

An Overview of the School Stories of P.G. Wodehouse, Richmal Crompton and Enid Blyton

What Readers Say....

“A very interesting exposition on the school stories written by selected authors.”

—Dr. Dolphy M. Abraham, Independent Researcher and former Professor and Head of the Doctoral Program, Alliance University, and former Dean, St. Joseph’s Institute of Management, Bangalore.

“I found this book to be very readable indeed.”

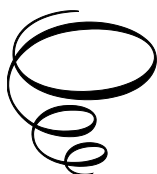
—Dr. Kishan Rao, Former Professor of Finance Alliance University, Bangalore.

An Overview of the School Stories of P.G. Wodehouse, Richmal Crompton and Enid Blyton

By

Mohan Gopinath and Edwin Castelino

Cambridge
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Publishing



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For my parents and Chinnam - MG

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Mohan Gopinath holds a BA (Hons.) degree and a Master's degree in English Literature from St. Stephen's College – Delhi University, where he later joined as a member of the faculty. In between, he joined the Indian Police Service which he quit after one week. After the two year stint in the college, he joined the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation and worked as a senior level banker for almost 21 years in India, the UK and Hong Kong, after initially completing a two year training attachment in the London branch of the bank. Subsequently, he left the industry and worked for a doctoral degree which he obtained from Osmania University on the topic, Organizational Learning (in the banking industry). His career in HSBC also included an attachment to the all India HR function.

After obtaining his doctoral degree, Mohan worked as a management consultant in India and the Middle East. He has also worked as a lead consultant for a World Bank-funded Institutional Development Study conducted for the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department.

He reverted to academia after working as a consultant for more than one decade and joined as the Dean of St. Joseph's Institute of Management, Bangalore. He later shifted to the Alliance University's School of Business, Bangalore, where he worked as a Professor in the Department of Organizational Behaviour and Human Resource till September 2019. His areas of interest are leadership, management of change, conflict resolution, banking, and protection of the environment. He has written and published papers and case studies across a range of subjects (Banking, Organizational Behaviour, Human Resource, Finance, the Environment, and the Performing Arts). He is also a keen tennis enthusiast.

Mohan has conducted Management Development Programs for senior managers in his areas of specialization in the organizational development area in India and the Middle East. His first book was co-authored and titled Business Drama: How Shakespearean Insights Help Leaders Manage Volatile Contexts. His interest in Kathakali (he has trained in Kathakali

music and sung for many performances) led him to write (in 2015) *The Actor Who Could Connect: the Genius of Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair*. This book was selected by the American Library of Congress for inclusion in their database and also exhibited at the Paris World Book Fair in March 2019. The book was later completely revised and expanded and published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle in 2022 under the title, *Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair, The Mozart of Kathakali*. His other theme based book on Kathakali and Shakespeare is *Vignettes Relating to Kathakali and Shakespeare: the Thirashoola versus the Curtain*. The last book in the trilogy is *Shakespeare Meets the Indian Epics: Comparative Themes and Interpretations*. All three books are published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle.

Professor Edwin Castelino

Prof. Edwin Castelino holds a M.Sc. degree in Physics from the University of Mysore and a Post Graduate Diploma in Management from the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. He worked as a senior manager for the first 20 years in the field of Banking and the next 20 years as an academic in the field of Management. He was the Professor and Dean at the St Joseph's Institute of Management, Bangalore till he retired in October 2018. He has published cases relating to Management and takes a keen interest in the state of the economy in India and other countries.

Books Written by Mohan Gopinath

The Shakespearean Linkages in Unnayi Warriar's Nala Charitham
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Team Roles: through the Eyes of Shakespeare and Dr. Meredith Belbin
The Myers Briggs Type Indicator: a Shakespearean Validation
Why People Fail: Through the Eyes of Shakespeare and Sumantra Ghoshal

Leadership Nuances in Shakespeare's Plays

Fiction - Double Oh Seven (for private circulation only)

The Actor Who Could Connect: the Genius of Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair

(this book was selected by the American Library of Congress for inclusion in their database and exhibited at the Paris International Book Fair in March 2019)

Fiction (novel) – The Intruder – a Nocturnal Interlude

Memoir – Does the Spearmint Lose its Flavor on the Bedpost Overnight?

