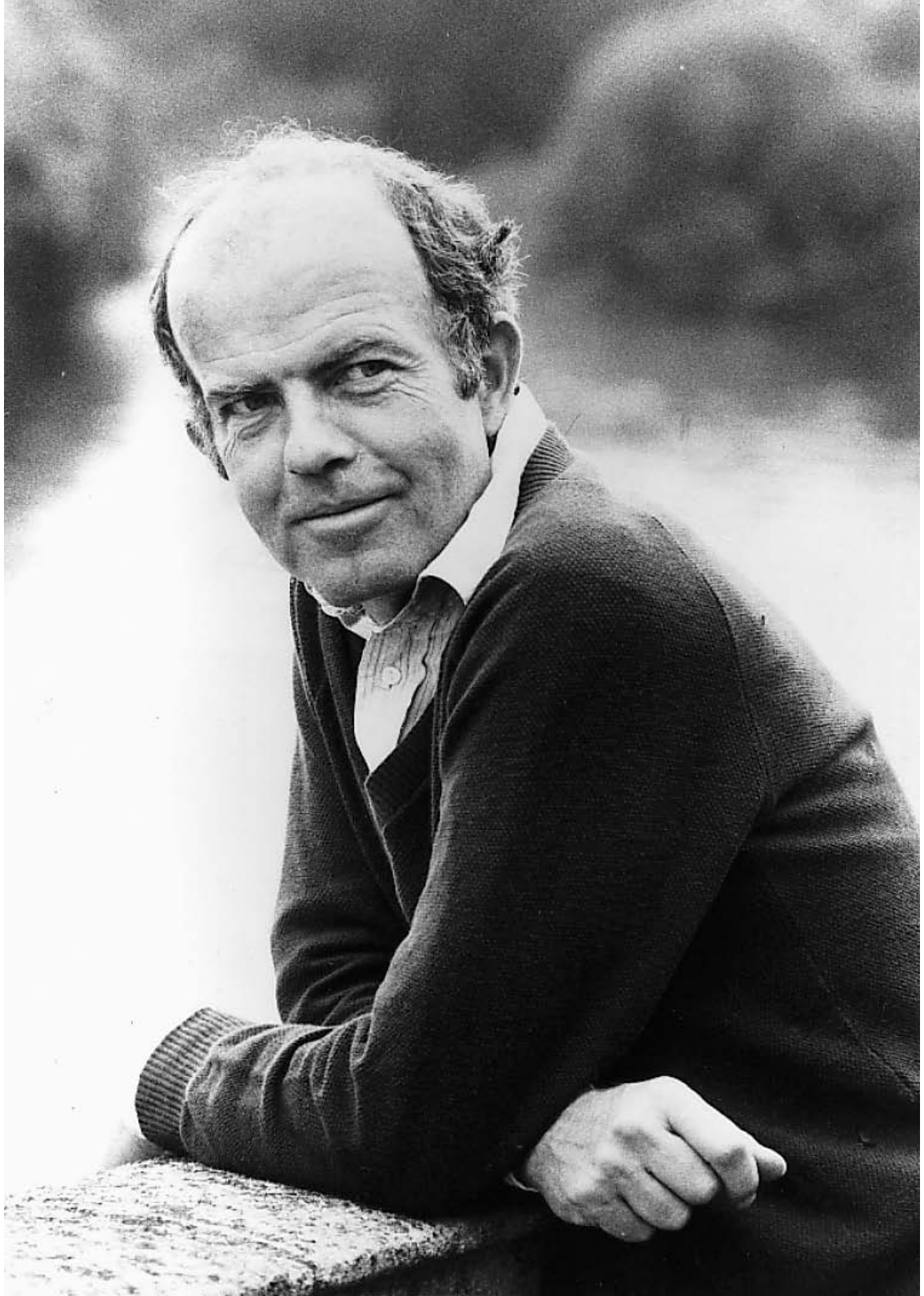


John Burningham



Hans Christian Andersen Awards 2012
UK Author Nomination

John Burningham - Biography

John Burningham was born in Farnham, Surrey in 1936 and attended the alternative education establishment, Summerhill in Suffolk. At the age of 17, he became a conscientious objector and avoided military service by joining the Friends' Ambulance Unit. This was followed by forestry work, farming, slum clearance, school building in Southern Italy and demolition work in Israel.

John returned to England and attended the Central School of Art in London for three years, graduating in 1959 with a National Diploma in Design, as well as the School's own Diploma.

Still unsure of his future, he went back to Israel where he worked on models and puppets for a film company until his return to England in the autumn of 1960. From then on, he created posters for London Transport, drew cartoons for magazines and designed Christmas cards. His first book, *Borka: The Adventures of a Goose with no Feathers* was published in 1963 and won the Kate Greenaway Medal. Jonathan Cape published a golden 40th anniversary edition of *Borka* in 2003. John is perhaps best known for *Borka* and the two Mr Gumpy stories, *Mr Gumpy's Outing* and *Mr Gumpy's Motor Car*, which are all firm favourites more than 40 years since first publication. *Mr Gumpy's Outing* won the Kate Greenaway Medal in 1971, making him the first illustrator to win two of these prestigious Medals.

John's books visit the world of make-believe. His empathy with children is captured in *John Patrick Norman McHennessy, the Boy who was Always Late*, the story of a school-boy incapable of getting to school on time because of the amazing things that happen. His 1984 book, *Granpa*, won the Kurt Maschler Award. It was subsequently made into an animated film by the makers of *The Snowman* and featured the voice of Peter Ustinov as Granpa. The *Daily Mail* described the book as 'a magical mystery tour, as an old man guides a little girl through the fantasy world of his memory . . . Outstanding.' A royalty from the sale of the animated film tie-in edition went to the children's charity, UNICEF.

Following this success, John Burningham was commissioned by Great Western Railways in Japan to write and illustrate a story around a boy and a train, which would have a strong ecological theme, for the Japanese Expo'90. The result was the highly popular book, *Oi! Get Off Our Train*, which deals with the issue of endangered animals as they try to board a train in order to escape sure extinction. This too was made into a short animated film and the railway in the book was re-created as part of the Exhibition. The book was variously described as, 'A delightful, humorous book with a simple important message' by the *Scotsman* and, 'A book not to miss', by the *Observer*.

Courtney, which was published in 1996, is one of his most endearing books, telling the story of a dog with a difference whilst *Husherbye* (2000) is an idyllic lullaby. *Edwardo, the Horriblest Boy in the Whole Wide World*, was published in 2006 and is a parable about the dangers of judging a child too quickly. It has been widely praised and the *Independent* asserted that 'this book has all the ingredients that Burningham's fans pounce on: a sharp clear sighted-edge, grace and wit'.

2010 saw the publication of *John Burningham*, a celebration of his work containing some of his finest illustrations, together with a commentary by him about his life. The foreword was written by fellow artist Maurice Sendak. A major retrospective exhibition, *Mr Gumpys Outing- a celebration of 50 years of John Burningham's work* was held at Seven Stories, Newcastle, UK.

John Burningham's work has been translated into many different languages including: Chinese, French, German, Japanese and Korean, and his popularity is

phenomenal – he receives letters from all over the world. John is married to acclaimed illustrator Helen Oxenbury, with whom he has three children. He lives in Hampstead, North London, UK.

John Burningham: An Appreciation

1963 saw the publication of **Borka: the adventures of a goose with no feathers**, the book which began John Burningham's career as one of our most distinguished and innovative illustrators. **Borka**, the featherless goose, is knitted a grey woollen jersey as substitute by her mother, and later, unable to migrate with her companions, she finds herself working her passage – coiling ropes and suchlike – on a small steamboat. The low-key presentation of these preposterous events helps to suggest a complete normality, a narrative method that continues through Burningham's four following storybooks: **Trubloff** about a mouse learning to play a balalaika (!); **Humbert**, a scrapdealer's nag who saves the Lord Mayor's procession; **Cannonball Simp**, a castaway dog who saves the career of a circus clown; and **Harquin**, a foxcub who outwits the local hunt.

Up to this point all the picture storybooks in which Burningham was involved followed a conventional pattern. A dilemma is posed which gives rise to dramatic events, however modest. One thing follows another along a determined course until a satisfying resolution is reached. **Mr Gumpy's Outing** introduced an alternative pattern: what might be called the elastic-sided story. For although the initial impulse and the final resolution are still there what lies between is scarcely determined at all; the author has given himself multi-choice options. Clearly Mr Gumpy needs more than a couple of children to get into his boat but it matters not a whit how many creatures join him or what those creatures might be. The only constraints are narrative effect – don't go on too long or the whole thing gets boring – and, at a fundamentally practical level, the number of pages available through which the cumulation may build.

Burningham's triumph in judging the pace and the rhythm of his text in **Mr Gumpy** caused him to realize the value to him of elastic-sided storytelling and much of his subsequent work derives its character from the way that he frolics among a wealth of random possibilities, the essential requirement being that he finds a closure congruent with his multiple choices. Thus, it makes no odds what farcical calamities overtake John Patrick Norman McHennessy along the road to learn so long as Sir gets his come-uppance at the end. **Would You Rather...** almost does go on forever. The delight which children take in having to choose amongst page-loads of ludicrous alternatives leads to endless creative extensions when you ask them to think up and illustrate their own sets of ghastly choices ('would you rather walk to school with mummy, or go in a stretch-limo with a tv, a cocktail cabinet, and a small-size skateboard-rink?').

