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Graham Atherton

Paul Carter

Colin Chalmers

Marion Flett

Lindsay Lewis

Julia Mason

Mark Ogle

Sheila Ramsay

Malcolm Shaffer

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Our promised feature on Multiple Births is held over. Honorah Perry, who's been researching this, is ill. Get well soon, Hon.

CONNECTIONS

Bring on the Dingbats!

TELEVISION

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the imminent financial realities facing all independent television companies, Scottish Television launched their new game show for children in late February.

The rights for **The Fun House** have been bought up by STV from America, and a new production team were busy for months preparing it for a networked British audience. Selection of participants has involved travelling round schools to pick teams of two children to take part in exciting games. 8000 gallons of glop, and 10000 balloons are part of the recipe of delight.

Producer Elizabeth Partykka told **Scottish Child** she'd made great efforts to consult children about their programme likes, including appeals to go to the Video Box.

It's certainly not been difficult for STV to improve on their children's programme output. The best thing that can be said for their old stalwart, the **Glen Michael Cartoon Cavalcade** is that it has stood the test of time. But Glen Michael can come across as so condescending to the younger viewer. The double-screen technique of appearing to talk to his double, does give just a hint of self-importance too. The question has to be asked though, when the emphasis in so much of children's

programming seems to be on entertainment, Do we really need extravaganzas like **The Fun House**?

Fun House presenter, ex-pop star, Pat Sharp has his work cut out just getting through each programme. Quick fire quizzes, gooey games, everything done on the run to loud music and audience cheers. Zap, zap, zap!

But he's got another harder task to contend with. A recent **Sunday Times** piece dismissed other such programmes in the genre as being of "dingbat intellect". And their presenters? - "grinning gel-haired jackanapes in dungarees." That's quite a stereotype to live down. Or live up to!

Programme makers will say

that these are the kinds of programmes that children say they want. At a recent meeting of the British Psychological Society the consensus was that children are a lot more critical than their elders assume.

It does seem important to have a wise and varied choice of programming, so that children have the opportunity to develop their own tastes along with their critical faculties. The BBC's hugely successful **Chronicles of Narnia** serialization last year represents the kind of quality and imagination to balance the game shows. But of course, in the short term, quality costs. ■

Honorah Perry



FUN! FUN! FUN!

Scottish Television



Children Talking

Douglas Carnegie/Radio Times

Now You're Talking!

RADIO

BBC Radio Scotland have just finished, at the end of March, their **Children Talking** series. Produced from their Aberdeen studios, the children doing their microphone bit have spanned the length and breadth of Scotland. From Shetland to the Borders, they've all fairly blethered away these last months.

Subjects have ranged far and wide. School, mums, dads, and marriage are among the old chestnuts. One Shetlander dismissed the Royalty as 'a bunch of show-offs' and that seemed to gain the approval of the peer group. A distaste for standing out from the crowd that was age related – or culture specific? The programme

on fear drew out the articulation of intimacy.

'When I'm frightened,' said one little voice, 'I like to cuddle my teddies.'

Scots are supposed in certain traditions to be inarticulate, and when they get near a formal occasion like a radio discussion, it is thought we usually become tongue-tied. The series used groups of twenty children of primary school age – but presenter Edi Stark found no evidence to support the stereotype of reticence. 'The contrary, in fact,' she told **Scottish Child**. 'It makes you wonder what happens between primary school and adulthood.'

Much of the success of the series has to go down to the unhurried and patient listening that

seemed evident in the presentational style.

"You have to be able to take time to listen," Edi Stark said. "And it's so important to accept what they're saying. My ground-rules are never to interrupt, and never to make negative value judgements."

Laudable aims. In the St. Valentine's Day discussion on love, Stark didn't quite manage that. She managed instead to somewhat freeze the bairns of Alford, Aberdeenshire, who sounded very much loved, by lapsing in the introduction into the tired old evaluative: 'I can see some of you are blushing already!'

But for the most part, Edi Stark was highly successful at engaging the children and winning their

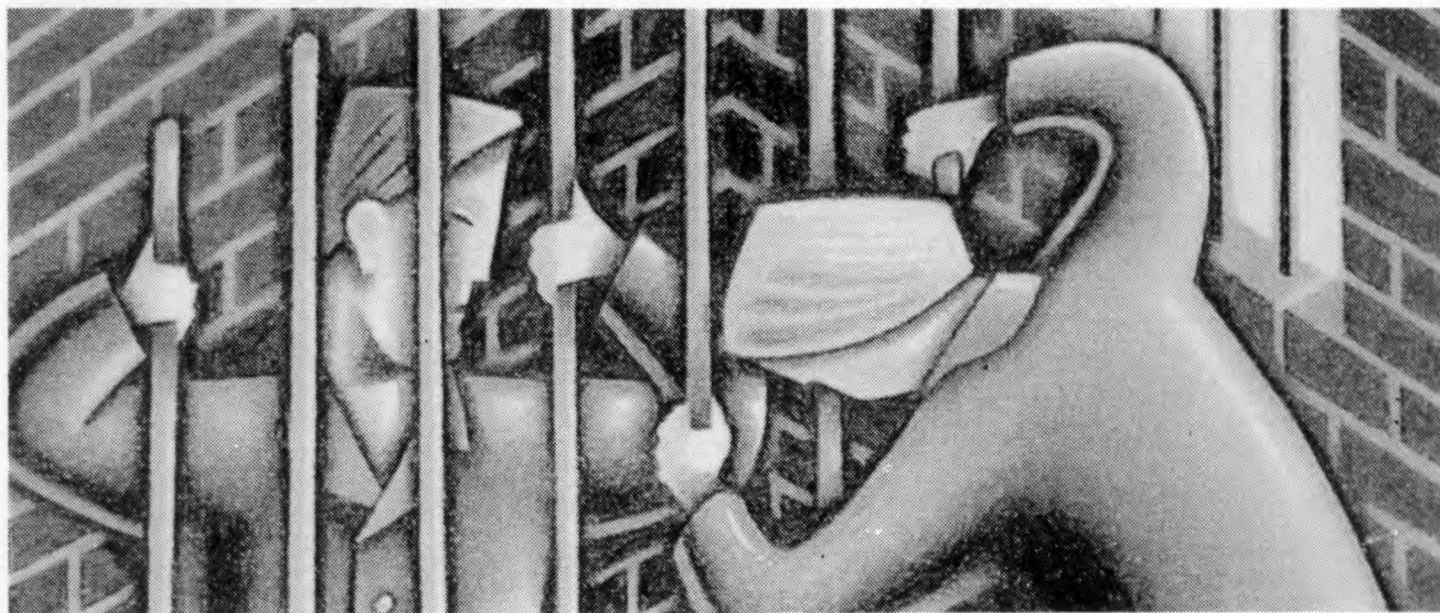
trust.

"What do you do when you are alone and frightened or anxious about something?" she asked in the discussion about fear. One quieter little voice came in after a minute of robust group discussion. 'When I'm frightened,' it said with a young but serious intonation, "I usually like to suck my thumb."

"You like to suck your thumb when you're frightened?" the presenter's voice came back searchingly. You could almost visualise a little head shaking a silent and serious assent, as Edi Stark's voice warmly confirmed this all too human response to stress: "I can understand that."

The BBC say they are planning a further series.

Derek Rodger



Seen But Not Heard

PRISONS

Cindy, 8 years old, stands watching at the window. "When's daddy coming home?"

No reply from mother.

"Why hasn't daddy come home?"

Still no answer.

The voice rises higher. "Mummy why hasn't daddy come home? Is he all right? What's happened mummy? Where's daddy?"

And then she's told. "He's not

coming home, don't you understand?" Screaming now. "Just shut up, will you. Shut up!"

When Cindy's father is jailed no one wanted to tell her. According to a recent book, *Children of Imprisoned Fathers* you can multiply Cindy by 100,000 every year. Its author, Roger Shaw conducted a survey in Leicester Prison of 415 men, all of whom were serving sentences of less than six months. The number of children affected by the imprisonment of this group was estimated at around 600.

As well as his investigations in-

side the prison, his study is based on discussions with prisoners' wives. He also took soundings among the various professional groups involved.

In the traditions of academic research, Roger Shaw is at pains to be even-handed in his study of the treatment of the children of imprisoned fathers. It is clear he has some difficulty in concealing his outrage at what the criminal justice system, prisons' administration, and the welfare services put prisoners' families through. Explosions of grief, anger and

incredulity are of course not confined to the children.

He makes some sober, well-intentioned suggestions about practical schemes of home support for families, and for professionals and others learning to talk to children about what has happened. England & Wales have their Roger Shaw. Now who will do the same for Scotland? ■

Rosemary Milne

Children of Imprisoned Fathers: Roger Shaw. Published by Hodder & Stoughton £3.95.

Helping Each Other

AIDS CHILDREN

Dr. Jacqueline Mok, working in community child health with Lothian Health Board, is the only one of her kind. She is the only paediatrician in Scotland working in the area of the study and treatment of HIV positive and HIV infected children.

She agreed to talk to *Scottish Child* rather than write herself. "I seem to have written everywhere," she explained. She wanted though, to correct a few misconceptions.

"There are no more than a handful of AIDS babies in Lothian. In the UK, there are about 20 cases of AIDS in children under 14." So the treatment side of her work is quite small. The problem is more potential than actual.

"In Edinburgh at least 50% of intravenous drug users are infected with HIV. A third are

women, and this means that children are being born who are HIV positive. This is a group that no one knows anything about. We need to know the outlook for children who lose their mothers' antibodies and remain well. But for the time being these are normal healthy children."

Her work with such babies and young children is therefore taken up with monitoring and research. Educating the public and other professionals about the effects of the AIDS virus on children and their casual contacts is also a major part of her job.

One effect of public attitudes and fears has been her own casting in the role of 'the AIDS doctor'. She throws her eyes heavenwards at the mention of a recent *Scotsman* newspaper profile.

"Work arising from HIV in children takes up about half my

working week. The rest of the time I am a conventional community health doctor. Given the fears that exist, it could become a handicap if my work with children were to be seen as always AIDS related - it's Dr. Mok, so it must be AIDS, sort of thing."

She is taken up with getting 'high risk' kids into playgroups and nurseries. She finds that responses even from professionals is mixed. Parents often find themselves adopting a position of not saying, because of a fear of rejection. It's the irrational public fears about contagion that Jacqueline Mok feels require challenge.

"Don't think of the handful of AIDS babies," she says. "Don't even think of the potentially infected - they're actually enjoying normal healthy lives. Their major problem is public attitudes.

"But do think of the mother who's used drugs in the past, even just occasionally, who's had a baby, and who hasn't said anything to anyone. How does she cope alone with her fears for herself and her baby?"

Dr. Mok poses the question, "How do we collectively help each other to meet problems like this?"

"AIDS in Edinburgh is the consequence of intravenous drug abuse, which with few exceptions is a habit of groups of the population living in conditions of multiple deprivation. Rather than isolating and scapegoating the victims, the task facing us all," according to Jacqueline Mok, is to "look out there into the causes and effects of deprivation, and to look at what we can do about them." ■

Derek Rodger



Under-5s – Who Provides?

PRIVATISATION

There are probably only two things we can say with certainty about privatisation of services for the under-5s. The first is that we don't want it. And the second is we're going to get it.

Given that preschool services are not part of the compulsory sector of education or social work, they are an easy target for cut-backs when each succeeding round of local authority expenditure is being considered. The contraction of the role of local authority as provider of services generally is bound to have had an impact on this as on other areas of provision. But – privatisation itself? Our gut reaction is to reject the notion out of hand. This is not the way to provide good services for the mass of the population. With privatisation we don't enjoy such good levels of service. And how do we ensure that standards will be maintained, that quality will be the major priority rather than profit making?

Yet sadly, the evidence indicates the lack of public commitment to young children and their

families. Far from responding to their clearly identified needs, our public services have singularly failed to address the issues of providing good quality early childhood care and education. To the extent that our levels of provision in Britain now rank amongst the worst in Europe.

The quality is there, but it varies enormously. Quality is not always associated clearly enough with the public services to ensure unequivocal public support. What we are forced to accept is what the local authority says is 'good for us'; what we have been able to do ourselves in the voluntary sector; or what the private sector has provided.

