

# *The Collecting Mystery*

BRIAN ALDERSON

He was a bibliomaniac ... When my father called on him to arrange about the house, he found him sitting almost in rags, apparently dining upon some cheese-parings, and surrounded by a library, the value of which would have fed and clothed him with comfort for an almost indefinite period.

Juliana Horatia Ewing, 'Reka Dom' in *Mrs Overthenay's Remembrances 1869*

John Carter, one of book-collecting's great philosophers, attempted to define the nature of the beast at the start of his Sandars lectures on 'Taste and Technique in Book Collecting' and, having ruled out certain shibboleths such as heredity or natural instinct, came close to endorsing the notion that the thing is 'a mystery, not only too complicated but also too delicate, almost too sacred, to make the exposition to the uninitiated anything but painful'. Whatever you may think of the phraseology, the notion seems—by its very vagueness—a justifiable one, and I would certainly accept it as an explanation of my own bibliomaniac propensities. I have no idea where these came from but, like Judy Taylor ('The Collecting Urge', *Signal* 96), I can perceive their emergence in fairly early youth and suspect that Carter's 'mystery' is for many book collectors a function of their own private histories.

Unlike Judy I'm not conscious of wanting, as a child, to collect children's books. (Some of my most pleasurable experiences in those days came from borrowing books from the tremendous holdings of the Enfield Central Library, whose stock, including the children's books, was uniformly bound in library-suppliers' leather, the gloomy appearance of which had no deterrent effect whatsoever.) Certainly I was desperate to own some books for myself. John Finnemore's 'Teddy Lester' school stories; the annual Wisden's

almanacs'; W.J. Basset-Lowke's *Model Railway Handbook* (oh, the joy when W.H. Smith's in Palmer's Green got hold of a copy in the teeth of wartime crises). The wish to possess these may have marked me as an incipient collector, but it was only in my middle teens that the craziness noticeably began to set in.

To some extent I blame the school library at my Quaker boarding school, which I recall with immense affection and whose large and intellectually stimulating stock did everything that school libraries ought to do.<sup>3</sup> (Please note that this judgement is entirely unaffected by the fact that—the school being coeducational—the library might also form an interesting venue for certain nonbibliographic assignments.) It was a reading of the library's copy of John Nyren's 'Young Cricketer's Tutor' in E.V. Lucas's *The Hambledon Men* (1907) that sparked an initial impulse to collect books on cricket—to go with the Wisdens—but that foundered fairly quickly after I acquired Wally Hammond's *Cricket my Destiny* (1946) and discovered the horrors perpetrated by ghostwriters.<sup>4</sup> Not altogether surprisingly, though, the Lucas book also directed my attention to the poetry of Francis Thompson and this, coupled with the never-to-be-forgotten enthusiasm of a couple of schoolmasters (*that's* what teaching's all about), turned me to the library's holdings of twentieth-century poetry and to a collecting endeavour that has continued, albeit somewhat erratically, down to the present.'

Incontestably, one facet of the attraction that books exerted lay in their physical presence, their character as 'dressed texts' rather than simply texts-in-themselves: the neat, businesslike make-up of the Oxford Miscellany series to which *The Hambledon Men* belonged; 'Four Quartets' in their original wrappers, with rusting staples, and printed on that variegated wartime paper. *Little Gidding* (1942) still exerts an almost mystic fascination. The appalling prospect of all literature soon being instantaneously available on a palm-pilot will result in coming generations being deprived of an essential—if by no means always successfully managed—element in the delivery of what authors have to say, or what illustrators have to show, supplied through the uncertain companionship of their publishers. And, of course, the hugely variable permutations

that can occur in The Production Process are perhaps at their most pronounced in the field of children's literature.

It was during my undergraduate years that the collecting mania really took hold, although from a position of extreme indigence. (Unlike most of my contemporaries I had no grant, and had to subsist on modest parental subventions and on what could be earned in vacations. [My copy of *Ulysses* was acquired in exchange for a term's worth of sweet coupons . . .]) But there were booksellers in small shops, or with market stalls, who could be relied on to have tempting stock at manageable prices, and I propose to note here three books that derive from those ancient times, not just to show the sort of things that turned up and why they got bought, but also because they point a direction which my collecting has—in a highly disorganized way—tended to follow from then on.

1) *Later Poems 1925-1935* by T.S. Eliot. Second impression. London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1942. (The Faber Library No. 50). Small crown octavo. Pp. [4]5-159 [1]. Inferior antique wove paper. Dark blue sand-grain cloth, lettered silver on spine. *Ref.* within Gallup A32. Bought 25 February 1950 from Mr Turner's little shop by the bridge, probably for 1/3 or 1/6. It was a pleasing acquisition because I had already been given its companion volume, *Poems 1909-1925*, a third reprint in green linen of the edition numbered 4 in 'The Faber Library' (1934), and the two books together made up the contents of the much more common single volume, *Collected Poems 1909-1935*, which came out first in 1936 and went through many reprints.