What matters is 'text', by which I mean not just words but the nature of the story they tell, the way words are paced alongside illustrations through the limited length of a standard picture book, and the degree to which the reader may find that they are matched by the artist's visualisation – which will of course demand our ability to distinguish the different ways in which line and colour may be handled. What better example could be found than **Granpa**? The 'text' is what Burningham has to say about youth and age. The progress of the story, such as it is, follows the elastic-sided

pattern with the choice and order of incidents and their connected illustrations being governed only by the denouement of the final three pages. A most delicate balance is achieved between what is said and not said as the pages are turned and it is this which gives the book its emotional depth.

Burningham-land is testing territory for anyone seeking to assess the relationship of illustrations and text in picture storybooks. In the few words that he was allowed to explain himself in the British Council's **Magic Pencil** catalogue he confesses (twice) 'I don't have rules' and that each book is a new tightrope-walk, words which suggest a reliance on instinct. The tightrope exists from the very beginning and some of the excitement over **Borka** may have come from watching the author sway his way across it. Burningham has no hesitation about altering his graphic methods in that way if he feels like it. The apparent randomness with which events are sometimes selected for his elastic-sided stories can be matched by an apparent randomness in the graphics, in what initially look like hastily sketched scenes and portraits or in the mixing of such sketches with forceful and often dramatic colour-work.

As occurred in **Borka**, so we find later on that a rough and ready distinction tends to be made in the artwork between the scenes of the everyday, which may be fairly subdued affairs in pen and ink or coloured pencil, and the fantasy that runs alongside. The 'Shirley' books are the most clear-cut examples. See the rudimentary picture of the sea-side visitors: mother peaceably knitting in her beach-chair next to father, prone under an open newspaper. 'We ought to be getting back soon' say the words, but there is Shirley and her dog on the facing page, in a glory of mauve, pink and yellow, unearthing the treasure of a pirate-isle.

But look again at those parents, oblivious to their child's rampant imagination on a chilly English beach ('Of course it's far too cold for swimming, Shirley'). They are easy prey for the satirist or the social critic but here they are in Burningham-land where the criteria are different. The reader does not despise so much as feel sorry for them. They are innocent participants in what is now a forty-year-old comedy, ornate with scenes of baroque eccentricity, but whose laughter is never derisory and whose purposes are ruled by an uncomplicated compassion. The tightrope-walk may make us laugh, or hold our breath, but the outcome is more resonant. As Tom Maschler notes in his preface to the anniversary edition of **Borka**: 'the aspect of his talent that I admire above all is his capacity to move readers'. Go look at **Courtney** to see with what delicacy a touching story may be fashioned from total absurdity.

In the last dozen years or so Burningham's 'capacity to move readers' has enlarged itself in radical ways. The simple, elastic structure which Burningham has made his own has continued to show its adaptability. The plot thickened though when **Oi! Get off our Train** was published and the Burningham tightrope was seen to be carrying him across the perilous tracts of Social Concern. Burningham works obliquely within a fantasy dreamscape, embedding his message in a picture-book text of great complexity, reflected by the increase of its length from thirty-two to forty-eight pages. The repetitious structure, both of words and illustrations, is extended; relationships between the real and the imagined (that amazing train, those personalized animals) are constantly shifting; and the whole is underpinned by a *joie de vivre* which strengthens its purpose (the wonderful final pay-off). It is a model for its genre – but an inimitable one.

The expansion of the scale and ambition of Burningham's work is in part characterised by a tension between comedy and high seriousness, innocence and irony, and subtle perceptions masked by an apparent simplicity. But as though to prove that simplicity works very well on its own, there is **Husherbye**, where formulae, however successful, are suddenly cast aside. Instead of the concertina of central variations we get what are, in effect, two six-finger exercises as child, animals, the man in the moon are brought to the end of their day and are then serially tucked up for the night. A new register is found for the words, lulling, half-rhymed verses, and there is a beautifully-judged progression of the drawings and paintings as they pace the two sequences of the text.

Brian Alderson's is founder of the Children's Books History Society and children's book consultant for **The Times** (London). This is an edited version of Brian Alderson's article **On the Tightrope in Burningham-Land**, Books for Keeps, 2003.

John Burningham- awards and other distinctions

1964 Awarded the UK Kate Greenaway Medal for *Borka, the Adventures of a Goose with no Feathers*

1970 The French shadow puppet theatre Les Marionnettes du Manifole, perform *Borka* and *Trubloff* in Paris

1971 Awarded the UK Kate Greenaway Medal for *Mr Gumpy's Outing*, the first illustrator to win it twice. It also wins the New York Times Best Illustrated Children's Books of the Year Award, and the Honorary Award from the Biennale of Illustrations, Bratislava

1972 Awarded the Boston Globe Horn Book Award for Illustration for *Mr Gumpy's Outing*

1977 *Come away from the water, Shirley* receives the New York Times Best Illustrated Children's Books citation

1980 *Would you rather..* receives the Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis Award

1984 *Granpa* receives the Kurt Maschler/Emil Award, UK

1985 *Granpa* receives the New York Times Best Illustrated Books Award

1987 *John Patrick Norman Hennessy, the boy who was always late* receives the Parents' Choice Picture Book Award

1989 *Oi! Get off our Train* receives the Parents' Choice Picture Book Award. Premiere of the film *Granpa* is held in London, with Peter Ustinov as the voice of Grandpa

1990 Expo 90 in Osaka, Japan features three carriages and two prefabricated station buildings, designed by John Burningham, and used on the Dream Express

(Yoshitsune) for 183 days. The buildings are later dismantled and reassembled at Wakasa-Hongo station and later at Kaibara station

1993 *Harvey Slumfenburger's Christmas Present* receives the New York Times Best Illustrated Children's Book of the Year citation

1999 *Come away from the water, Shirley* receives the China Times and United Daily News Best Children's Book Award

2000 *Husherbye* receives the UK Nestle Smarties Book Prize

2001 Contributed drawing to *For Every Child: The UN Convention on the rights of the Child in Words and Pictures*. Exhibited in "Tell me a Picture", an exhibition at the National Gallery, London selected by illustrator Quentin Blake

2002 Exhibited in "Magic Pencil", a British Council touring exhibition of children's illustrations selected by Quentin Blake

2004 A play based on *Cloudland* performed at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre, UK

2005 Exhibited at "In All Directions", a touring exhibition of travel and illustration selected by Quentin Blake. Exhibited in the Sungkok Art Museum in a joint exhibition with Anthony Browne in Seoul, South Korea

2006 Exhibited in "My Picture Book Story" in the Sungkok Art Museum, Seoul, South Korea

2007-8 Exhibited in "The World of John Burningham's Picture Book Artwork" in Osaka, Tokyo, Sapporo (Hokaido) and Nagano, Japan

2010 Exhibited in "Mr Gumpy and Other Outings: celebrating 50 years of John Burningham's work" at Seven Stories, Newcastle, UK

John Burningham bibliography

Books for Children

Borka. London, Jonathan Cape, 1963

John Burningham's ABC. London, Jonathan Cape, 1964

Chitty, Chitty Bang Bang: the Magical car. (written by Ian Fleming), London, Jonathan Cape, 1964

Trubloff the Mouse who wanted to play the Balalaika. London, Jonathan Cape, 1965

Humbert, Mr Firkin, and the Lord Mayor of London. London, Jonathan Cape, 1965

Cannonball Simp. London, Jonathan Cape, 1966

Harlequin the Fox who went down to the Valley. London, Jonathan Cape, 1967

Seasons. London, Jonathan Cape, 1969

Mr Gumpy's Outing. London, Jonathan Cape, 1970

Mr Gumpy's Motor Car. London, Jonathan Cape, 1973

The Rabbit, The School, The Snow, The Baby, The Blanket, The Cupboard, The Dog, The Friend.
(Little Books series), London, Walker, 1974-75

Come away from the water, Shirley. London, Jonathan Cape, 1977

Time to get out of the bath, Shirley. London, Jonathan Cape, 1978

Would you rather... London, Jonathan Cape, 1978

The Shopping Basket. London, Jonathan Cape, 1980

Avocado Baby. London, Jonathan Cape, 1982

The Wind in the Willows. (written by Kenneth Grahame). London, Puffin Books, 1983

Count Up, Five Down, Just Cats, Pigs Plus, Read One, Ride Off. (First Steps Number Play) London, Walker, 1983

Granpa. London, Jonathan Cape, 1984

Sniff Shout, Skip Trip, Wobble Pop. (First Words series) London, Walker, 1984

Slam Bang!, Cluck Baa, Jangle Twang. (First Words series) London, Walker, 1985

Here's Julius. London, Jonathan Cape, 1986

John Patrick Norman McHennessy, the boy who was always late. London, Jonathan Cape, 1987

Alphabet Book, Colours, 123, Opposites, Letters, Numbers. (Play and Learn series) London, Walker, 1987

Oi! Get off our Train. London, Jonathan Cape, 1989

Aldo. London, Jonathan Cape, 1991

Harvey Slumfenberger's Christmas Present. London, Walker, 1993

Courtney. London, Jonathan Cape, 1994

Letters, Numbers, Colours, Opposites. (First Steps series) London, Walker, 1994

Cloudland. London, Jonathan Cape, 1996

Whadayamean. London, Jonathan Cape, 1999

Husherbye. London, Jonathan Cape, 2000

The Magic Bed. London, Jonathan Cape, 2003

Edwardo, the Horriblest Boy in the Whole Wide World. London, Jonathan Cape, 2006

It's a Secret. London, Walker, 2009

There's Going to be a Baby. (with Helen Oxenbury) London, Walker, 2010

Books for adults

Around the World in Eighty Days. (written by Jules Verne). London, Jonathan Cape, 1972

