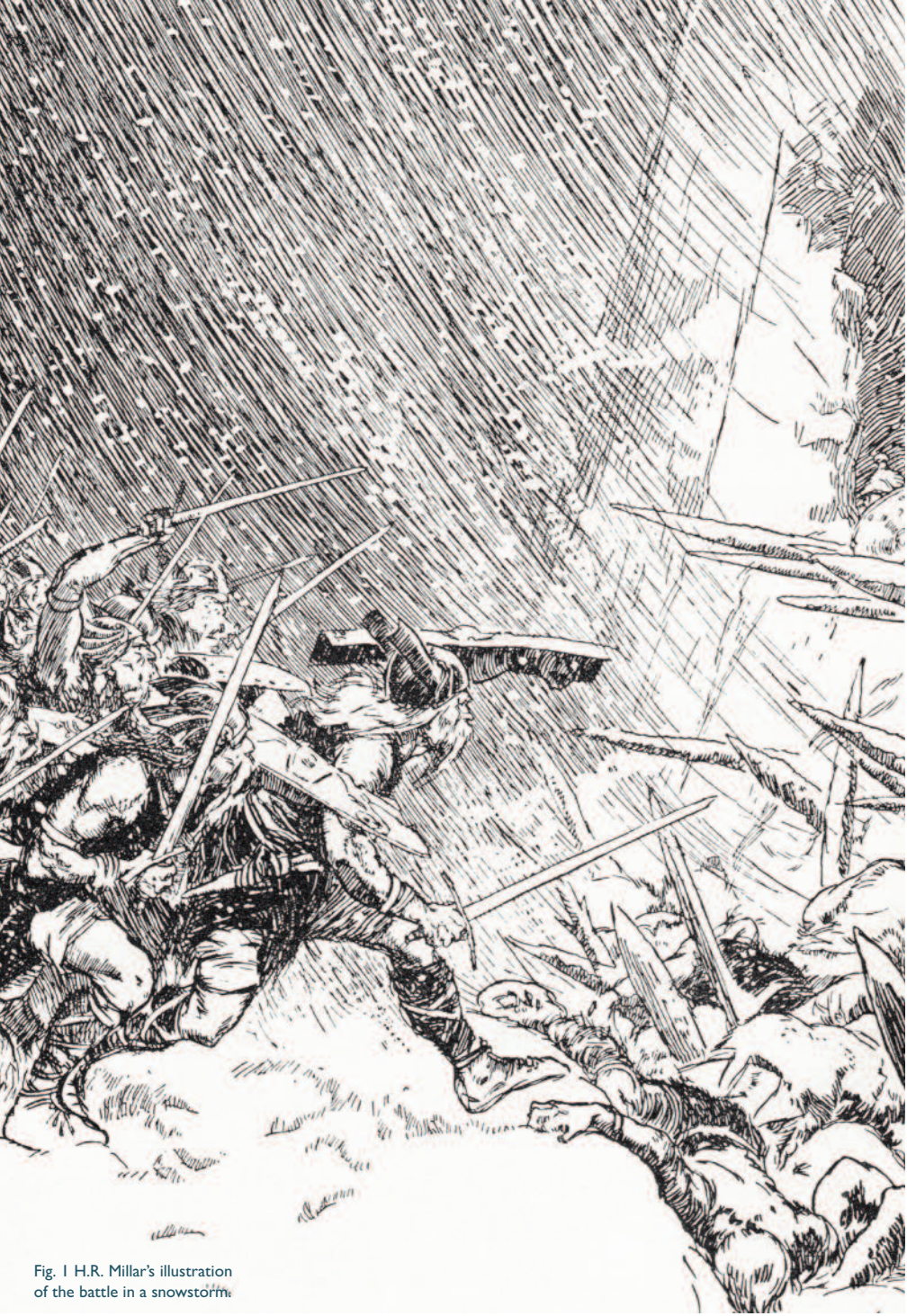

Fig. 1 H.R. Millar's illustration of the battle in a snowstorm.