2) *Novum Organum or true suggestions for the interpretation of nature* by Francis Lord Verulam. [Translated by William Wood]. London: William Pickering, 1844. [Title, with Pickering's dolphin device, printed black and red within a wood-engraved monumental frame signed W. Gerente del'.] Foolscape octavo. Pp. [3] 2-536. Thin off-white wove paper, printed in a Caslon old face type by Charles Whittingham at the Chiswick Press. Half dark maroon morocco, marbled paper sides, gilt titling on spine, raised bands, gilt top. Chalked endpapers in pale yellow. *Ref.* Keynes p. 51, starred copy. Bought 31 October 1950 from 'the Man in the Market' for 1/6, but I may have persuaded him down to a shilling. We never knew him as anything but 'the Man in the Market', and he kept his stock in a lockup down by the river where I suspect he dwelt too. We visited him there once and he was boiling up a hunk of gammon over a gas-ring.

The book itself was bought because I liked the look of it so much. I had never heard of Pickering, and hence knew nothing of his reputation as the man who brought back dignity into English book design (his dolphin device is a copy of that of the great Venetian printer Aldus Manutius and bears the proud inscription 'Aldi Discipulus Anglus'). I also knew nothing of the *Novum Organum* and was disappointed in its prosy prose, discovering only later that Bacon wrote it in Latin and that this translation was done circa 1830 by one William Wood. That too is not without a personal resonance, for the book had been first published as part of a seventeen-volume *Works* of Bacon, edited by Basil Montagu and published by Pickering between 1825 and 1834. Montagu had hoped (vainly, of course) that Coleridge would do the translation, and he may well have overseen Wood's work. During the 1960s I got very keen on Coleridge and collected quite a lot of his stuff, often in Pickering's neat but severe editions.

3) *Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales* with illustrations by W. Heath Robinson. Boots the Chemists Branches Everywhere [all within a classical frame, decorated and pictorialized by WHR]. n.d. [1927]. Published by Hodder and Stoughton Limited for Boots Pure Drug Co. Ltd., Nottingham and made and printed in Great Britain by Butler & Tanner Ltd.... [imprint on verso of title page]. Crown quarto. Pp. [8] 9-319 [1] including a frontispiece and 15 illustrations in 4-colour halftone tipped into blanks furnished with a single-rule frame and typographic legend; 81 illustrations in line (plus some repeats). Featherweight paper. Red linen boards with gilt titling on front and spine (shabby). *Refs.* (i) Beare no. 74 f. with the book's history outlined on pp. 39-40; (ii) Alderson (1982) no. 52, noting Caroline Peachey as the translator of 16 of the 17 stories.

Bought from the Man in the Market for, apparently, 3/- probably towards the end of 1951. This was a joint purchase with a fellow student, whom I subsequently married, but neither of us is entirely certain when we got this particular volume. We bought it not so much as a children's book as an example (surprising to us at the time) of 'the other Heath Robinson'. Much later I made great efforts to get hold of all the children's books in which he was involved, patiently seeking them out from sources where the whacking great 'Heath Robinson premium' had somehow not been applied.

These three heterogeneous examples, chosen from a fair number of contenders, will, I hope, be sufficient to show that the mysterious airborne virus of collectormania had taken hold and also that it spread itself

broadcast. Where was the discipline, the sense of purpose that made 'collecting' more than just random accumulating?

That question becomes even more pointed when children's books enter the field of vision. This was in 1956 when I bought a copy of de la Mare's *Peacock Pie* with Ardizzone's illustrations (the second, larger format, edition printed on slightly jaundiced paper) and when I was getting more and more involved in the 'new' market for children's books. Indeed, collecting the things became more and more interwoven with various busy-nesses in the way of, first, selling them and, then, writing about and lecturing on them, so that—unlike my other collecting endeavours such as what the trade call 'modern firsts', or Coleridge, or Pickering, or the whole subject of typography and book design—a reciprocal force developed. Trawling through bookshops or specialist booksellers' catalogues stimulated ideas about the subject 'children's literature', while having to deal with the subject in a vaguely professional way (can one be an amateur professional?) stimulated the quest for an increasingly complex series of interrelated examples. Judy Taylor noted something of the character of this stimulus when she wrote of one discovery leading to another: 'and why not try to find [other books] illustrated by the same artist, written by the same author, published in the same series, perhaps by the same publisher?'

Following a collecting policy along such a single track, or set of related tracks, can be very rewarding for the satisfaction that it brings and for the furthering of an understanding of some aspect of the subject. Thus S. Roscoe's collecting of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century children's books and Bewickiana (he had wonderful runs of Doves Press and Eragny Press books as well); or Marjorie Moon's collecting of John Harris's publications, which was inspired by Roscoe; or, in less elevated mode, the Folly *bergeres*' rounding up of the straying maidens from the Chalet School and other worthy seminaries.<sup>o</sup>

Lacking patience, and too indulgent of my own whims, I have not so much disregarded Judy's simple rationale for focused collecting as expanded it into an ever-more-complicated web of interconnected enthusiasms. 'Rationale' is surely the wrong word, since I have never had a scientific plan, only a long, long series of encounters with certain children's books which seemed at the time worth getting. For the sake of this article, however, I will present a very brief overview of the whole glorious muddle as though I knew from *Peacock Pie* onwards exactly what I was doing.

