

The SECRET GARDEN



By FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT
Illustrated by TASHA TUDOR

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by Frances Hodgson Burnett

Frances Hodgson Burnett, the J. K. Rowling of her day, enjoyed an audience of both adults and children for all of her best-selling books. In her lifetime everyone believed she had written a masterpiece in *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, a book that caused a fashion craze—young boys wearing suits patterned after the Little Lord. But *The Secret Garden*, a quieter book of Burnett's, unmentioned in her *New York Times* obituary, grew in importance after she died and has become her contemporary legacy.

When Mary Lennox becomes an orphan because of a cholera epidemic, she is sent to Misselthwaite Manor, an isolated country estate in Yorkshire, England. Left mostly alone, she explores her environment and becomes curious about a walled garden, now locked away. Eventually, Mary finds the key, opens the garden, and brings Dickon, a servant's brother, and Colin, her uncle's sickly child, into the mysterious place. Published in 1911 and considered the first modern children's novel, the book features two initially unattractive protagonists, Colin and Mary, who become better human beings as they transform the garden into a beautiful place. Mary's cry in this book, "Might I have a bit of earth?" continues to speak to anyone who wants to dig in the ground and bring forth life.

Newbery Award winner Katherine Paterson found *The Secret Garden* as a child and continues to reinterpret its meaning as she moves through the stages of her life. Librarian-Pat Scoles discovered a reason to read when she picked up the book at age eight.

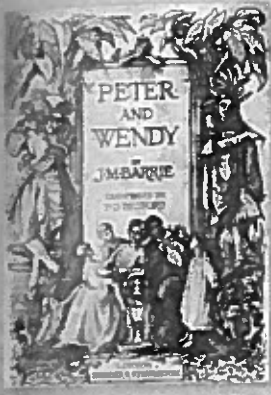
Katherine Paterson

A sense of wonder

In trying to say what reading *The Secret Garden* meant to me as a child, I find myself awash in feelings that do not easily translate into words. *What was the gift of this magical book?* I ask myself. Then I realize that it was wonder—not the kind of wonder that fantasy evokes, but the wonder of the natural world when I take the time to look. Frances Hodgson Burnett taught me to marvel that a shriveled brown bulb can produce a tulip, that dead sticks can give birth to roses, and that even people, shriveled by illness and deadened by grief, can still blossom. Her book helped me to see the miracle of new life bursting forth from apparent death.

In *The Sense of Wonder*, Rachel Carson says: "If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength." This was surely the gift *The Secret Garden* gave to me as a child, and although I'm no good fairy, it is a gift I seek to share.

Anita Silvey, ed. Everything I Need to Know I Learned from a Children's Book: Life Lessons from Notable People from All Walks of Life, New York: Roaring Brook Press, 2009.



PETER PAN

by J.M. Barrie

Although the character of Peter Pan first appeared in 1902 in James Barrie's book *The Little White Bird*, Barrie developed Peter's personality on the stage in 1904. In this play he created some of the great iconic characters of the twentieth century—the crocodile with a ticking clock, Captain Hook, the Lost Boys, and of course everyone's favorite fairy, Tinker Bell. One night Wendy, John, and Michael Darling leave home and soar into the sky with Peter Pan, the boy who never grows up. They land on an enchanted island, Neverland, filled with fairies, mermaids, and pirates. All narrowly escape having to walk the plank; together they defeat Peter's archenemy, the villainous Captain Hook.

In 1911 Barrie created a book, *Peter and Wendy*, which provided added background and events. In a generous bequest, he left the funds from the play and book to the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children. An act of Parliament extended those rights indefinitely, providing care for sick children as long as the hospital remains in operation.

New York Times best-selling writer Gail Carson Levine viewed life differently after she read the novel version of Peter's story.

Gail Carson Levine

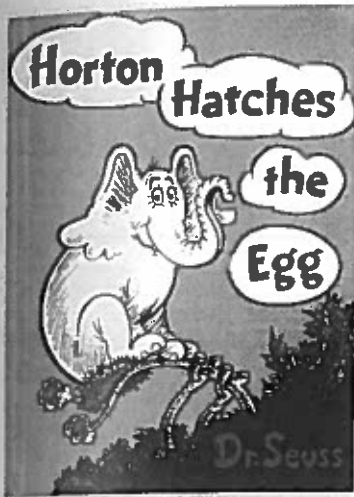
How precious is our term on earth.

