

DRAWING ON LITERATURE

Recent illustration art by Robert Ingpen

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Disc of illustration images supplied

People often ask me how long have I been drawing? Reports of my childhood suggest that my drawing began early. A frieze of tiny illustrations for *Peter Pan and Wendy survive* survive today after nearly seventy years. My career has been as an illustrator.

After school in Geelong and art school in Melbourne, over fifty years of creative work have brought modest prosperity, and the chance to work in exciting places, and with interesting people. I have drawn on walls, designed posters and Australian postage stamps, even planned tapestries and bronze doors, but mostly illustrated the pages of many books. In the most recent years I have been drawing on literature where one needs to work with some of the great authors in our English literature for children. I hope to now guide you through some of my recent experiences.

To do this I show examples of these drawings that illustrate passages from books that are familiar to you. And you may need to bring your imagination to go where I propose to take you.

Imagine that all our creative literature is contained in a forest that runs far out each side of the highway - the place where everything is real and never imagined. We can journey into that wild and beautiful forest by following the tracks and trails made by the great storytellers of the past. For this journey we need not wear sensible shoes and take water and a packed lunch, for it is only in our mind, and we will certainly be back in time for dinner.

In 2003 I began to read, understand then to illustrate selected classic stories so that modern children might be attracted to know great writing. My publishers believed that proper pictures in real books could encourage the curiosity of children to read these selected stories in their original written form. So far, we have done eight titles - *Peter Pan and Wendy*, *Treasure island*, *The Jungle Book*, *Wind in the Willows*, *The Christmas Carol*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Tom Sawyer*, *The Secret Garden*. This 'library' of classics is printed for many countries and in many languages, and still to come is *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *Around the World in 80 days*, and *Alice Through the Looking Glass*.

All these books were first published over a hundred years ago and the authors are long dead. I used special tracking skills to be find traces of them in the forest. Also I needed to remember some basic rules to follow to do this tracking so as not to be seduced by the storytelling to go so far into the forest that I lost touch with the highway of reality. The forest is full of trails crossing each other, some well marked, some overgrown and some lost altogether for the moment.

As an introduction we enter the forest by way of two literary forests described for us by Kenneth Grahame in *Wind in the Willows*.

(2) Mole in the Wild Wood

In *Wind in the Willows* Kenneth Grahame invites us to experience the excitement and fear that Mole feels as he enters 'The Wild Wood' on his first adventure away from his home by the river to 'make his acquaintance' with the animals of that place. Grahame writes..

' There was nothing to alarm him at first entry. Twigs crackled under his feet, logs tripped him, funguses on stumps resembled caricatures, and startled him for a moment by their likenesses to something familiar and far away: but that was all fun and exciting. It led him on, and he penetrated to where the light was less, the trees crouched nearer and nearer, and holes made ugly mouths at him on either side. Everything was still now. Then the faces began...'

(3) The Piper at the Gates of Dawn

Not far from here is a strange wooded island.

Some commentators have said that this place is so isolated that it has not a proper place in the story about the simple lives of Ratty, Mole, Badger and Mr Toad.

Indeed the great illustrator E.H.Shepherd asked that chapter 7 *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* not be included in the edition he was asked to illustrate. Others say that Kenneth Grahame had fallen under the spell of Charles Dickens, and become carried away, but we will never know for sure.

Here Ratty and Mole row to that remote place in search for a lost baby otter and first hear the faun's pan pipes.

' Breathless and transfixed the Mole stopped rowing as the liquid run of glad piping broke on him like a wave, caught him up and possessed him utterly. He saw the tears on his comrades cheeks, and bowed his head and understood. For a space they hung there, then the clear imperious summons that march hand-in-hand with the intoxicating melody imposed its will on Mole. And the light grew steadily stronger, but no birds sang as they were wont to do at the approach of dawn; and but for the heavenly music all was marvelously still...'

This scene helped me see the metaphor of the forest as a creative landscape and workplace of writers away from day to day reality.

From here by the river somewhere in southern England we know the water will eventually flow in to The Thames and on to London, then, if we let it, back to the Victorian times made immortal by Charles Dickens.

(4) Fog on The Thames, 1857

Charles Dickens wrote a famous account of fog bound London in the opening paragraphs of 'Bleak House' just after the new buildings of Westminster had been completed. He writes:

Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among the green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great and dirty city. Fog in the Essex Marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying about the yards, and hovering in the rigging of great ships... Fog in the eye and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners wheezing by the firesides of

their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck...