For those who cannot afford to pay, the chance of where they happen to live has most typically defined the child's chance of access to any form of preschool service. Some curious anomalies have arisen. Mothers who cannot afford to pay for childcare may well have to label themselves as being 'in need', or submit to a process which defines their children as being 'at risk'. This is the kind of thing that happens when

services are not properly funded. In the private sector too there are problems. The costs are very high, and acceptable fee levels mean that private nurseries are barely more than cost covering operations. In the prevailing climate of doubt, suspicion, and outright hostility, even on the part of some Social Work Departments who are responsible for registration, it is very difficult for private nurseries to survive. Yet they present us with models of good childcare practice, and represent a lifesaver for many mothers.

We are living in a changing world and our public services are slow to wake up to the fact. This is not to argue for a world in which services for preschool children are 'market-led'. But who would argue for the imposition of rigid, inflexible systems which are only acceptable because they're all we've got?

A major issue at present is that with changing demographic patterns and increasing employment opportunities for women, the provision of preschool services may

well become 'employer led'. And yet the public sector is offering little in the way of new approaches. The question of whether or not the signs of private growth should be supported is redundant. They are happening.

The real problem lies not in the provision of services, but as always in who pays for them. We need the kind of energy, initiative and insight being displayed in the new range of available services, some public, mostly private. They should be properly funded and resourced through mixed funding arrangements. There are plenty of examples in Europe where the state subsidises provision and regulates standards, but is not necessarily a provider of the services.

We need to shift the focus to meet the needs of children in terms of quality of service, and meet the needs of families through adequate levels of publicly funded provision whoever is the provider. The two are inextricably linked and indivisible.

Marion Flett

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Colin Chalmers

Okay, You're Miserable!

PARENTS

"I always thought you had to be totally giving all the time. It's a relief to know that you don't have to be. I know I can't be a non-stop attentive mother. If I don't give myself some time, I just get ratty and resentful and no one's happy."

Allowing people to express how they fail to match up to some ideal of the perfect parent is just one attraction of a programme of self-help groups described in **THE PARENTS BOOK**, out last year.

It's co-author, Ivan Sokolov describes at the beginning, his own experience of single fatherhood. At the very time of a traumatic marriage breakup, when he

was most in need of a crutch himself, he had to give emotional and physical support to his two small sons.

The experience crystallised in his mind the need in a modern fragmented society, for support for people "engaged in the most important job of all" - bringing up kids. Sharing his experiences with others led to the setting up of parent support groups. And in 1986 to the inauguration of **THE PARENT NETWORK**, a national charity which aims to provide education for parenthood.

The Network has spawned **PARENT-LINK**, which is a network of support groups. Parent education in this approach is not a series of lectures or instructions on how to best cope. Adopting a self-development model,

parents are encouraged to express their frustrations and anxieties, to gain an insight from their own needs, and to learn from each other. In the safety of the group, people are able to look at such failed strategies as "If you hit your brother again, I'll smack you!" and the effects of negative labelling - "She'll never amount to anything."

The capacity to listen reflectively was the key to more fulfilling mothering mentioned by one woman. "Say a child is feeling miserable. You say 'OK. You're feeling miserable.' You learn that you don't need to contradict their feelings. Children will go through their own processes, and after they've had a good grumble they're over it."

THE PARENTS BOOK is, true to its

participative message, an outline not so much of techniques and advice, as of experiences of parents which have come out in groups.

PARENT-LINK support groups, led by parents who have themselves come through as members, are planned to be developed in Scotland. Anyone interested in further information, or who would like to join a **PARENT-LINK** group when one is available locally, should contact: The Parent Network, 44-46 Caversham Road, London NW5 2DS Tel. 01 485 8535.

Copies of **THE PARENTS BOOK** by Ivan Sokolov & Deborah Hutton are available from the same address at £6.89 incl p&p.

Deirdre Robertson

IN BRIEF

Alan Bowman, Fife's Social Work Director, has been in the news again. An official enquiry, ordered by Secretary of State Malcolm Rifkind, and led by Sheriff Kearney, is now under way into the Region's child care policies.

The enquiry centres on a recent Scottish Office report about the effects on Children's Panel decision-making of Fife's policy of reducing residential places for children in the Region. At least that's what the papers have been saying.

But, as **Scottish Child** suggested in a searching interview with Director Alan Bowman last year, that's not the whole story. To look at why the Scottish Office should become involved, probably against its will, in the internal workings of a regional depart-

ment, you would have to go beyond the efficacy of the policies of community care themselves.

The dictatorial management style of putting them into practice - and the corresponding way they've been received - might bring us closer to the real issue here. Not that the social workers themselves have been given much choice in all this. It is other regional power groups - the children's panel and the education department - who have weighed in for the fight.

That level of confrontation having apparently failed, the stakes have been raised to a higher level of authority. Is the Secretary of State's enquiry an exasperated attempt to get Mr. Bowman to change after a long period of ineffective persuasion? Or is it a hasty response to a political embarrassment? We can only guess.

But one thing you can bet - it'll be tough on the kids while the adults settle their scores. And there's nothing new in that.

Following massive pressure from organisations involved with teenagers, the government has been forced to revise their recent changes to the **Social Security Act** and allow Income Support to 16 and 17 year olds estranged from their parents. This welcome U-turn will come into effect in July.

Welcome yes, but hardly enough. The government climb-down is a tacit admission that the YTS places 'guaranteed' to teenagers just don't exist, but 16 and 17 year olds - old enough to marry or join the army - are still denied the right to Income Support when they can't find a job. It remains to be seen how the changes will work in practice - **Scottish Child** will keep you posted.

Meanwhile the **University of Stirling** has studied the ways in which the Social Security system responds to some of the most insecure in our society. The research has centred on young people at the Open Door emergency accommodation project in Livingston. Enquiries should be made to Catriona Lyon, University of Stirling, FK9 4LA.

In line with our plans to up the literary content of the magazine, **Scottish Child** has appointed a new **Literary Editor**. He is Sean Bradley.

Sean will set his own standards in the next issue when he interviews James Kelman, whose new book, **A Disaffection** seems to have drawn an enthusiastically mixed response.

Stories and poems for publication should be sent to Sean at our Edinburgh office.



WHAT'S GOING ON TELLY?



One of the most insidious, if less obvious, divisions in eighties Britain lies in the distinction we make between 'high' and 'popular' culture. 'High' includes things like opera, ballet, classical music, theatre, books, exhibitions, and Radio 3 style material, which are considered good for you, even when they're boring, pretentious and badly done.

'Popular' culture is seen to cover all the modern media, including T.V., video, rock music, Radio 1 – and is considered by a great many professionals, pundits, and parents to be as bad for you as sweets and coca-cola, even when the material in question is funny, interesting, informative, thought-provoking and technically brilliant.

by Joyce McMillan

Just as parents and grandparents have been grumbling for years about the 'noise' of jazz and soul, so it's become conventional wisdom to regard telly and video as 'mindless', an empty, passive goggling that turns our children into pasty-faced, aggressive morons with miniscule attention span and no initiative. Parents feel they 'shouldn't' let them watch too much telly, and see their kids' hours long evening viewing as a failure of imaginative parenting, or a pathetic concession to peer-group pressure.

But now, British television is approaching a crisis which is going to force parents and public to think a good deal harder about what television means to children, and whether it matters. Ever since the 1950's, British families have been enjoying the benefits of a comfortable, highly regulated broadcasting system, which has guaranteed some short, purpose-made programmes for pre-school children during the day (**Watch with Mother**, **Playschool**, now **Playbus**), and an hour or so of varied children's programmes in the late afternoons – drama like **Grange Hill** and the recent **Young Charlie Chaplin**, cartoons like **Superted** and **Defenders of the Earth**, and information shows like **Newsround** and **Blue Peter**. In recent years too, both BBC and ITV have been offering 'rolling' shows of quizzes cartoons, competitions and celebrity spots on Saturday mornings. But under the new broadcasting arrangements envisaged in the Government's White Paper, **Broadcasting in the Nineties**, the face of children's television could change, if not disappear altogether within the next few years.

It's to counter this threat that a new organisation called British Action for Children's T.V. (BAC-TV) was launched last month in London.

The most immediate threat implied in the White Paper is to children's programming on ITV. With commercial television franchises on sale to the highest bidder, and regulation passing from the old Independent Broadcasting Authority to the new and less demanding Independent Television Council, commercial companies are going to find themselves subject to greater financial pressure – and less regulation.

ITV bosses like Greg Dyke of London Weekend and David Elstein of Thames have suggested that in the new situation, original programming for children – which costs about 20% of ITV's annual budget to make, and attracts only 4% of the advertising – is likely to be extremely vulnerable. Indeed, the experience in America, where deregulation was introduced in 1984, indicates that within a year, almost all children's programme-making apart from the cheapest kind of product-related cartoons could well disappear.

As for BBC children's programming, in the short term, it is relatively secure. Relatively. When in the mid-1990's the BBC Charter comes up for renewal, and when the government has indicated it would like to see the end of the license fee, it might be a different story. BBC's Head of Children's Television, Anna Home, has already made it clear though, that even in the short term, it would be extremely difficult to sustain present expenditure on quality children's programming without serious competition from ITV.

There are those, on the TV-rots-your-brain side of the argument, who would suggest that this potential collapse of children's television as we've come to know it, hardly matters. In her recent book, **Television is Good for Your Kids**, Maire Messenger Davies quotes Marie Winn, a psychologist, who believes that television is a dangerous visual 'drug' to which children become addicted irrespective of programme content. Winn argues that

"the industry's cool indifference to the quality of children's television may indirectly prove to be more beneficial for children than the struggle of those who insist that fine programmes be available, since conscientious parents are more likely to limit their children's television intake if only unsavoury programmes are available."

But it seems to Messenger Davies that such attitudes fly in the face of common sense to the point of irresponsibility. Even if we accept that television has some damaging effects, it is not practical, fair or constructive to suggest that children living in a culture in which television is the dominant medium of information, should simply stop watching it. In fact, they have a right not only to watch it, but to learn how to watch it in an intelligent, critical and responsive way. Just as they need children's books to introduce them to the conventions of literacy, so children need TV

"the experience in America indicates that within a year, almost all children's programme-making could well disappear"

programmes of their own, which handle subjects that interest them at a pace and in a narrative style they find comprehensible.

If it's accepted that there should be children's programming, it's obvious that concerned adults must be interested in its quality. Are the programmes correctly pitched for the age group? Are they too violent? Do they pass on crass might is right values? Do they always show girls in subservient roles? Are they smutty (rather than honest) about sex? Do the presenters talk too much nonsense?

Anyone who has seriously watched children watching television, and talked to them about it, knows how much information a child can acquire from TV, and what a positive effect the best children's programmes can have on their horizons and expectations. To talk as though a general decline in the standard of our television, including the loss of quality children's programmes, would have no impact on the quality of life of modern children is nonsense. Concerned adults, it could be said, have a duty to fight not only for the survival of children's television, but for improvements in its integrity, self-awareness, artistry, variety and wit.

One strand of evidence in Messenger Davies' book concerns the way in which some adults consistently ignore the complexity of children's interactions with television, almost



as if telly were such a silly downmarket medium that the less attention we pay to it the better. But adults may be missing an opportunity when they say things like "I've no idea what they see when they go nextdoor" – "I let them watch while I'm getting the tea, but I don't take any interest" – "What rubbish are you talking now, Kirsty?" (to an animated toddler trying to act out a bit of the story of *Neighbours*). When the adults in child's life clearly disapprove of television, refuse to talk about it and share it, a major possible source of enrichment is lost.

In accepting the importance of children's T.V., another thing becomes apparent. That is that this is yet another area in which children, particularly poor children, are likely to suffer because of the progressive impoverishment of public provision in favour of private purchasing power. Just as the health, the educational opportunity, and the whole quality of life of underprivileged children is threatened by the growth of the private sector and by ever more 'privatised' attitudes to child rearing, so is their access to the information, the entertainment, and the common cultural experience that comes from good children's television.

This is doubly important to kids whose parents may not be able to afford books and concerts and trips to the zoo. These children's horizons will be severely curtailed if the main terrestrial channels stop making children's programmes. In America, most children's programming is now available only on satellite subscription channels, which can cost anything up to £50 a month.

At the BAC-TV conference, it became clear as the day wore on, that the audience was full of parents and others who had simply had enough of an ethos which makes child-rearing a competitive and lonely affair even for those who can afford it. There was a sense of a whole generation of men and women becoming politicised again by the unavoidable impact of the last decade's social changes on the lives of their growing children.