England. London, Jonathan Cape, 1992

France. London, Jonathan Cape, 1998

The Time of Your Life. London, Bloomsbury, 2002

When We Were Young. London, Bloomsbury, 2004

John Burningham. London, Jonathan Cape, 2009

John Burningham translations

Books for Children

Borka. London, Jonathan Cape, 1963
(Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian)

Trubloff the Mouse who wanted to play the Balalaika. London, Jonathan Cape, 1965
(French, Japanese, Korean)

Humbert, Mr Firkin, and the Lord Mayor of London. London, Jonathan Cape, 1965
(Japanese)

Cannonball Simp. London, Jonathan Cape, 1966
(Japanese, Korean)

Harlequin the Fox who went down to the Valley. London, Jonathan Cape, 1967
(French, Japanese, Korean)

Seasons. London, Jonathan Cape, 1969
(French, Japanese, Korean, Spanish)

Mr Gumpy's Outing. London, Jonathan Cape, 1970
(Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Thai)

Mr Gumpy's Motor Car. London, Jonathan Cape, 1973
(Chinese, French, Japanese, Korean)

The Rabbit, The School, The Snow, The Baby, The Blanket, The Cupboard, The Dog, The Friend.
(Little Books series), London, Walker Books, 1974-75
(French, Japanese, Korean)

Time to get out of the bath, Shirley. London, Jonathan Cape, 1978
(French, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese/Brazil)

Would you rather... London, Jonathan Cape, 1978
(Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish)

The Shopping Basket. London, Jonathan Cape, 1980
(French, Japanese, Korean)

Avocado Baby. London, Jonathan Cape, 1982
(French, Japanese, Korean)

Grandpa. London, Jonathan Cape, 1984
(Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Welsh)

John Patrick Norman McHennessy, the boy who was always late. London, Jonathan Cape, 1987
(Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean)

Oi! Get off our Train. London, Jonathan Cape, 1989
(Chinese, Dutch, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Swedish)

Aldo. London, Jonathan Cape, 1991
(Afrikaans, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese)

Harvey Slumfenberger's Christmas Present. London, Walker, 1993
(Chinese, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Portuguese, Swedish)

Courtney. London, Jonathan Cape, 1994
(Chinese, Dutch, French, German, Japanese, Korean)

Letters (Japanese, Korean, **Numbers** (Japanese, Korean), **Colours** (Catalan, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish), **Opposites** (French, Japanese, Korean). (First Steps Series) London, Walker, 1994

Cloudland. London, Jonathan Cape, 1996
(Chinese, Dutch, French, German, Japanese, Korean)

Whadayamean. London, Jonathan Cape, 1999
(Chinese, German, Korean, Swedish)

Husherbye. London, Jonathan Cape, 2000
(Danish, Japanese, Korean)

The Magic Bed. London, Jonathan Cape, 2003
(Chinese, Danish, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Swedish)

Edwardo, the Horriblest Boy in the Whole Wide World. London, Jonathan Cape, 2006
(Chinese, French, Japanese, Korean, Spanish and Galician)

It's a Secret. London, Walker, 2009
(Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean)

There's Going to be a Baby (with Helen Oxenbury) London, Walker, 2010
(Brazilian, Catalan, Chinese, Danish, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish)

Books for the Jury to Consider

Five most important titles

Borka, the Adventures of a Goose with no Feathers. London, Jonathan Cape, 1963

Mr Gumpy's Outing. London, Cape, 1970

Come away from the water, Shirley. London, Cape, 1977

Granpa. London, Cape, 1984

Oi! Get off our Train. London, Cape, 1989

Five other important titles

Would You Rather...? London, Cape, 1978

John Patrick Norman McHennessy, the boy who was always late. London, Cape, 1987

Courtney. London, Cape, 1994

Husherbye. London, Cape, 2000

Edwardo, the Horriblest Boy in the Whole Wide World. London, Cape, 2007

John Burningham interviewed by Nicolette Jones for The Sunday Telegraph
22 May 2009

John Burningham has lived with his wife, the illustrator Helen Oxenbury, in the same Hampstead house for 30 years. It is embellished with stained glass windows and gothic doors, a decorative stone fireplace from Somerset and a window seat that once belonged to Lillie Langtry. It is full of Victorian features found on building sites and, more recently, on eBay. In the garden there is a stone fountain from a French square and a belfry that once adorned an English church. Burningham has become expert at how to move masonry and glass across counties and even countries. It is the home of someone who not only has an eye, but also the imagination to think big.

It fits with the picture books he has made – about 50 of them since *Borka: the Adventures of a Goose with No Feathers* was published in 1963. His are quirky stories that reflect his enthusiasm for Ronald Searle, Saul Steinberg and the French cartoonists André François and Albert Dubout, and his interest in landscape and light. They also resonate with big ideas, though he insists that they contain “no propaganda whatsoever”. Still we agree, as we chat overlooking the garden and the belfry, that *Edwardo: the Horriblest Boy in the Whole Wide World* expresses a principle which could valuably be applied not just to child-rearing but to the penal system and even to foreign policy. Edwardo behaves badly when he is criticised and punished, but becomes kind and useful when, even in the face of his wrongdoing, he is given opportunities. “We are beginning to see it now even on an international level that you can’t just keep bombing people and expect them to change their ways. It isn’t going to work,” says Burningham. The world could learn a lot from Edwardo.

Although his work is underpinned by liberal values, Burningham is not didactic. “As soon as you start to deliberately put messages across, it’s like a Seventh Day Adventist on the doorstep... you realise you are being got at.” His guiding principle is different: “The 11th Commandment should have been ‘Thou Shalt Not Bore’.” He deplores what he calls a “party food approach” to books for children: the belief that “lots of colours and pretty pictures will do when there’s no content. Children get very quickly bored. Colour means absolutely nothing unless it is used to some effect.”

This month sees the publication of John Burningham, a handsome anthology of his work and memoir of his life. It reveals that his own childhood was unconventional.

He went to nine different experimental boarding schools, ending with a few years at Summerhill. His family lived during the war in a caravan in various rural locations, renting out their home to pay school fees for three children. Burningham’s mother was a Froebel-trained teacher; his father, an RE teacher, was a pacifist who had been awarded a military medal in the First World War. “He never said what it was for. He just said, ‘Oh they must have had a lot of extra ones, so they gave me one’.”

Burningham left Summerhill with a school certificate in English literature but failed other subjects, including art. Six years later he left the Central School of Art (where he met his wife) with a distinction in design. In the meantime he had also been a conscientious objector, serving Alternative Military Service in farms, forests and building sites in Sussex, Hampshire, Glasgow, Italy and Israel. He then made

posters for London Transport, and fell into children's books when he was encouraged to submit *Borka* for publication.

Burningham's books have now sold more than four million copies worldwide and he has won the Kate Greenaway Medal for children's illustration twice, for *Borka* and for *Mr Gumpy's Outing*, which is now a primary school mainstay. He also won an award for ***Granpa***, which is based on the relationship of his daughter Emily (the youngest of his three children) with Helen's father, who used to live next door. "People say Granpa is about death. I think the point of it is the relationship between the very young and the very old. There is a bonding, especially between grandfathers and young children." His other daughter, Lucy, has three children but, he says, "We are hopeless grandparents, Helen and I, because we are so incredibly busy. This idea that Grandpa has retired, and Grandma has nothing to do except look after children and can't wait for another set of babies – we are not like that; we work harder than we did even 20 years ago. Getting older makes you want to get on with your work, while there is still time."

He does fewer school visits than he used to, deterred by audiences of "TV-orientated kids wriggling away with boredom" and an ungracious schoolteacher in Dunfermline who suggested that his long and difficult journey had been a jaunt that wasted the Scottish Arts Council's money. "I'm not a kind of Pied Piper figure. Children rather frighten me." In fact, he says, "I am not thinking about [children] when I do this at all. I never do anything differently because it's for children." As he says in his memoir. "I am not trying to make a landscape that children can understand. I am just making a landscape." He also takes the view that picture book texts are "2,000 words pruned down to 80". This is why his books are not "party food", but works of substance, that entertain the parents and teachers that read them as well as the children.

Each picture book is a set of problems to be resolved. "I am trying, I suppose, to break new ground every time. I could have settled for the endless adventures of Mr Grumpy, which would probably commercially have been better than doing obscure, different things." The different things included such memorable animal characters as Humbert, a rag-and-bone-man's horse who gets to lead the Lord Mayor's parade; Simp, a dog based on Helen's rotund pet Lulu, who is fired out of canons at a circus and Courtney, a mongrel with unexpected talents for playing the violin and rescuing a baby from a burning house. Burningham has illustrated ***Chitty Chitty Bang Bang***, ***The Wind in the Willows*** and (by retracing Phileas Fogg's journey) ***Around the World in Eighty Days***.