(5) Christmas in London

Charles Dickens guides us along his well-trodden 'Christmas Trail' in *A Christmas Carol* written in 1843. Here he describes Christmas Eve in the cold on a street corner somewhere in a poor part of London...

'The cold became intense. In the main street, at the corner of the court, some labourers were repairing gas-pipes, and had lighted a great fire in a brazier, round which a party of ragged men and boys were gathered warming their hands and winking their eyes before the blaze in rapture...'

(6) Scrooge goes home

Not far from there we see Ebenezer Scrooge hurrying home from his counting house that years before he shared with his dead partner Jacob Marley. Dickens has the chained ghost of Marley following him right to his front door.

(7) Marley the doorknocker

In true Dicken's style he gives the reader the same fright that he gives Scrooge. The doorknocker turns into the ghostly face of Marley to haunt Scrooge.

He writes:

'Let it be borne in mind that Scrooge had not bestowed one thought on Marley since his last mention of his seven-year's dead partner that afternoon. And then let any man explain, if he can, how it happened that Scrooge, having his key in lock of the door, saw in the knocker, not the knocker, but Marley's face!...'

(8) Wind in the Willows characters

Our path branches now back into rural England. Kenneth Grahame and Lewis Carroll seem to construct impossibly parallel paths much deeper into storytelling and far beyond reality. It is here, for example, that three wonderful literary kitchens appear.

(9) Badger's Kitchen

This is Badger's Kitchen somewhere below the Wild Wood and deep in Grahame's imagination. After becoming lost in a snow storm Mole and Ratty are taken in to Mr Badger's warm home and given a hearty breakfast. As you can see it was a joy to create a picture to help readers want to share this time with Ratty and Mole...

'It seemed a place where heroes could fitly feast after victory, where weary harvesters could line up in scores along the table and keep their Harvest Home with mirth and song, or where two or three friends of simple tastes could sit about as they pleased and eat and smoke and talk in comfort and contentment. The ruddy brick floor smiled up at the smoking ceiling; the oak settles, shiny with long wear, exchanged cheerful glances with each other; plates on the dresser grinned at pots on the shelf, and the merry firelight flickered and played over everything without distinction...

(10) Ratty's kitchen

Elsewhere in the story, and below ground by the river, we are in Ratty's untidy kitchen for a meeting. Mr Toad is holding forth to Mole and Ratty as they plan an assault on Toad Hall to get rid of the Stoats and Weazels.

'Well, I shan't do it anyway!' cried Toad, getting excited, 'I'm not going to be ordered about by you fellows! It's my house we're talking about, and I know exactly what to do, and I'll tell you. I'm going to-'

By this time they were all three talking at once, at the top of their voices, and the noise was simply deafening, when a thin, dry voice made itself heard saying 'Be quiet at once all of you!' and instantly everyone was silent. It was the Badger..

(11) Alice falling

Lewis Carroll takes us on his wild path from a riverbank not far away, and leads the reader on a roller-coaster ride with Alice down a rabbit hole to her underground adventures in Wonderland. In her dream of strange meetings and challenges Carroll opens up many layers for interpretation. All of which are enjoyable to read, but can become quite challenging for the illustrator.

(12) Alice at the kitchen door

In Chapter Six *Pig and Pepper* Alice finds the house of The Dutchess deep in yet another forest. She is greeted by a Frog-footman who lets her into this scene in the chaos of a smoke-filled kitchen.

(13) The Kitchen of The Duchess

'The door led right into the large kitchen, which was full of smoke one end to the other; the Dutchess was sitting on a three-legged stool in the middle nursing a baby; the cook was leaning over the fire, stirring a large cauldron which seemed to be full of soup.

'There's certainly too much pepper in that soup!' Alice said to herself, as well as she could for sneezing. There was certainly too much of it in the air. Even the Dutchess sneezed occasionally; and as for the baby, it was sneezing and howling alternatively without a moment's pause. The only things in the kitchen that did not sneeze were the cook, and a large cat which was sitting on the hearth and grinning from ear to ear...

((14)Drink Me

Throughout Carroll challenges Alice and readers, literary scholars and educators, not to mention illustrators, with some issues that we now in modern times classify as substance abuse. Some curious offerings and happenings suggest the need for care. Since Carroll's writing cannot be edited from its origins in the 1860's, I have tried to illustrate Alice's body language as she meets moments in her adventures where the reader may share her apprehension and consider her choice of options....

Should she drink or not from an unlabeled bottle? Or eat suspicious cakes? Accept a thimble from a Dodo? Even upset a box of assorted animal jurors?