*Au fond* there are the essentials, the books that have been waymarks for their own generation and often for many subsequent ones. Being much reprinted and adapted (for instance, the Lambs' rendition of Shakespeare has been in print in one form or another since 1806 and Marryat's *Children of the New Forest* since 1847) these so-called classics are a testing-ground for collectors. The excitements that can be engendered over the defining and the possessing of first editions of such books have often drawn spiky or derisive comments from those for whom any printing is as good as any other (so who cares if there's a turned letter on sig. E4, corrected in later impressions?). But you need to distinguish between fashions—and fashionable prices—nurtured among communities of 'high-spot collectors' and the legitimate and sometimes powerful attractions of the first arrival of a text in book form. (I won't go into the fascinating subject of a book's prior publication in serial form—a very frequent occurrence—but I will say that the hopelessly overstained Alderson shelf- and floor-space is not noticeably eased by Valerie Alderson's extensive collection of Victorian and Edwardian periodicals for young ladies—to say nothing of several Pisan towers formed by the novels of Evelyn Everett Green.) After all, any serious longitudinal study of a 'classic' has to begin with first publication, from which point every such classic will develop its own history, so that there is a universal stability about 'firsts' which is inescapable. What collectors need to determine is how far a representative copy of a classic text is good enough for them and what status that copy may have within the book's total history. I have no yearning to glorify some odd copies of *Tom*

*Brown's Schooldays* with an 1857 first edition, but (after how many years?) still seek Caroline Peachey's frightful translation of H.C. Andersen, in its original boards, as published by Pickering in 1846; while George MacDonald's *Dealing with the Fairies* (1867) is one of the most perfect of all Victorian children's books in its unity of design.

These 'waymark' books form a kind of framework within which all manner of separate growths occur (sometimes these seem, like fungus, to sprout overnight). And at this point I had better confess that, although the bulk of the material in these separate sections is British, I have had a growing interest in the parallels and divergences of children's book publishing in the United States which may manifest itself in copies of quintessential American texts. I regard some of these with special affection, partly because they are books of great character which took some hunting down, and partly because they are examples of the United States emerging as its own master in the creation of a literature for children, whether in storytelling (e.g., Cranch's *Last of the Huggermuggers*, 1856, and *Kobboltozo*, 1857; Carl Sandburg's *Rootabaga Stories*, 1922) or in the treatment of texts originating in Europe (e.g., De Silva's edition of Maria Edgeworth's children's books, Philadelphia, 1821-3, whose design far outstrips anything her London publishers managed; or the first US *Water-Babies*, which must have been done from an early printing of the first London edition, since it retains the 'Envoi' verses that Kingsley had had removed during the print run).

The ramifying nature of these collections-within-the-collection is such that no sensible account of any one of them could be fully described in this article—to which a supplementary point needs to be made that some books fit into several homes at once. That early-acquired *Peacock Pie*, for instance, is now part of compound groups that could be labelled English Poetry; de la Mare: his writings for children; *Peacock Pie*: all known editions; Ardizzone: illustrative work; and Faber & Faber: publishing in the 1930s and 1940s.

Probably the least daunting approach to the whole tottering structure (for me, anyway) will be to put forward the following summaries of some of its more clearly defined areas (that is to say: areas where I am conscious of some sort of collecting plan being in evidence) with a single descriptive note on an item in the holdings which I particularly treasure.

### *Genres*

Historians and critics have often found it easier to discuss the progress of the literature by examining what might be called particular subject-patterns that authors are drawn to, which seem to establish traditions of their own (see Auchmuty's recently published two-volume *Encyclopaedia of School Stories* for some telling examples). As it happens, I have myself been a casual collector of boys' school stories ever since my childhood reading of those 'Teddy Lester' books and the nonbibliographic writings of Talbot Baines Reed. (In 1971 I was allowed to supervise an edition of my favourite, *The Fifth Form at St. Dominic's* for a rather sort-lived series of reprints put out by Hamish Hamilton.) Any dormant interest was sharply awakened through the arrival of catalogues from the book-dealer and bibliographer Bob Kirkpatrick, which make up an elongated commentary on the many varied aspects of the genre.'

School stories, though, are a minor concern compared with my much longer activity as a collector, first, of poetry specially written or gathered up for child readers (nonsense especially) and, second, of traditional literature, which has to be divided up into such categories as nursery rhymes, ballads, romances and folk tales (themselves divided up into those originating in the British Isles or North America and told in English, and those that have suffered translation from other languages). In earlier times I did quite a lot of storytelling in schools and libraries, as well as with my own young sons, and there is no better means of discovering the disjunction between the origins of the told story and its letterpress adaptations. I have fairly huge holdings of Perrault, Grimm, the *Arabian Nights* and the 'inventions' of H.C. Andersen, assembled partly to demonstrate the almost universal deficiencies of the texts and, indeed, very often of the illustrations too.

Here are two plus two specimens which display in little some aspects of the publishing process at work within these genres.