He is a great celebrator of the imagination: in ***The Magic Bed***, a bed found in a junk shop transports a child on adventures; in ***Where's Julius?***, in ***Come Away from the Water, Shirley*** and in ***It's a Secret!***, his latest, children's play brings them amazing experiences. The style of his picture books is spontaneous, though the textures are often carefully worked. He does his drawings quickly, but only after a great deal of rehearsal. "I do lots and lots of sketches of what the characters are going to be like. I have to know them all before I start working." There is nothing better than when a drawing works but when it doesn't ... this is the horror of the arts: because you have been doing it for 50 years, it doesn't guarantee that you can ever make colour work again."

This anxiety has not slowed his productivity. He is planning an exhibition in Edinburgh which will include, if possible, a huge copy of a Burningham gorilla hanging from the rafters. And he is making a music box out of his book *Husherbye*. "The idea is, you read the book, leave the music box and make your retreat. My memory of reading to children was that it's absolutely fine while you are reading, and then when you are trying to get out they jerk themselves awake." He may not claim to be a Pied Piper, but he knows what parents need.

An Interview with John Burningham

John Burningham's books are rarely on the shelves in our house. They are usually on the floor getting looked at or they are being read. A prolific children's author, his books include Borka, Granpa, Mr. Gumpy's Outing, Cannonball Simp and John Patrick Norman McHennessy - the Boy Who Was Always Late (which names a very few). He has been producing books since 1963. He is the recipient of numerous prestigious awards for his work and for some of us he is the most astute, fearless and penetrating living writer of children's books.

I started with Aldo, the story of a solitary child's secret/invisible friend. Since then I get at least one of his books each year - from the kids - and I'm hooked. Oi! Get Off Our Train is a particular favourite of mine, highlighting our environmental plight (it is dedicated to Chico Mendes). Mr. Gumpy's Outing is another - a magical tale in which, characteristically, Burningham is deceptively simple in both text and illustration. His writing is rare in its truth, sincerity and authentic grasp of the world of the child. It was with this in mind that I approached him through his publishers to give an interview to Inspired Fatherhood. After some months I spoke with him and he agreed to give the interview of which the following is a faithful transcript. He impressed me as a thoughtful, considered and modest man, a real delight to talk to and, as I might have suspected, an unselfconscious purveyor of wisdom - Ed

Richard Harvey: What is the role of children's literature?

John Burningham: Well, I suppose to stimulate and interest children.

RH: What are you communicating to children in your stories?

JB: Well, I don't know. I mean having said that children's literature is to stimulate children... I mean there is not, in my estimation, a tremendous gap between adults and children, it is just one of experience and that if you produce, by and large, a successful book for children it often is something that adults actually enjoy, because after all they are the people who go out and buy things and they are the ones who have to suffer reading them night after night if they do work. But I personally never say, "Well, I'm going to do something for children". I mean I have an idea and I obviously, I suppose, have an ability to communicate with children by being able to simplify what I produce.

RH: So are you thinking of adults when you're writing the books?

JB: No, I'm not thinking of anybody. I'm just thinking of the problem of the book... I don't ever think really of an audience. I just think of it as a sort of headache that has to be solved really.

RH: I was noticing that the adult figures in your books, the parents and so on, are usually quite severe, unloving sorts of characters, nagging, the father is often absent - I'm thinking of Oi, Get Off Our Train or Aldo for example - and the benign presences that the children turn to in the books are usually animals - like Courtney - or imaginary figures like Aldo or otherworldly figures like those in Cloudland or idealised figures even. Why is that?

JB: I really don't know, I mean in the case of Aldo I think I definitely wanted to write something in that case for a huge sort of stable of children from broken relationships. I mean that was a deliberate move in the case of Aldo. In other cases well, I mean for example I don't know if you know those books *Come Away From The Water, Shirley* and *Time To Get Out Of The Bath, Shirley*, on one page there is the sort of parents moaning about various er... they go to the seaside and its don't get your feet wet, don't step on the towel, mind that dog and all that sort of thing and the child's carrying on a fantasy on the other page. But really it's exploring two worlds, because once your child has inevitably let the sea go over his Wellingtons, or whatever it is, you're in for a tough afternoon and people say, "Oh, those dreary parents", I say, no, they're not dreary, that's the way it is.

So perhaps they are... I'm just trying to think about *Courtney* now... yeah, they're very dreary parents in *Courtney* certainly.

RH: They're killjoys aren't they?

JB: They are. Yes, absolutely.

RH: One of the things that we feel as the adults buying the books - as you say - is that you've got a more authentic grasp of family life and the children's world, as we see it, than most other children's authors. It's hard to actually think of anybody who comes to mind writing children's books that enters into those areas as authentically as you do.

JB: Well, that's very nice of you to say. I must say I don't make judgements. I'm not really particularly interested in what anybody else is doing in that field and it sounds a sort of rather dreary statement to make but I just get on with whatever problem I have in front of me, rather than looking at what everybody else is doing and if I manage to do that well, I'm glad to hear it from you.

RH: What makes a bad children's story, do you think?

JB: Oh god, I really wouldn't like to be able to say that. But I suppose what I personally don't like is any kind of... "I'm now going to do something for children and therefore we'll have lots of pretty colours and balloons and parties". Because they suffer they've got a boredom threshold which is much more acute than the adult one, which is rather nice, that you can't persuade a child to get interested in a story if he doesn't like it. I mean there's no way around that. But they do like... there are some

really awful things that one might consider absolutely awful that children like, so it is a great enigma really I think. I have met people writing their essays and PhD's on children's y'know... what is behind children's stories and I feel sorry for them because I just don't know or think that anybody knows. In fact I had somebody do a PhD on a book of mine called *Where's Julius?* Have you seen that one?

RH: I don't know that one I'm afraid. There's so many you've written. I mean we've got a stack of them but you're mentioning ones we don't have.

JB: Yes [laughs]. *Where's Julius?* is about a boy who... the parents are preparing a meal and they say, "Where's Julius?", and they say, "Well Julius is in the hall making a little home out of chairs and an old curtain and a broom", so you get the picture of Julius in the hall. So they take the tray to Julius. Then the next thing he's doing is he's digging a hole in the end of the garden to get to the other side of the world. So they take the tray to him there. Then he's in Egypt, then he's in Russia, then he's in, you know, wherever it is and each time one of the parents takes the tray to him and then the penultimate page is - you can hear the mother getting fairly desperate, saying is he doing this, is he doing that and is he in the North Pole and feeding this that and the other. And the father says, "No Betty, tonight Julius is coming to eat with us". Now this man wrote hundreds of pages on this story, trying to analyse it and completely missed the point. The point, as I saw it, was that you have all these different stages of development with your children which you may not enjoy as a parent, but you just have to tolerate them and, if you do and if you back them, then hopefully they'll come through it as sort of reasonable adults and this PhD just totally missed the point so I don't know what the ans... you know...

RH: Could you respond to that, did you tell him that?

JB: No, you can't [laughs] tell somebody who's written three hundred and... pages you've missed the point. I couldn't understand his PhD and he couldn't really understand my book so we left it at that.

RH: That brings me to the next question because it is what do you think of the education system in this country?

JB: Well... I find that very hard to say. I mean obviously the classes are too big, the teachers are underpaid and so on... it worries me that we have this explicit belief that if we equip our schools with millions and billions of pounds worth of computers that that somehow is going to solve everything. I personally think that it's the relationship between a teacher and a small group of people that is important and I don't think it matters whether you're doing it in some old sort of hut somewhere. I think that the quality of the buildings or the quality of the equipment isn't what it's about. It's stimulation and it's a form of apprenticeship really. I think that apprenticeship is one of the better ways of learning something. But to get to say we've equipped the school with computers and we're now going to have a class of thirty-five people and sit them down and try and make them like Singaporeans, or whatever they'd be called, is not right, because I think in this country we are... the quality we have is innovation and originality and this should be encouraged.

RH: How do you think spirituality should be approached in schools?

JB: When you say spirituality, what do you mean - religious education?

RH: I think I'm using spirituality... or to me it's something wider than religious education perhaps, but certainly encompassing that, yes. But I'm thinking also of the spiritual world of the child that may be outside of conventional religion.

JB: I don't know. I probably am not quite picking up on what you're saying there.

RH: For example, we send our children to a Steiner School, so that embraces a spiritual dimension, more so than the state school although religious education would be part of the teaching there. There could be an argument that says that in state school the spiritual dimension of the child is subordinated to religious instruction or something like this.

JB: Yes. I think I'm vaguely familiar with the Steiner method which is that you proceed with English until you get tired of English and then you get on with history and then you do history and so on and so forth - you keep stimulating. What is I think extremely difficult to really know with education is whether - and equally with being a parent - is whether it wasn't... I mean my parents made me do X and I *hated* it at the time but later on I was tremendously grateful and I've never been sure about that, because I've never been capable of doing that and this could be construed as being a weakness. So I'm never sure about the Steiner system. I went to lots of schools, including a Steiner at one point. I don't know, I don't have a fixed opinion because I think you can come down on so many sides with that sort of thing.

RH: Do you see the role of the father changing in the 21st. century?

JB: Well, I suppose that it must be changing *now* in that the classical role of father was always that he was the bread-winner and he went out to work and she cooked and cleaned and dusted and had babies and all that sort of thing. Well I suppose there are two factors now: there are so many one parent families, broken marriages that it could well change, yes, and probably for the better. I think that one of the most horrendous, anti-family things is commuting. I mean getting up at half-past six in the morning, disappearing and coming back tired after a couple of hours on the train or in the car or whatever, and having no time with your family is an absolutely appalling way to live, but we've structured our society like that and I think it's a great pity.