"That was Sussex – seely Sussex for everlastin'!" Arthur Rackham and H.R. Millar's illustrations to Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*

Simon Poë

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Puck of Pook's Hill was first published in 1906, with two editions appearing simultaneously in New York and London. The English edition, from Macmillan, was illustrated by H.R. Millar, while the American one, from Doubleday, Page & Company, contained Arthur Rackham's illustrations. My grandparents gave me a copy of the English edition of *Puck* for my eighth birthday, but I did not encounter the Rackham version until this year. I was curious to find out, having experienced Kipling's text and Millar's pictures together from the first, how far my perception of the stories might have been coloured by Millar's images. How would *Puck of Pook's Hill* have seemed to my younger self if it had been illustrated with pictures in Rackham's very different style? *Would it have been like reading a different book?* In this article I shall compare the editions and contrast the ways in which the two sets of illustrations serve the text and evoke the countryside I played in as a boy.

Puck of Pook's Hill concerns two children, Dan and his sister Una, who accidentally 'break the hills' by performing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* three times in a fairy ring on Midsummer's Eve. Thus, without ever intending to do so, they summon Puck. He is the last one remaining of 'the People of the Hills', and he rewards their magical act by introducing them to four figures from the history of England, a Norman knight, a Roman centurion, an artist from Tudor times and a persecuted Jew from the reign of King John. All four have distinct voices and story-telling styles (respectively romantic, matter-of-fact, whimsical, and cynical) and in a way the book is 'about' story-telling itself. 'And what did you do afterwards?' Una asks the knight, Sir Richard (it's almost her *leitmotif*). 'We talked together of times past,' he replies. 'That is all men can do when they grow old, little maid.'

'Puck's Song', which opens the book, draws attention to familiar local landmarks – such as 'the dimpled track' and 'our little mill' – that have their place both in history and

in my own memories of Sussex (which, though vivid, all belong to childhood and adolescence, as we moved out of the area at the same time that I left school). The idea that the past might be inscribed on the landscape I was growing up in caught my imagination. The stories about the Roman centurion Parnesius made a particularly deep impression because the first excavations at what would turn out to be Fishbourne Roman Palace were taking place just up the road from our house in Westgate as I first read them. The ancient, I suddenly understood, was embedded in the everyday. The poem concludes with a reference to 'Merlin's Isle of Gramarye' and the thread of magic that is also woven through it.

The Norman sequence of the book begins when Weland, a Saxon deity, 'the Smith of the Gods', forges a sword for the Saxon novice, Hugh. It's no coincidence, I suspect, that Kipling spells his name so that it combines the words 'we' and 'land'. The stories trace the slow integration of the Saxons and Normans and the almost mystical way England has assimilated wave after wave of invaders. Sir Richard marries Hugh's sister Aelueva and, when he and Hugh have grown old and left the running of their manors to their sons, they travel far to the south with a band of Vikings and win a great treasure of African gold. They bring it back to England and hide it in a well in the walls of Pevensey Castle. Then, in the final tale, the persecuted Jew Kadmiel engineers the signing of Magna Carta by denying King John the gold. Puck illustrates the inevitability of this process with an image from the English countryside:

> 'Well,' said Puck calmly, 'what did you think of it? Weland gave the sword! The sword gave the treasure, and the treasure gave the law. It's as natural as an oak growing.' (303)

Parnesius the Roman centurion is another assimilated Englishman, hailing not from Italy but from the Isle of Wight. Young Parnesius is sent north to Hadrian's Wall and, after Maximus has stripped the garrison of most of its men to mount his unsuccessful bid for the Empire, he and his friend Pertinax lead the desperate defence against invading Northmen. 'Hal o' the Draft' (as in 'draughtsman') introduces Harry Dawe, an artist and architect from the beginning of the 16th century, who comes home to the children's own village to rebuild the church and becomes involved in a story of gun-running that features the explorer Sebastian Cabot. 'That was all', he says, at the end of his tale, 'that was Sussex – seely Sussex for everlastin'!' 'Seely' means 'happy', 'auspicious', 'good', 'pious' or 'blessed'. 'And what happened after?' asks Una again.