There was a sense of real and serious anger that one of the few remaining public provisions that gives stay-at-home parents some help – the availability of good discussible telly at sensible times of the day – should now, in its turn, be coming under threat.

"I'm delighted to be here," said one woman to the loudest applause of the day, "because there seem to be so few people today who really cherish and care for children. This hall is full of people who do, and I feel that has an importance that goes beyond kids' TV."

Of course there are those who think television too inane and reactionary a medium, in its very nature, to provide the catalyst for a serious protest movement. But on the evidence of the BAC-TV launch, it would seem that there's a nation of practical parents out there who disagree, and for whom the loss of the time-honoured institution of British children's telly might be something like the last straw. ■

Further information can be had from British Action for Children's TV, 21 Stephen Street, London W1P 1PL.

WHY DO CHILDREN WATCH TV?

How much TV, and what kind of programmes, should children watch? Do they need protection? **Gordon Rennie** reviews the arguments.

Some statistics first.

98% of children in one survey said they like to watch television. The same survey showed that children watch about 20 hours of tv a week. Boys are, by one hour a week, slightly more avid viewers than girls.

Viewing increases with age, with 10 – 14 year olds as the greatest 'consumers' of television. After age 14, viewing seems to tail off.

Evidence shows that even babies 'watch' television. The 1979 Hollenbeck and Slaby study found that babies vocally responded to a television picture.

So what, it might be pertinent to ask, is the attraction? And, in the light of parental anxieties about t.v. values, advertising and commercialisation, are such levels of viewing a good thing?

For modern children, television is only part of the fast-paced technology-oriented world that they have been born into. Children readily comprehend television, and the new generation of tv programmes, – 'trendy telly' as it has been called, – is intended with its complex visuals and breakneck speed to cater for the tv reared generation who have a very limited attention span, but are able to take in a great deal of visual information.

Adverts are often the best indicator of the state of the medium. They contain the maximum information in the shortest time, utilise the latest technology, and shamelessly plagiarise everything else. The latest computer generated offerings, such as the *Smarties* ads, with their dazzling speed and colour, are part of the same phenomenon as the credits of *Top of the Pops* and those irritating and banal subtitles in *Network 7*. The intention in all cases is not to confuse the viewer but to provide maximum visual attraction and all the relevant information in the minimum time.

Older critics who complain of its fast pace and vacuous content could be missing the point, – as well as showing their age.

The greatest obsession – there can be no other word – of those concerned with television's effect on children is with sex and violence. Putting aside the uniquely Anglo-Saxon equation of sex as being as negative a thing to be lumped together with violence, a look into the research is no mean task. The sheer number of studies done since tv's inception on the possible links between tv and behaviour threatens to overwhelm. Which is

more than can be said for the thin evidence unearthed linking tv violence with social trends.

In truth television as a medium has never been innovative or ground-breaking, performing at its best only when it casts a reflection of the society which creates it. The idea that television is responsible for a violent uncaring society shows little understanding of the subtle, complex and unsettling reasons we are now living in such a one. Not surprisingly, it is a view that is taken up by politicians and tabloids, and anyone else wishing to play to the gallery.

When you consider that children's television programmes contain six times the amount of violence as adult programmes, and that 98% of children's cartoon favourites

'Older critics who complain of its fast pace and vacuous content could be missing the point, – as well as showing their age.'

have a violent content, then you might be alarmed. Until, that is, you consider exactly what kinds of violence such programmes depict.

Children are not usually frightened by cartoons' 'ritualistic' violence – that is violence where the outcome is pre-ordained by the traditions of the story, i.e. the good guy must kill or otherwise dispose of the bad guy to save the day. Such violent action, dealing as it does with ultimate matters of life and death, is the stuff of virtually any story that has ever been created.

It is not so much the act of violence itself that is the cause for concern, but the level of violence depicted, the detail it is shown in, and whether its presentation is in any way an endorsement of violence as a means of resolving problems.

There is little chance of children 'learning' aggression from cartoons. They are too far removed from real life for children to see them as appropriate models of behaviour. The now popular toy-oriented variety such as *Masters of the Universe* have surprisingly little violent action. The manner in which they encourage children to obtain all the related merchandise is a far greater threat to civilisation than a generation of He-Man inspired



psychopaths. Part of the appeal of television is that it provides examples of how to act socially. Which might explain why children watch more adult television, especially soaps like **Neighbours** - which is consistently the most popular slot among the young - than programmes made specifically for children.

The general obsession for research to prove that children learn aggression from television obscures the real harm that television can inflict. For a child, the most harmful events on a television programme or a video film are those which frighten them to an extraordinary degree. This does not include material which is just plain frightening. Like everyone else, the excitement of fear/tension is the reason why the young would watch a horror film or thriller.

Despite much press hype, there is no frightening material actually broadcast on British television **which will harm a normal healthy child**. Children are particularly frightened by viewing situations which remind them of their own experiences - e.g. darkness, loneliness, typical childhood fears of 'things' hiding in cupboards, and the unknown.

Violence or dramatic content of the level found in a typical British television programme cannot be expected to produce an extreme reaction. Rather it is the expectation of violence or the far more explicit violence found in a televised film (which will be censored for tv broadcast), or a video cassette film which can cause these problems. The result of viewing this kind of material can be nightmares, hysterics and irrational fears.

Of course children who are used as examples of tv induced disturbance can often have problems far deeper and complex. "Delinquent children who blame tv for their crimes," according to the authors of **TV in the Lives of Our Children**, "have something seriously wrong with their lives quite apart from TV." And one obvious wrong might be the lack of parental care for what they view.

It seems clear that the ongoing backlash against 'undue influence' on the young is just part of the currently successful attempt to bring the powerful medium of television under censorious control. After all, if viewers can be persuaded to accept censorship of drama and for reasons of taste and conventional morality, then we've not so far to travel to accept censorship of tv news and current affairs on grounds of 'fairness and decency'. The watchword of the moral guardians might be 'start them young'. ■



Celluloid Hero

Autumn slid its frosting spikey hand
Over cooling summer clouds
Gliding off in gloomy quick retreat
Before the wintry Eastern wind
While
Flash and I struck out in search
Of Dale and Ming and dragon lair.

◁SEE NEXT WEEK'S EXCITING
EPISODE▷

The shifting moody sky of Mongo
Black and hailstone-heavy
Filled out with white winged men
Waiting to pit their fabled wits
Against we two. Watched us
Swording
Sly servants of sky city . . . 'Clay People'
Deep in Mongo's gloomy earth mouth.

◁SEE NEXT WEEK'S EXCITING
EPISODE▷

Tiny hurricanes of old toasted leaves
Cry their ritual death rustling
Dry
Against the path-tar crystallising skin
A telling sign of seasons changing scene
While cold steel chains of swings
Clank a lonely boney tune to Zarkov's ray
Cutting down a giant demon of the deep
As me and Flash fight off
A hail of stones from Mings evil magic
empire.

◁SEE NEXT WEEK'S EXCITING
EPISODE▷

Beneath the towering arch of stone
We hid
With hands about our ears
As Ming's raging mighty storm
Thunder clapped and warned us well
Against our siege on emperor's throne
room

That lay beyond the massive wall
Toward the clanking empty swings
And roundabout where
Mindless zombies
Stood in silent royal guard.
Yet unafraid was I -
I who stood beside Flash Gordon . . .
'Champion of Earth'
We two pals and mates - Flash and I.
Then:
Zarkov's deadly beam bit deep
Wounding flesh of hand and hip
Missed me . . . 'lucky'
As I dipped and dived
And weaved and wrestled
With the blinding death-ray-light
Flash fell to the ground
Leaving me to fight for final victory!

◁SEE NEXT WEEK'S EXCITING
EPISODE▷

The endless heavy sky looked down
In muted sorrow
On a tiny speck below tall tree top
To form a wrinkled smile
And yawn
His easy breath of broken Sunlight
Across the trimmed neat face
Of Well Park
Crusting over white
And watched a boy alone
Play within his wild imagination.

John Davidson



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TOMORROW'S SCOTSMAN—IT'S LOOKING GOOD

THIS DIARY

Party Pieces

There was a party in our flat a couple of weeks ago. Thirty-five 14 and 15 year olds, elaborately dressed, their lemonade bottles probably spiked with vodka, took over most of the house from 8 p.m. until midnight. The noise reached an outrageous, elemental crescendo at about 10 p.m. We sat in the kitchen, working our way steadily through a 2 litre bottle of Cotes du Rhone.

When it got slightly quieter, we knew the snogging had started. At about 11.30 I ventured out and flung open the doors of various darkened rooms and shouted "half an hour to go!" to the dimly visible bodies strewn on beds and floor, and then retired hastily to the kitchen for another glass of wine. I was envious of my daughter, Elisabeth, aged 2 and a half now, who incredibly managed to sleep through it all.

I suppose I was also envious of the teenagers themselves in a way. Perhaps every generation is fated to think that the generation after it gets to grips with the goodies of adult life earlier and more confidently than it did.

I remember the parties I went to when I was that age. Awful stilted affairs, riddled with snobbery and convention. I would wrestle myself into an ill-fitting dinner jacket, and sit in a strange house eating a very formal meal with people I hardly knew, dreaming of saying something so effortlessly witty that I would immediately become popular.

At the same time I would be struggling with the equally strong desire to stand up, and with a brief violent movement of my arms, yank the white linen cloth and all the cutlery off the table, just to see the shock on the other guests' faces, and watch the hostess's father turn puce with rage.

Of course, nothing of the sort happened. After dinner, inarticulate, awkward, tormented by acne, I would stand in a safe corner of the room, clutching a glass of cider or weak punch, watching people pretending to be happy, pretending to be drunk. Towards the end of the event, the conga would wind its way from room to room, couples would disappear into rooms off landings, and return dishevelled and fortunate. I remember the hostess's mother, noticing my failure to circulate, introducing me to the Twist, saying in her high Home Counties accent:

"It's so simple. You just pretend you're drying your back with a towel, and trying to stub a cigarette out on the floor with your toe at the same time."

I dutifully tried, but my eyes were watching the couples heading off upstairs to the growls of Chubby Checker. And then the blessed release of car headlights in the drive, the drive home along the dark country roads, the need to pretend that I had had a good time. I remember once even thinking of carrying some lipstick with me, so that I could surreptitiously mark my collar as proof that a girl had been attracted to me. Yes, adolescence can be a long embarrassment.

You see, I have a confession to make. And as this is my last diary piece, I'd better make it now. I came from an essentially English privileged background, prep school, public school, university etc., and I suppose in many ways I've

**"when the decibel level
outside the kitchen door
reached storm force, . . .
I remembered the parties of
my youth"**

been deliberately moving away from it ever since.

Moving away from the voice of the hostess's mother at the ball, and the equally piercing voice of the riding instructress, "Don't let Samba eat the deadly nightshade!" as I struggled to haul the black shiny neck of a wilful horse up from the hedgerow; running away from the voice of the Brigadier, as I stood aged 14, sweating in full kit on parade, clutching a World War 1 Lee Enfield .303 rifle, "In the nuclear age, your role is essential."

I've had to move quite a long way to see the utter nonsense of remarks like these. One particular area of movement arose from attendance at a single-sex public school on the East coast of Kent, the result of which I was almost completely ignorant of the opposite sex until I was 18. After my early childhood, I don't think I had a serious conversation with a girl until the end of my first year at university. At the time, I did not think this was abnormal. The female sex were either mothers or sisters of school friends, pinups from *Parade*, or town girls who we used to leer at over our expresso at Pelosis' coffee bar.

"On Margate Sands
I can connect
Nothing with nothing"

and I can only say that as far as I was concerned, T.S. Eliot was dead right. I used to sit on the beach, a few yards away from the giggly girls wearing 'Kiss me Quick' hats, trying to think of something to say. "Do you like the Beatles?" was about the extent of my repertoire.

I certainly knew a great deal more about T.S. Eliot's poetry than I did about the female body. I remember at the age of 14, after my first pub crawl from Haywards Heath to Billingshurst, sitting in the pub garden with my friend Tucker from the year above, listening awe-struck to his whispered revelations that the vagina (he had discovered) was not situated near the belly button, as we had previously thought, but was much lower down. Somehow our biology lesson on the reproductive cycle of the frog had not prepared us for this.

I don't know if that level of ignorance is still around among present day teenagers. I rather doubt it. To me, it remains the best argument for co-educational schools that I know.

