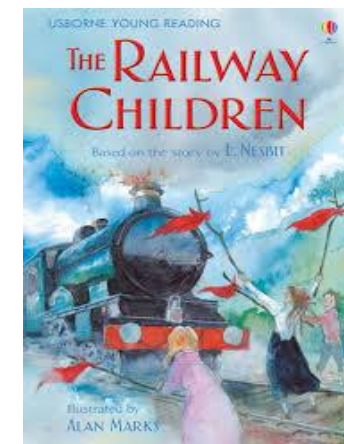
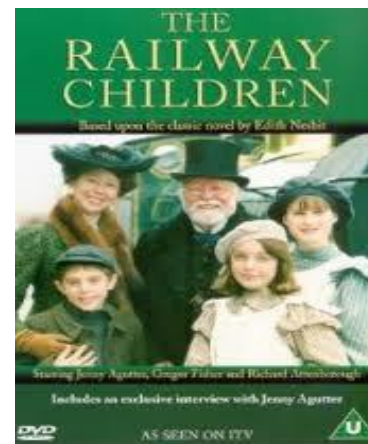
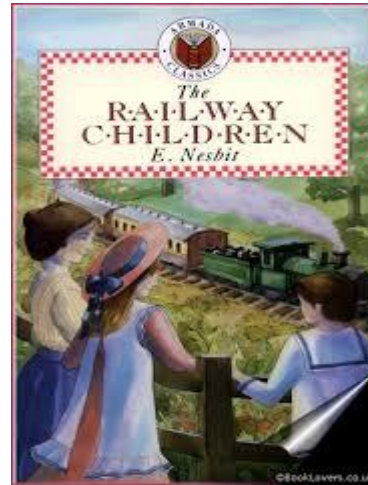
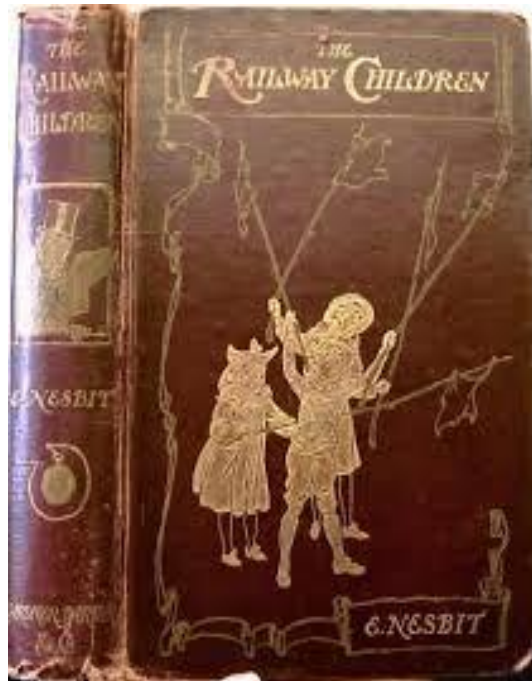



The Railway Children by E. Nesbit



Edith Nesbit (1858- 1924)



*A woman of passion torn between
bohemian desire and Victorian rectitude
(Gardner, 2005)*





*Like so much Golden Age children's literature, *The Railway Children* is a retreat, the celebration of the rural idyll of an England that never existed. It also presents an idealised view of childhood, in which unfettered and tenacious children, unencumbered by school and drawing only on their own resourcefulness, prevent derailments and set in motion the wheels that allow their falsely incarcerated father to return to the bosom of the family.*

Gardner 2005


- A subversive, radical book about equality and inclusion that reflects the author's ideology
'The possibility of a prompt and rational altruism, the possibility, even the likelihood, of which we would always seek, to urge upon children. Odd though it now sounds to say so, it is the dream hidden in the idea of the welfare state; the institutions of health and shelter were intended to carry those qualities of care, magnanimity, and understanding, which the Old Gentleman has the power to show.'

Inglis(1981:100)

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- Exploration of social injustice
 - New opportunities offered by the absent ‘perfect’ father and changed circumstances
 - Paternal substitutes: disciplinarian (the station manager); provider (the old gentleman); playmate (Perks); stability in the home (the Russian immigrant and Jim) – Peter’s view of Dr Forrester
 - Town versus country
 - The railway as a metaphor for social change
 - Wider political changes- the Russian revolution (1905) – Nesbit’s political sympathies clearly expressed

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- Secrets and why some have to be kept
 - Women and traditional/ changing gender roles – Mother and Bobbie satirized through the essentialist views of Peter (and to some extent the doctor): eg ‘ men have to do the work of the world and not be afraid of anything...and much stronger, and things that hurt *them* don’t hurt us.’
 - The importance of children in changing the world via their immediate community – redistribution of wealth
 - Social class differences eg Perks and his family; Bill the Bargee
 - Individual transformations eg Bobbie
 - Conservative forces – happy ending/ reclamation of Bobbie by her daddy/ ambivalence/ a realistic feminist novel of its time?

Noimann (2005) and Foster and Simons (1995)



‘ The children, in their innocence, have come up against the lines of class in Edwardian England, which they hardly knew to be there, but because their innocence is such that they have themselves created a different structure of moral intention in all the villagers, the new economy may fit the best terms of the old morality. Perks self respect matches the children’s goodness.’

Inglis (1981: 101)

Is it one of those ‘ classic’ books?

- ...about which you usually hear people saying: ‘ I’m rereading...’, never ‘ I’m reading...’
- ...which with each re reading offers as much of a sense of discovery as the first reading
- ...those books which come to us bearing the aura of previous interpretations, and trailing behind them the traces they have left in the culture (or just in the language and customs) through which they have passed
- ...which persists as background noise even when a present that is totally incompatible with it holds sway

Extract Adapted from Calvino (1991: 3-9)

Is it something that has...

- Weathered at least one generation
- Charm of style and form
- Simplicity and sincerity- children do not like to be patronised
- Characters that ring true and have vitality
- Been given the designation by publishers
- Born out of the sensitive and problematic area of need and longing
- Simultaneously a joyeous greeting and a valediction

Adapted from Jordan (1973) and Watson (1991)

Other characteristics of 'classics'....

- Can be interpreted, adapted and translated in many different ways without losing central narrative power
- Undisputed by prestigious critics
- About cultural archetypes – instantly recognizable and part of shared knowledge and understanding
- Anything else?



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