



Editorial ? January 1993

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News and comment from the Editor.

Every so often I'll receive a note or phone-call from one of our regular contributors. 'Have you thought of running a piece on?' comes the tentative question. Straightaway, I'm grinning. Experience has taught me that

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a) The person concerned is likely to be undergoing an acute case of writer's itch.

b) Good copy is in the offing.

Of course, sometimes a little persuasion is involved. **BfK** contributors are a modest lot on the whole and, even when transparently right for a particular article, may need convincing that there's none who could do it better. Almost certainly there won't be since the best person to scratch an itch tends to be the person suffering from it.

There are two such articles in this New Year issue of **BfK**. The first is by Nick Tucker who, in his joint role of psychologist and literary critic, was intrigued by a television discussion of Berlie Doherty's Carnegie Medal winning novel **Dear Nobody**. Does the book give a rounded picture of teenage pregnancy and what it entails? *Should* it? For Nick's deliberation on both issues see pages 4 and 5. His answer, surely the only possible response for all but the closed-minded, is that any shortcomings **Dear Nobody** may display in its coverage of the available options - it is, after all, a novel not a Compendium of Moral Hygiene - are best taken care of by other books written from a different viewpoint. No doubt Berlie Doherty herself came to the same conclusion.

Our second unsolicited piece comes from a member of the reviewing team, David Bennett. What about myths and legends in the secondary classroom, he asked. Would we be interested in an account of some work currently going on at his school linked with the books that initiated it? Readers who are familiar with David's occasional chalk-face commentaries, not to mention his reviewing and authorgraphs (see **BfK** 77, Nov '92) will know what to expect from pages 20-21.

As a postscript to his piece, David asked if I'd seen the newly-issued 'Books at Key Stage 3 For Use In The Test Of Prior Reading At Level 3 and 4'. I had to admit I hadn't, **BfK** not being on J Patten's mailing list - or his Christmas card list come to that. Straightaway David sent me a copy along with some quick impressions of his own written so close to the end of terms, he says, 'I'm too shattered to have deep thoughts.' Fragmentary or not, his observations and queries no doubt represent the stuff of much English Department discussion throughout the land - or would, if the Christmas break hadn't intervened. Am I alone in being uneasy about the timing here? And about the routinisation of these restricted reading-lists generally at earlier key stages? Now there's an itch worth scratching ...

A remark of David's that struck a particular chord concerns an absence of non-fiction from the KS3 lists. Why not a diary, he asks, or autobiography? Why not, indeed. Look no further than page 15 for a special review of a new series of

autobiographies for teenagers - a review, I may say, which led to a major confrontation in the Powling household where the Adele Geras Fan Club has long had a lobbyist-in-residence tirelessly pushing the case for an AG Autobiograph. Naturally, the disinterested responsibilities of high office being what they are, The Editorial line was 'in due course'. Well, the course became due ... a splendid opportunity being provided by **Yesterday**, Adele's contribution to the aforementioned series (see our front cover) along with the bright idea that four actual teenagers should look at the individual titles. 'Wonderful!' said the L-in-R. 'Can I review Adele's?' The word Nepotism was much mentioned, believe me. So was the word Divorce ('Kids can do that now, Dad'). Eventually I was forced to summon all my steely resolve. Much good did it do me. Still, as the committed party was not slow to point out, it's nice to be able to offer some home-grown evidence of passionate readership. So thanks a bunch, Ellie - also Helen, Jon and Tim who covered the rest of the series with such no-holds-barred freshness.

The same could be said of all our reviewers, I hope - from guest critics like Naomi Lewis on the back page to our regular team throughout, including on page 11, a new column assessing the latest series-titles which we intend to run in alternate issues from now on. The combination of freshness and experience is difficult to sustain, Heaven knows, but crucial if we're to offer the best possible service to our readers and the youngsters who depend on them. Teachers have the same problem. How can even the most dedicated communicate their enthusiasm for books and their belief in the value of reading in these days of diminishing resources and the ringbinder revolution? On page 22 Henrietta Branford's Writer Reply spells out why she, both as writer and parent, considers their contribution to be vital. The future of literacy, and a lot more besides, depends on it.

Enjoy the issue!

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