Which brings me back to where I started. Parties. During my last term at school, there was a co-educational dance for the first time. After an initial period of cocktail party sparring, utter mayhem ensued - a farcical and totally appropriate expression of a fearfully incompetent sexual education. It swiftly degenerated into a mass orgy with masters, prefects, matrons and nuns rushing around, crawling under tables, literally pulling the gentlemanly schoolboys and the ladylike convent school girls apart. As a result the entire sixth year was gated for the rest of the term, and so far as I know, it was several years before girls set foot in the school again. So when, a couple of weeks ago, the decibel level outside the kitchen door reached storm force, and the sound of breaking glass was heard and Rachel with a harassed socially responsible expression came into the kitchen looking for a dustpan, and the boys started trying to ride Elisabeth's tricycle round the hall, I remembered the parties of my youth, calmed myself just in time, and returned to the large bottle of Cote du Rhone.

Mark Ogle

Mark Ogle will continue to write for Scottish Child, but not the diary. From next issue we will welcome a new diarist.

GET MY MEANING?

Literacy, even in a highly visual world, is still the key to learning. How we acquire it, argues **Jeff Aldridge**, is related to the meaning of the words.

It was Frank Smith who pointed out that in two thousand years of teaching people to read, nobody had yet devised a system that was completely useless. Every method had worked for some people some of the time.

Indeed, it could be argued that children learn to read despite what teachers do to them!

Many of us will remember the strange world of Janet and John – a world that was ruled by some extremely bossy, monosyllabic and disembodied voice:

'Look, John, look.

Run, Janet, run.

Look at Janet run.'

I have been long unconvinced by the arguments for traditional 'readers' – carefully structured, they contain a deliberately controlled and limited vocabulary and sentence structure; and any increase in complexity is carefully graded to take account of children's natural development.

Even if you accept the arguments, you're still left with the problem, as above, of the material. Things have improved though. The 'Link-Up' books have attempted to relate early readers to modern urban life and include things like shop signs and bus destinations. The Ginn 360 series include stories, as do all the new schemes, such as the Oxford Reading Tree.

This emphasis on stories is significant. It is a response to a new development in the teaching of reading – the apprenticeship approach. It has been the important work by Frank Smith, and of Jill Bennett and Liz

Waterland that has actually produced a logical and humane system, which has certainly answered my prayers.

What these people are saying is that reading is a much more complicated business than C-A-T, CAT. It involves memory and prediction, the understanding of relationships as well as the simple meaning of words and the sounds of letters.

The work with the Initial Teaching Alphabet in the 1960's proved beyond any doubt that children could be taught to 'read' beautifully without understanding a tenth of the content. Just as I know that with a bit of practice, I can 'read' a passage in German

"reading is a much more complicated business than C-A-T, CAT"

quite well – the trouble is I can't speak German. So that in other words, I can't read the passage in any real sense at all.

So it is important to show children that the words mean something. As opposed to the nuts and bolts of individual letters building into words, what the apprenticeship method emphasises is the meaning of the text. This is, in fact, by no means a revolutionary approach. It is indeed the oldest approach known. It involves one person reading a story to another.

Just as mothers and fathers have done for generations, so now the teacher sits down and reads the text – following with fingers if they like. Young children, finding this a pleasure, are usually glad to hear it again. So they read

it again, with the child gradually joining in. The child eventually takes over more and more of the reading until he/she can cope alone.

All very well? All very well, says the busy school teacher, but how can I do this with a class of twenty five or whatever? A valid and most pertinent question, teachers are always concerned with practical matters. And there is a practical solution, though it needs to be worked at.

The answer is that it can't be done. But if you get others to help, it can. First and foremost, it requires the help of the parents at home. It only needs five minutes a day, but those minutes are vital. During that time the parent goes through the same shared reading process as described.

Parents have to be 'trained' to do this; another five minute process. The main thing is not to 'correct' the children's reading, just to put in the bits where the children are stuck and to ensure that the reading is done to appreciate the meaning.

And this is why stories are so important. Children gain meaning through stories. They don't read, nor could they understand books on political economy. Abstract thought is not their province. The logical sequence of events in a story however, makes sense.

But, say our practical teachers, not all parents are able to read even a simple children's story, and there are still parents about who will argue that education is the school's job; not theirs.

Some schools get round this problem – and the equally taxing one of classroom organisation and management – by making use of any



parents who are able and willing to help in this way during the day. Recognising the value of having additional help, many schools are much less sniffy about having mums and dads in the classroom than they used to be.

And there is still another source of help - other children, possibly from older classes, who are more advanced readers. Reading in this way with younger or less able children reinforces their own reading skills and can be a useful feature of their social development too.

But whoever is involved in this process - teachers, parents, helpers, other children, not to mention the learner - finds that the greater intimacy of a closely shared activity is of immense benefit.

All of this is not to say that the nuts and bolts of reading can be ignored. It does say that they are not the first consideration. That must be that the words must have meaning.

Nor is all of this to say that all our problems are over. But the figures from research are impressive. A study which covered two-thirds of the schools in Kirklees in Yorkshire showed that, over a period of eight to nine weeks, reading accuracy improved at 3.3 times the normal rate. An average of nearly seven months in reading age was gained.

With regard to comprehension, the same study showed progress at 4.4 times the normal rate, with children gaining 9.2 months

"the oldest approach known - it involves one person reading a story to another"

in reading age. As the Kirklees survey, it should be noted, covered a wide range of schools and ages, the technique seems to be not confined in its benefits to the beginning reader, and there are several instances of its successful adoption in secondary schools.

There is a further spin-off. Instead of plodding week in week out through Book 4 or whatever of their 'reader', using this approach, young children can find themselves reading up to a hundred different books a year. Writers like Shirley Hughes, John Burningham, Anthony Browne, Jan Pienkowski, Pat Hutchins - to name but a few - have established a body of work which ensures that there is plenty of delightful material around for the early stages.

Children who are given a diet of these kinds of writers will be given the best possible start to their reading careers.

Run, Janet.

Run, John.

Run, run, run. Away. ■

Reading Frank Smith. Pub. Cambridge University Press 1978, second edition 1985.

Learning to Read with Picture Books Jill Bennett. Pub. Thimble Press 1979, third edition 1985.

Read With Me - an apprenticeship approach to reading Liz Waterland. Pub. Thimble Press 1985, second edition 1988.

LOOKING BACK

*And how the past becomes us in the end,
its place and people,
and how past becomes perception, though perception of that past
may still,
perhaps, become us too.*

The slamming of a car door and the settling of dry dust
leaves only busy silence in this burnt-out arid bush;
the scratching of a host of insects interrupted now and then
by raucous cries from bright white cockatoos.
The distant sky is cobalt blue, the burning sun direct above,
December's midday heat is oven hot -
instinctively I make for shade.

It's half a lifetime almost since we left here
for another Northern world I'd still then yet to know;
to leave this place as fragments in a mem'ry
of a bright and somehow better world;
confused though too through years by reminiscence,
half-remembered talk, by those odd slide-shows
on a snow-bound Scottish winter's night.
A memory which in the end became unsure and hardly-real
but which bequeathed, unrealised,
to those long childhood years,
a sense of dislocation from a distant dream-like past.

And now, returning as if pilgrim to a sacred site;
back to this first place of my memory
and where it seems my self began.
It is at once as if I have always been coming back.
And by that quirk of fate of course,

the place exists still, separate,
as if my journey has been back through time
and not around the earth.

(And so it caught me yesterday,
just after turning off the highway northwards
up the dirt track and to drive
the last odd hundred miles;
a sudden tear, my throat stuck at the thought of us then,
he no more,
myself almost afraid, expecting I might meet them,
he just my age now, myself as child.)

I wander round the place
and cast about for some familiar sight;
it's even stranger that the homestead
is just as it was, unworked now and unviable,
the rough-hewn sheep pens stand there empty
as do shearing sheds which hoard though still
that clinging, aromatic smell of tar and wool.

The whole spread now part of a National Park,
the only signs of life are down the creek
around the brand new stone-built Rangers' huts;
- 'Black fellas' mostly, some might be
the 'piccaninnies' that I played with as a kid;
It's white man's beer they drink now but they sing,
I heard them last night in the distance
how they sing - "My wallah*, oh my wallah,
rumbellin', tumbellin' . . ."

I slip into the garden, almost luscious, unexpected,

Scots migrate and think of home. IAN KERR's is a reverse experience. His parents left in the early fifties to farm in Australia, where he was born. After half a dozen hard years on a sheep station on the edge of the Flinders Ranges, they were obliged to return to Scotland. Home takes on a different meaning, and in this prose poem, he charts his emotional journey to find it.

WILCANOONA HOMESTEAD

irrigated from a tank filled up by flash-floods
down the otherwise dry creek;
its bank must be what I remembered as a hillside
at the garden's edge;
I gaze around -
a single date palm and the blooming oleander's purple-pink;
a clutch of orange trees, miraculous out here
and then I see a covered-over corner pipe.
It was the bump across the path
I used to stick at on a kiddie's bike;
I stop and squat and feel,
and it is real.

Our every story has a past,
my own has come to seem somehow bound up with that removal
from out here,
as have throughout the years
recurring half-formed thoughts of only if;
as if the attribution
of childhood's loss or hardship could be made,
simply, somewhere and round the people
who were there.

And as if the fall from childhood did not bring itself
a sense of loss, of self at odds
with our frail, common passage.
(Becoming what we are must happen in some place,
some time, always we learn a local voice.)

- What then could come of such a confrontation?
Could there really be an exorcism of a childhood's legacy
or an interment of those questions still unanswered?

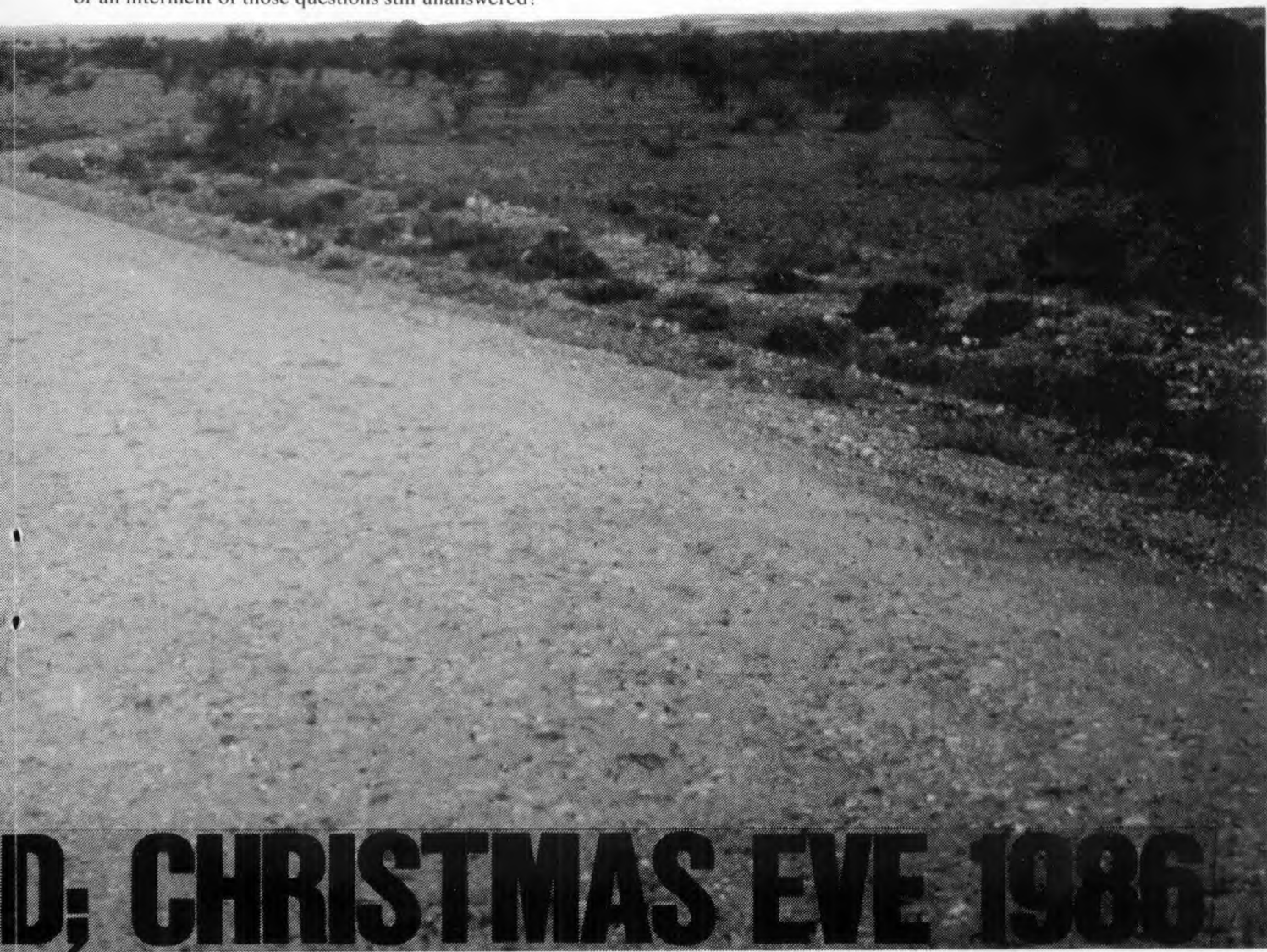
It seems that even less here now could there be
any recall of that living past,
and anyway through all these years
I have unknowingly been going back
and now I am those memories,
they are of me, as real as flesh or blood.