(15) Eat Me

(16) Thimble gift

(17) Upset Jury Box

As you see here I was trying to add meaning and warning for modern children through drawing on or over the literature so it might be possible for children to have empathy with Alice by observing her reaction to unfamiliar and difficult situations.

I found it hard work, and in the end I was as relieved as Alice to return to the real world above ground and out of the reach of Lewis Carroll's imagination.

(18) Alice Awakes

Here she is as she wakes from her dream...

'Who cares for you?' said Alice (She had grown to her full size by this time.)

'You're nothing but a pack of cards!'

At this the whole pack rose up into the air, and came flying down upon her; she gave a scream, half of fright and half of anger, and tried to beat them off, and found herself lying on the riverbank...'

(19) In the portrait hall

Exactly one hundred years ago Frances Hodgson Burnett wrote a much different but equally classic story set on the Yorkshire moors. In *The Secret Garden* she writes of the development of Mary Lennox, an orphan from India, who has come to live in a grand old mansion set in walled gardens on the edge of a moor. Here a lonely Mary wanders through the picture gallery seeking answers to understanding the strange habits of the owners and the staff..

Burnett writes:

'She found herself in one long gallery whose walls were covered with portraits. She had never thought there could be so many in any house. Some were pictures of children... There was a stiff plain little girl rather like herself. She wore a green brocade dress and held a green parrot on her finger...'

'Where do you live now?' Mary said aloud to her. 'I wish you were here.'

Later, outside in the gardens Mary discovers an abandoned walled garden and the secret it holds.

(20) The Walled Gardens

Mary restores the overgrown garden with the help of Dickon, a boy from the moor who has special skills with wild animals and plants, and the sickly Colin who is the difficult son of Archibald Craven owner of the Manor. The story of the garden's secret, and how restoring the garden improves the behaviour and health of the children ends with Colin being re-united with his father at the entrance to the Secret Garden...

(21) The Admiral Benbow Inn

Still in England but to the southwest on the coast near Bristol is another of the great imagined buildings - The Admiral Benbow Inn. This is the home of Jim Hawkins and his mother, and the site of some of the more dramatic events ever written down

by Robert Louis Stevenson as witnessed by Hawkins in *Treasure Island*. As we read it is easy to imagine this place being the crossing of two trails - this one made by Stevenson and the other rather more used by the many pirates that inhabit our storytelling. But before we turn off on the Pirates Trail we need to remind ourselves of why this literature is so enduring well beyond our childhood.

(22) **The death of Blind Pew**

This happens at night. It seems that in literature most of the dramatic events take place in darkness, or by moonlight. This makes work harder for the illustrator. Here we read of the death of Blind Pew as witnessed by Jim Hawkins on the road by the Admiral Benbow...

‘Pew they had deserted, whether in sheer panic or out of revenge for his ill words and blows, I know not; but there he remained behind, tapping up and down the road in a frenzy, and groping and calling for his comrades. Finally he took the wrong turn, and ran a few steps past me crying ‘Johnny, Black Dog, Dirk, you won’t leave old Pew, mates - not old Pew!’

Just then the noise of horses topped the rise, and four or five riders came in sight in the moonlight, and swept at full gallop down the slope...”

You all remember what happens next.

(23) **The Pirates Trail**

Now we take the Pirates Trail much more used by readers and deeper into the forest, even as far as fabled Neverland.

The claim as to the most notorious of literary pirates must be shared between Long John Silver, the sea cook, and Captain Hook as created by J.M. Barrie in *Peter Pan*. Hook lived in Neverland as leader of a band of pirates surrounded by red indians, wolves, mermaids and lost boys. Long John Silver remains forever in the minds of readers of *Treasure Island*.

(24) **Hook’s Pirates**

Hook’s pirate band shown here in part could not be more colourfully described or more eagerly illustrated...

‘A more villainous looking lot never hung in a row on Execution Dock. Here a little in advance, ever and again with his head to the ground listening, pieces of eight in his ears as ornaments is the handsome Italian Cecco. That gigantic black behind him has had many names since he dropped the one with which dusky mothers still terrify their children. Here is Bill Jukes, every inch of him tattooed, and Cookson, said to be Black Murphy’s brother: and Gentleman Starkey, once an usher in a public school and still dainty in his ways of killing: and the Irish bo’sun Smee, an oddly genial man who stabbed, so to speak, without offence: and Noodler whose hands were fixed on backwards.