RH: How far do you think that the roles of mother and father are culturally designated? Do you think that a man could effectively 'mother'?

JB: I don't know. I suppose that the conventions are so entrenched, aren't they, that there is no reason why... I mean I don't know whether father could ever be a hundred percent mother, but he certainly could be an eighty-percent mother and we've now got this scenario with a sort of phobia about paedophiles that no male... I mean it's even frightening males out of the teaching profession. They don't even dare put their arm round a child and comfort it in case somebody starts assuming that they have other intentions. But yes, supposedly, I don't see why not.

RH: How do you think the large numbers of single-parent families today will affect our society in the future?

JB: I don't know. I know lots of children who are the products of broken marriages who seem to be perfectly alright. The great question, I suppose, is what's going to happen when they try to form family relationships at a later stage in the way that if you... you'll find that violent criminals were usually beaten up as children or abused in one way or another. So if they have the example of the parents breaking up, or having no parents, then perhaps they will perpetuate it and does it matter? - perhaps we all have to change.

RH: How do you view 'the family'?

JB: How do I view the family? Well, I think it's sort of as good as you can get really, I mean warts and all. I think grandparents are very underused. This is another thing about dispersed family because the role of the grandparent is very important and when the grandparents live two-hundred miles away and they're just sort of seen at Christmas, this is a great pity.

RH: What is the role of the grandparent?

JB: The role of the grandparent is that they have a sort of detachment. Parents are usually overanxious and overworked and sort of over everything and the grandparents can borrow children and hand them back. So they're *semi*-responsible and I think this is a tremendous contribution to upbringing to have that. They have all the love and all the attention but equally the grandparents can say, "Well, we never did this with our children. This was the failure, or whatever, and we're going to do it, because now we have the time with the grandchildren", and they also take the pressure off the parents.

RH: So in that way it's two-way traffic. There's something in it for the grandparents also.

JB: It is, yes, absolutely and it takes the grandparent off the back of the parent. So I mean this is sad in a way... with dispersed communities that you don't have this going on.

RH: What are the ideal conditions for children's early years?

JB: Well, I suppose they need love and security and an introduction to as many things as they can get, plus a lot of playing.

RH: How do you think your own relationships with your mother and father have affected your life and work?

JB: *My* life and work? I don't think as any kind of definite reaction or... I mean obviously one's parents have an effect on one in some way or other, but I really can't think how they affected my interest, I mean the choice of what I did was mine, not theirs, and I can't really see beyond that.

RH: Who are the figures who have most helped to develop our understanding of ourselves in this century?

JB: I honestly don't know because I am not well-read on all this sort of... I mean if you are talking of people like Freud and Jung and... you know those sort of people I am really not... Krishnamurti or whatever, I am so ill-read on that lot that I really couldn't answer that.

RH: It's interesting you think of those figures perhaps?

JB: Well you can say Stalin and Adolf Hitler, Mahatma Gandhi or what... I would find it very hard to answer.

RH: What are the latest developments in your work?

JB: I'm doing all sorts of things really. I've just finished a book on the French which was an almighty, huge amount of work. I'm doing another children's book. There's various things going into animated films. I've got lots of things going on really.

RH: So the book about the French is for the adult market, is it?

JB: Yes, that's adult.

RH: Is that an academic work?

JB: No, it's not. I did one on England about four years ago which they're going to reissue at some point. No, it's a hundred and twenty-eight pages of drawings and quotations really.

RH: Why do you think that, in spite of all we now know, education in this country, and in most of the world, remains achievement-orientated and insensitive to the needs of the child?

JB: Economic pressure or economic fear and that goes back to schools full of computers and then we'll make them as prosperous as they are in Singapore. There is this desperate panic that people have with children and young people. They cannot believe that a sort of "oafish" teenager is ever going to be a responsible adult and so I suppose that's what may cause it.

RH: What advice would you give to actively-engaged fathers at this time?

JB: When you say actively-engaged, what...? Actively-engaged with their children?

RH: Yes, I'm thinking of the fathers who take an interest, who are not 'the commuters' you are talking about, and are actually engaged in the business of parenting.

JB: Yeah, well I suppose one of the things you have got to bear in mind is you don't say, if a child's doing something which is driving you mad, and you don't want them to do it, there's no point saying, "Don't!", you just say, "Let's do something else". You

divert and that's a kind of hot tip. It seems to work. Otherwise you just get a confrontation and that's very difficult to resolve with extremely young children.

RH: I couldn't agree with you more about that and then in practice it's so hard to do sometimes.

JB: Yes, because you're just irritated, tired or exasperated.

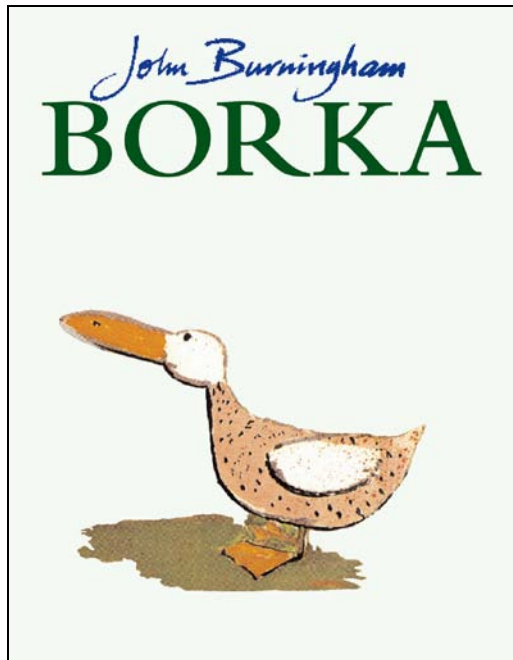
RH: Which children's book, other than one of your own, would you most like to have written?

JB: So you're saying what's my favourite children's book really, I suppose.

RH: I suppose it could be that, but there's another meaning I think perhaps in it.

JB: Oh right. There's a book that I loved as a child called *Brendan Chase* which was written by... a man who is the artist and the name escapes me now. He signed his name B.B., I know that. Yes, it might be about some boys who run away and live in the woods, some beautiful woodcuts. Dennis Watkins Pitchford was the man's name. Yes, I wouldn't have minded doing that.

RH: Thank you very much.



First published 1963

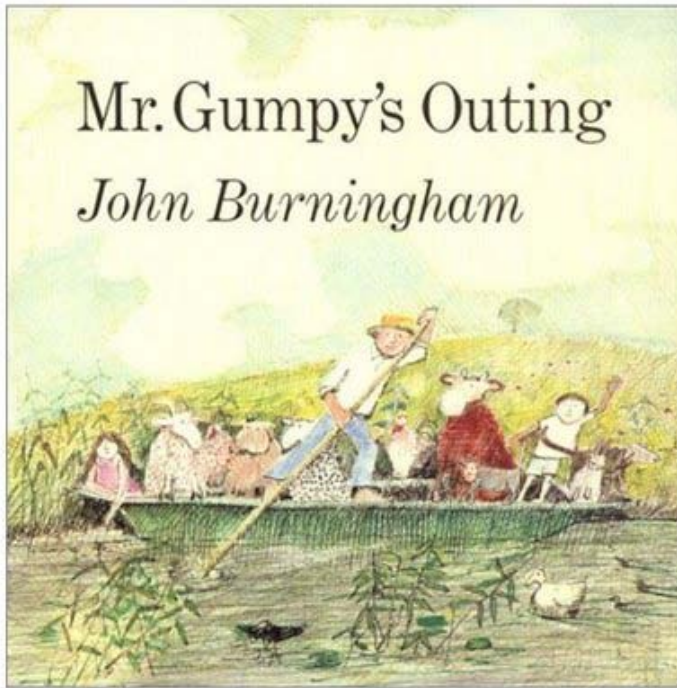
Kate Greenaway
Medal

Burningham's career as an illustrator took off when, as an unknown artist, his first book, *Borka*, was brought to the attention of Tom Maschler at Jonathan Cape. Maschler had just joined Cape as literary director. He had never published a children's picture book before, and neither had Cape, but Maschler's instinct told him that this was an exciting new talent, and somehow he persuaded his chairman that they should publish it. It was an immediate success, selling to eight foreign publishers and winning the coveted Kate Greenaway Award for the best picture book of the year. It was to be the first in a long line of distinguished titles published by Cape in this field.

Maschler's eye for a good picture book is now legendary (the next artist he signed up was Quentin Blake), so I asked him what he saw in *Borka* that gave him such confidence. "What I saw then was what I still look for in every picture book I publish. I want each book to be unique, completely different from anything else and above all, true to itself, true to the artist's vision." *Borka*, he says, had the additional draw that "it had the capacity to move the reader - and that's something you very seldom find."

What's exhilarating about this book is the uninhibited breadth, vigour and variety of the artwork: in addition to the very beautiful landscapes, there's the impact of bold, black, angular outlines, which give some of the pictures the look of stained-glass windows; there are spiky ink drawings that retain the immediacy of the artist's preparatory drawings, which are included in this anniversary edition. There's a loosely executed brush drawing on toned paper that gives a warm, domestic feeling to the cabin scene. And the robust lines of the chunky red boat gives the story a buoyant optimism.

Joanna Carey, *The Guardian*, 2003, from a retrospective survey of John Burningham's career, occasioned by the 40th anniversary publication of a new edition of *Borka*.