Millar's twenty illustrations to these stories are evenly distributed through the text, with each chapter being illustrated with between one and four pictures. They visualise Kipling's narrative in quite a literal way. Fig. 1, for instance, which thrilled me as a boy, illustrates the following passage:

> By the end of the second month we were deep in the War as a man is deep in a snowdrift, or in a dream. I think we fought in our sleep. At least I know I have gone on the Wall and come off again, remembering nothing between, though my throat was harsh with giving orders, and my sword, I could see, had been used. (221)

Kipling's use of the 'snow' image is metaphorical, evoking a sense of being stuck, and baffled. Millar chooses to take it literally, and gives us a picture of a battle in a snowstorm. Again and again, he locates the author's narrative in solidly material reality, and leaves the magic to Kipling.

Rackham's strategy is as different from Millar's as it well can be. In contrast to his twenty, Rackham offers only four illustrations, though whereas Millar's are simple black-and-whites Rackham's are thoroughly worked-up watercolour drawings. With so few, he cannot attempt to 'mirror' the structure of Kipling's text as Millar does. Nor does he illustrate moments of action such as Hugh and Richard's fight with the gorillas or the battle in the snow. His illustration to 'On the Great Wall', for instance, takes its cue from a phrase in a scene-setting paragraph in which Kipling sends Parnesius beyond the reach of civilisation and hints that the dominion of Rome is faltering:

> Of course, the farther North you go the emptier are the roads. At last you fetch clear of the forests and climb bare hills, where wolves howl in the ruins of our cities that have been. …There's where you meet hunters, and trappers for the Circuses, prodding along chained bears and muzzled wolves. Your pony shies at them, and your men laugh. (170)

Rackham responds to this with a rather anachronistic gypsy troupe, traders in wild animals for the games. The red-haired girl, with her brass earrings, goading a bear along with a spear-point, adds a note of perverse, absent-minded cruelty that is pure Rackham (Fig. 2). There is nothing like her in Millar's illustrations.

His illustration to 'Hal o' the Draft' shows, not an incident from the story Harry Dawe tells, but the story-teller's own confrontation with a turkey:

> 'Body o' me,' said Hal, staring at the hop-garden, where the hops were just ready to blossom. 'What are these? Vines? No, not vines, and they twine the wrong way to beans.' He began to draw in his ready book.

