

Christmas with a tiger for tea

Alison Baverstock

Opinion - Children Monday, 13th January 2020

Alison Baverstock on reading to children and rediscovering favourite books



I spent most of the Christmas period reading *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* by the late and much lamented Judith Kerr. This was not a book I had read to my own children - although I knew of it, and did read them Kerr's books about Mog the cat. Rather it was because our first grandchild, who arrived (aged 7 months) with his parents in the UK from his home in Mexico on Christmas Eve, turned out to be really fond of the book - and loved to have it read to him.

By happy chance, Channel 4 showed a 30-minute film adaptation of what is a very short book on Christmas Day, and we recorded this and played it to him endlessly. It uses all the words from the original book, plus some more that are entirely in keeping, and offers an enhanced experience. The songs and voices used for the various characters are a really good match.

My main memory of this time will be of the great pleasure that comes from reading to a child. With a child sitting on your lap, you feel their warmth as they lie against you and you can really experience their concentration taking place. What also struck me was the perfection of the words. Someone once said that you should write for children in the same way as you write for adults, only better - and rereading Kerr's story this felt so true. There are no redundant words, and the pictures offer a development of the text - not simply illustration. All in all, thoroughly enjoyable.

It's an interesting process to go back and read titles you remember from your childhood. Doing this recently with a particular favourite - *A Little Princess* by Frances Hodgson Burnett - I was amazed how I remembered not just the plot but also many complete phrases. It was the first book to make me cry, and I have a strong memory of a Saturday morning, aged 9, when I finished the book in tears.

Also over Christmas I went to see the new film of *Little Women*, which so splendidly captures the feistiness of the original book - much more so than previous rather sugary films. I loved the rough and tumble of the sibling relationships and the untidy house. As I know from personal experience, a home with four children close in age is never going to be a neat environment and this is captured perfectly. The book is well worth reading if you think you remember it from childhood - I know I missed a lot of the radical commentary about women's position in society the first time around.



BookBrunch

Your daily serving of news and views

Dr Alison Baverstock is professor of publishing and director of the Kingston University Big Read. Her industry-related research has explored self-publishing and marketing in publishing, and is now concentrating on the changing role of the author. This article first appeared on the Kingston University blog.

Source article: <https://www.bookbrunch.co.uk/page/article-detail/christmas-with-a-tiger-for-tea>