¶ *Jack the Giant Killer*. [London] Printed by J. March, Waterloo Road [cover title: the book-title in rustic capitals as part of a full-page illustration, printed in three colours; the imprint in letterpress below]. Half-sheet foolscap quarto [?]. Pp. [5] 6-7 [1], a single sheet of cheap paper folded twice, now splitting at folds. The cover and three half-page woodcuts on the recto of the sheet are colour printed from three wood blocks; page [3] on the verso is a drop-head title with a single half-page woodcut. n.d. [c.1860].

Bought recently from M. & D. Reeve Catalogue no. 56 no.188. A Victorian 'chapbook' from a publisher who specialized for decades in such cheap things. The text is a hacked-down version of the traditional one as given in the Opies' *Classic Fairy Tales* (1974) and the object is chiefly of interest for the publisher's use of relief colour printing, glorifying its boldly dramatic if amateurish woodcuts.

¶ *Divine Emblems: or temporal things spiritualized. Calculated for the use of young people*. Adorned with fifty copper plate cuts. By Mr John Bunyan ... London: engraved, printed and sold by T. Bennett ... Likewise sold by T. Massey ... M. Trapp ... and Wilkins ... Price bound 1'6<sup>d</sup>. [all engraved] n.d. [1790?]. Small square octavo. Pp. [5] 6-88, with the text, a frontispiece and 49 headpiece illustrations engraved throughout and printed on a thick laid plate paper. Original sheep, neatly rebaked in old calf. Inscribed W. Scripps Oct 15<sup>th</sup> 1973.

Bought about five years ago, but I failed to note from whom or what I paid (there will be a bill somewhere). This neglect, and my forgetfulness, are odd because obtaining the book was a triumph. I had been coveting it for years.

The *Divine Emblems* were first published in 1686 as *A Book for Boys and Girls, or country rhymes for children* and although it rather bumps along both in its versification and its contorted 'comparisons' it went through many curious editions. This one is delectable, partly because of the quality of the engraving of the (pretty extensive) text and partly because of the finely observed and skilfully engraved pictorial headpieces.

*Dryaden. Et eventyr fra udstillingstiden i Paris 1867*. Af H. C. Andersen. Andet oplag. Kjobenhavn: C.A. Reitzels Forlag, 1868

Foolscap octavo. Pp. [7] 8-60, off-white wove paper. Yellow paper boards with pictorial design in line on front, silk-glazed paper endpapers, all edges gilt. Inscription: Jil Viv for Dad [?]

with:-

11 *The Wood-Nymph*. By Hans Christian Andersen. Translated from the Danish by A.M. and Augusta Plesner. [Floral decoration] London: Sampson Low, Son and Marston ... 1870

Super royal 16 mo. in fours. Pp. [60] + inset pictorial secondary title-page and 3 plates, all lithographed in four colours, the text paper a cream wove, the plates on a whiter plate paper. Purple sand-grain cloth decorated in black and gilt on front, gilt lettering on spine; dark blue chalked endpapers, all edges gilt.

Refs: Alderson (1982) no. 75; Waddleton Suppl. 1 1870.160

The two bought from Justin Schiller *Realms* 1983 no. 153. The copy in Danish has ms. interlineations throughout in English, these being preparatory drafting by the Plesners for their translation, which first appeared in *Aunt Judy's Magazine* before the Sampson Low volume. As someone who has attempted Andersen translation I find this example of the work in progress of particular interest. Pity it wasn't a better story.

### *Publishing*

I have long contended that the character of children's literature throughout its history is as much, if not more, determined by publishers as by authors and illustrators. It's no surprise that some of the most scholarly—and illuminating—studies of the subject are the annotated bibliographies and checklists of publishers such as those by Roscoe on the Newberys and on Lumsden, Marjorie Moon on John Harris and on Tabart, and Russell Freedman on Holiday House. I'm often influenced in buying a book by the way it represents, or relates to, its publisher's individual style or policy, and in some cases I am trying to assemble substantial cross-sections of a publisher's output. In one instance, Peter Lunn/The Westhouse Press, I'm

after a complete run of publications; in others I'm after facets of their much more multifarious activity: the astonishing potpourri that came from Humphrey Milford at the Oxford University Press in the time of the *entre deux guerres*, or the distinctive *faux* medievalism that characterized some of Nelson's children's books during the 1860s. Over the years I have contributed some notes on 'Unusual Children's Books' to the *Newsletters* of the Children's Books History Society. In *Newsletter* 56 I gave a sample description of one of these Nelson volumes: *Pictures and Songs for the Little Ones at Home* (1856). Here's a choice item from the Milfordiana.

¶ *Dolly's Pretty Play Box*. A cardboard box published by Humphrey Milford. Oxford University Press, London, 1933. 75mm. tall, 85mm. wide, and 68mm. deep with a hinged lid and fall-down front, the sides and lid patterned with large white and blue diagonals, the box title printed black with a blue fleuron frame on a label 60mm square pasted on the lid and on the inner side of the fall-down flap. The box contains 8 little volumes selected from the series 'The Henry Penny Books for Little Chicks' printed by Mackays Ltd of Chatham. Each has 48 pages of creamy featherweight paper arranged as a single gathering which collates  $[A]^4 < B^4 < C^4$ , the signed sections coded to indicate the title of the book in the series. All are illustrated with line drawings on almost every page (perhaps by Ernest Aris?) and the gathering is stapled into card covers with a plain colour wash (pea green; cerise; dark purple; bright blue; light green; orange; pale yellow; and maroon) on the exterior and a letterpress title label 13 x 45mm., white with black-printed sans serif titling between thick single rules. No author is acknowledged and the titles, which figure as the final eight in an advert for twenty-four on p. [2] of each book, are as follows: *Bunnikin Tales*; *Henny-Penny and Bow-Wow*; *Henny-Penny and Cock-A-Doodle*; *Henny-Penny and Piggy-Wiggy*; *Henny-Penny's Book of Trains*; *Little Goosey Gander*; *Little Mousey*; and *That Naughty Mouseykins*.