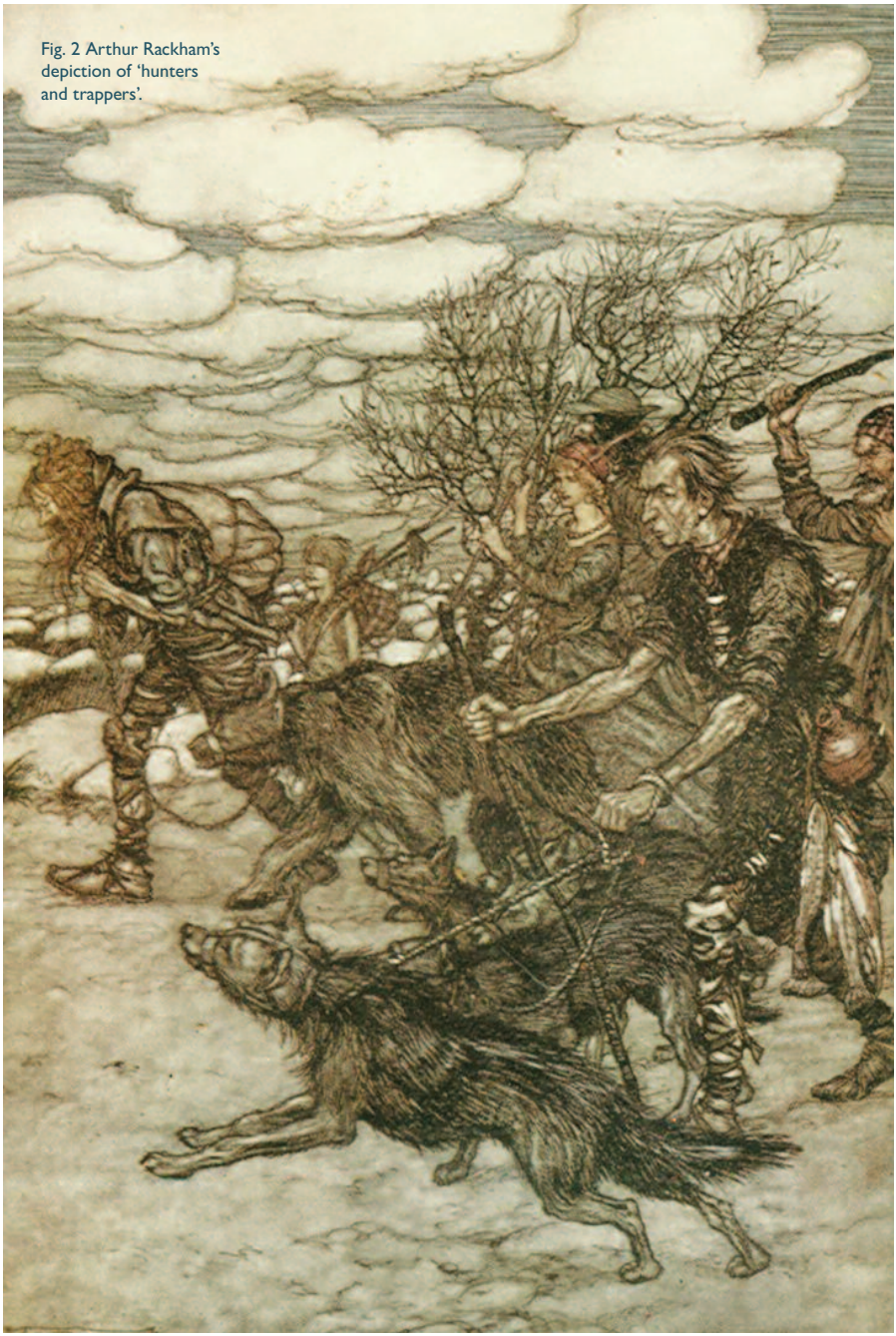


Fig. 2 Arthur Rackham's depiction of 'hunters and trappers'.

'Hops. New since your day,' said Puck. 'They're an herb of Mars, and their flowers dried flavour ale. We say –

'Turkeys, Heresy, Hops and Beer
Came into England all in one year.'

'Heresy I know. I've seen hops – God be praised for their beauty! What is your Turkis?'

The children laughed. They knew the Lindens turkeys, and as soon as they reached Lindens orchard on the hill the full flock charged at them.

Out came Hal's book at once. 'Hoity-toity!' he cried. Here's Pride in purple feathers! Here's wrathy contempt and the Pomps of the Flesh! How d'you call them?'

'Turkeys! Turkeys!' the children shouted, as the old gobbler raved and flamed against Hal's plum-coloured hose.

'Save your Magnificence!' he said. 'I've drafted two good new things to-day.' And he doffed his cap to the bubbling bird. (235-6)

The reference to heresy in Puck's couplet (domesticated by its juxtaposition with turkeys, hops and beer) prefigures the significance of the Reformation in the next story. But it's hard not to suspect that Rackham is more interested in the turkey than in Hal, and in the bear and wolves than in Parnesius.

Another theme of the book is the identification of the native peasants with the land. Proprietors – Romans, Normans, Dan and Una's middle-class parents – come and go, but 'old Hobden the hedger' and his ancestors are permanent fixtures. The story that is the emotional centre of *Puck of Pook's Hill*, 'Dymchurch Flit', concerns Hobden's family and is told in dialect and in his voice, in conversation with Puck, who has disguised himself as Hobden's friend Tom Shoesmith for the purpose. Dan and Una join the two old men and the Bee Boy – 'Hobden's son, who is not quite right in his head, though he can do anything with bees' (258) – in the oast-house, where the hops are being dried. Kipling's description of the scene is almost more powerfully visualised than Millar's.