Business Drama: How Shakespearean insights help leaders manage volatile contexts, with Debashish Sengupta and Ray Titus

Papers Written by Professor Edwin Castelino

Case Study Publications

(Principal Author – Dr. Mohan Gopinath)

The Launching of the New Performance Appraisal System', in Journal of Applied Case Research, a publication of the Southwest Case Research Association, Vol 12 No 1, January 2015, with Dolphy Abraham, Asha Prabhakaran, Edwin Castelino

'Janalakshmi Financial Services Pvt. Ltd: Strategic Innovation to Achieve Financial Inclusion', in Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies, Vol. 2, No. 8, 2012, pp. 1-18, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, with Dolphy Abraham and Edwin Castelino

'Man vs. Machine – The Society for Case Research', in Business Case Journal, University of Nebraska at Kearney – Fall/ Winter 2013, Vol 20, Issue 1, with Dolphy Abraham, Edwin Castelino and Asha Prabhakaran

'The Promotion', in Business Review, Journal of St Joseph's College of Business Administration, December 2012, with Edwin Castelino and Dolphy Abraham

'A Comedy of Errors', in Aweshkar Research Journal (Welingkar Education) Volume XIV, Issue 2, September 2012, with Dolphy Abraham and Edwin Castelino

'The Auditor', Indore Management Journal Vol 3 Issue 1 April – June 2012 (IIM Indore) with Edwin Castelino and P Janaki Ramudu

'An Occasion for Making an Overtime Payment - Management and Labor Studies', in the Journal of XLRI, Jamshedpur, May 2011, Vol 36, No 2, with Edwin Castelino and Dolphy Abraham

'The Transformation', in Aweshkar – Research Journal (Welingkar Education), Volume XII, Issue 2, September 2011, with Edwin Castelino

and Dolfy Abraham

‘The Auditor – Emerging Markets’, in Case Studies Collection, compilation of selected cases presented at the International Case Conference 2010, organized by the Institute of Management Technology, Nagpur, Excel India Publishers, 2011, with Professor Edwin Castelino and P Janaki Ramudu

‘The Encounter’, in Asian Case Research Journal, National University of Singapore, Volume 15, Issue 1, 2011, with Edwin Castelino

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This is for my parents and Chinnam; also, for my mentor Colonel S.C.F. Pierson of the British Indian Army who taught English in St. Stephen's College, and my friends Dr. M.J. Sridhar, and Dolphy.

Dolphy (Dr. Dolphy M. Abraham) has been of immense support by giving regular feedback on the MS as it progressed on its journey towards completion. My profound thanks to him.

—MG

L'Envoy

**Go, little Book; from this my solitude,
I cast thee on the waters:—go thy ways!
And if, as I believe, thy vein be good,
The World will find thee, after many days.
Be it with thee according to thy worth:—
Go, little Book! in faith I send thee forth.**

by Robert Southey (1774 – 1843)

“All writers are vain, selfish and lazy, and at the very bottom of their motives there lies a mystery. Writing a book is a horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness....and yet it is also true that one can write nothing readable unless one constantly struggles to efface one’s own personality. Good prose is like a window pane.”

George Orwell on *Why I Write*

FOREWORD

DR. M. J. SRIDHAR PH.D.

**FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR- ERMG MANAGEMENT
CONSULTANTS PVT. LTD. BANGALORE**

It is a matter of delight for me to write another Foreword for one of Mohan's books. When Mohan and Edwin (the author and coauthor of this book) asked me to do so, I did not hesitate for a minute as I have known Mohan for a long time and knew that he was interested in writing on subjects such as the theme of this book; in fact, our association is many decades old. As I said in the last Foreword I wrote for one of his books, he and Edwin have collaborated in the writing of many books and all of them have an unusual theme which raises the curiosity of the reader right from the beginning. As far as this book is concerned the three authors identified in terms of writing school stories are well known but two of them have in their time raised controversies which were avoidable. These are also discussed in the book.

One of the nicest features of this book is that it is written in a simple style and is devoid of jargon. It is without question an academic book, but the style of writing goes easy on the reader. And I know full well it is difficult to write an academic book in a way which makes the contents appear simple and will appeal to the general reader. Incidentally, the language of this book is crisp and there is nowhere an abundance of unnecessary words or jargon. As Alexander Pope said in his Essay on Criticism, 'Words are like leaves and where they most abound, much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.' The book had avoided the pitfall identified by Pope a long time ago.

