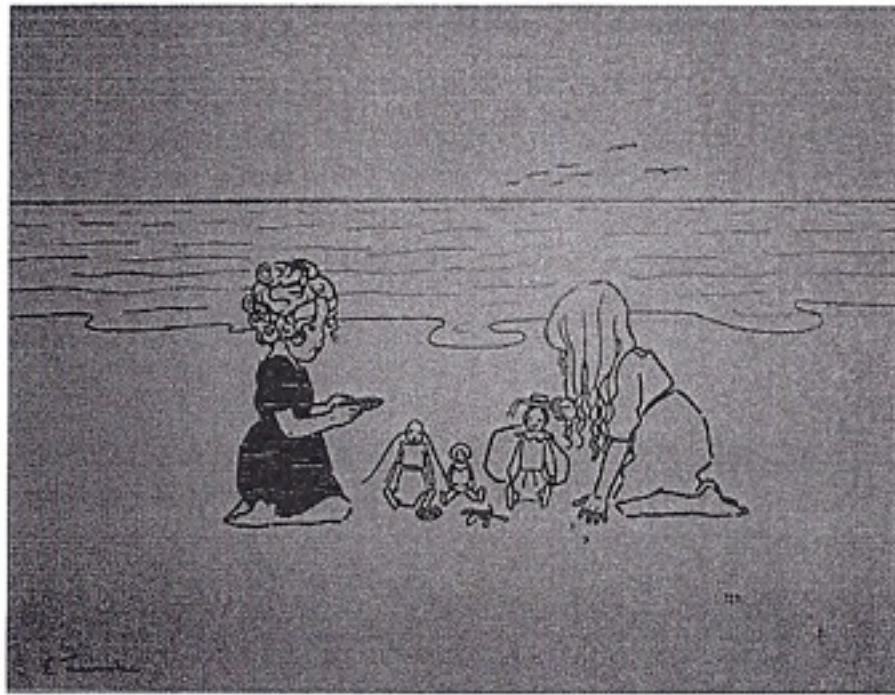


BOOK REVIEW: "FIFTY YEARS IN THE FICTION FACTORY" Julia Jones

CHILDREN'S BOOKS HISTORY SOCIETY

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EDITORIAL

During the Society's recent Grimm "Study Day" two speakers touched on the issue of the conversion of oral stories to printed versions. How can the rigid permanency of print reflect the fluid and sometimes casual, even throwaway, tones of the storyteller?

As it turns out this is a question that applies also to the very different sphere of Study Day papers and the like. In the notes on recent periodical articles in last year's November number (no.101) we tossed out - in our cavalier way - a complaint about the informality in the reporting of a talk given to the Imaginative Book Illustration Society (p.42). As a direct transcript of the speaker's words, we felt it was "in serious need of editing". This brought forth a rather pained justification from Geoffrey Beare, the editor of IBIS's *Studies in Illustration* (no.51, p.4) in which he made the very cogent point that, by editing as lightly as possible the spoken words of a speaker who is not reading from a prepared paper ("not reproducing every 'er' and 'um'"), the journal is passing on to members who could not attend the meeting a sense of the speaker's presence.

Mr Beare will probably not be pleased to find that we have returned to the fray with a similar offhand remark about what was clearly a most valuable and extensive survey of the work of Barnett Freedman, given by Alan Powers (*Studies* 51, as noted below on p.42). As a member of IBIS who

one who had lost his/her father. Thus Nixon offers an important contribution in her consideration of those who remain central to the socio-economic axis despite their orphan status. Nixon's work significantly enhances our understanding of eighteenth century culture and society adding a valuable dimension to the study of the orphan figure.

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Julia Jones *Fifty Years in the Fiction Factory: The Working Life of Herbert Allingham* Pleshey (Essex): Golden Duck (UK) Ltd., 2012. 214 x 138 mm. xii 388 pp. Paperback. £17.99.

In this age of instant celebrity it is well worth remembering that many of the most popular and prolific writers of their time lived and died in obscurity, leaving no mark other than their stories and serials. These were the "hack" writers who filled the pages of papers, comics and magazines during the heyday of the cheap periodical, from the 1840s to the 1940s. One or two, most notably Charles Hamilton and Edwy Searles Brooks, did achieve recognition and fame both in their lifetime and beyond, but most, largely thanks to the anonymity of their work and the machinations of the publishing industry, remain unsung and forgotten. Herbert Allingham was one of those unsung heroes. A contemporary of Charles Hamilton, he was a mainstay of several comics and papers published by the Amalgamated Press (AP) between 1907 and 1936. Hitherto, little was known about him, but now, thanks to a slice of good fortune in that Julia Jones inherited 16 boxes of his diaries, account books, letters, manuscripts and published stories, we now have a vivid account of both his personal and, more importantly, his working life. In addition, we are given insights into how publishers such as the AP worked, how insecure the life of even the most productive writers could be, and how writers such as Allingham adapted their work to changing social conditions and attitudes. Furthermore, Julia also looks at the readers of Allingham's stories - who they were, what they did, how much they earned, and how and why his relationship with them changed over the years.



Allingham was born, in 1867, into a literary family - his father James was the founder of the *Christian Globe*, a one penny weekly newspaper for family reading, and his uncle, John Allingham, better-known as "Ralph Rollington", was the publisher and editor (and main author) of several boys' story papers in the 1880s. Indeed, Herbert's first earnings as a writer were for a serial for John's *New Boys' Paper* in 1886, written whilst he was still a student at Cambridge University. Shrewdly, Herbert retained the copyright to this serial, which was subsequently reprinted three times. This illustrates one of the first aspects of his work which Julia Jones highlights - during his working life Herbert wrote 98 full-length serials which were published at least 299 times in various formats - reprinted, abridged, or re-written - in at least 58 different periodicals, showing how old material was constantly being recycled for new readerships.