The 'Flit' is set in Romney Marsh and explains how the People of the Hills (all but Puck) came to leave England. Tom explains that it was the Reformation that drove away the Fairies (he calls them 'Pharisees', as was customary in parts of rural Sussex). He tells them how 'it eended up in 'em takin' sides an' burnin' each other no bounds, accordin' which side was top, time bein'' (267). And just as he had with the image of 'an oak growing', he employs images from the Sussex countryside, comparing the behaviour of the Pharisees with that of bees and rabbits:

'That tarrified the Pharisees: for Good-will among Flesh an' Blood is meat an' drink to 'em, an' ill-will is poison.'

'Same as bees,' said the Bee Boy. 'Bees won't stay by a house where there's hating.'

'True,' said Tom. 'This Reformatories tarrified the Pharisees same as the reaper goin' round a last stand o' wheat tarrifies rabbits. They packed into the Marsh from all parts, an' they says, "Fair or foul, we must flit out o' this, for Merry England's done with, an we're reckoned among the Images."' (267)

Recognising, perhaps, the pivotal importance of this story, Rackham uses an image drawn from it for his frontispiece (Millar's shows Puck introducing himself to the children). Rackham represents the Widow Whitgift (ancestress of Old Hobden's wife and hence of the Bee Boy) and her two sons atop the shingle bank that holds back the sea from the low-lying Marsh. He shows the fairies crowded around their feet, trying to communicate their need for a boat and crew to sail them over to France, 'where yet awhile folks hadn't tore down the images'. The Widow is the only person who can hear their cries for help. They prevail upon her to lend them her sons – one of whom is blind and the other, who is dumb, can't tell what he sees – for the purpose, and they sail the fairies across. Puck stays behind. Although the story is set in the time of Henry VIII, Rackham's characters are shown in modern dress, and it has often been suggested that he is deliberately parodying the realist paintings of the Newlyn School, such as *A Fish Sale on a Cornish Beach* (1886) by Stanhope Forbes (Fig. 3).

Millar twice portrays Puck – in his frontispiece and in the picture of Weland making the sword (Figs 4 and 5) – but he nowhere represents any other 'People of the Hills'. In *The Widow Whitgift and her Sons*, however, Rackham does just that and shows them as the 'gauzy-winged' creatures familiar from Victorian fairy painting. In doing so he flatly contradicts Kipling himself and the words he puts in Puck's mouth:

'Ah, but you're a fairy,' said Dan.

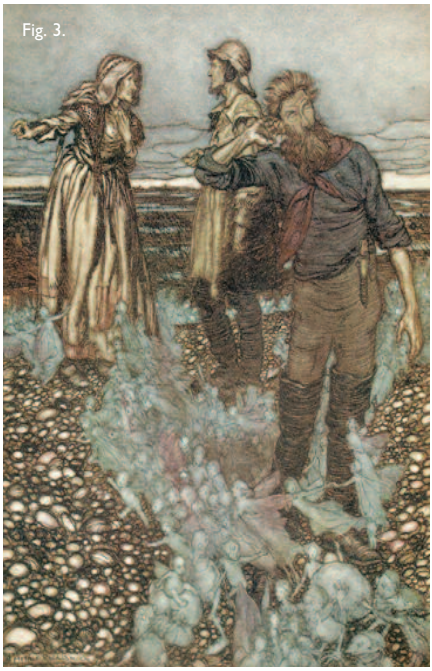
'Have you ever heard me say that word yet?' said Puck quickly. … 'Besides, what you call them are made-up things the People of the Hills have never heard of – little buzzflies with butterfly wings and gauze petticoats, and shiny stars in their hair, and a wand like a school-teacher's cane for punishing bad boys and rewarding good ones. I know 'em!'

