watch for the dialogue of the typical suburban mother who brings over a child who turns out to be a monster. It's one of the most amusing things in all of the four books.

In a few places Lowry shows the strain of searching for ideas, but for the most part, this should please those who couldn't wait for more of Anastasia's adventures.--Tim Wadham.

Haunted by the predictions of an old hill woman and isolated in a Mississippi hill home when her Father begins a new job as a travelling salesman, Ellen Stump idealizes the composed, self-confident young woman newscaster, Maureen Sinclair, whom she sees on the "News at Noon" each day. When a young man who claims to be caring for his insane wife comes asking for food and work, Ellen's fears almost cause her to turn him away, but before the book ends, Ellen has become a newsworthy heroine herself, and has learned that things may not be what they seem. Naylor's depiction of the rural qualities of the area and its people is deft but unobtrusive; Ellen herself is clear and real, as is Granny Bo, and even the retrospective glimpses of Ellen's mother (dead for some time) flesh out a believable character. With a kidnapping and a fire, the book has plenty of action to hold interest and a satisfying but relatively uncontrived conclusion.--Janet Francis.


Twelve isn't exactly the easiest age to be--especially if you have an old-fashioned name like Lillian Iris Pinkerton and you're at least three inches taller than anybody else in the seventh grade. Thirteen just had to be better--there was no way but to go up. (Oh no, not that!)

On her thirteenth birthday Lillian made just three wishes, but they were big ones (no, not big--important!). She wished first that her mother would take her seriously when she asked her for a bra, second that she would get to dance with a boy, and finally (Oh, heart, stand still!) that she would make the Junior High Pom Squad.

Most (How many middle graders do you know who are not too tall, too short, too fat, too skinny, too smart, too dumb, too fast, too slow, etc., etc?) preteens will agonize along with Lillian as she suffers disappointments, and will relish her victories--most of which are over herself. It's called growing up.

A simple but perceptive story of every child.--Afton Miner.


If you want to get attention, Norman Gates discovers that camping on the roof of the high school with the home ec teacher will do it. Norman Middal Gates had always been the average, unnoticed, cause-no-trouble kind of middle schooler until the year his father went
mountain climbing and the worried Norman decided to fight the school board's decision to close Fortuna Middle School and bus the students to neighboring schools. Concerned parents were making no progress and student projects began to peter out because the school board seemed to have its mind made up. So Norman started to hatch his creative ideas, culminating with the orange tent atop the school which rallied the community, brought a helicopter, and thus revived the interest of the school board.

Ruckman proves no one is average as she brings Norman to life with his running commentary on what he's thinking, feeling and doing:

"Steve spit on the sidewalk. That's the way he gets up his courage. I tried to but I didn't have enough saliva."

Adelsack, the down-to-earth home ec teacher, is the other member of the team to keep Fortuna's fight for survival alive. Delivering a pep talk as she demonstrates fudge-making, Adelsack makes sure she has her class's attention: "Using a hook shot, Adelsack chucked a square of margarine into the pan (from an impressive distance). Somebody cheered." Adelsack ends the candy-making with a roaring call to action. "Timidity is standing around waiting for those buses to arrive. Sure enough, they'll arrive if everyone expects them to. If I were you kids or your parents, I'd be stirring up more than fudge around here!"

Adelsack is delightful--a real 60-year-old superwoman. With Norman, she makes a great combination for saving schools.--Lillian Heil.


An ambitious mother, a lazy father, a no-talent former infant prodigy and Sam, the Cinderella son, make up the mainstream family whose livelihood depends on restoring Humphrey's dwindling concert dates. When determined Mama Bridget comes up with a scheme to let Humphrey "communicate" with the spirit of Lazlo Magyar, famous deceased gypsy musician, and under his influence create additional works, Sam finds himself the scapegoat as his own heretofore ignored musical talent is put to use composing. (Mama may ignore him, but she doesn't miss a thing.) The action is as swift as the acclaim Humphrey garners with "his" ghostly music. Did Lazlo really share his head and hands? Or did the two boys simply find their own hidden strengths along with their route of escape and their new (but ancient) friend, Lazlo's son? It's worth reading to find out.--Janet Francis.