I was a good child, too good for my own good. *Peter Pan* showed me other possibilities. Peter is self-absorbed, conceited, thoughtless, brave, and completely lovable. Tinker Bell is passionate: She tries to kill Wendy and saves Peter's life. Wendy and her brothers abandon their parents without a note or a backward look. They aren't orphans. They *choose* to leave. Wow!

After reading *Peter Pan* again and again and again, I was still mostly an obedient kid, but sometimes not. Sometimes I joined the league of heartless, selfish children. It was beneficial for me, if not for my parents.

Of course, there is more to *Peter Pan* than mischief. The book is subtle and wry. I had to become subtle myself to get it. Here's Barrie describing the Lost Boys who are twins: "Peter never quite knew what twins were, and his band were not allowed to know anything he did not know, so these two were always vague about themselves."

I've left the best for last: the poignancy of Neverland, where no one grows old. Wendy leaves, but I wanted to stay; I discovered how precious youth is and how precious is our term on earth.



HORTON HATCHES THE EGG

by Dr. Seuss

America's best-selling children's book author, Theodore Geisel—Dr. Seuss—did not have an easy time getting his first book published. After *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* had been rejected by more than two dozen publishers, he decided to go home and burn the manuscript. On his way, he ran into an old Dartmouth classmate on the street in New York. As he told this friend a tale of woe, Seuss found his fate suddenly reversed. His friend, it turned out, had just been appointed the children's book editor of a small press, Vanguard. He was hunting for books; Seuss had one. And the rest, as they say, is history. But Seuss always maintained that had he been walking down the other side of the street that day, he would have ended up in the dry-cleaning business.

In Seuss's fourth book, *Horton Hatches the Egg*, published in 1940, a good-for-nothing, lazy bird, Mayzie, convinces a gullible elephant Horton to sit on her egg while she flies away to enjoy the sun of Palm Beach. No matter what happens, Horton hangs on to the nest—even when hunters threaten his life and later consign him to a circus. But Horton holds on to his simple ethos: "I meant what I said! And I said what I meant. . . . An elephant's faithful / One hundred per cent!" For his devotion he receives an amazing reward, an elephant bird that looks just like Horton. This seemingly straightforward story works on many levels. Some appreciate one of its implicit messages—even if your mother might not love you or want to stay with you, you can find someone who will. Someone important, like Horton. Newbery Award winner Karen Hesse found a role model in this book.

Karen Hesse

A grasp on morality

I met my first genuine humanitarian in the elephant Horton, and I embraced him and his way of being with every cell in my body, every curl on my head, every freckle across my cheeks.

Horton showed such sensitivity: He solved his problems with a sweet willingness that enchanted me, that endeared him to me. His determination to stick to his word, to his task, no matter how unpleasant, informed me, shaped me. He was ridiculed by his peers, and yet he still honored his commitment. To meet such a character when I was searching for a grasp on morality, for a handle on ethics and humanity—it was most fortuitous.

I wanted to be like Horton. I wanted the world to be populated by Hortons. I wanted all the children of the world to be treated with the same loving devotion with which Horton treated the egg.

If you look at my work, it all comes back to Horton.



MADLINE

by Ludwig Bemelmans

While bicycling around a French island, Ludwig Bemelmans ran into the only car in the area and spent time in a hospital, neighbor to a girl recovering from an appendectomy. As he looked at the ceiling, a rabbit appeared; he thought about the stories his mother had told him of her convent days. Creativity happens in empty spaces, and during his hospital stay, Bemelmans formed the ideas for his most famous book.

He opened that book with rhyming couplets: "In an old house in Paris / that was covered with vines / lived twelve little girls in two straight lines." But *Madeline*, as he called the story, faced a rocky road before it became a classic. Prior to its publication in 1939, Bemelmans' editor May Massee of Viking had turned the book down because she thought it too sophisticated. So he chose one of the new publishers on the block, Simon & Schuster, to release his story about the plucky girl who lives with Miss Clavel in a convent. In the episodic plot the tension mounts as Madeline faces the removal of her appendix. It turns out to be such a joyous event that the other girls want an operation, too.