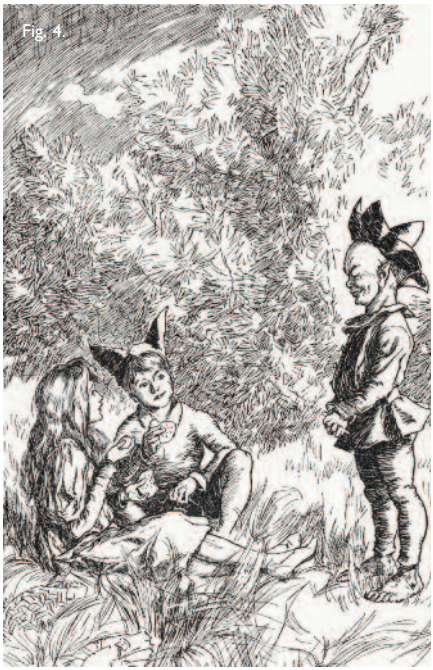
'We don't mean that sort,' said Dan. 'We hate 'em too.' (13-14)

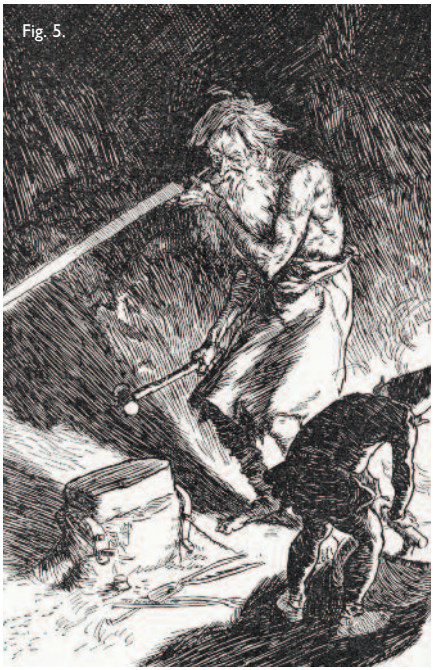
Fig. 3 Arthur Rackham's Widow Whitgift.

Fig. 4 Millar's frontispiece depicting Puck.

Fig. 5 Millar's Puck watches Weland making the sword.