Bought at a book fair 25 June 1991, the third example of such a Milford boxed set that I have acquired. The other two, differing somewhat in make-up and dimensions, are (1) *My Oum Box of Books* (1934): 6 titles chosen from 'The Teeny-Weeny Books' 85 x 60mm., each with 80 pp. in five gatherings, the first and last leaves pastedowns, the bindings in grained paper alternately orange and bright green; and (2) *Baby Bunting's Box of Books* (1935): 8 titles from 'The Tippeny-Tuppeny Books' 73 x 60mm., each with 48 pp. in three gatherings including pastedowns. The bindings are similar to those in the *Play Box*. I know of no similar boxed sets nor of any other copies of these. Milford was fond of boxes and I included another example in the exhibition I recently organized for the National Library of Scotland: a very pretty checkerboard box containing Hulme Beaman's four early Toytown stories, written before Larry the Lamb & Co. arrived.

### *The Glass of Fashion*

The agglomeration of publishers in any one period, coupled with its economic circumstances and the state of its technology, go far to determining its distinctive character. This is not just a matter of how things look (although you can often date a book to its decade by simply flicking through the pages), it is a matter of what subjects are deemed to be in and how those subjects are treated by whatever creative talents are around.

The drawback for collectors is the increasing dearth (and *ergo* price) of books from distant times. Thus, although it's always worth having a dip at unheard-of oddities, my own collecting of 'period' material relates chiefly to the years from 1920 to 1950 when much was happening in the English and American book trades. Indeed, the prompting towards the Peter Lunn subcollection comes from my unending preparations for a long-overdue paper examining the children's books of the 1940s. (Mention of that labour is perhaps a good moment to give an obiter dictum on the importance of book jackets. These adornments are often derided by cynics, who usually possess the mathematical skills to work out the premium attached to second-hand books that still possess them.<sup>8</sup> But for any bibliographies of twentieth-century children's books their presence, if called for, is essential—and of course they are usually chucked away by curators of national collections.)

¶ *Jack Robinson* [by] John Keir Cross with pictures by John R. Parsons. A Peter Lunn book. [Imprint on final page reads: 'first published in December 1945 by Peter Lunn (Publishers) Limited ... Printed ... by Dugdale Printing Limited ... London W.1']

Oblong crown quarto. A single gathering of 14 leaves, the conjunct outer ones being off-white wove

paper serving as free endpapers, which match the stock of the pastedowns; the rest are a white coated stock chosen to take the vigorous designs by John Parsons, printed in four colours, probably by offset lithography, and given dramatic placing on the page openings. (The centre spread is a vista without text.) Ochre cloth boards with a design embracing the title by JP blocked in red; a wraparound illustration on the dust jacket repeats that on the centre spread.

Bought by Valerie Alderson from M. & D. Reeve at the York Book Fair in September 1998 and given to me as a birthday present. John Keir Cross (aka Stephen MacFarlane) is an amiable storyteller, and his fanciful tale of a little girl who is saved from being turned into a cliché overcomes its limitations by his companionable writing and by John Parsons's bright and airy decorations. Like most of Peter Lunn's children's books the whole thing is slightly offbeat, owing less to contemporary fashion than you would expect.

### Authors

Since trying to collect all the authors is hardly an attainable project (although I sometimes think that Mr Lloyd Cotsen<sup>9</sup> is attempting it), a choice of direction will almost certainly be subjective. For orderly persons who confine their lusts within specific genres, such as Boys' Adventure Stories or Evangelical Fiction, the key authors will be a *sine qua non*, but, for the more wayward among us, fancies are likely to roam. For myself, I recognize the value of having at least reading copies of most of the works of most of the authors whom one may need to call upon in the course of professional work, but only a few—and those manageably unprolific like William Blake (posthumous editions of the *Songs*), or Edward Lear, or Richard Jefferies, or John Masefield—stir me to accumulate variants of all their children's books. (Illustrators though are a different matter. Their presence is often of vital importance in determining the appearance of a book, but their work—scattered promiscuously all over the place—is rarely the subject of detailed consideration. I am currently garnering the work of Brian Robb, whose quiet genius is matched by the world's obliviousness to it.) A Masefield example is as follows.

¶ *Il Popolo di Mezzanotte* [by] John Masefield; traduzione di Ilva Tron, illustrazioni di Quentin Blake. [Milan] Arnoldo Mondadori Editore. 1990

Octavo 216 x 146 mm. Pp. [8] 9-197 [3] + 8 halftone colour plates on a coated paper with a defining quote on the versos. Laminated paper boards; no dust jacket.