Books on any subject can be dedicated to one or more persons, and this is also a type of homage. But I feel that the best way to show respect to someone is to write a book about that person and detail the person's contribution to a particular genre. The word 'homage' means a special honor or respect paid publicly and it is clear from the flow and contents of the chapters that Mohan and Edwin are happy at having done this as is evident from the enthusiasm with which the chapters are written. The three writers they chose obviously deserve this accolade.

The book has rightly identified the ingredients which should be present for a school story to be successful. These are a mystery which is solved at the end, eccentric students, bullies who are finally defeated, and a match (any sport) which is a close one and is packed with descriptions of the sport which only a writer who is proficient in that sport can bring out.

Out of curiosity I asked Mohan about his school days, and he told me that he really liked the last one he attended - the La Martiniere College in Lucknow. Mohan is an admirer of British schools and their inherent influence on the students, and La Martiniere had many of the qualities found in their native habitat. This book has gone fairly deeply into this area.

He also said that the first major challenge for the La Martiniere School was the events of 1857 when it had to leave its premises and assisted in the defence of the Lucknow Residency. While this is true, his views on the way India was ruled by the British are now clear cut; he strongly feels India and the Indians were badly subjugated, and he is now particularly interested in the events of 1857. But I am getting into unnecessary areas and suffice it to say that the College instilled in him the qualities he cherishes to this day. Both Edwin and Mohan told me that friendships, social connections, milestones and interpersonal skills were the important aspects of school life they liked. It is thus not surprising that the three writers chosen by them include all these in their stories.

To compare the techniques of writers who have written school stories is a very interesting thing to do and Mohan has made full use of his reading of the three writers covered in this book right from the times when he was a very young person. He told me once that this love for the English language was given to him by his father who himself was a student of English Literature and started his working life as a lecturer (like his son). The father was an alumnus of the Presidency College in Madras, considered one of the finest. So, the love of the language was there in Mohan's genes and it was but natural that he became a full time writer later in his life.

This book is correctly positioned an academic book and is targeted mainly at the student of English Literature who is interested in the writing skills of authors who made a name for themselves. To read the analyses of the stories of the authors who were identified (with a lot of care) is an ideal beginning for an aspiring writer and I encourage would be writers to make sure they read the book. I am very certain that they will learn a lot about the technicalities of writing school stories for starters and then can move on to bigger things.

In the world of children's literature, certain authors have managed to capture the essence of youthful adventures, mischievous escapades, and the universal charm of school life. P.G. Wodehouse, Richmal Crompton, and Enid Blyton stand as titans within this realm, each writing stories that have endured through generations. Some people may feel that writing school stories is not really all that difficult; after all the targeted readers are young adults and they are not super critics of what they read. This book has shown that nothing could be further from the truth. A good school story is difficult to write and one of the reasons according to me is that they must reproduce the conversations of young people realistically. The three authors analyzed in the book are masters at this and this also accounts for their continuing popularity. I am happy that the analyses of the three writers present all these facts clearly and succinctly.

P.G. Wodehouse, the master of wit and humor, transports us into a realm where the trials and tribulations of school life are narrated with a flair that is incomparable. His characters, like the infamous schoolboy Psmith and the inimitable Mike Jackson, breathe life into the corridors of British boarding schools. Both of them figure in the chapter devoted to Wodehouse.

Richmal Crompton, a literary luminary in her own right, introduces us to the misadventures of the iconic schoolboy, William Brown, and his band of loyal companions known as the Outlaws. Through her insightful tales, Richmal Crompton not only entertains but also offers a glimpse into the complexities of growing up and the importance of friendship and understanding.

Enid Blyton, a beloved figure in the world of children's literature, writes stories that transport us to the heartwarming landscapes of fictitious schools such as Malory Towers and St. Clare's. With her captivating narratives, she paints vivid pictures of school life, brimming with friendships, rivalries, and the triumph of moral values.