First published 1971

Kate Greenaway Medal
Honorary Award from
Biennale of Illustrations
Bratislava
New York Times Best
Illustrated Children's Books
of the Year
Boston Globe/Horn Book
Award for Illustration and
Outstanding Book citation
from School Library Journal
Children's Book Showcase
selection
and American Library
Association (ALA) Notable
Book citation

John Burningham was employing a well-loved formula when he composed Mr Gumpy's Outing in 1970. One by one children and animals pile into Mr G's boat, each in turn being commanded to behave... Of course they do not behave: 'The goat kicked, the calf trampled...' and the chain unwinds... 'and into the water they fell.' Such a simple climax, so perfectly judged, and then followed by the happy outcome when they all walk back across the sunlit fields for tea at Mr G's place.

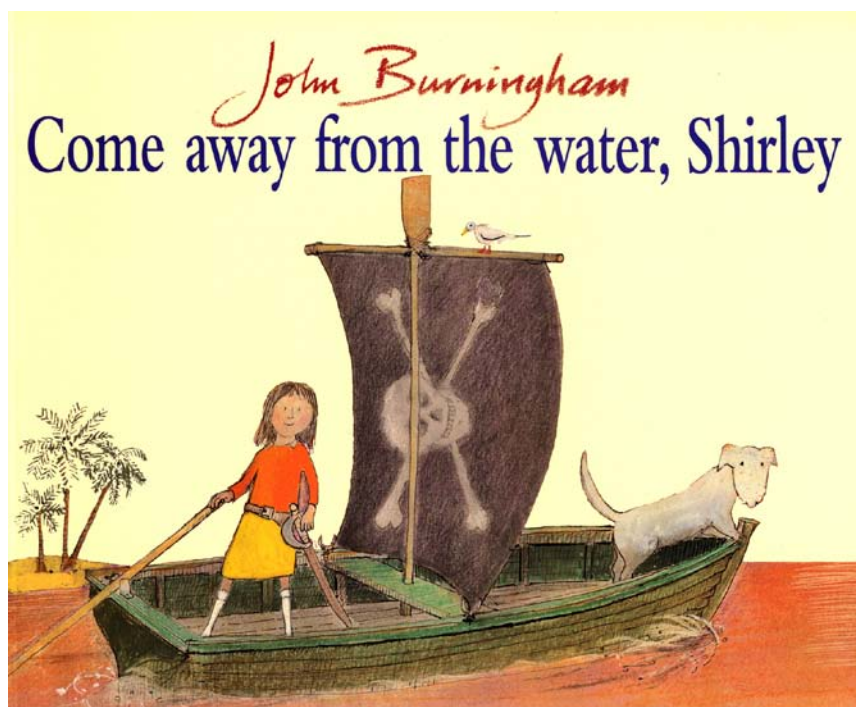
This is indeed a story for telling... But of course it's a story to look at too... There is an almost haphazard spontaneity about the illustrations, with little of the narrative detail that might have been given in a traditional picture book, and, indeed, one of the virtues of the drawing is the extreme sketchiness with which the characters are delineated.

The varied music of these turning pages has its own purpose. For with the capsizing boat the rhythm changes. The upset is portrayed in a magnificent dynamic double-page colour illustration, which is balanced two pages later by the peaceable feast. Everybody scoffs tea and cake, too full for words, before the final, single-page, moonlit valediction. The exigencies of the 32-page picture book are perfectly exploited.

Brian Alderson, Classics in Short, Books for Keeps, 2003

The first page of Mr Gumpy's Outing has the distinction of being the subject of a brilliant piece of critical analysis by Perry Nodelman of how picture books represent the world, in which he concludes (in part): "Making ourselves and our children more conscious of the semiotics of the picture books through which we show them their world and themselves will allow us to give them the power to negotiate their own subjectivities – surely a more desirable goal than repressing them into conformity to our own views."

Perry Nodelman, Decoding the Images: Illustration and Picture Books, in
Peter Hunt (ed.), *Understanding Children's Literature*, Routledge, 1999



Horn Book Honor
list
New York Times
Best Illustrated
Children's Books
of the Year
citation

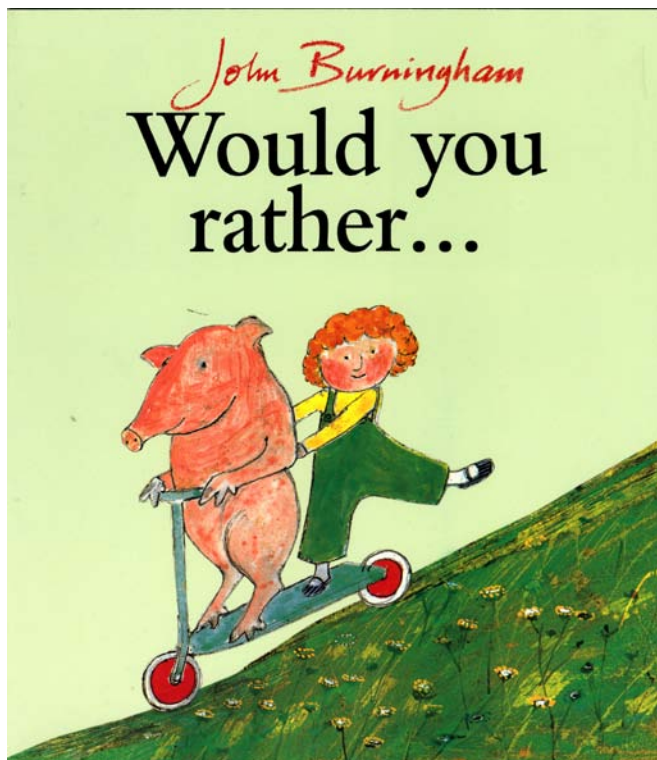
First published 1977

A deceptively simple work of great interest both formally and stylistically and typical of the pared-down approach to picturebook making adopted by Burningham in the 1970s and 1980s...By using the central gutter of each double page spread to separate story worlds rather than pictures in sequence, Burningham is able to show the reader two distinct perspectives on events. Thus the verso has the parents sitting in deck chairs doing little more than making largely cautionary remarks to their daughter. The latter is visible only on the recto where, in a sequence of vividly coloured, wordless images, she appears to become caught up in an adventure aboard a pirate ship. By eschewing explanation and removing cues to interpretation, Burningham creates gaps in the text larger than is customary in picturebooks and thus gives the reader more work to do. Older children and adults tend to see Shirley as wrapped up in imaginative play or fantasy. Younger, less experienced - and less easily satisfied - readers are frequently intrigued by the lack of a clear relationship between the two sets of images and will try to puzzle out how they are connected.

David Lewis, Entry for Come Away from the Water Shirley in Victor Watson ed., *The Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English*, Cambridge University Press, 2001

Children know how powerful the imagination can be at a young age and the contrast between Shirley's wild fantasies and the prosaic concerns of her parents will be one that they may have experienced themselves. They will also enjoy Burningham's over-the-top pirates, all so fierce and fearless until Shirley stands up to them, after which they tumble over in comic despair. Children who have already discussed their fantasies with others will surely love this book, those who have kept their imaginings a secret may enjoy a delicious sense of recognition.

Nicholas Tucker, Entry for Come Away from the Water, Shirley, in Julia Eccleshare (ed.) *1001 Children's Books You Must Read Before You Grow Up*, Universe, 2009.



Deutscher
Jugendliteraturpreis
West German
Federal Ministry of
the Interior

First published 1978

A year ago my family discovered this wonderful book and my kids and I all love it. They howl with glee over the disgusting choices, and ponder thoughtfully over the more enjoyable choices. There is always much discussion and explanation of preferences, the pros and cons of being pulled through the mud by a dog versus being covered in jam, or whether having a koala bear you can read to or a pig you can ride on would be more fun. This is one of the few books of my experience that transcends both sex and age - both my sons and my daughter, ranging from 3 -8 years all enjoy it, making it a rare commodity: something they can all agree on.

But the best part is that now the kids love to make up their own "would you rathers". This has become a favorite car game, and I love the creativity and imagination they put into it.

Parent's review on Amazon

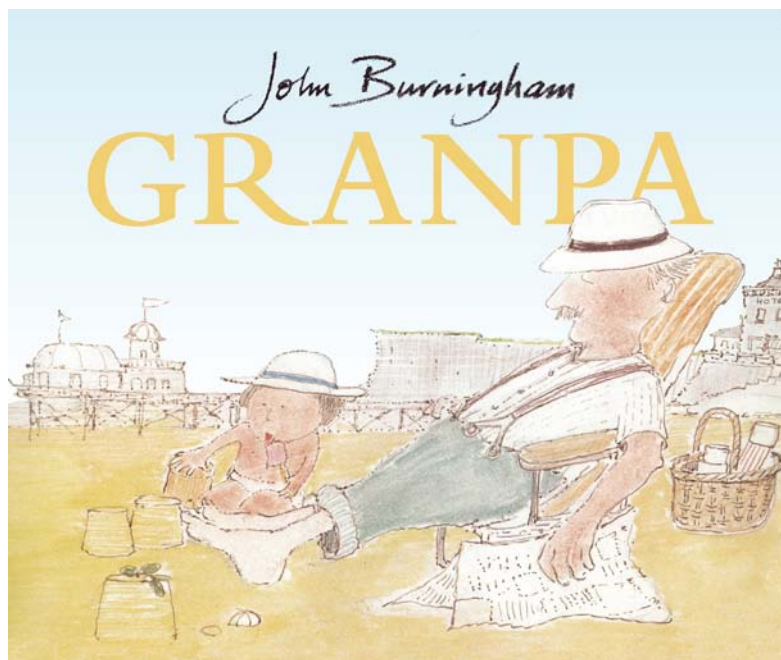
Would you rather

Instructions for teachers and students.