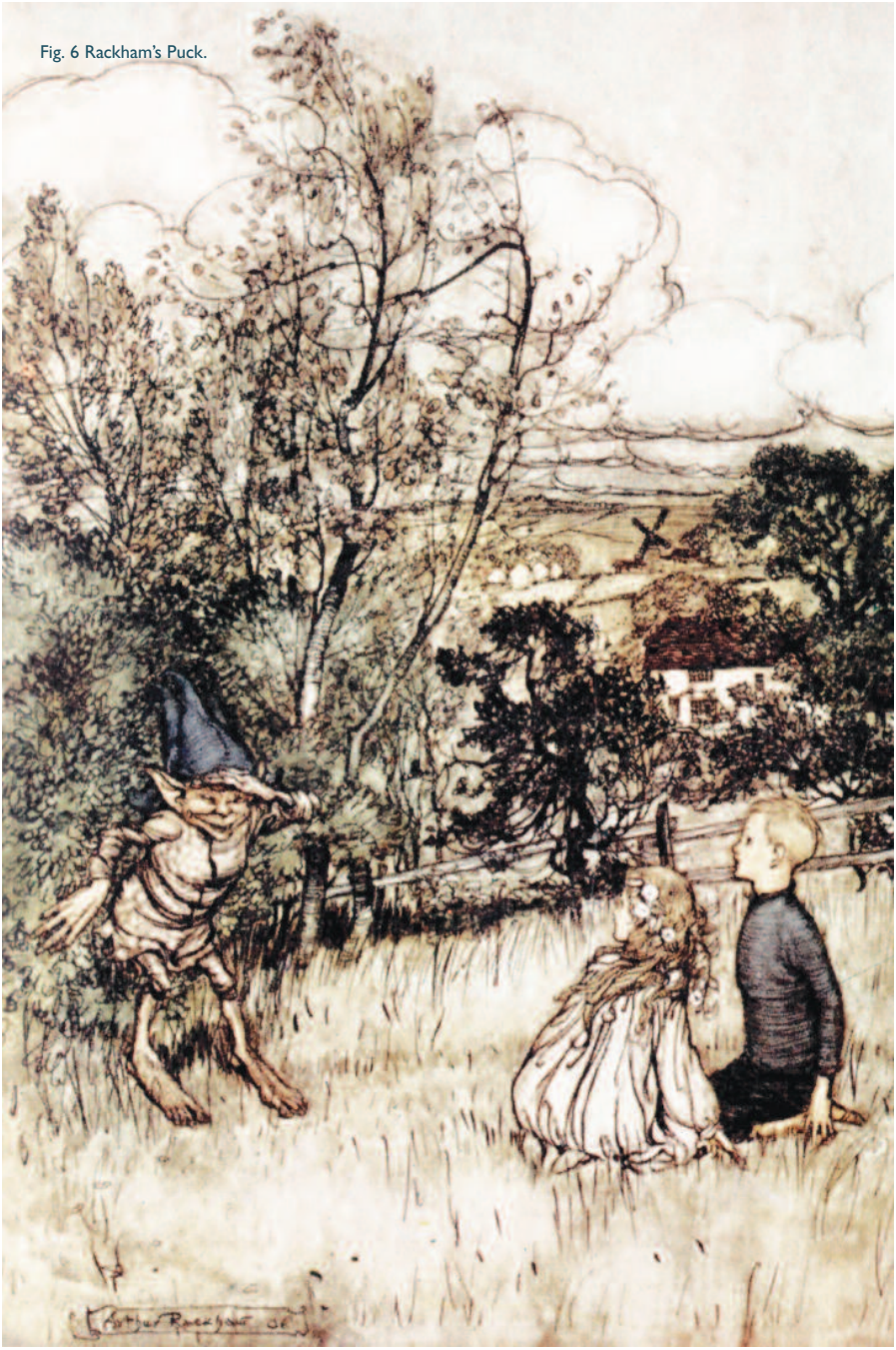


Fig. 6 Rackham's Puck.

One wonders whether Rackham's own reputation as a fairy-painter, firmly established by his work for J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (published earlier in 1906, the same year as *Puck of Pook's Hill*), ought not to have disqualified him from illustrating Kipling's book in the first place.

The only direct point of comparison between Millar's illustrations for *Puck of Pook's Hill* and Rackham's is between Figs 4 and 6, which both illustrate the moment when Puck, 'a small, brown, broad-shouldered, pointy-eared person with a snub nose, slanting blue eyes, and a grin that ran right across his freckled face' (6-7), steps out of the bushes and introduces himself. Once again, the two artists' work couldn't be much more different. As usual, Millar adheres quite closely to what it says in the book. His Puck is pointy-eared, slanty-eyed, small and sturdy, but recognisably, as Kipling says, a 'person'. Rackham can't seem to restrain his penchant for the grotesque. His Puck is a goblin with stick-like limbs and weirdly elongated hands and feet. What Kipling describes as 'a grin that ran right across his freckled face' is a gap-toothed grimace that splits his face in two. It's difficult to believe that, confronted with such a creature, the children would not simply have run home screaming.

Rackham's Una is a charming little thing in a loose, flowing smock, with flowers in her hair. But she is not, it seems to me, Kipling's clever, curious, down-to-earth, monosyllabic girl-child. I don't think she's a Sussex native at all, nor a subject of King Edward VII. She looks more like one of Jessie M. King's Arthurian damosels, born and bred far from Sussex in 'Illustration-land' and in some mythical Middle Ages.