And yet I cannot know a future now apart this coming back,
Though living that, perhaps, becomes a resolution
and, out of it all, a being able to move on.

But for this moment I am here and breathe long
in this shock of my reality.
I am a man apart, as far perhaps as can be
from that common passage or my any aspiration.
Consumed in ecstasy of consciousness,
this, mine, though merely spark
in this primaevial endlessness of earth.

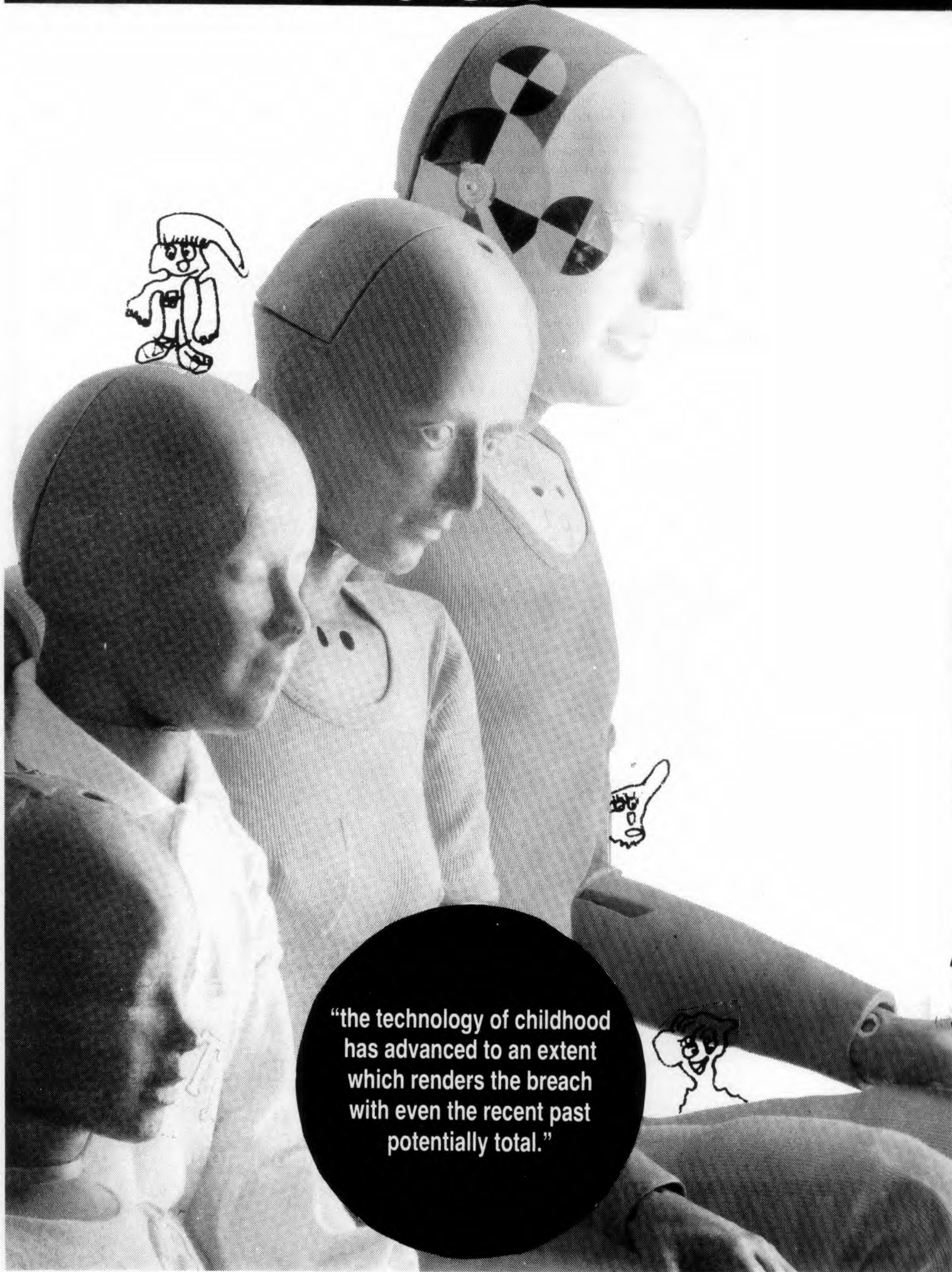
I lie upon my back,
stretched on the cool verandah stone
and gaze up at the wispy strands of cloud-white
in the unimaginable distance of the sky.
I hear leaves rustle in the breeze,
I hear the jerky swish of water from the sprinkler on the grass.
I know life and I am
earthmother, Gaia, death.

Ian B. Kerr Noosa Heads, Queensland/London 1987/88
**belly*



ID; CHRISTMAS EVE 1986

THE CHILD IN HISTORY



"the technology of childhood
has advanced to an extent
which renders the breach
with even the recent past
potentially total."

FAIRY TALES AND Vorsprung durch Technik.

Over the last few years I've been deep into fairy stories. This is partly because my daughter insists on one every evening, and partly because reading the *Kinder und Haus Märchen* of the brothers Grimm is an undemanding way of improving my German.

But I also found that serious academic research, on the fiction of politics, when followed to its source, landed me at the same folkloric spring. Benjamin Disraeli, the great fabulist of British parliamentary politics, began his literary career by writing pantomimes, and most of the characters of his novels seem closer to Dick Whittington and Puss in Boots than they do to any actual political figures.

A figure of equal fascination closer to home, John Buchan, regarded the fairy story as providing the skeleton, not only of the thriller, but of the nineteenth century realist novel:

Only in so far as the novel is a development of the folk and fairy tale does it fully succeed . . . In the first place their writers tell a good story, with true drama and wonder in it . . . they pass judgements on their characters . . . weakness winning against might, gentleness against brutality, brains as against mere animal strength . . .

Buchan, a shrewd and reasonably progressive Tory politician, seems to have been a Jungian of sorts, and to have regarded fairy tales as archetypes of appropriate social conduct. In much the same way, Savigny the great Prussian Justice Minister, had a century earlier commanded and sponsored the researches of the Grimms as grounding law in a popular mythology.


Add Bunyan, the Bible and the ballads, and you get a framework of myth which for centuries nurtured (or checked) the psyche of the Scots child.

Does anything of it still survive?

When I compare my own childhood, in the late 1940s and early 1950s (a Motherwell prefab housing scheme, and a schoolhouse in the Borders), it seems that the technology of childhood has advanced to an extent which renders the breach with even the recent past potentially total.

The cassette recorder, television, video, the microcomputer – have all put into the child's hands an unprecedented potential for self-selected entertainment and instruction. At the same time the breakdown of the extended family, the impact of the motor car (an almost overwhelmingly negative influence on children's freedom), and the relative absence of preschool education have blocked off traditional patterns of socialisation.

Obviously the impact of all of these varies across the social classes. Working class kids are unlikely to experience the conscious direction inflicted on the 'public-sector-middle-class' kid, who I suspect is the main beneficiary from the rise of Scots projects



In our increasingly market-led culture, we lose the wonder – and good sense – of the fairy tale at our cost, argues
Christopher Harvie

like the *Maisie* books, and the *Whigmaleerie* and *Singing Kettle* tapes. Yet unless they're stacked in tower blocks, they have more chance of playing together and more contact with neighbours' homes, with aunts and grannies.

My daughter Alison was born in Germany and has attended kindergarten in Tübingen and primary school in London. When in London she always says how much she misses 'my German friends', meaning the gang she ran around with in and around the small flat block in which we live.

Yet recently, a Mexican TV producer made a film contrasting the lives of children in West Germany and his home country, much to Germany's disadvantage. In Mexico, literally crawling with kids (70% of the population under age 25), the values of the young predominate. The ethos in West Germany (whose birth rate has now fallen below replacement level) was symbolised for him by a granny and grandpa, muffled up, contemplating a solitary bairn trying to make sense of a children's play park. "Nicht ein kinderfreundliches Gesellschaft" (not a situation friendly to children) – as the programme put it.

This may have been a bit unfair. Partly spontaneously, partly as a result of careful planning, Germany has become in the last decade more sympathetic to children than the U.K.

The car is held at bay by drastic restrictions which turn whole streets and urban areas over for kids to play in. The presence of *gastarbeiter* kids with cultures of outdoor play from Southern Italy or Turkey livens things up, and keeps a lot of the old games in circulation. With the Nazi period and its perversions in mind, there is a strong bias against war toys. And war comics or films of the sort that British boys are steeped in are simply (though for obvious reasons) not available.

The Green movement, which derives a surprisingly large part of its ideology from Scottish sources, Adam Ferguson to A.S. Neill, has been particularly important in promoting an attitude which regards the child as a citizen. Kindergartens, special

not only in schools and kindergartens, but in libraries, bookshops and holiday hotels.

Märchen, like much in Germany, are not completely a 'good thing'. Their rediscovery and deployment in teaching coincided with rampant German nationalism, and many conveyed a parochial defensiveness bordering on xenophobia.

All too often the Jew (as the itinerant trader, almost the sole stranger that many villagers encountered) became the alien crafty deceiver. But folklore bears limited culpability for 1933-45 compared with the militaristic habits of authority and obedience inculcated in the German empire, and the sheer disorientation induced by the headlong sequence of unification, industrialisation, and total war.

The Germany the Grimm brothers envisaged was, after all, a liberal federation, quite unthreatening compared with the Germany of Krupp and Moltke, or Kaiser Wilhelm II's glorification of force.

Very interesting, you may say, but what has all this to do with being a child in today's Scotland?

Well, a central theme of the Scottish renaissance of the inter-war years was the need to heal a similar breach between power and feelings. Edwin Muir (translator of Kafka and Feuchtwanger and an associate of A.S. Neill in Germany in the hopeful years of the Weimar republic) wrote of the contrast between the 'Eden' of his Orkney boyhood and the purgatory of his youth in industrial Glasgow.

A similar, less agonised contrast is visible in Neil Gunn and, despite the formal commitment to Marxism of Hugh MacDiarmid and Lewis Grassie Gibbon, their own equilibrium was derived not from a post-industrial prospect, but from country or small town society. As I remarked in *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes*, this was reassuring to the intellectuals, but was scarcely helpful to the folk stacked away in the city centre slums, and vast facility-less peripheral housing estates.

On the other hand the shared insight was valuable and something like it is being worked on in Germany to create among children a consciousness which is communitarian and compassionate in its treatment of the natural world and of the rest of humanity.

To me this compares favourably with the official desire of the present government to regress to a nineteenth century notion of education as the three R's and THE FLAG; while unofficially allowing big business to target kids as an unprotected, captive market for junk food, junk toys, and junk entertainment.

The consequences of this go beyond philistinism. They postulate a repetition of the nineteenth century breakdown of the values of Scottish society on a far greater scale. On one side 'civilisation' will take the form of a meritocratic ladder enabling sharp-toothed streetwise operators of the Michael Forsyth or Andrew Neil type to clamber to the top of a 'market society' – effectively as salesmen of finance-and-services multinationals

located in London.

