



I Wish I'd Written? Manifold Manor

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[113](#) ^[2]

Article Category:

I Wish I'd Written

Byline:

Adèle Geras chooses Philip Gross's **Manifold Manor**.

In this book, Gross opens 'tall, scrolled-iron gates' and leads us into a haunted garden and a mansion in which ghosts wander the corridors. Our guide in this enchanted place is Jack the jackdaw: wise, full of tricks, games and secrets. 32 glorious poems await us: unsettling, funny, poignant, clever, glittering and sombre. Illusions are important in the Manor. Is that a face or a reflection? The wind or someone sighing? Lord Boneleigh, Madame Mirador, and especially Mrs Stoker the hellfire cook wouldn't be out of place in Gormenghast, and I'm sure Gross must be a Peake fan. I love this sinister, beautiful, gone-to-rack-and-ruin world. I love the unhappy people who drift about there. I love the jackdaw and the tabby cat. I love the darkness.

There are word-games at the back of the book, and poetry exercises too, so that readers can join in the fun. These are real poems, not the doggerel with which children are often presented, and not prose cut up into short lines. I really do wish I'd written this extraordinary book, but I've done the next best thing: I've read it, and now, in a way, it's mine.

Manifold Manor by Philip Gross, ill. Chris Riddell (0 571 15405 0, £3.99 pbk) is published by Faber and Faber.

Adèle Geras's latest novel for teenagers is **Silent Snow, Secret Snow** (Puffin, 0 14 038564 9, £4.99 pbk). Her poetry collection for adults **Voices from the Dolls' House** is published by Rockingham Press (1 873468 26 1, £6.95).

Page Number:

16

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