In 1889 Herbert became editor of the *London Journal*, founded in 1845, a weekly periodical which focussed heavily on fiction. At the same time he began contributing stories to other magazines, some of which he subsequently reprinted himself. In 1904 he re-wrote his first serial and sold it to the Aldine Publishing Company, who issued it in *True Blue*, a weekly boys' story paper which went on to feature several more of Herbert's stories until its demise in 1906. The following year Herbert took over the editorship of a second *New Boys' Paper*, a short-lived attempt to revive his uncle's earlier periodical.

At the same time he was developing a relationship with Harold Garrish, the editor of several AP comics such as the *Jester*, *Puck*, *Illustrated Chips* and *Comic Cuts*, and he sold him several stories which had previously been rejected by another AP editor, as well as writing numerous new boys' school and adventure stories for him. Herbert's diaries and letters go on to highlight the pressures that editors were under, the fierce rivalry between different sections of the AP, and in turn the pressures that editors put on writers. If a writer, seeing that one of their serials was popular and increasing a paper's circulation, asked for an increase in pay, he was rebuffed and threatened with the prospect of his work being taken over by a substitute writer. Even when Herbert had negotiated an increase in his pay from one to two guineas a thousand words, this only applied to new serials and not those he was yet to complete.

In early 1917 the war-time paper shortage, rationing and the loss of readers led to the demise of many of the AP's papers and comics, and Allingham's income decreased substantially. He began writing for a new audience of young women, whose role in society had drastically changed, and his serials began appearing in periodicals such as John Leng's *Happy Home*, *My Weekly* and the *People's Journal*. Many of his earlier serials had been quietly political, touching on issues such as sweated labour, slum housing, police corruption and poverty, and he now began focussing on issues of interest to working girls and young mothers. But, despite his output, he still occasionally found himself in debt, at one point being obliged to sell some of his copyrights. Again, his diaries and account books provide vivid illustrations of the insecurity of freelance writing - Allingham ended up writing for the AP for 30 years but with no personal security other than goodwill and the rights to some of his stories.

His fortunes changed in the early 1930s, largely thanks to Anne St. John Cooper, the second wife of Henry St. John Cooper, a prolific writer of boys' stories for the AP, who was a new editor at the AP and who published numerous new and reprinted serials in papers such as the *Home Companion*, *Family Journal*, *Miracle* and *Oracle*.

Allingham died on 19 January 1936. Not one of the papers he had written for mentioned his passing. Julia Jones points out, because, as was common practice at the time, almost all of his output was anonymous or published under pseudonyms, "as he never really existed for the readers, he could not really die." He also belittled his own career in that he told his daughter Joyce¹¹ that "you cannot call yourself an author until you have been published in hard covers." None of his work did appear in hard covers, despite his popularity, and this as much as anything else is to blame for his obscurity. Now, thanks to this fascinating, detailed and revealing biography, which not only charts Allingham's

career but also places each stage of it into a social context, the veil of obscurity has been lifted, and we are left with a welcome tribute to an unsung hero of a forgotten profession.

Robert Kirkpatrick

REVIEW IN BRIEF

Okiko Miyake *Songs and Tales for Children; a collection of chapbooks in nineteenth century Britain*. Kyoto: Eureka Press, 596-804 Banocho Karasuma Sanjo Agarū, Nagagyo-ku, 604-8172. 2008. Unpriced.

257x180mm, xii,211 pp. illus, facsim. Full pink cloth boards, slip-case, including a 22-page synopsis in Japanese.

As a teacher and now Professor Emeritus at Baika Women's University, Okiko Miyake has developed a longstanding love of English children's books and this volume presents to English and Japanese readers an overview of some 43 popular chapbooks in possession of herself and her University. A 12-page Introduction sketches in the background to the publishing of these little books and the bulk of the book consists of complete facsimiles of the chosen volumes (laid out with - mostly - four chapbook pages to one page of the book). It may be found unsurprising that most of the contents derive from those two prolific publishers, Kendrew of York and Rusher of Banbury who supply twenty examples each of the texts on display. Not only though is there almost no duplication of titles but the reader can also see different ways in which each producer has chosen to organise his material on the page. In the case of Rusher eight of the titles exist as uncut sheets and are thus produced here (very neatly) as "fold-outs", showing the whole printed sheet before being folded into its final form. The only duplicated (actually triplicated) title is "Cinderella" and there we find both publishers using Perrault's text but with different cuts, with Kendrew also producing a versified edition:

*Here Cinderilla you may see,
A beauty bright and fair.
Her real name was Helena
Few with her could compare...*

Three oddments make up the full complement, a Lumsden *Gulliver* and two Otley items. The Walker & Sons *Butterfly's Ball* is the most unusual of these and it should perhaps have been pointed out that the stanzas are new reworkings of Roscoe's original.

Observing such quirks and the varying treatments of many well-known traditional verses (and some moral tales too) gives a much stronger interest to chapbook versions than their modest pretensions suggest and it seems a pity that, as a book which is likely to be most read by non-native English speakers, *Songs and Tales* could not have been given a more extensive commentary. (From current experience. I fancy that many English readers could do with such a thing too.) The page-layouts may also be found difficult to negotiate to begin with, but, once mastered, their careful printing within an attractive book-block could afford much pleasure.

B.A.

¹¹ Hardcover authorship (and a deal more success) came to Allingham's other daughter, Margery, the highly successful crime writer, and creator of Albert Campion.