On the other, kids will be reared on lame-brain cartoons, soaps, and 'craze' toys from the sickly 'My Little Pony' to those appalling mutants which change from violent looking robots to fighter planes. Such victims will be unskilled labour-fodder for the 'fast-food' economies of Americanised post-industrial society. If they don't fit into it, we can already see, in the most advanced of all Western cities, New York, what their other future will be. Andrew Neil, no less,

"The Green movement . . . has been particularly important in promoting an attitude which regards the child as a citizen."

whose *Who's Who* entry gives 'New York' as his hobby, may be too absorbed in His Master's Sky to keep an eye on what his *Sunday Times* is doing, but in February it was announcing that, what with drugs, crime, poverty and governmental breakdown, the Big Apple had really turned sour.

To the Germans this is the 'Zwei-Drittel Gesellschaft': the society in which only the well-doing two-thirds count. As Neal Ascherson wrote in a recent *Observer*, this is a concept they find deeply offensive.

The 'holistic' German approach has its failings. Its relentless earnestness can be over-didactic (my daughter did a jigsaw in the Tübingen children's library which showed a children's playpark being bulldozed to make a luxury hotel). But it has at its roots a notion of producing 'whole' people, proud of their own identity and talents, and their *Beruf* ('calling' as opposed to 'occupation'), in a society that finds room for them.

German 'Ausbildung' or work-training for example, is still renowned in an age when the jargon has it that by the time you've trained a worker to a new process, the process has become obsolete. But a 'gelernte' worker (like the masons and carpenters in their big-buttoned waistcoats and beaver hats, who seem to come straight out of Grimm), though his or her specific training may rapidly date, has the self-esteem and confidence to pitch into new technologies.

Not least of these are the complex environmental engineering processes demanded in order to cope with pollution problems of which the Germans, in an almost landlocked country, are peculiarly aware.

The dark woods which used to cut off village from village pervade the *Märchen*. In many ways, as Elias Cannetti has argued, they pervade the whole German psyche. Perhaps it was the threat to these forests, detected in the mid-1970's, that stimulated the reactions that have put Germany at the top of the environmentally conscious league.

In the battle for the future of the natural world, *Märchen* have their uses, as well as 'Vorsprung durch Technik'.

"Germany has become in the last decade more sympathetic to children than the U.K."

traffic and transport measures – you can take prams on most German buses, and some trains now have playroom compartments – are regarded as **rights**.

In all of this the *Märchen* continue to play a part – sometimes in some odd guises, like the hi-tech *Märchengarten* at the Ludwigsburg Palace near Stuttgart, where Rapunzel's hair responds to a device triggered by a child's voice, and Aladdin's genie is conjured up on a hologram. Many delightful animations from Eastern Europe can be seen on TV, and story telling is organised



THE FROZEN CHILDREN

A Short Story by Carol Anne Davis

"Today," Miss Anscombe says, "we will have netball. Gwendoline and Zoe are the captains."

Teams are picked, girls with lithe bodies and confident smiles forming two lines. Soon only Carol is left.

"Carol – you go into Gwenda's team." Eyes rolling heavenwards, Gwenda tuts her distress.

The cupboard is opened, a ball is found, the game begins.

"Run for it, Carol!" Miss Anscombe shouts. "Make an effort! **Par – tic – i – pate!**"

Limbs, veins, sluggish with thick black ice. "Heaven help you if there's ever a fire," Miss Anscombe says, and the class titters.

The next day we have Art. There are fewer bullies in Art, and the sun shines through the south-facing windows and sometimes there is peace and a chance just to dream without dread.

There is also attractive young Mr. Shreever with his tall neat body and beddenimmed buttocks who is easy on the eye and whose wife carries their baby papoose-

style on her back and laughs a lot and is living proof that parenthood isn't all about hatred and distress.

Effortlessly Mr. Shreever sets up a still life of plants and car tyres on a pedestal.

"Draw it from whichever angle you're sitting at."

So far, so good. *Please God, let me use charcoal, let me use charcoal, let me use charcoal . . .*

"Go and get your paints, everyone. And remember, use small amounts – the department isn't made of money!"

The charcoal smudges like a forlorn hope in her palm as her classmates surge from their desks to the paint counter at the side of the room. *Please God, let me . . .*

"Is there a problem?" He has come to stand behind her.

"I thought I'd use this."

"Well you thought wrong!"

Maybe it's the way she flinches or bows her head, but he relents a little, smiles. "You'd best get used to paint. You'll probably want to use it in the exam."

He is looking at her impatiently again as she staves off the moment of reckoning. Slowly she stands up, pushes the stool back, wincing as it grates along the floor. Painfully she edges to one side of it, lifting it back further with clenched hands. Sickeningly her gaze confronts another row of desks.

Heavy with self-consciousness, Carol manoeuvres her body slowly sideways, careful not to touch anything, a strange slow motion half-step making her way to the paint counter, to her journey's end.

Fingers splayed, teeth gritted, knees locked, she reaches agonisedly for each container, holds tightly to the bright colour, squeezes, releases, recaps. Then back, back, the interminable lifting back to its place on the shelf a second time, third time, fourth.

And now she is holding her breath, armpits swampy beneath her blazer, heartbeat erratic and pained. Everyone else finished ages ago, is already at work. Laboriously she returns to her desk, lowers herself with precision into the stool.

"Good God, girl – hurry up! You forgot the water!"

Back, back, back, eyes watching, mouths grinning as she edges to the sink and surely climbing a mountain would be easier than this all too observable trek?

Before her, Mr. Shreever puts a roll of paper atop a desk.

"CATCH!"

Flushing she stops the cylinder tipping over the edge.

"Christ!" he says with feeling, "that's the fastest I've ever seen you move."

And she tries to smile her forgiveness, but now even her facial muscles are frozen and the tears which lie long-trapped beneath her eyelids are unequal to thawing them out.

Years later when the blows and kicks are over, when she's grown up and away from home and is trying to make sense of it all, she asks why. Why immobile, why the inability to walk properly, play sport?

It's simple really. For isn't spectating from the sidewalk always simple?

"Every time you got in your father's way he assaulted you, shouted down your self-confidence, your rights. Your only means of protection was to avoid being noticed, to immobilise yourself in a corner and hide behind a book. You couldn't do that at school though. You were **told** to move, **had** to risk being noticed. The conflict was enormous, so your limbs became frozen as your father's and your teachers' voices raged for supremacy, for control."

The stepping stones of adult experience, the encouragement of strangers, weave their burgeoning path of possibilities behind her, as, with slow-won unself-consciousness, she stretches every limb.

My voice now, she thinks, just mine. ■



SHYING AWAY...

Child care workers are faced with the responsibility of looking after children who have been subject to abuse. How do they do it? The staff of Strathclyde Region's Burnside Children's Home in Irvine recently studied their own responses to the problem in a series of training sessions. **John Jamieson** summarises the ground covered.



Some teachers, social workers, GPs, nurses, psychologists and psychiatrists experience a strong desire to avoid cases of child sexual abuse. In the age of the expert, when society places responsibility on the professionals to cope, why do so many adults involved in the care of children shy away from cases of suspected child abuse?

One reason may be the acute revulsion felt by professionals who may have to work with perpetrators as well as victims. Consider the comments made by Henry Giarretto, director of a child sexual abuse treatment programme in California, on meeting the father of a girl client. The child had been sexually fondled by her father at age 5, subjected to oral copulation and sodomy at age 8, and vaginal intercourse at age 13.

"A picture of the panic stricken face of the girl I had just seen flashed in my brain. Instead of compassion, I was wracked by violent feelings towards the offender. I didn't want to listen to his side of the story but to kick the bastard in the crotch . . ."

Another reason might be that some professionals have had unpleasant sexual experiences in their own lives which have left them scarred and with unresolved problems. In a two day workshop on child sexual abuse attended by 12 people, Graham Ixer (1987) found that over half the participants were able to state that they had themselves been sexually abused as children. When we find statistics quoted from retrospective studies of non-clinical populations that between a quarter and a third of all children and adolescents have had at least one unwanted sexual experience with an adult (NCB Highlight 1982), should we be surprised at Ixer's discovery?

A further reason for professional reticence might lie in a presumed lack of expertise in the area of sexual abuse. Experts are few and far between and workers are reluctant to assume that the skill and knowledge they have acquired in one domain will transfer to another. The lack of familiarity with the treatment of incest victims may result in further neglect of the needs of these children.

Of course, contrary perhaps to public stereotype, professional workers are themselves sexual beings. Sex for them, as for most other people, is one of the most pleasant and constructive of human activities. In most human beings there is a powerful urge to procreate

and subsequently there are strong feelings surrounding any sexual act. When deviant methods of satisfying one's sexual desires are perpetrated against children, professionals can themselves be left stunned by the corruption of what is basically a normal desirable human function.

Why sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse was not, of course, discovered in the 1980s. It has been around for a long time, sometimes hidden and sometimes not. It can range from flashing exhibitionism to digital stimulation, from vaginal intercourse to anal and oral sex. The variety of forms of abuse, as well as the customary secrecy surrounding it, make it difficult to define. Consequently the collection of reliable statistics on its extent has been traditionally difficult.

One of the most commonly used definitions of child sexual abuse is that provided by Kempe & Kempe (1978) who considered it to be "the involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children and

"contrary perhaps to public stereotype, professional workers are themselves sexual beings"

adolescents in sexual activities they do not truly comprehend, to which they are unable to give informed consent, or that violate the social taboos of family roles."

If we knew why sexual offenders behaved as they do, we would be in a better position to help them and prevent further abuse of children. But there is no single cause.

For some it appears to operate almost like an **addiction**, and these can be as resistant to treatment as the alcoholic or the heroin addict. For others it is the **power and control** over their victims which is as important as the gratification of sexual desire. Many rape survivors articulate the apparently unnecessary violence and determination of offenders to inflict pain and humiliation. Rape appears to be as closely related to the need to be dominant by means of physical violence, as it does to the satisfaction of sexual desires.

Undoubtedly, **adults who have been sexually abused themselves as children** are more likely to become sexual abusers. Some studies have

indicated that as many as 80% of child sex abusers were abused as children. Almost half of a sample of male and female prostitutes in one study were found to have been sexually abused by a relative or neighbour when they were children. Some workers in the field claim that they have never met a sexual abuser who was not himself abused as a child. And studies of people on 'death row' in American states which have the death penalty have indicated a high incidence of sexual abuse in the childhood experiences of those awaiting execution.

Incest survivors can be upset by the foregoing statements for fear that they too will be suspected of becoming child sexual abusers, or even murderers. Of course there is no such implication. The vast majority of sexually abused children grow up to be adults with a distinct distaste for anyone who deigns to interfere sexually with immature young people.

One paedophile organisation is known to have as its motto: "Sex before eight, or else it's too late!" Many adults, including professional workers would be abhorred by such a statement, and find it hard to imagine a grown-up using a child for sexual gratification. But is it so difficult to understand how a child could be gradually seduced into sexual activity?

One forty year old man wrote of a seduction process starting from superficial conversation, and arriving months later at the stage where direct sexual requests can be made. At the point where the relationship becomes overtly sexual, the importance of it being their secret is stressed. When one considers how it is possible for an initial stranger to carry out abnormal sexual acts on children in this way, how much easier it is to understand how fathers, grandfathers, cohabitees, uncles and brothers of little children can take sexual advantage of them.

Sexually abused children are not just the children of the poor, the deviant or the abnormal. In terms of income level and property, part of our difficulty in understanding these relationships which arrive at sexual abuse, lies perhaps in regarding children as the possession of their parents.

Children may be better regarded as not really belonging to anyone. They are collectively **our** children, and they are **our** responsibility. Professionals and public may need to come together to relearn that.



Are You a

EVALUATION IN ACTION: A CASE STUDY OF AN UNDER-FIVES CENTRE IN SCOTLAND

Joyce Watt

Bernard Van Leer Foundation, The Hague

Derek Rodger

Barbara and Frances are on their knees doing a large jigsaw on the floor. Barbara is a single parent. Frances at 2 and a half is her only child. As she later tells me "Frances is all I've got. She's my whole life and I didn't want a place for children alone."

Patiently the two go through three jigsaws together, Barbara encouraging and occa-

sionally suggesting, but Frances ultimately finding most of the pieces herself. It is no mean achievement for a child of her age. "She's quite bright," says Barbara trying not to look too proud.

Alex's discussion group: the topic – separation and divorce. It's a personal and traumatic topic for several in the group – that's probably why they've chosen it. Eight of the ten present are mothers from the Under-Fives Centre.

Almost everyone speaks. Loneliness, financial problems, rejection, they're all aired. Most complain they have no social life as they have nobody to look after the children. One disagrees. She has a partner although she refuses to be married. She has two very young children, is quite content with her lot and rejects any offers to babysit. "I enjoyed myself when I was young," she says. "I've had my life." She is 23.