How to play the game

Nobody wins and nobody loses in this game but everyone has a good time. Take turns to throw the dice or make a spinner with a Would you Rather flavour. Move around the board. When you land on a Would you Rather square pick a card from the centre, and tell everyone what you would rather do from the choices available. When you have made your choice have another chance to spin or throw. You can change the game rules as long as you all agree. As you can see some of the cards come from the book, others have been invented by players of the game.

From the instructions for a game devised by teachers as a reading and decision making activity. At <http://www.collaborativelearning.org/wouldyourather.pdf>



New York Times Best Illustrated Children's Books of the Year citation
Kurt Maschler/Emil Award,
New York Times Best Illustrated Book Award

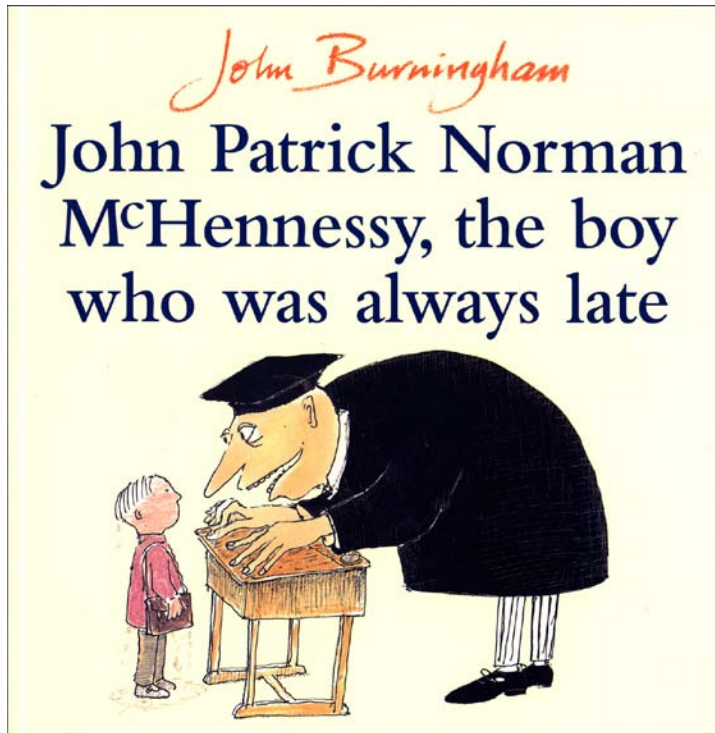
First published 1984

Because of its lack of a clearly told story, *Granpa* has challenged many assumptions about how children read. Its design assumes an interactive view of reading which tolerates uncertainties and gives free rein to the child's readiness to question and speculate...In a famous page opening there is a sketch of the old man and the young girl with their backs to one another, their faces and body language eloquently suggesting anger and hurt: the only words are: "That was not a nice thing to say to Granpa." The text gives no indication of what she has said; it trusts its young readers to fill the gap from their own experience. This fragmentation of expected narrative patterns has been defended by Peter Hunt, who argues that 'its very complexity, together with the relinquishing of any authorial control in the verbal text makes *Granpa* closer to the comprehension patterns of an orally based reader than the vast majority of texts that set out to be "for children".'

Victor Watson, Entry for Granpa in Victor Watson ed., *The Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English*, Cambridge University Press, 2001

On December 31st that year it happened that my own father was dying in Brighton General Hospital, aged 88, and my daughter Catherine who was then six came with me to visit him. She had had a very similar relationship as that described in the book, since she adored my father who was for ever telling stories and rhymes and jokes which made her laugh. The doctor told us that very sadly he could not last out the week and my daughter said to me: 'Will he go to heaven?' I said: 'I very much hope so' and Catherine with the sublime innocence of youth said: 'Can I come and watch?' This made me laugh despite myself and to see how as children we are able to accept all of life in a way that we find so difficult as adults.

Howard Blake, who wrote the music for the animated film of *Granpa* (1986), which was awarded the Prix Jeunesse International.



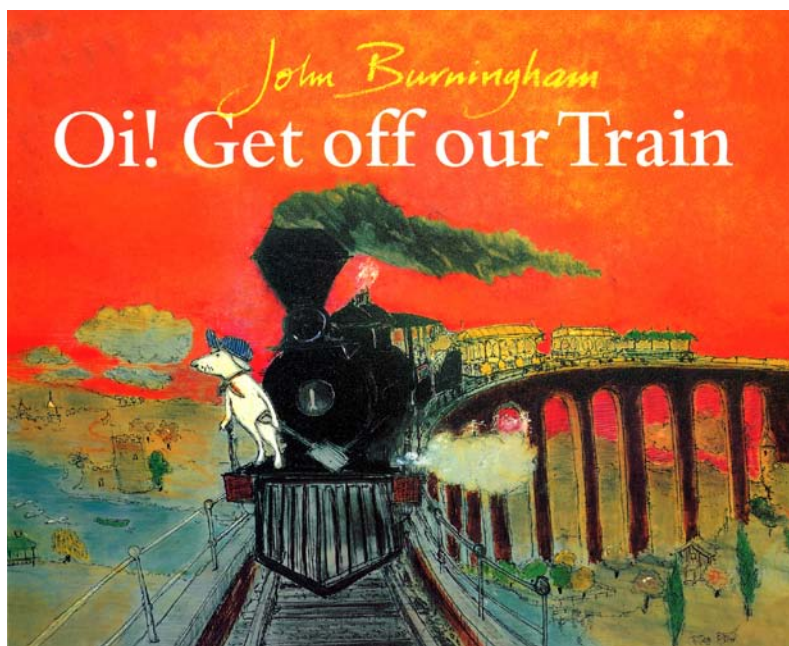
Horn Book
Honor list
Parents' Choice
Picture Book
Award

First published 1987

John Patrick Norman McHennessy is a good child. He regularly sets off for school, traveling "along the road to learn." Unfortunately he is always being waylaid en route, once by a crocodile, once by a lion and finally by a tidal wave. As a result, he always arrives late, minus a glove, or with wet clothes, or torn trousers. Being a truthful boy, he tells the schoolmaster exactly what has happened. But his explanations are huffed off as terrible fibs and his punishments become progressively more severe. At last Fate, in the shape of a huge gorilla, lets him turn the tables. On time for class for once, he finds the teacher up in the ceiling beams, clasped in the gorilla's hairy arms. Responding to his desperate cries, John Patrick is quick to point out that there can be no help for that sort of thing because it just doesn't happen, and away he goes, leaving his tormentor to be swung from the rafters.

In other words, the British author and illustrator John Burningham has yet again produced a book to entrance children in their early school years and to add to his impressive list of titles, including "Granpa" and "Mr. Gumpy's Outing." His delightfully whimsical turn of mind is not enough to explain his success. Beneath the story's simplicity there lies tremendous craft. For example, he knows the value of repetition: the hero's resonantly syllabic name crops up 15 times and each disastrous occurrence follows an identical pattern in both sequence and language. In addition, the vocabulary of this fantastic tale is extremely simple. Other than the boy's name, there are only three words of more than two syllables in the entire text. There are also very few adjectives and a great many verbs, for Mr. Burningham has long since grasped that all children need is a trigger and their imaginations will do the rest. What is more, he is content to leave it to them.

Vicki Weissman, New York Times, 1988



Parents' Choice
Picture Book
Award
Books Can
Develop
Empathy Award

First published 1989

A little boy sets off on a round-the-world night train to dreamland with his pillow case dog for company. On route they are joined by all sorts of endangered animals asking to join the journey. Through fog, hot sun, wind, rain and snow they travel. Each time a new animal attempts to board we have the repetitive phrase "Oi! Get off our train!" followed by an explanation as to why that animal is endangered. "Please let me come with you on your train." says the tiger. "They are cutting down the forests where I live, and soon there will be none of us left." And so we are introduced to a range of habitats as well as a range of weathers; sea, marsh, forest and the "Frozen North"

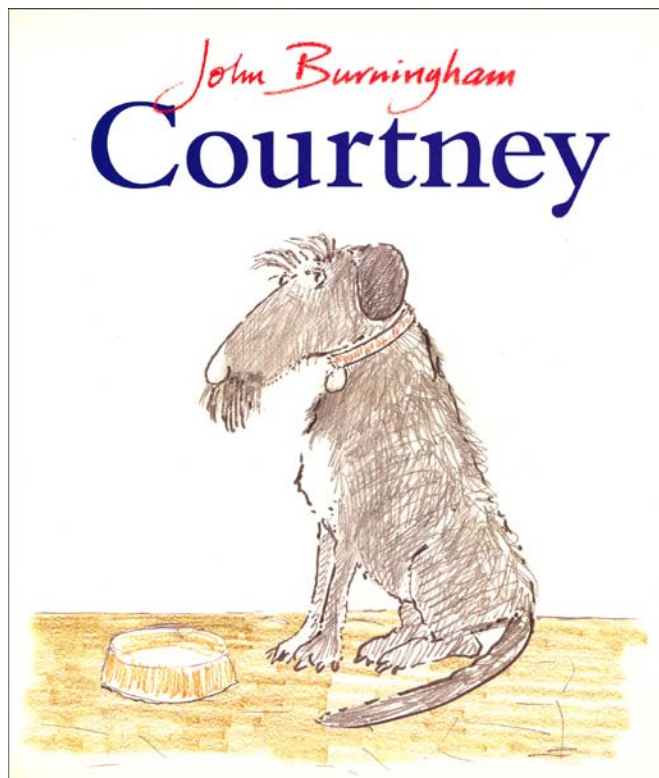
The illustrations are inimitable John Burningham, simple, humorous pencil outlines and delicate colour washes on one page with a much denser use of colour on the opposing page. The penultimate double page spread is a magnificently glowering, dark illustration of the train returning to an industrial town at night time – cleverly portraying the green message of the book, mankind is messing up the planet. There's a nice twist on the last page.

