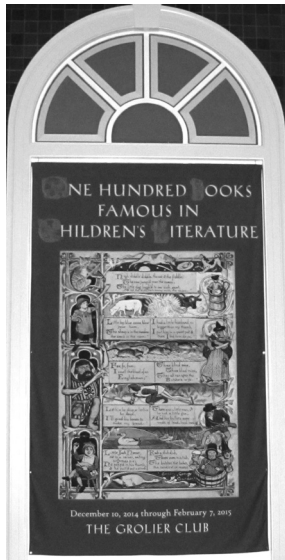


One Hundred Books Famous in Children's Literature

GROLIER CLUB, NEW YORK,
DECEMBER 10, 2014–FEBRUARY 7, 2015



NEW YORK'S FAMOUS Grolier Club is a true club. Membership is by election and the members are all book collectors of the highest calibre. Since the club's founding in 1884, it has hosted several exhibitions of 100 books famous in a variety of areas. Its first such exhibition was in 1902, *One Hundred Books Famous in English Literature*. In 1999, it hosted *A Century for the Century: Fine Printed Books 1900–1999*.

Most recently, from December 10, 2014, to February 7, 2015, the club hosted the exhibition *One Hundred Books Famous in Children's Literature* and published an accompanying catalogue. The curator was Chris Loker, a dealer in rare children's books and children's book art. Jill Shefrin, a bibliographer and book historian from Toronto, edited the catalogue and was also a member of the exhibition's distinguished international advisory committee.

As someone with a long association with the Toronto Public Library's Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books and an

abiding interest in children's books, I travelled with Friends of the Osborne Collection to see this exhibition in January 2015.

"Literature for children is forged from the same enduring elements as literature for adults," explains Loker in a preface to the exhibition catalogue. "Powerful narrative, unforgettable characters, illustration that stirs the imagination, and insights that engage the mind and heart. Children's books with these qualities often shine for generations."

Books published in England and America since the 16th century were candidates for inclusion in the exhibition. The limit of 100 is arbitrary but that is part of the game, and required Loker and the advisory committee to do a lot of hard thinking.

Literature was defined to include fiction and non-fiction. For a book to be "famous," it had to be widely known at the time of its creation and admired over succeeding generations, but the advisory committee decided to treat famous as not always the same as "influential" or "important." They gave consideration to the book's literary merit. They read contemporary scholarly and literary reviews, and they noted honours and prizes bestowed. They considered publishing records, where available, and spinoffs such as movies, toys and games—some of which also made it into the exhibition to provide context.

Children were defined as twelve years and under, removing from consideration books for adolescents. Yet *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*, two adult books adopted by children as their own from the very beginning of their publishing history in the 18th century, were among the books chosen.

It should be noted that, whatever the fame of the chosen titles, the list is explicitly meant for collectors. This should be no surprise, given that the exhibition was at the Grolier Club. The purpose of the list to some degree defines its scope. One expects that book dealers offering a book that is one of the Grolier 100 will note that fact in the description and price the item accordingly.

Still, the books exhibited were limited by what actually exists. The most-enjoyed children's books were often loved to death, leaving no examples of the titles. The curator also relied on

the willingness of owners to lend examples, their transportation and display always entailing a risk of loss or damage. But the lenders were generous.

Books for the exhibition came from across North America and included seven books from the Osborne Collection. The Morgan Library lent what was probably the most valuable book on display, a copy of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence* (1789) hand-coloured by Blake himself. Some lenders also provided non-book items that were used to give additional context to the 100 books. One of the pleasures of such an exhibition is seeing items from so many locations brought together across vast distances in a single room.

The first display case provided an introduction to the exhibition, with a book or two from each of the eleven selected themes. Thereafter, the books were organized by theme, with books of varying ages displayed together. The themes were Fairy Tales & Fables, Faith, Learning, Nursery Rhymes, Poetry, Girls & Boys, Animals, Fantasy, Adventure, Novelties and Toys.

The books on display ranged from Comenius's *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (1658) (Book 1A) to J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997) (Book 100). I really enjoyed seeing Blake's hand-coloured copy of *Songs of Innocence* and the copy of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) marked up by Lewis Carroll (Charles L. Dodgson) in preparation for *The Nursery "Alice"* (1889), an abridged edition for younger children.

During my visit the club hosted a colloquium, *Journeys Through Bookland: Explorations in Children's Literature*, which featured talks by speakers with impressive credentials: Andrea Immel, curator of the Cotsen Children's Library, Princeton University; the aforementioned Jill Shefrin, a historian of children's books and education and former rare book librarian at the Osborne Collection; Adrian Seville, a British expert on printed board games; Nick Clark, chief curator, Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art; Leonard Marcus, a children's book historian, author and critic; and Michael Suarez, SJ, director, Rare Book School, University of Virginia. Speakers and audience were hosted in the display space, encircled by the exhibition. Although the speakers were not always referring

specifically to the books on display, I was able to listen and look and make connections.