In the midst of them, the blackest and largest in that dark setting, reclined James Hook, of whom it was said he was the only man the Sea-Cook feared...’

(25) Hook poisons Peter

In *Peter Pan* there is a chapter titled 'Do you believe in fairies?' where we see James Hook at his worst. The pirate manages to poison our hero Peter Pan while he is asleep, and once again in darkness underground at night. I took the liberty to introduce a candle light to help us see what Barrie describes here:

'Thus defenceless Hook found him.... Lest he be taken alive Hook always carried about his person a dreadful drug, blended by himself of all the death-dealing rings that had come into his possession. These he had boiled down into a yellow liquid quite unknown to science, which is probably the most virulent poison in existence. Five drops of this he now added to Peter's cup...'

But, as we know, Peter does not die. For a moment we forget that Peter stays young forever, he can fly and he cannot die. Yet Barrie's storytelling weaves a wonderful magic.

(26) On Marooner's Island

In the chapter 'The Mermaid's Lagoon', Barrie has Peter Pan stranded by the pirates on a tiny island as the rising tide threatens to drown him. He will surely die now. Through his writing Barrie briefly makes him mortal and vulnerable to enthrall the reader..

'Peter was not like other boys; but he was afraid at last. A tremor ran through him, like a sudder passing over the sea; but on the sea one shudder follows another till there are hundreds of them, and Peter felt just one. Next moment he was standing erect on the rock again, with a smile on his face and a drum beating within him. It was saying, 'To die will be an awefully big adventure.'

(27) Mowgli and the monkey

Another boy slightly more believable than Peter Pan still wanders through the jungle of our literature in Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. Mowgli, an Indian boy, is brought up by wild animals - wolves, a bear, a panther and monkeys to learn the law of the Jungle before returning to his human family.

(28) Tom and Huck fishing

Mark Twain seems to have left trails in the American zone of the forest. He carved a path on the banks of the Mississippi for two boys in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and we published this last April to mark the centenary of the death of Samuel Clemens, who you know best as Mark Twain.

In Twain's rollicking whimsical way he races through the adventures of Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn and friends at a pace almost too fast for an illustrator to keep up. There are flaws in narrative continuity that are revealed only in pictures, and, once again, much of the dramatic action takes place at night or deep in a cave.

(29) Fence painting

Fortunately for the illustrator the famous episode early in the story of fence painting happens in daylight on a Saturday morning sunny St Petersburg, the home town of

Tom Sawyer. Twain could not give clearer instructions to me for this picture...

‘Tom gave up the brush with reluctance in his face, but alacrity in his heart. And while Ben worked and sweated in the sun, the retired artist sat on a barrel in the shade close by, dangling his legs, munching his apple, and planning the slaughter more innocents...

(30) In McDougal’s Cave

Mark Twain is in full flight again when Tom and his girl friend Becky Thatcher are lost in the dark depths of Mc Dougal’s Cave

((31) The trial of Muff Porter

Even the Court House of St Petersburg is described as a darkened room for trial of Muff Porter for a murder he didn’t do. Here Tom is called as witness to the killing in the graveyard outside the town. The shaft of sunlight coming through the window may or may not have met with Twain’s approval, but it helps to give light to the scene as Twain describes it:

‘Call Thomas Sawyer!’

‘Thomas Sawyer, where were you on the seventeenth of June, about the hour of midnight?’

Tom glanced at Injun Joe’s iron face and his tongue failed him. The audience listened breathless, but the words refused to come. After a few moments, however the boy got a little of his strength back, and managed to put enough of it into his voice to mark part of the house hear:

‘In the graveyard!’

(32) The death of Injun Joe

The climax of the story sees Injun Joe, who actually did the murder, die horribly inside the locked entrance to Mc Dougal’s Cave. A search party including Tom opens the cave door and finds him:

‘Injun Joe lay stretched upon the ground, dead, with his face close to the crack of the door, as if his longing eyes had been fixed, to the last moment, upon the light and the cheer of the free world outside...’

(33) Tom and Huck rowing

‘The free world outside’ is illustrated simply by Tom and Huck rowing away to another adventure in Twain’s mind and our imagination.

I have chosen for Twain to have a final word on behalf of all the authors and their literature I have drawn upon so far. As his conclusion to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* writes:

‘It being strictly a history of a boy, it must stop here; the story could not go much further without becoming the history of a man. When one writes a novel about grown people, he knows exactly where to stop; but when he writes of children, he must stop where best he can...’

And, that for me is now.

Read by Robert Ingpen with actors voices for literary quotes