*The Midnight Folk* was first published in 1927 and, along with its sequel, *The Box of Delights* (1935), stands among the high peaks of children's literature. (If I had to chuck them, or the two *Alices*, out of a balloon they would be the survivors.) Indeed, all Masefield's writing for children is admirable, and I seek it out in whatever variants I can find. (I have the two great books in their first issue in the 1957 format with the author's inscription to Margery Fisher, who wrote the Bodley Head Monograph about him.) *Il Popolo* is also of consequence to me as a translation. Our neglect of such things (whether into or out of English) is pretty scandalous—it's a subject beyond most children's book persons' comprehension—but I delight in this Italian job and in the knowledge that Mondadori had the wit to ask Quentin Blake to illustrate it. He also did *Lo Scrigno delle Meraviglie* (1990 too) and my only regret is that they allowed him no black-and-whites. Both books were kindly sent to me by the publisher when I was working on a notice of their arrival as an English edition from Heinemann in 1991.

But I am much more interested in tackling the life history of

### Single Books

While Masefield is fairly easy to deal with, because of his few books for children and their publication within the last century, writers like Stevenson or Kipling are tough propositions and I have tended with them, and others, to concentrate on single titles such as *A Child's Garden of Verses* (1885) and *Just So Stories* (1902—which prompts me to say that, as I write this, a package lies in wait for me downstairs containing a first edition of that book of which I have at last found an affordable copy). Arguably the runs of editions of such books tell us more about illustration and book production than authorship, but I believe that the reading of a text is profoundly influenced by its presentation and indeed adaptations occur more of-

ten than you think. That certainly occurs with *The Water-Babies*, which I am (madly) trying to collect *komplett* in order to write a definitive study of how its illustrators have failed to measure up to its extraordinary text. Resisting the urge to give an example from those groaning shelves, I offer Kipling (of a sort). After all, 2002 is *Just So's* centenary

¶ *The Sing-Song of Old Man Kangaroo*. By Rudyard Kipling. [Illustrated by Day Hodgetts] New York, Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Co. 1923. ('The Just So Stories' Painting Books for Children no. 2)

Ref Alderson (1992) Nos. 6 and IV.2

Broad quarto (8 7/8 x 10 5/8 in.). A single gathering of 16 leaves, the outer leaves pastedowns. Pictorial paper boards, being a wrapround illustration in colour of Yellow Dog Dingo chasing Old Man Kangaroo.

Bought from David Miles on 25 June 1991, along with no. 4 in the series: *How the Alphabet was Made*. My interest in *Just So Stories* and my arguments for there being only one acceptable version of the book (i.e., that illustrated by the author) have been fully articulated in a little essay, noted at the end of this article. I possess many pictorial versions of both the book and the individual stories, but these Painting Books are particularly elusive. The unnamed illustrator (who provides outline drawings and coloured versions of the same for copying) is said by the *National Union Catalog* to be Day Hodgetts (but who s/ he?). The old British Museum Catalogue notes the date of a Hodder & Stoughton edition of the four Painting Books as 1922-3, but I am inclined to think that the books were masterminded by Doubleday, who were RK's regular U.S. Publishers.

This seems to be the appropriate moment to bring in:

### *Illustration*

about which I propose to say as little as possible. That is partly because illustration naturally figures among the aspects of collecting touched on in the categories above, which are bound to include unillustrated and illustrated books, including picture books, of which, I fear, I possess many hundreds. Furthermore, because the work of illustrators—especially in periodicals—is so little attended to outside the publications of the Imaginative Book Illustration Society and the Private Libraries Association, I believe that one owes it to many neglected talents to engage with as much of their work as possible. (Among the numerous disappointments of *The Cambridge Guide to Children's Books* was its professed ambition to redress the balance between writers and illustrators and its almost complete failure to do so.)

What I suppose I should emphasize about this by-no-means-fully digested purpose in collecting so much illustrative work is, first, that it feeds my predilection for examining the critical issues which surround the interaction of words and pictures and, second, that it supports my interest in the way that pictures are dependent on the varying technical processes available for their reproduction. This last has resulted in the most unusual and appealing part of the collection, which consists of illustrated books from various periods accompanied by the artists' original artwork and, in one or two cases, the materials involved in the illustrative process: a copper plate, wood engraved blocks, progressive proofs, etc.

¶ *The Butterfly's Birth-Day [by A.D.M.], St. Valentine's Day, and Madam Whale's Ball, poems, to instruct and amuse the rising generation. With elegant engravings*. London: printed for J. Harris ... 1808.

Square 16 mo. Pp. [5] 6-16 + inserted frontispiece and 3 plates, all engraved on a thicker stock and hand-coloured at the publishers. The letterpress text is furnished with three wood-engraved tailpieces. Bound in plain yellow wrappers with the publisher's ms. price: 1/6 on the front. Ref.: Moon 509, giving details of authorship

with:-

the four original watercolours on which the engraver based his plates, mounted. The whole housed in a modern book-box in canvas over boards with a red morocco label, gilt.