Both of these all too human episodes took place on the premises of Edinburgh's Craigroyston Community High School. And just to prove that you should never judge a book by its cover, these and many other similarly moving accounts of educational life as it is actually lived, are contained in this ponderously titled and dull looking report.

But then the whole thrust of the Craigroyston Under-Fives Centre's work over the last six years of van Leer Foundation funding has been to challenge certain preconceptions about the boxes we put things in.

Toddlers in High School, parents in school classes, teenagers learning to look after little ones – just some of the boundary re-drawing work that has been going on. Another not so little hurdle to have been tackled has been the (incurable?) academicism of a group like secondary school teachers.

"A dumping ground," one responded to



Mummy?

the question of the Centre's function. A place "to babysit while parents went to classes," said another. Needless to say not all of the teaching staff have been so dismissive and the educational value of what goes on for parents and their children seems beyond any rational dispute.

It is the irrationalities though which beleaguer even the most stout hearted attempts at innovation. The centre has had to contend with critics who feel that the under-5's are being given special treatment, that their work is taking too much of the limelight from the other work of the school, that it was drawing too many parents with high aspirations from outwith the area.

The fact that it continues to thrive, and has now procured full local authority funding shows that a genuinely child-centred approach, with a commitment to parents' education does work. The centre staff try not

to interrupt conversations with children in preference to visiting adults, for instance.

Droning on at the entrance to one of the school's assistant heads, we were invited to sit over at the sandpit where we continued the conversation while we played. Parents' needs are important too. Eye contact was the very least that they were offered as they flitted in and out from classes and from the parents' room. No one's needs were ignored.

Attending to individuals' needs is not alas! an attribute that hierarchic organisations are noted for, and it remains to be viewed with interest how the centre develops as a full local authority service.

Innovatory schemes of any sort can draw suspicion just because they are new. When they make claims that they are in any way the answer, they tend to draw hostility. Craigroyston makes no such claims. Nor does their researcher. The Under-Fives Centre has

shown the potential of a preschool/family facility within a secondary school. That little, and given the prevailing lack of facilities of any kind for two out three of Scottish under-fives, that much.

It has been a gradual and patient building of trust and reputation from the community up. Unlike other initiatives in this and other spheres which seek to impose 'progress' from a remote-feeling centre, you can sense the benefits of Craigroyston's achievements on the ground.

"Are you a mummy?" a two year old asked. Thinks I, I'm a daddy actually. But seeing the book she was holding and entering into the sense of fluidity in the place, I found myself replying, "I **can** be a mummy. Would you like me to read you that story?" She was on my knee, and in a trice we were off to John Burningham's ballet school. ■

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REVIEWS

MOTHER, MADONNA, WHORE

Estella Welldon

Free Association Books £11.95

Rosemary Milne

Considering the amount of poetry, drama and fiction that, from the Greeks on, has pondered the theme of the powerful woman, **Mother, Madonna, Whore** shouldn't be expected to contain many surprises.

But it has. As readers of a recent **New Statesman & Society** review already know. Some feminists have been angered, and some bookshops have refused to stock it. The reason seems to lie in Welldon's main theme – that of the perverse and abusing mother. The hostility is the expression of a fear that this book “puts it all back onto women”.

Wait a minute though! Puts it all **back** onto women? Surely it's been there all the time: the power – and the loneliness that goes with that power – of being a mother.

Any woman who has become a mother – and many of those who've only thought about it – knows in her deepest self that motherhood is not the benign, selfless condition that the desexualised image of the Virgin Mary portrays. You know, the kind of image beamed at us in TV soaps and whiter than white commercials. Motherhood in reality, can be many things, both benign and self-interested, but never asexual.

What makes Welldon's book different is that it doesn't take up as a central theme, the issue of power relations between men and women. While not denying the abuse that many women suffer at the hands of men, Welldon deals instead, in a thoughtful and wholly woman-centred way, with woman's sexuality.

Adult womanhood with mothering at its centre, is shaped to a great extent by the experiences females have had as babies and children of mothers who were themselves

Undressing the Madonna

also mothered. A thorough understanding of her patients' difficulties – Welldon is a London based psychotherapist – requires investigation stretching back three generations of mothering.

Women come to Welldon after years of finding that no one will take their perverse or

their mothers, come to possess as adults the almost limitless power over their own tiny babies. Perverse and abusive behaviour which reflects a woman's sense of her own damaged sexuality can be turned inward in the case of the non-childbearing woman – eating disorders, prostitution, masochism are all features of such self-hate. Or when motherhood comes along such negative self-image can be channelled outwards onto the next generation.

A mother's abuse may not, as is usually the case with men, be identifiable by clearly defined single sexual acts, but may have the ‘all-pervasive’ quality of woman's sexuality. That sexuality does not reside in one sexual organ and is not even necessarily fully expressed in sexual intercourse. Penis envy is after all, an essentially male definition of how women experience themselves as sexual beings.

In women, sexuality is inextricably bound up with the reproductive ability – her ‘biological clock’ which ticks remorselessly away during her childbearing years. The diffuse, hidden nature of abuse that may result from this way of being of women, combined with a widespread cultural resistance to believe in the perverse mother, can mean that maternal abuse continues unchecked indefinitely.

These are pagan understandings, harking back to Medea, Ceres and Isis. The bureaucratic twentieth century has preferred the safe ground of procedures, structures and formalities.

Perhaps though, it's not too much to hope that at the end of a decade chiefly notable for its infantile ‘conspicuous consumption’ aspirations, we are beginning to be ready once again to tackle some questions about our human relations in more thoughtful and adult terms.

If so, we shall require an honest appraisal of woman's position in that nexus of relationships. Without it, the abuse debate for one, will simply run into the ground. It's time we undressed the Virgin Mary and took a look at the woman underneath. ■



Fergus Bourke

abusing behaviour seriously. It has been explained and ‘made safe’ – to others at least – by recourse to the ‘Virgin Mary’ version of womanhood.

Women who are victimised and trivialised as children and whose sexuality is not confirmed in a positive, individuating way by

Storm Clouds

One day she and Danny are driving across the Saskatchewan prairies to a legal convention in the Rockies. The sky is clear, the wheat golden. A small cloud comes into view. Within minutes there is heavy rain, the road is black with water and the sky is dark as night.

It is a perfect metaphor for the arrival of Sylvia Fraser's other self. It is precisely when her life is tranquil that her alter ego makes her emotional claim.

From the age of seven Sylvia shared her body with a twin, created to do the things that Sylvia was herself too ashamed to do. Her father had demanded a sexual relationship

from this early age. This chronicle of piecing together in adult life, the defensive splitting from her early years, forms the basis of **My Father's House**. Already having sold over 100,000 copies in North America, it is to be the subject of a major film.

“Even now,” she writes “I don't know the full truth of that other little girl I created to do the things I was too frightened, too ashamed, too repelled to do . . . She loved my father, freeing me to hate him . . . She knew everything about me. I knew nothing about her . . . Hers was the guilty face I sometimes glimpsed in my mirror, mocking all my daytime accomplishments.” ■

MY FATHER'S HOUSE – A MEMOIR OF INCEST AND OF HEALING

Sylvia Fraser

Virago £4.95

Deidre Robertson

Sylvia Fraser is a successful journalist, married and in love with a successful lawyer. They have material wealth, shared memories, good friends.

THE SCOTTISH CHILD AND THE LAW

Julia Mason



How do Children Perceive the Law?

How are the young socialised to an awareness of law and government? **Archie Roy** reports on research with Glasgow children.

Karen: "The police don't make the laws. They follow the law but the judge says - right, make a law."

Elizabeth: "It's the police who make the laws, not the judge who

makes the laws."

Karen: "It is 'cause they're . . . listen to me!"

Elizabeth: "It's not! It's the law who makes the law. It's not the judge."

Karen: "Don't be daft. The law is supposed to be a service to the Queen and who takes after the Queen? The Prime Minister, the judge and the parliament. Not the police. They come last in line 'cause they've got to follow it."

Karen and Elizabeth were just two Glasgow nine year olds who took part in a recent research enquiry into how children perceive the law. Children aged 9 to 15 were presented with questions about the law, and stories about people breaking various rules.

Received research wisdom is that there exist clear trends in children's and adolescents' attitudes towards the law. American studies show that younger children aged 7 upwards focus on laws as protective - laws keep the individual safe. Also laws are seen as unchanging, punitive, coercive and repressive until a certain age, until older adolescents begin to understand that laws can be a guarantee of the individual's liberty. With age too, there is a shift from an authoritarian to a more humane, liberal approach.

Children's perceptions of morality and justice are also considered to advance through stages, and these are related to legal perceptions.

Unexpectedly perhaps, the study of Glasgow children revealed some novel thinking in one or two 9 year old boys about the morality of handbag stealing. After stating that stealing an old lady's handbag was definitely wrong, the question why? evoked: - Because there might not be any money in it!

Children of 12 seemed far more aware (than 9 year olds) of the serious consequences for others when someone breaks a law, and were far more concerned about fairness. Older children also gave more spontaneous examples of situations in which laws should be broken - though even the youngest would give examples. Susan (aged 9) talked about when it's wrong or OK to park on a double yellow line.

"It really depends what it is. If it's an emergency and when there's a double yellow line outside a hospital they should be allowed to park there. But just to go into town . . . it's wrong then and might make a traffic jam."

While children would often personalise the power of those in authority (e.g. believe that the Queen or Prime Minister personally makes laws), the awareness of some older children was more abstract. John (aged 12) talked about how he believed laws can be changed:

"Yes . . . they'd write to their M.P. and their M.P. would try and get some more M.P.s to support him and then go down to the Houses of Parliament and get all the M.P.s of the other parties to vote for him, and they'd have a vote and a bill would be passed."

It seems clear that by talking to children, we can discover their ways of thinking. But this by itself does not explain **how** children are socialised into legal or political awareness, and how each generation comes to relate to authority and political power.

Many psychologists concerned with child development now consider that thinking and understanding can develop because of conflict. If children with different perspectives are brought together to talk about their opinions, the mutual stimulation will in many cases promote intellectual stimulation.

To explore these ideas with Glasgow school children, two further studies were conducted, this time with 9 and 11 year olds.

Again, children were presented with questions and stories about legal transgressions. This time however, they were paired according to the extent to which they disagreed on various legal points. Argument and discussion was encouraged between children, until a solution - or a stalemate! - was reached. The whole task was designed as a game so that children could relax and enjoy what was happening.

Some interesting points emerged. There was conflict for instance, between children taking an authoritarian perspective on the treatment of criminals against those favouring a more humane approach. Stuart and Scott, both aged 9:

Stuart: "Well they've (prisoners) done something bad so they shouldn't be allowed to do things. It would teach them a lesson . . ."

Scott: "They should be allowed to do lots of things! Like

they should be allowed some exercise in case they get stiff."

There were many instances of children arguing about the relative importance of reasons they gave for legal offences being wrong. While some attributed reprehensibility to the actual act of law-breaking, others' reasoning stemmed from more person-centred concerns. Michelle and Christine (aged 9):

Michelle: "It (speeding) could kill someone and knock someone down . . . Hurting someone is worse than breaking the law."

Christine: "No it isn't."

Michelle: "It's worse. It is."

Christine: "It isn't. . . because you're not supposed to break the law."

Michelle: "Well knocking someone down, it could kill them, or it could stop them walking . . ."

Christine: "I'm not going to agree with you."

The most significant finding of both conflict studies was that children's legal thinking could be advanced if they exchanged their views and argued with each other. It was interesting to find that arguments between children, regardless of age differences and differences in levels of understanding, were mutually beneficial. It seemed that the challenges posed by younger or less advanced children prompted further legal insights in the more advanced.

The kind of conflict mentioned may occur haphazardly and spontaneously from time to time in children's lives, and may impinge on children's socialisation and cultural development, but it is safe to say that it is hardly recognised or encouraged. Yet for the hundreds of child conversations I heard on the research, the significance of such processes seems clear.

There is evidence to suggest that the moral and legal values we develop in childhood and adolescence will tend to remain fairly constant through much of adulthood. These processes need to be understood by parents and teachers and anyone who relates to children. It may be that these kinds of structured conflicts need to be encouraged, both to encourage learning about the law and also tolerance of differing points of view. ■



Scottish Legal Group

Those of us who wrestle with the vexed legal issues arising in the course of adoption proceedings, assumption of parental rights or referrals to Children's Hearings will be pleased to hear of a new Scottish Legal Group.