Millar's Una, on the other hand, is emphatically a girl of her time. One costume historian I consulted was able to identify her outfit as 'a white cotton pinafore with a lawn cotton printed dress underneath … very typical of the Edwardian teenage girl.' Another told me that 'her dress is a pretty typical fashionable middle class, upper middle, or upper class, loose, long-sleeved young girl's dress and pinafore from about 1905/1906', and that her 'large round hat was also really fashionable at that time.'[1]

But this precision developed into a problem. Macmillan published the book in a variety of formats that went through numerous reprintings, until in 1935 – the last year of Kipling's life – they brought out *All the Puck Stories*, which included *Puck of Pook's Hill* and its sequel, *Rewards and Fairies* (first published in 1910, with illustrations by Charles E. Brock), in a single volume. The 66-year-old Millar was brought back to design the dust jacket and supply a new frontispiece. It is difficult not to regard these as sadly inferior to his 1906 line illustrations, though the cover, with its spine decoration of oak, ash and thorn leaves, is attractive. Subtle changes were made to the original frontispiece. Fig. 7 shows its last appearance, in the 1935 reprint of *Puck of Pook's Hill*. In *All the Puck Stories*, and in subsequent printings of *Puck*, Una's once-fashionable mutton chop sleeves have disappeared and her hair has been put into pigtails. The changes are more evident in the picture of her with Parnesius (Figs 8 and 9). Her skirt is shorter and her flamboyant cartwheel of a hat has been replaced with something less formal. I believe that the publishers wanted to allow

fresh generations of children to identify with Dan and Una and not to feel distanced from what had become a period piece. Arthur Rackham's cavalier anachronisms (from an Arthurian maiden in Edwardian Sussex to a fedora-wearing gypsy in Roman Britain), on the other hand, remain firmly rooted in the 'golden age' of illustration.

I asked whether Millar or Rackham best evoked the Sussex countryside I played in as a boy, and I was surprised to find that Millar hardly does so at all. Those of his illustrations that are not interiors or night-scenes are 'shut in' in the foreground or middle distance. Even in the picture of Una and Parnesius at 'Volterrae' – 'an important watch-tower that juts out of Far Wood just as Far Wood juts out of the hillside' – a large tree trunk obscures the view. Once again, Kipling's word-painting is perhaps more evocative that Millar's drawing:

> Pook's Hill lay below her and all the turns of the brook as it wanders out of the Willingford Woods, between hop-gardens, to old Hobden's cottage at the Forge. The sou'-west wind (there is always a wind by Volterrae) blew from the bare ridge where Cherry Clack Windmill stands. (141-2)

Two of Rackham's four illustrations feature wide vistas, however. In *The Widow Whitgift and her Sons* the flat expanse of Romney Marsh stretches away to the horizon, and in his picture of Puck's first appearance, in the view over the children's own part of Sussex, there is Cherry Clack Windmill on its ridge, just as Kipling describes it.

The Rackham edition has become more collectable than Millar's, but arguably it is the very strength of the former's artistic personality that renders him less effective as the illustrator of a book like *Puck*. Millar – a journeyman, but a skilful one – was able to subordinate himself to Kipling, and serve his text, in a way that Rackham – with the creative autonomy of a true artist – was not. Deliberately or otherwise, Rackham set up his imagination in rivalry with Kipling's. It was his project, in his best work – and for authors with whom he was in more complete sympathy, such as J.M. Barrie – to re-enchant the soft shadows of suburbia and the twilit London parks by peopling them with just the sort of 'made-up things' that had so roused Puck's scorn and ire. Kipling's significantly different message was that, though there may be no fairies at the bottom of your garden any more, England itself – 'seely Sussex' in particular – is magical still.

. . . . . .

Simon Poë

Notes

Page numbers given in the text refer to Rudyard Kipling, *Puck of Pook's Hill* (Macmillan & Co, Ltd, London, 1906, Library Edition 1951).

1. I am grateful to Karina Hesketh and Sally-Anne Huxtable for their help.

Fig. 7 Millar's Una loses her Edwardian appearance …

Figs 8 and 9 … and again here.