Although the book won a Caldecott Honor, Simon & Schuster put *Madeline* out of print in the 1950s. At that point May Massee, who rarely made the same mistake twice, asked Bemelmans to write a sequel and reissued the original. From that point on, the bold and gutsy Madeline gained a large crowd of admirers, even the first lady of the United States, Jacqueline Kennedy, corresponded with Bemelmans about her love of this book. One of Madeline's fans turned out to be a young girl who would herself become one of the best-loved children's book writers of all times, Judy Blume.

Judy Blume

To understand other people— and myself

When I was small, my mother took me to the public library in Elizabeth, New Jersey; I would sit on the floor and browse through the books. I not only liked the pictures and the stories but the feel and the smell of the books themselves. My favorite book was *Madeline* by Ludwig Bemelmans. I loved that book! I loved it so much I hid it in my kitchen toy drawer so my mother wouldn't be able to return it to the library. Even after the overdue notices came, I didn't tell my mother where the book was hidden. If only I had asked, I'm sure she would have bought me my own copy. But I didn't know that was a possibility then. I thought the copy I had hidden was the only copy in the whole world. I knew it was wrong to hide the book, but there was no way I was going to part with *Madeline*. I memorized the words in the book, and though I couldn't really read I pretended that I could.

When I did learn to read, I was very proud. Not only could I read *Madeline* but I could read the back of cereal boxes, the signs in store windows, and I could read the words in my schoolbooks. I loved getting into bed at night with a favorite book and reading until my father said it was time to put out my light. Books opened up a whole new world to me. Through them I discovered new ideas, traveled to new places, and met new people.

Books helped me learn to understand other people, and they taught me a lot about myself. Many years have passed since I hid that copy of *Madeline*—and I've never done that again—but I can still recite the story by heart. When my daughter was born, *Madeline* was the first book I bought for her. Some books you never forget. Some characters become your friends for life.

EMIL AND THE THREE TWINS ERICH KÄSTNER



EMIL AND THE THREE TWINS

by Erich Kästner

First published in 1929 in Germany, Erich Kästner's book *Emil and the Detectives* re-creates details of Kästner's own German childhood in Dresden at the turn of the twentieth century. Emil's mother works extremely hard to set aside some money so that her beloved son can visit his grandmother in Berlin. Hence when the money is stolen, Emil must find it and follows a mysterious stranger in a bowler hat, setting off a madcap set of events. The same pacing continues in the sequel, *Emil and the Three Twins*.

Not only a writer for children, Kästner created novels, poetry, and plays that came under attack during Hitler's regime and were banned and burned. Later, in 1949, one of his children's books, *Lisa and Lottie* (renamed *The Parent Trap* in the Disney film), was also highly controversial; it was one of the first children's books to deal openly with the subject of divorce. But no matter what happened to him or his books, Kästner retained great faith in children and remained true to his own experience as a child. As he once wrote, "Truly to hold childhood in the memory means to know again . . . what is genuine and what false, what is good and what bad."

Author Philip Pullman, who knows as much about weaving a spellbinding tale for children as any writer today, responded to the emotional truth he found in the Emil books.

Philip Pullman

The value of self-control and reticence rather than me-first emotionalism

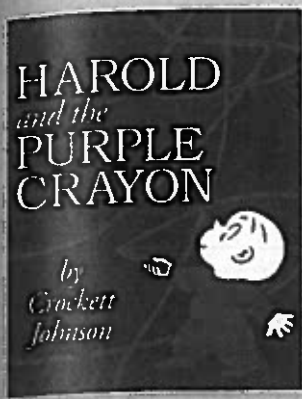
As *Emil and the Three Twins* opens, Emil is living with his widowed mother in the little town of Neustadt, where his mother earns a meager living as a hairdresser. He and his mother love each other very much; Emil is a good boy, conscientious, helpful, honest, though in some miraculous way neither boring nor priggish. He's mischievous, though; a couple of years before, he and some friends decorated the statue of the Grand Duke Charles by chalking a red nose on it, which has led Emil to be slightly wary of the local policeman, a formidable man called Sergeant Jeschke. However, as this book begins, Emil has a very large surprise: Sergeant Jeschke announces, with some awkwardness, that he would like to marry Emil's mother, if Emil does not mind.

Well, Emil does mind very much. He wants things to continue as they always have, and for him and his mother to live together and look after each other as they always have done. But he thinks that if his mother wants it, he ought not to stand in her way; so he agrees.

