



I Wish I'd Written? Red Shift

Article Author:

[Anthony McGowan](#) [1]

[181](#) [2]

Article Category:

I Wish I'd Written

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Anthony McGowan chooses Alan Garner's **Red Shift**

Anthony McGowan on a challenging novel where meaning often seems to hover just beyond reach?

I missed out on most of the classics of children's fiction when I was a child. I went straight from reading books like **The Guinness Book of Animal Facts and Feats** to adult fiction. It was only relatively recently, therefore, that I discovered Alan Garner. He's probably best known for his fantasy novel (albeit one with a strong streak of realism) **The Weirdstone of Brisingamen**, but the book that utterly transfixed me was **Red Shift**.

It's a genuinely challenging read, even for an adult. Three plots intertwine - one set in Roman Britain, one in the turmoil of the 17th-century civil wars, and one, told largely in dialogue, in the contemporary world. The stories are tied together by geographical continuity, and by the presence of a mysterious object. The historical stories are brutal and mysterious; the contemporary one funny, touching and, ultimately deeply sad. Garner's style is glancing and fragmentary, and often the meaning seems to hover just beyond reach (cracking the secret code in the text helps, a little).

In the intensity of its action, the brilliance of its characterization, the jagged wonder of its prose and, above all the sense that historical sinews bind us together through the ages, giving meaning and wonder to our lives, **Red Shift** is the book I'd have given anything to have written.

Red Shift by Alan Garner is published by Collins Voyager (978 0 00 712786 3) at £5.99. The author of **The Knife That Killed Me** which was shortlisted for Booktrust's Teenage Prize, Anthony McGowan's **Einstein's Underpants and How They Saved the World**, the first in a new series for younger readers, is published in April by Yearling (978 0 440 86924 5, £5.99).

Page Number:

16

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