Smith's book is warm and evocative. His portrayal of people is memorable, the dining car scene and the ride in the cab being especially delightful. But he is not accurate. Of the two domes on top of the boiler, only one holds sand; the rear one is actually the steam dome where the throttle valve is. Some of his boilers sit much too high, with inordinately long boiler braces. Buffalo Bill's 'Wild West' Indians, 'a stray easy-going Mexican,' and cowboys all at one 'water tank station' seem an undue compression of Western geography, especially since the children's destination seems to be Los Angeles. Children deserve accurate books.

Readers will be interested in unraveling what Uncle Eben's relationship is to Bob and Betty's family.--Thom Hinckley.


Ripple, her mother and Uncle Kane are torn from their forest home by giants. They are put into a glass prison filled with plants, where they meet other prisoners--Pan, Crick and Lissa. Together the six brave Micarus people escape and cleverly use a giant as their transportation into a new forest home.

Almost everyone enjoys stories about tiny people like Thumbelina and Tom Thumb. **Moth-Kin Magic** has an involving story even if the characters are not completely engaging. The book is short, so there was not much time taken for strong character development. Still, each character is consistent and their tiny world inside the giant world we know stirs the imagination.

This is a good tale for children from kindergarten through third grade, and it could serve as a read-aloud. But if the children prefer to read it for themselves, they will discover how much Michele Chessare's thirteen black-and-white illustrations enhance the story.--Janice Card.


"Ever since my mother's death, the sea had assumed a malevolence for me." In **The Two Worlds of Coral Harper,** Coral tries to resolve the pain and anger she has felt since her mothers death. Her father is a fisherman and her mother was killed by the sea, and the sea becomes the predominant force in this novel.
The two worlds spoken of in the title refer to the world of Coral's childhood memories, and the world right now. Coral has to leave her childhood home and travel to the house of an aunt. As she rides the bus she remembers how it was before her mother died. Tarlton shifts the story effortlessly back and forth between past and present, and this is one of the strong points of the novel.

Coral is an intriguing heroine. She wants to be a concert pianist and she has the talent and the will power to do it. Tarlton should be commended for creating a character that transcends teenage stereotypes.

Gillian Leigh Tarlton is a New Zealander and this is an added plus for the book. The story is set in New Zealand, a country that not too many children are very familiar with. This book gives them a chance to learn of the culture of another country in a very entertaining fashion.—Tim Wadham.


Call the Darkness Down (a first novel by Dixie Tenny, who did attend college in Carmarthen, Wales) takes place in the present in a small college in Carmarthen where a young American girl from the mid-west has won a year's scholarship.

The story started long before that, though. Morfa's mother and aunt, Gwenfair and Angharad, had grown up in Wales but left rather abruptly as young women. They obviously love Wales and tell children wonderful stories from their girlhood, but say nothing about the time they left or about their grandparents. Just before Morfa leaves for Wales, she talks with her cousin Sheena and her brother Ethan and they all think she should try to discover the mystery.

In Carmarthen Morfa quickly makes friends with Laney from America, and her Welsh boyfriend, Steffan; her own Welsh roommate, Aranwen, and her boyfriend, and Gareth, a Nationalist. Rhys is most sensitive and willing to believe what happens.

Laney helps her hunt for her grandparents. Morfa and Gareth experience almost being hit by a car and a witch horse of the hills. Fog appears and a strange dark man attempts to talk to Morfa. A cabbie appears unexpectedly and claims to have been sent for her and delivers an old newspaper which tells of her grandfather's death and that her grandmother is in an institution. Finally a girlhood friend of her mother and aunt, who has heard she is inquiring after her grandparents, comes to her and fills in the story.
At the end of the novel Morfa's friends are participating in a ritual to give her strength to confront the force trying to destroy her, to help her call the darkness down. The strange dark man takes his place on the point of one of the five stars. "Darkness is not evil or good. Dark is the symbol of intuition, of all that can be known without knowledge. It is the symbol of feelings, of emotions, of what you know deep down is true, though you have no way of proving it. Light is the symbol of learning, of reason, of logically correct choices. Both can be bad and both can be good. It depends on what is being done with it and who is doing it."

It is a compelling story with characters I liked getting to know. And I feel, at the end with Morfa, that "the mystery and magic of what had happened would fade until it came to rest at the back of my mind, hovering between reality and fantasy."--Elizabeth Wahlquist.


This may be one of the finest nonfiction books for teens to be published in the last couple of decades. Through diaries and interviews, Vinke tells the story of Sophie Scholl, a young German girl who actively opposed Hitler through membership in an underground group known as The White Rose.