In honoring the brilliance of P.G. Wodehouse, Richmal Crompton, and Enid Blyton, the author pays homage to their literary genius and acknowledging the indelible mark they have left on children's literature. Their stories continue to be popular with readers of all ages, reminding us of the charm of school days and the everlasting impact of a well told tale. Overall, this is a book which has tackled the complex theme of school stories (as I said, it is not easy writing them) extremely well and I wish the book all success. I also look forward to seeing more such books on unusual and interesting subjects which open the doors to a hidden world of excitement and romance and magic. While perusing these books the reader is captivated just like the magician captivates the watcher.

School stories are addictive for adults because they help the former to escape the trials and problems of day to day living. Young adults find them addictive because they compare the stories with their real life experiences and often observe and think about the mismatch. The greater the mismatch the more addictive is the story.

This book has analyzed three writers who are at the top of the form when it comes to writing school stories. The choice of the three writers has my complete agreement as readers who are interested in the school story genre can branch out confidently to plunge themselves into similar stories by other writers. The explosion of stories relating to school life is unusual in its volume and so I recommend a careful assessment of the writer before reading the book and disappointment sets in. As far as Wodehouse, Richmal Crompton, and Enid Blyton are concerned, their stories are free from sentimentality and mawkishness, which is one of the reasons for their continuing appeal for adults. And the underlying base of humor provides the icing on the cake.

Humor, conversation, and unusual plots are the three main ingredients which go into the making of a successful school story, and I am full of praise for Mohan and Edwin for their choice of the three writers. The Reader should forgive my repeating this point about the choice, but I felt that it was important and worth the re-emphasis.

This book captures the essence of the addiction, and it is my wish that the Mohan/ Edwin team continue writing such books.

To go slightly at a tangent, I have often asked Mohan about how he felt about the changes in his career over five and a half decades. Beginning as an academic to being a banker to being a trainer and researcher and then to being a consultant and finally to being a Professor in a Business School. His answer was simple, and he said the changes were good in retrospect though traumatic while the shifts were in progress. And he had enjoyed every day of it except when he came across self promoting and not very nice people. But he added that even these were used by him in many of the case studies he has published, though their names were changed.

I have gone on for longer than usual in writing this Foreword; but I too am very fond of school stories and that is my only and justifiable reason.

—M.J. Sridhar
Bangalore

PREFACE

The writing of this book is something I started very late in my life. In fact, most of my literary ventures started late and this is unusual because school stories by many superb authors were part of my growing up and left an indelible mark in my consciousness; so logically I should have tried my hand at writing this book much earlier. This must have happened to a lot of people and, as must have been the case with them, these stories by various authors kept revolving in my mind for a number of decades. In fact, they were and are still so very captivating that I go back to them over and over again even after almost seven decades. In British literature, a genre of storytelling has thrived for generations, capturing the essence of youth, education, and the trials and tribulations of growing up. These are the school stories, a beloved and enduring tradition within British literature that has, for decades, enchanted readers young and old alike. In fact, this was my first exposure to reading and I came to like these stories enormously. But that was many long decades ago and then I decided to put my thoughts about these stories on paper.

The thought also came to our minds that in writing school stories in particular, an author was very like an actor who is portraying a famous character, such as Othello or Hamlet. Interpretations can differ widely, and school stories are the same. They can be humorous (Wodehouse), moralistic (Hughes), convey a straight narrative (Mark Twain), a blend of all these (Enid Blyton), just to give a few examples to justify this point. There is nothing wrong in these approaches and in fact they are very essential. Similarly, the way Al Pacino portrays Shylock will differ from how Patrick Stewart interprets the role which will be different from how David Suchet sees Shylock. These differing portrayals give depth to the play and the differing ways authors see school stories also give the stories their depth. This point applies to all important genres such as detective or spy novels and are important for their popularity and longevity.

It would have been natural for a person who is writing about school stories to have had an overall happy experience in the schools in which he studied. This was not entirely correct in my case; in total I attended five schools spread from the south to the north of the sub-continent. I was very happy in some, reasonably happy in a few, and not at all happy in the others. But the

fact remains that the impressions the schools left were vivid and can be recollected even now clearly, after the passage of many decades. This fact is only being mentioned as a matter of possible interest and as being one which definitely had an impact on this book seeing the light of day.