Then comes an invitation to stay with one of his friends from the *Detectives* book at his newly inherited house by the Baltic Sea, and the main plot gets under way: a story that involves a team of acrobats consisting of a man and his two sons, the Byrons. It turns out that they're not related at all, and that one of the "twins" is growing faster than the other and making their gymnastic routines more difficult; and the adult Byron is intending to abandon him and make off with the smaller one. Emil and his friends, indignant at this injustice, succeed in making everything all right.

But that's not what I most value in this book. Near the end, Emil has a conversation with his grandmother, a wise and sharp-tongued old woman who has sensed that Emil is not happy, and who has learned—by means of a letter from Emil's mother—the reason why. The wonderful thing about this conversation is that the grandmother never ceases to be her sharp, sardonic self, even while dispensing comfort.

I love this passage because it is full of wisdom, and because it celebrates the value of self-control and reticence rather than the me-first emotionalism that we see everywhere these days; and I hope I learned from it. The reason it resonated so strongly for me was that I was in a similar situation to Emil, though I had a brother and Emil didn't, and the man who became our stepfather didn't consult us beforehand as Sergeant Jeschke did. But I hope I was as good as Emil; I still believe everything that his grandmother says.



HAROLD AND THE PURPLE CRAYON

by Crockett Johnson

A book of amazing longevity, with two million sold and never out of print, *Harold and the Purple Crayon* at first failed to impress Crockett Johnson's editor Ursula Nordstrom. "It doesn't seem like a good children's book to me," she wrote, although admitting that she might turn down Tom Sawyer the way she felt that day. She later apologized to her talented artist for her "lukewarm and unenthusiastic" reading and went ahead to publish the book. Johnson, the *nom de plume* of David Johnson Leisk, had worked with Nordstrom on other books, such as *The Carrot Seed*, written by his wife Ruth Krauss.

A cartoon artist and creator of the popular 1940s newspaper Barnaby comic strip, Johnson on occasion turned his hand to inventing children's books. He had a genius for distilling figures and landscape to the bare minimum to tell a story, although he once confessed that he drew people without hair because it was easier. In his most popular children's book, Harold sets out for a walk one evening and with a well-worn, stubby purple crayon draws an entire adventure for himself—a dragon, sailboat ride, a picnic with the nine types of pie he loves best, a balloon trip, and his return home. The book celebrates the power of the imagination and the creative spirit of children.

Not surprising, the book has spoken to legions of artists because Harold can create an entire universe with his beloved crayon. Maurice Sendak, creator of *Where the Wild Things Are*, personally learned book making and illustration from Krauss and Johnson and admires *Harold and the Purple Crayon* for its lightness of touch. Chris Van Allsburg, creator of *The Polar Express*, loves the idea behind the book.

Maurice Sendak

Just let the kid do his own thing.

Crockett Johnson's *Harold and the Purple Crayon* is just immense fun. Harold does exactly as he pleases. There are no adults to demonstrate or remonstrate. The book comes out of a particular theory of children's books: Just let the kid do his own thing; let him have fun. Books shouldn't teach. They shouldn't give lessons. Kids should feel that they can do what they want to do and no one will punish them. They can just be kids and enjoy reading and looking at a book.

Chris Van Allsburg

I could create my own world.

When I was child, I didn't draw much. My principal activity was building models—cars, boats, electric trains, planes, everything. I was very good at it. While I was building them, they worked on my imagination. If I built the HMS *Victory*, I imagined myself fighting side by side with Lord Horatio Nelson, commander of the British fleet. Or I'd sail with Charles Darwin to the Galapagos Islands on the HMS *Beagle*.

As a child my favorite book was *Harold and the Purple Crayon* by Crockett Johnson. The book is based on a perfect visual concept: A little boy builds a world out of purple lines, and then that world becomes real. If he wants to take a ride in a sailboat, he draws it. I believe that the empowerment of Harold appealed to me as a reader—I loved the idea that I could be in control and create my own world.

I have remembered the book since childhood for two reasons. First, for the theme: The book explores the power of imagination, the ability to create with imagination. Second, the book contains a fairly elusive, mysterious idea but presents it so succinctly through these simple drawings that this idea registers clearly.

When I first started making picture books, I thought about the books of Crockett Johnson. These books contained stories that kids would remember all their lives; they were the kind of books I wanted to make.