Just Imagine website review

I was asked by the West Japan Railway Company to write a story for Expo 90, which had to include Japan's first steam locomotive...At the same time I was asked to design three full-sized railway carriages and two earthquake-proof station buildings [for a railway to run at the Expo]. My "Dream Express" ran at Expo 90 for 183 days without a hitch.

Oi! Get Off our Train was first published in Japan in 1989. It is an environmental tale, now dedicated to Chico Mendes, who did so much trying to protect the rainforests. He was murdered for his work. Oi! Get Off Our Train is about endangered species, but more than that it's about the social hierarchy of young children and the need to ease themselves into a group.

John Burningham, in John Burningham, Cape 2009



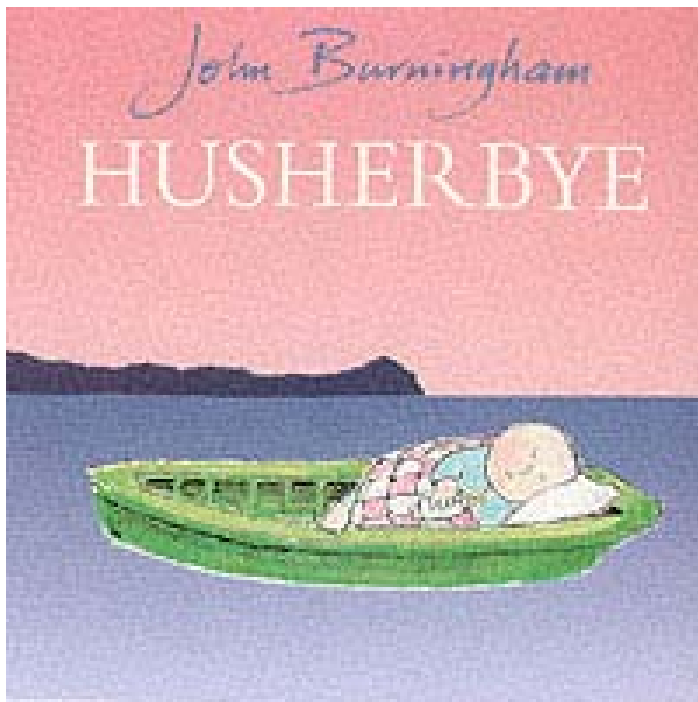
First published
1994

Another caretaker animal is presented in *Courtney*, the story of children who badly want a dog, but the one they pick out from the pound is not quite the purebred animal their snobbish parents were hoping for. But *Courtney* turns out to be a *Mary Poppins* in dog clothing, capable of cooking, juggling, and rescuing all in turn. Deborah Stevenson commented in *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* that such a talented dog "will charm quite a few viewers ... as Burningham, with his usual ability to make silent animals personable and friendly, depicts *Courtney* as a walrus-ish yet debonair individual who never loses his air of mystery." Kate McClelland noted in a *School Library Journal* review of *Courtney* that this "is all typically assured Burningham at his ironic best." A contributor to *Kirkus Reviews* commented on Burningham's "familiar cartoon mode" which is "poignantly expressive," and concluded that the book is "[w]itty, well told, and superbly illustrated."

From the web biography of Burningham at Answers.com

In '*Courtney*', John Burningham has created a delightful, imaginative story... The children I read it to found the idea of a dog dressing up and doing household chores or dancing extremely funny. Although *Courtney* is an old and not particularly attractive dog, there is something very lovable about him and you can understand why the children decided they wanted him as soon as they saw him. I have to admit that it was not on first reading that I noticed *Courtney's* presence on the cliff top in a picture near the end of the book, but when I asked the children how they thought the boy and girl had been saved, they were convinced that *Courtney* rescued them. Interestingly, *Courtney* is the only character in the story who is named.

Liz Allen on the Helium website



Nestle Smarties Book Prize

First published 2000

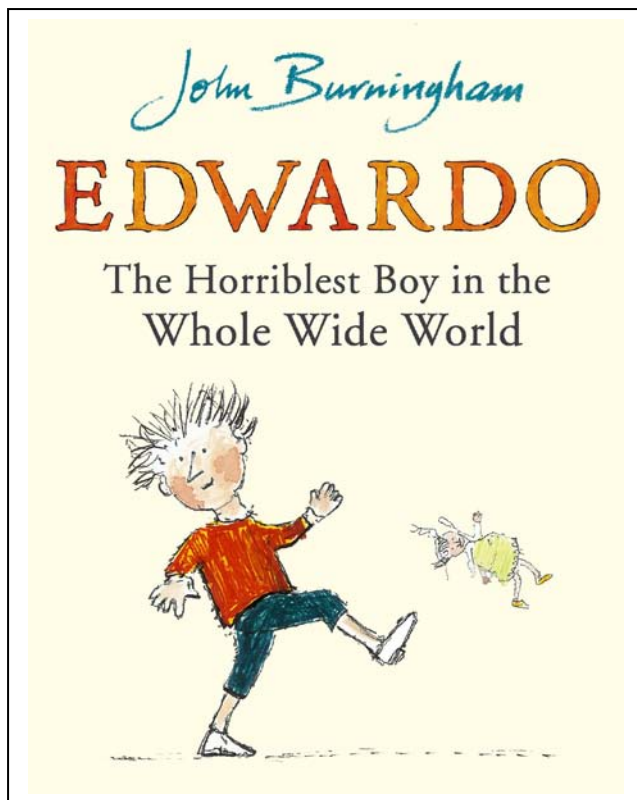
In Burningham's *Hushabye* additional narratives abound in the illustrations to his workpersonlike, quirky attempts at verse ('The baby's been sailing a boat on the sea, /and now needs to sleep./HUSHERBYE'). An exhausted mother cat trudges through the snow with her sleepy kittens; three bears, grumpy with tiredness, climb the stairs; and the serene man in the moon is beginning to doze off. Sleep in this lullaby is sometimes a blissful state of consciousnessless ('The baby's asleep/in the boat that's afloat,/and is rocking on watery waves.')

but more often a desperately needed sinking into oblivion after a difficult and strenuous day. The baby, tucked up in a blanket, bottle in hand, sleeps peacefully in her/his little green boat which floats serenely on a smooth pink sea but the exhausted goose sleeps flat out, slumped in a chair. Not all life, not all sleep then can be simple, easy and blissful, the watcher by the cradle appears to tell us. Just as the baby tumbles down when the bough breaks, so *Hushabye*, within its comforting, tender, sleep inducing words and pictures, does not, like all the best lullabies, altogether reassure.

Rosemary Stones, Books for Keeps, September 2000

This is Burningham in classic form with a bedtime tale that is so snug, gentle and warm, it makes you want to rush off to bed immediately. Once again, simplicity is the keynote here, both in the everyday magic of the text and the simple drawings. Burningham actually manages to capture exactly what a fish looks like when it is heavy-eyed with sleep or how comfy the man-in-the-moon is as he settles down for the night. This is a book that, in the tale of the baby sailing a boat on the sea, the cat looking for a place for her kittens to stay and the goose who has been flying high, takes the reader on a journey from sleepiness to sleep itself. A book to bring the day to a close with a caress and a whisper.

Lyn Gardner, The Guardian, 2000



First published
2006

If only politicians would take the philosophy promoted by this picturebook to heart: that vilification is not the answer to antisocial behaviour. When Edwardo behaves badly, he is told how horrible he is, so he gets worse. It is only when his actions are interpreted generously and he is given opportunities and responsibilities, that he lives up to kind expectations and turns out to be nice.

Offer children chances, not punishments, is the theme: this is a guide to parenting in a few pages, in which the characterful drawings — breezy, relaxed, energetic — are as succinct as the text, demonstrating aptly that “messiness” can be a sign of light-hearted liberation. For children, the book is a series of funny adventures and misunderstandings with a reassurance that even if, inevitably, you are sometimes untidy, noisy or cruel, you still have the potential to be lovely (and you, too, could be a lion-tamer). Parents reading this at bedtime will be reminded how to forgive childishness and to treat children well. Endpapers with the title in many languages confirm that this is a message the whole world could take to heart.

Nicolette Jones, The Sunday Times, 2006

Young readers will be shocked, fascinated and amused by Edwardo’s misdeeds whilst also identifying with his horriblest moments. At the same time they will be relieved (and also identify) with the Edwardo who now also has ‘loveliest’ moments. The apparent simplicity of Burningham’s sketchy scenes belies the drama and tension of the initial section in which accusing fingers are repeatedly pointed at Edwardo, culminating in his wholesale condemnation. From then on gentler narratives crowd the pages with humorously farfetched accounts of his redemption. A tour de force.

Rosemary Stones, Books for Keeps, March 2006