Bought in August 1990 from Justin Schiller at Kingston, New York. An unusual survival. The watercolour drawings, which are the same way round as the printed versions, were probably traced on to the copperplate in reverse in order to print as positives. Neither the three poems nor the watercolours are in the first rank as artistic creations, apart from a very dramatic Triton with his nautilus shell (about whose biology the poet supplies a descriptive note).

The acquisition of primary materials such as these is coming to be seen (not before time) as a contribution



to both descriptive bibliography and critical studies, and private collectors are likely to have an increasingly hard time competing against institutions in the United States to win possession of them. Most distressing is the growing tendency for dealers—or even artists themselves—to break up suites of illustrations for the richer return of selling individual drawings or paintings.

The intimate relation evident here between the creating of children's books and their critical assessment forms for me a justification for my self-indulgent divagations as a collector. To some extent I blame the editor of *Signal* for the whole astonishing saga, for it was she who, in a previous incumbency, as editor of *Children's Book News*, taught me the need to question not just my own critical opinions and the manner of their expression but also the Received Ideas of the time—whether these came from the luminaries of the Carnegie committee or the patrician reviewers of the *Times Literary Supplement*, which in those far-off days used to publish Children's Book Supplements.

Collecting children's books, I realized, if undertaken with a degree of thoroughness (John Carter quotes the bibliographical scholar Graham Pollard on the qualities of a collector: 'critical intelligence in defining the scope of his collection, pertinacity in seeking everything within that scope, and courage in acquiring it'), entails not only a continuous critical questioning of the origins and influences of the books that everyone knows but also a comparative evaluation of textual, illustrative and production variants of the books that nobody knows. In recent years I have developed a particular penchant for buying children's books (usually quite cheaply) by writers, illustrators and publishers of whom I've never heard. This can then lead to the discovery that only minimal differences separate these lost works from their more celebrated contemporaries. How small a gap there is between survival and oblivion.

What these ventures down overgrown paths also reveal is the paucity of simple, unadorned, factual guidance that is to be had from the standard sources. The apparently pretentious and by no means complete references included in some of my notes above were intended to show something that is important to many collectors and bibliographers: the pinning-down of information sometimes in obscure publications about the location of other copies of a particular book, and about aspects of the work that may enhance its interest. Such information is not always trivial, and collectors may seek it because it gives emphasis to the diverse ways in which authors and illustrators have been served by those who produce their works.

Where children's books are concerned this diversity can be especially prominent, in part owing to publishers' attempts to market an attractive product and in part (contrariwise) by their recognition that children's books do not necessarily call for the same degree of physical robustness as may occur with books for adults. In consequence any collector worth his salt will discover that investigating a book, either before or after its acquisition, may send him to a range of secondary sources far wider in their coverage than the few that are devoted directly to children's literature. Such sources include histories and monographs on printing, publishing, graphic processes, bookbinding as well as all the customary catalogues of collections and special exhibitions, reference works, biographies, etc. (Running a shocked eye over my own collection of secondary sources—very necessary to one rusticated in the North Riding of Yorkshire—I arrive at a guesstimate that there are well over two thousand titles on hand. These do not include some rather long runs of various bibliographic journals and individual pamphlets, nor yet many shoeboxes full of back numbers of specialist booksellers' catalogues. The latter are, in my view, of inestimable importance and the

reading of them can be an education in itself.)

My computation of holdings is not set down out of vanity but out of an awareness that much of the busy activity in the field of children's literature today is undertaken by persons whose access to such sources—indeed, whose access to substantial collections of children's books themselves—may be severely limited. Mingling among the cognoscenti at conferences and the like, one is a little discomfited to explain what 'Roscoe' might be or the varied contributions of 'McLean'—but I suppose one shouldn't be surprised since few contemporary critics seem themselves to be conscious of the traditions of their craft. How intimate a knowledge do they have of the work of Margery Fisher, say, or Fred Inglis, or John Goldthwaite, or even the last 98 numbers of *Signal*? And so far as institutional collections are concerned, dormancy prevails. There is apparently no creative, forward-looking collection development going on at an. In some ways, though, this depressing lack of activity and—more—of curiosity among the children's book potentates supplies the private collector with that peculiar *frisson* of opening up virgin territory untrampled by the boots of Research.

Or am I wrong? Perhaps there are dozens of *Signal* readers who can enlighten me on the critical status of the following little item that has just come through the letterbox.

¶ *A Guide to Caper*. Text by Thomas Bodkin. Pictures by Denis Eden. [Vignette of key]. London: Chatto & Windus, 1924

Foolscap quarto. Pp. [viii] 1-89 [3], irregular foliation. Red glazed linen boards, lettered gilt on front and spine; no dust jacket, although one is probably called for.