Due to be launched by the British Agencies for Adoption & Fostering's Scottish Centre in April, the group is designed to facilitate understanding and the interchange of information among lawyers, social workers, and

others concerned with adoption, fostering and the welfare of children.

In its first year there will be seminars in every Scottish Region, dealing with issues of local concern.

Scotland has a unique system of child care law, and while we are justifiably proud of our system, it has its complexities. One of the aims of the Legal Group is to provide a forum in which those concerned can keep up to date on children's legal issues. Close co-operation

of this kind also promotes good practice, as well as providing a lobby for clarification, and greater conformity of procedure.

Readers of SCOTTISH CHILD will find this a valuable addition to the resources open to them. BAAF will be pleased to supply further information on request. Write to BAAF Scottish Centre, 40 Shandwick Place Edinburgh EH2 4RT Tel. 031 225 9285 ■

Jany M. Scott

Children's Evidence

An International Conference on Children's Evidence in Legal Proceedings is to be held at Selwyn College, Cambridge, from 26 to 28 June this year.

Speakers will include Judge Thomas Pigot QC, who chairs the Home Office Committee on Videotaping, and Sheriff Gordon Nicholson QC (Scottish

Law Commission).

Among other contributors are Professor Johannes Andenaes (Norway); Dr. D. Frehsee (Law Faculty, University of Keele); Dr. Gunter Kohnken (forensic psychologist, Germany); Professor Eliahu Harnon (Israel); Hava David (child examiner, Israel); Judge H. Hamon (France); Debra Whitcomb (USA); and Jeffrey Wilson

(practitioner and writer, Canada).

Additional speakers come from England, Scotland, France, Australia and Scandinavia. The Lord Chancellor, Lord Mackay of Clashfern, will open the proceedings.

Further details are available from J.R. Spencer, Selwyn College, Cambridge, CB3 9DQ.

LETTERS



Food Glorious Food!

Dear Editor,

My daughter Sofia can now hold a spoon and point it in the general direction of her mouth. What power! The last month and a half has involved great self-restraint, as well as the mopping up of a great deal of porridge, mashed banana, and other offerings from the kitchen floor, walls and myself.

Others have had to be restrained too during these first self-feeding days, particularly my mother-in-law. She belongs to the 'hold their hands and stuff it down' school. The local health sister admits to being of the hold their hands school too - I wondered if a career filled with so many clammy porridge hand

shakes had proved too much! Lovely to rub your hands in porridge - feel that texture - 'num a num' as they say here in Norway.

Sofia's voyage of discovery sails through the mashed ba-

been a rather anxious time. Trying to calculate how many spoonfuls have landed on her bib, the floor, etc., it has got easier as I have discovered that she has not lost weight or suffered in any way.

all, 'eat up your dinner like a good girl'. 'Nuff said?

But while I am prepared to admit that my fear that my daughter will starve is groundless, I am not so sure the anxiety will completely disappear with the knowledge.

Feeding is certainly an area where a parent can at times feel helpless. Which can be rather painful and frustrating. It isn't easy to give your little one power. But being able to feed oneself, and being allowed to fulfil that basic need, is after all one of the first steps to independence.

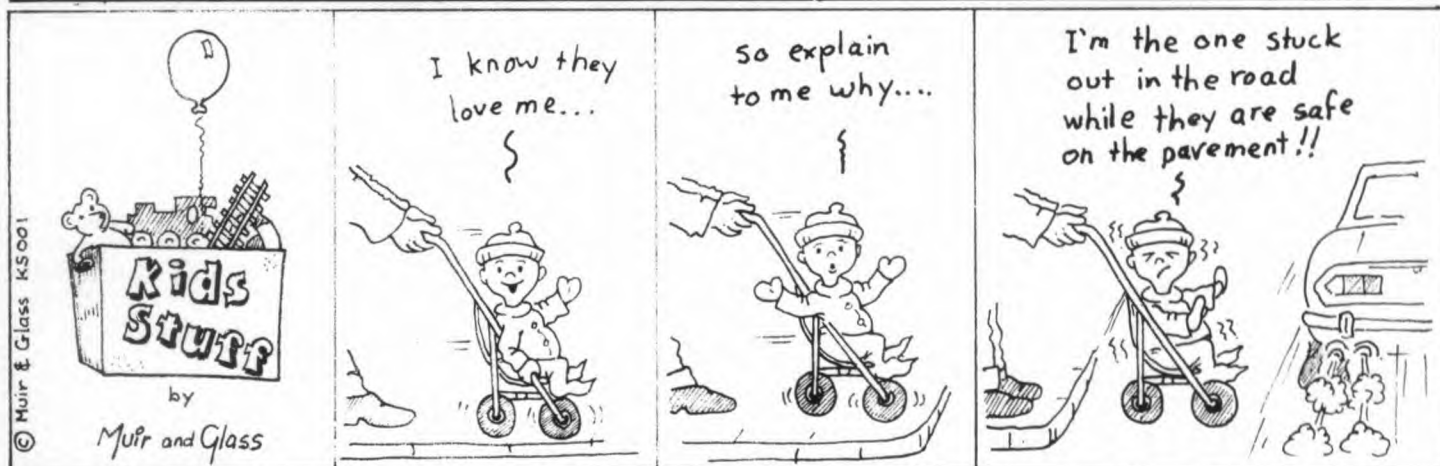
Lynda White Petterson
Hvalstad
Norway

Lynda White Petterson sends her latest news from Norway

nana, wee bits of bread, and anything you happen to be eating if she gets the chance.

While believing in the 'hands off' theory, it has been rather difficult these first weeks to offer help in an unobtrusive way. Despite the fact that Sofia is having mainly mother's milk, it's

The reason for the anxiety then? Perhaps the emotional backlog many Scots and other Europeans carry around can be traced to those little jewels, passed on from parent to child. 'You're not leaving the table/ getting you pudding until you've cleared your plate'; 'think of the starving children'; or worst of





Only an Irish Mother

Dear Editor,
A piece I saw in the newspaper a few weeks ago set me to thinking about the phenomenon of the Irish Mother. It told how a Belfast woman had forgiven her son for stabbing her three times. In fact her clemency had saved her son from jail.

Whatever the details of this particular case, it made me think of all those Irish mothers who give everything they have, sometimes even their lives (through exhaustion, malnutrition, and stress related illnesses) for their children.

Although it is true that levels of selflessness are not usually quite as dramatic as the Belfast woman's, the young mother of the present is left with a difficult act to follow. I am surrounded by women from another generation for whom the family is more important than themselves. They have developed an expertise in looking after their families that

leaves people like me floundering.

These women can iron baskets of clothes as quick as look at you. They can make cheap cuts of meat edible. They can make jam, brown bread and proper pastry. They'll always be last to the table, if they get a chance to sit at all, during dinner.

Traditionally rural Irish women have been respected in their local community. They contributed to the economic well-being of the farm or the shop or just the household itself. It is still true that both in the city and in the country even today, the Woman of the House is the linchpin of various familial relationships. And yet for all this, Irish women have little power in the wider political and social areas. It is as if women, whether daughters or mothers, shoulder many of the responsibilities of power, without any of its action.

The majority of Irish women accept the teachings of the Catholic Church which cast them in subservient roles. A priest, no matter how young and inexperienced, will be deferred to. Many nuns do great work, but are viewed as Handmaids of the Lord. The Church powers (i.e. men) refuse women the right to make decisions about whether or not they will have children.

Being a mother for me in Ireland today means striking a balance between the giving of myself which I have to do with children, and the need I have of my own rights. If I put myself before the kids I end up feeling guilty. But at the same time I am not prepared to go about doing my mothering and family work quietly and be the martyr that some women are, or have been in the past.

Margaret Sweeney
Dublin

Among the Contributors in this issue...

Jeff Aldridge is a lecturer in the Language Studies Department at Moray House College of Education in Edinburgh.

John Davidson lives and writes in Greenock.

Carol Anne Davis is a freelance writer and lives in Edinburgh.

Marion Flett is Director of the project, 'Young Families Now', which aims to promote learning for young children and their families in Torry, Aberdeen.

Christopher Harvie has been since 1980 Professor of British and Irish Studies at Tübingen University. He was born in Motherwell in 1944, and educated at Boswell, Kelso and Edinburgh. He is the author of *Scotland & Nationalism* (1977) and *No Gods & Precious Few Heroes* (1981), new edition 1987.

John Jamieson is a psychologist with Strathclyde Social Work Department.

Ian B. Kerr was born in Australia, but brought up and schooled in rural Scotland. He graduated in medicine from Edinburgh University, and currently works at a research institute in London.

Joyce McMillan is Scottish theatre critic of the *Guardian*, and radio columnist of the *Glasgow Herald*.

Mark Ogle works part-time and looks after his baby daughter.

Honorah Perry is a freelance journalist.

Sheila Ramsay works in a child care team in Strathclyde Social Work Department.

Gordon Rennie is a graduate in Film & T.V. Studies, currently working as an Information Officer at the National Centre for Play in Edinburgh.

Deirdre Robertson is a Glasgow based freelance writer and journalist.

Archie Roy is an adviser for the Royal National Institute for the Blind in Glasgow.

Janys M Scott is Legal Adviser at the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering Scottish Centre.



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Enterprise City

The prospect of Glasgow as European City of Culture was always going to lead to comments about the massive financial cost in a city rife with poverty and deprivation. Such comments are now appearing in the letters pages and elsewhere.

It is, it has to be said, a difficult one. One aspect that is of interest, and may shed some light on what's going on, is the nature of the counter arguments raised in defence of the City of Culture concept. These are often expressed in terms of the jobs that will be created, and the wealth that will be attracted through the numbers of visitors and tourists.

"Art for art's sake" appears not to be in it! Making money – it is an Enterprise Culture, after all – is something we all understand and approve of.

Drama, literature, music, visual arts – all invite the active

engagement of the imagination. Hopes will be raised, fantasies acknowledged, fears confronted, the unconscious become conscious, dreams grasped, and the unsayable said. Which is all potentially dangerous stuff.

Poverty deprives people of more than decent food, housing, clothing and warmth. It can

Important as these are, they can only ever be a rope bridge across the chasm that keeps 'the Arts' firmly in the domain of the middle classes – or at least those who can afford a ticket. They help people to view their own life experiences in new and creative ways. They invite critical interpretation of the history of 'ordinary people'.

Giovanni. The human dilemmas, the struggles, and the emotions explored in all three have a relevance and connectedness that transcend boundaries. Unless of course, access by the poor to such imaginative stimuli is considered dangerous!

The government meanwhile is taking education down a parallel utilitarian track. Good education has a direct application to the world of work – productive, wealth-creating work, that is. Intellectual thought, the pursuit of ideas, philosophical and artistic experiment are dismissed with sneering disdain.

So a contempt for the intellectual, a familiar feature of the totalitarian regime everywhere, is indulged in by a joint and unholy alliance of the powerful and the powerless.

And nothing much changes. ■

Sheila Ramsay

A·F·T·E·R·T·H·O·U·G·H·T·S

isolate us from the means to connect with other experiences. Deprivation is about the limiting of experience and the stunting of human growth.

Perhaps as a sop to a radical politics, community theatre is increasingly seen to be the thing by arts organisers and their political backers. Companies such as **7:84** and **Wildcat** take theatre to the housing schemes.

But why, if it's not too irreverent to alternative theatre orthodoxies to ask, why should art be deemed relevant to anybody if it depicts only one's own experience? You need not have been alive at the time of Agincourt for example, to be enthralled by **Henry V**; or to live in a black township to be moved and enraged by **Sophiatown**; or even to speak Italian to enjoy **Don**

In the next issue...

June/July 1989



THE POWER IN SCHOOLS – Just who runs education? And what's the prognosis for power sharing when school boards are set up this Autumn? **SCOTTISH CHILD**'s writers examine our traditions to find the answers.

Mark Ogle, in a feature exclusive to **SCOTTISH CHILD**, writes on the way we experience **LOSS** in our culture.

Fred Stone gives a brilliantly perceptive account of what's involved in **COPING AND CARING** for children.

Other items include **WOMEN'S MAGAZINES** – Joyce McMillan reads between the lines, and **COMICS** – just harmless fun!?, as well as regular comment, analysis and controversy.

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