The long-term influence of the exhibition will be in the associated catalogue. It is a stunning production of 318 pages measuring about 9 by 11 inches. Jerry Kelly designed and typeset the edition of 1,000 copies (plus 50 special copies), which was printed in China. It includes essays by Justin G. Shiller, Jill Shefrin, Brian W. Alderson and Nick Clark, all well-respected writers about children's books. The essays themselves are followed by three pages of notes.

The books in the catalogue are given proper bibliographic description, with the "Principles of Description" set out in six pages preceding the catalogue proper. The general principle stated is that the descriptions of the books follow standard bibliographic conventions, with a few adjustments to give greater weight to those aspects of children's books that are sometimes given short shrift, particularly those relating to illustration and novelty formats. "The Principles of Description" are followed by a list of abbreviations and a glossary (two pages) and references (eight pages).

The catalogue entries themselves are chronological. The themes that were used to organize items in the exhibition room are put aside, properly so, I think. Most items are given a double-page spread, with text on the left and photographs of the item on the right. In some cases the picture is printed separately and folded and tipped in, giving it the feel of a facsimile. The text includes the entry number, familiar title, first edition date, author's name, transcription of the title page, physical description of the book, provenance, lender, references and notes. This surrounds a several-paragraph note in a larger font about the significance of the item.

After the final entry, an appendix lists and describes the artifacts on display at the Grolier Club, plus provides photographs of some of them; two pages list the lender with the entry numbers of the items loaned. A 14-page general index as well as a four-page index of "Booksellers, Printers, Publishers and Binders" completes the volume.

It is hard to think of anything else one might want in such a catalogue. The listing of

the books by theme as exhibited is the only possible exception. On visiting the exhibition, I was given an exhibition guide, a single sheet folded to create four panels. This included a brief introduction by Chris Loker and all of the items, listed according to theme.

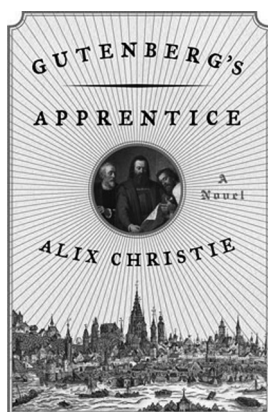
This catalogue should become a standard reference text for a survey of children's books. It also offers a starting point for your own game of which books would be in your personal 100. A different game might be to name a book that you think was wrongly excluded from this list. I noticed that John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) is not included but his *Book for Boys and Girls* (1686) is. Thomas Day's *History of Sandford and Merton* (1783) is another title not included, but I will spare you the arguments for its inclusion.

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone is the 100th book chronologically, but I understand that the final book to be selected came down to a choice between *Mary Poppins* and *Pippi Longstocking*. One was in, the other not. Unfortunately, it is too late for you to go and see the exhibition to discover the answer. I will let you take up the discussion with your friends and purchase the catalogue yourself when you wish to find out who is correct.

~ REVIEWED BY CHESTER GRYSKI

Gutenberg's Apprentice: A Novel

BY ALIX CHRISTIE
(HARPERCOLLINS, 2014, \$34.99)



THIS WORK IS A BRAVE ATTEMPT to fictionalize the emergence of the typographic book in 15th-century Mainz by following the travails and fortunes of one of the key figures of that time, the apprentice of the title and the story's protagonist,

Peter Schoeffer. The author, California-born Alix Christie, is a printer, journalist and now a first-time novelist who was immersed in the world of books from an early age.

Schoeffer's antagonist is Johann Gutenberg, a difficult subject for a historical novel since the record of his life is sparse. Essential facts such as his date of birth, what he looked like, the full extent of his education, his location and occupation at various times, and the nature of his affectionate relationships are all still opaque to us despite years of dedicated research.

To draw a picture of Gutenberg, Christie has, she tells us, "relied heavily on Guy Bechtel's... *Gutenberg [et l'invention de l'imprimerie]: Une enquête* and the art historical insights of Dr. Eberhard König."¹ She mined much, but by no means all, of the extensive historical literature regarding Gutenberg, and benefited from the advice of world experts on her topic.

Peter Schoeffer (or Schöffer), meanwhile, was born around 1425 in Gernsheim, near Mainz. The historical Schoeffer was foreman in the printing workshop that resulted from the partnership of Gutenberg and his main banker, Johann Fust. Documentation by and concerning Schoeffer starts from his days as a calligrapher and manuscript copyist at the Université de Paris. After the collapse of the Gutenberg/Fust partnership in 1455, Fust and Schoeffer continued with their own firm that produced more than 110 books, including the famous *Mainz Psalter*, certainly one of the top 10 books of all time. As a well-trained calligrapher, Schoeffer was the ideal person to help design some of the type sorts used by Gutenberg and Fust.

If you are knowledgeable about the life of Gutenberg, you will recognize the novel's deviations from the established timelines related to the printing of the 42-line Bible and accept that Christie employs literary licence to provide a more dramatic climax to her story.

Yet, the book sometimes fails to seize the potential for building dramatic tension that should have been available given the extraordinary and dramatic events that influenced the working life of Gutenberg and later Schoeffer. For example, we learn in passing about the Armagnac mercenaries that threatened Strasbourg, where