Bought a few weeks ago from Talatin Books catalogue 57 no. 34 on the strength of the bookseller's annotation, which includes the description 'a very odd book'. That is true—and the fact of its oddity and of its being nowhere (apparently) recorded proved irresistible. The author (Irish?) was an art critic, whose proximity to children's literature is seen elsewhere only in his preface to the edition of Perrault, published for an adult market, with illustrations by Harry Clarke; the illustrator Denis Eden is quite unknown to me or the standard reference books; and there are good reasons to count the book as a promiscuous *jeu d'esprit* of the twenties intended for everyone and anyone, its audience being addressed throughout as 'Dear Reader'. Nevertheless, its perambulation around the city of Caper, largely peopled by Ursors, who look a bit like teddy bears, is characterized by a po-faced battiness which would make excellent comedy to share with a child, and that goes too for Eden's fanciful halftone illustrations which demand to be pored over (but not 'pawed', the paper being all too receptive of grubby fingerprints).

#### REFERENCES & NOTES

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Gallup. *T.S. Eliot. A bibliography ...* By Donald Gallup. London: Faber & Faber, 1952 [I don't have the most recent edition.]

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41. New York: Justin G. Schiller Ltd., 1983

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1. *Taste & Technique in Book Collecting; a survey of recent developments in Great Britain and the United States*; given as the Sandars Lectures in 1947 and published by Cambridge University Press, 1948. A reprint with corrections and notes and an epilogue was published by the Private Libraries Association in 1970.

2. An early lesson for book collectors. My treasured copy of the 1939 Wisden, recording the wonders of the 1938 season, was 'borrowed' by a grandee fifth-former called Bellamy, who had recently scored a century in an inter-schools competition. I never saw it again.

3. The library itself was a fairly notable building, having been designed by a promising architect who died young. It had been officially opened in 1937 by Sir Michael Sadler, the father of that pre-eminent book collector, Michael Sadleir. For some incomprehensible reason the building has now been converted to accommodate sixth-form students, etc. The school itself is not a stranger to children's book history, which may be discovered by consulting F.J. Harvey Darton's *Children's Books in England* (rev. 3rd ed., The British Library, 1999) in the edition which I edited (237-8). It also happened that Elfrida Vipont was a busy member of the School Committee and one of her daughters (who was a prefect) attempted unavailingly to improve my table manners.

4. I do still have, however, the probably ghostwritten *Cricket in the Sun* by Learie Constantine, which the great man signed for me when he visited the school on 9 May 1947.

5. I recently bought at a Durham book fair a copy of Ezra Pound's *Personae* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1909) for a sum of money which my schoolboy self would have thought beyond belief. The stuff's awful tosh, but I love it—and, anyway, have long nurtured an interest in the Elkin Mathews set-up.

6. The *bergers* in question are Sue Sims, Belinda Copson and Daphne Faux-Larkman [sic], and their flock are the Fans of Light Literature for the Young, for whom *Folly* arrives thrice-yearly (current subscription £9 to Daphne at 37 Kingstanding Road, Birmingham B44 8BA). First published in September 1990 it rejoiced in pre-modernist informality, abjuring all 'scholarly and beautifully-researched articles on serious or important writers ... / seventeenth century chapbooks / lithogravure [?] techniques in children's books of the Netherlands'. It abjured too all earnest articles on collecting (like the present one) but its 36 issues so far are replete with un-earnest but wondrously knowledgeable and comic articles on the joys and frustrations of collecting among the Fans, many of whom have a serious pash on the likes of Dorita Fairlie Bruce and Elsie Oxenham.

7. It was Bob who fostered my latent interest in the works of Desmond Coke (aka 'Belinda Blinders'!) who wrote the famous school story about school stories, *The Bending of a Tung* (1906, rev. ed. 1908). He also wrote *The Confessions of an Incurable Collector* (1928). He was a schoolmaster at Clayesmore when Ardizzone was a pupil there, and he features briefly but significantly as adviser in the final pages of *The Young Ardizzone* (1970)—Ted didn't like him much, though.

8. You may do the sums for yourself. Among upmarket dealers, the going rate for a nice copy of Beatrix Potter's *Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse* (1918) could be somewhere between £350 and £450. A recent bookseller's catalogue records a (perhaps unique) copy in its original overprinted glassine wrapper at £1850.

9. I am continually surprised by the need to expatiate to children's book persons both in Europe and North America on the wonders of the Cotsen Children's Library, now housed alongside the Firestone Library at Princeton (apart from substantial holdings awaiting transference from Los Angeles). In terms of its range—no language is too remote to be included; indeed, the remoter the better—and of its size, and of its multifarious rarities it is an astonishing phenomenon, made the more so because of Mr Cotsen's desire that children should not be excluded from joining in the fun.

An account of the founding of the collection by Lloyd Cotsen and his late wife, JoAnne, is given by Andrea Immel in the Introduction to the first volume of *A Catalogue of the Cotsen Children's Library. I: The twentieth century A-L*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Library, 2000. This 700-page work, with details of 6695 children's books, is the first of a projected four-volume catalogue. Volume II covering letters M-Z is to be published soon (\$200 each, but non-profit institutional libraries should consult the distributor: Battledore Ltd., PO Box 2288, Kingston, New York 12402-228 U.S.A.).

Mr Cotsen has also established the Cotsen Occasional Press to publish accounts of individual aspects of the collection. Among other items there have appeared *The Dawn of Wisdom: selections from the Japanese Collection* . . . by Ann Herring (2000) and *Virtue by Design, illustrated Chinese children's books* . . . by Don J. Cohn (2000).