Sophie was an incredible person, with a deep sense of the beauty of nature. The quotations from her diary in the book are extremely beautiful and insightful.

One of the best things about this book is that the reader is left to make his own conclusions about the worth of The White Rose, and the meaning of Sophie's sacrifice. At the age of 21 she was beheaded by the Nazis, along with her brother, both accused of being traitors.

This book won the top German young adult book prize, and with good reason. It should be required reading; it is very moving and every peace-loving human being should know about this remarkable young lady.--Tim Wadham.


Something new from Cynthia Voight is always welcome, and Building Blocks, her latest effort, has a terrific premise. Brann Connell thinks his father has missed the boat in life. Then, via some building blocks, Brann is transported to his father's boyhood town and meets his father, except his father is now younger than he is!
Brann, of course, learns some important lessons from this experience and he learns to appreciate his father. There is much good in this book, and the moral certainly can't be faulted. Children should learn to appreciate their parents more fully. This book's only faults are that at times the plot drags and we find the whole affair to be rather blah. The idea is good, but what we are lacking is a little excitement. Cynthia Voight is still doing some of the best writing in children's literature today. From someone of her caliber, however, Building Blocks seems like a minor effort. The fact that she wrote it does make it worth mention. We should look forward to what she has in store for us next.--Tim Wadham.


A Solitary Blue is very much of the same ilk as the author's Newbery Award winning Dicey's Song. In fact, Dicey herself appears in this book. It is not a sequel to Dicey's Song, but rather a companion piece. Readers may remember the character of Jeff, the boy that played the guitar for Dicey on the wall of the kindergarten playground after school. A Solitary Blue is Jeff's story, and a fascinating one at that.

Jeff's mother, Melody, leaves him and his father for greener pastures. The novel recounts his struggles to deal with this, especially when he learns the superficial nature of the love that Melody had for him. Jeff becomes like the solitary blue heron of the title, drawing strength from his solitude.

This is a powerful novel, full of wonderful images. When Jeff's father describes how it was for him when he first met Melody he says that she filled him with sunshine. Everything about this novel works; the symbolism is apt, and the language appropriate for the story. It is also notable for the fact that it does not show the Women's Liberation Movement in a favorable light. It's refreshing to see both sides of the argument justly and sensitively portrayed. A Solitary Blue should be highly recommended.--Tim Wadham.


Jane Yolen's treatment of fantastic subjects is varied and imaginative, but the venture into science fiction...
represented by the Pit Dragons series is not up to her usual standard. The requisite out-world is there and the new race, removed from their contact with earth; there is also the intra-planet conflict developing (in this case, a revolution), and the alter-culture (based in these books on a dragon cultivation) is carefully detailed. Perhaps the trouble lies there: the wealth of detail and the repetition that the author uses to depict character weigh down the first half of this book (the second in the series) almost to boredom. When the action finally begins (page 170 or so), it moves very quickly and there are some graphically depicted scenes of terror and wonder, albeit almost too late!

Jakkin, the young dragon master and hero, identifies with his own special dragon, Heart's Blood, and finds they can communicate on a telepathic, visual level. When the dragon sacrifices herself to save Jakkin and Akki (the girl he has loved forever and has jeopardized his own freedom to save), the young people are forced to spend a period of time inside the dragon's carcass, and come out transmuted into something between human and dragon, and the book awkwardly ends with a thinly veiled introduction to the next volume.

There are some interesting ideas portrayed here: "Dark After," the period of time corresponding to night but so cold that life cannot be sustained; pit fighting with dragons (somehow my own romantic concept of their grandeur is offended here... alas, for one more illusion); "baggeries" where girls serve physical and medical needs and are acceptable but not respectable to others. Nonetheless, for dragon stories McCaffrey does it better, and a series book that cannot stand alone lacks integrity.--Janet Francis.


Ed Young has vividly brought to life the tale of the greedy dog who lost his bone when he tried to grab the bone's reflection in a pond.

Told without words, the story takes our dog hero from dreaming of a tasty morsel to waking up to do something about the tantalizing smell wafting from the nearby garbage can. After dumping everything out, as only dogs can do, he marches off past the pond with his prize. The pond is his undoing, and after getting thoroughly wet, he exits, leaving the bone at the bottom of the pond.

The soft pencil sketches capture both movement and facial expressions of the frustrated dog so that the viewer is both laughing and feeling sorry for the dog and for the human foibles he represents.--Lillian Heil.