There will be some autobiographical patches in this book, and I felt guilty about including these at first as they would not hold much interest for the reader. I then realized that the school stories I was writing about are inextricably woven into my childhood and so a logical connection was there to include the bits about my own life. The novels I read as a young person and the life I led at the time have a composite unity in my mind at the time of writing this. I can in no way think of my childhood without the writers present in this book coming to my mind. In fact, the Reader will find that I have this habit as he or she goes through the book, of going slightly off at a tangent and bringing in material which may seem not directly in line with the main analysis contained in the particular chapter. It is requested that this is treated not too harshly but as a stylistic habit; but a habit which has a direct line to the analysis. So, these excursions into my childhood thoughts when reading about these authors are to be regarded as one such habit. So, in my case the authors I read as a young person were Enid Blyton, Richmal Crompton, P.G. Wodehouse, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Ian Fleming, John le Carré and after that the field exploded. Even though all these writers had favorite themes and characters, in my view it was Wodehouse who showed me the actual size of the range of these themes and characters. From school stories to Blandings Castle stories to golf stories to Mr. Mulliner and Uncle Fred and many more, his range was unprecedented, and the reading world owes him a debt which can never be repaid.

In some of the analyses I may have been critical of what I have written. But this wisdom to be critical (if that is the correct word) came with maturity and was not there when I first read the books. The story was in the driver's seat, and I was the passenger who willingly sat in the vehicle. The references to race and similar prejudices which two of the writers are accused of were alien to my young mind and did not make any kind of impression. That idea that such things were a part of some of the novels was placed in my mind by critics of the books whom I read later. Such is the innocence of childhood, and it requires external forces to control the mind later on. To be honest I do not know if I would on my own have discovered the significance of these references in the novels had I not read about them later on. But having read the views, I was disappointed in some of the writers as they had allowed their inborn prejudices to creep into the stories insidiously. Whether this was deliberately done or not is difficult to determine now, though this

does not really matter. It is a story which is important. But the negative references made me uncomfortable when I read about them.

In many ways these references are like the commencement of a movement to take control of young minds and that is sad. I consider these writers my close friends even though I have not met them and never will; they will, for the record occupy a large space in my mind always. I will say no more about all this though the subject has been discussed in specific chapters relating to the authors.

One of the ingredients essential to the creation of a memorable school story which was pointed out on the Foreword was humor. I would expand on this and say that humor should be rapier like rather than applied with a bludgeon. Wodehouse, Richmal Crompton, and Enid Blyton never use inappropriate humor but apply it so skillfully that it blends into the narrative of the story. It is as said used like a rapier. Bernard Shaw and Mark Twain are skilled at doing this.

Christopher Moore and Kurt Vonnegut on the other hand do the opposite. So does Jonathan Swift.

In a way we can say it is like floating like a butterfly versus biting your opponent's ear.

— — —

The reader will find a few references to Ian Fleming throughout the book at appropriate places. The reasons he was pulled into the narrative are that:

- He was as much a master of the language as the three writers who figure majorly in this book.
- Some of the experiences he had in his working life approximated closely with that of Wodehouse and both the writers brought these experiences into some of their novels.

So it was but natural that Fleming was used as an example of the ways the language can be used to captivate the reader; both young and old.

The question often rose in my mind as to why adults are fond of school stories and very often go back to rereading them at regular intervals; even the ones they are familiar with over the years. Perhaps this is because school stories, despite being typically associated with the adolescent experience, hold a unique and enduring allure for adults. These narratives, often set

against the backdrop of academic institutions, manage to captivate a mature audience by tapping into universal themes and emotions that transcend age. The following exploration delves into the reasons behind the timeless appeal of school stories for adults.

First and foremost, school stories serve as a powerful vessel for nostalgia. Adults, when reflecting on their own formative years, often find themselves drawn to the familiar settings and experiences portrayed in these tales. Whether it's the camaraderie among friends, the trials and tribulations of young love, or the challenges of academic life, school stories transport readers back to a time of innocence and discovery. This nostalgic journey allows adults to reconnect with their own youth, rekindling memories of friendships, first crushes, and the exhilarating sense of possibility that defined those years. Moreover, school stories offer a lens through which adults can revisit and reevaluate their past. As readers, they may identify with characters that grapple with issues of identity, self discovery, and the quest for belonging. The challenges faced by these characters often mirror the complexities of adult life, prompting readers to reflect on their own journeys and the lessons learned along the way. The relatability of these narratives creates a bridge between the reader's present self and their younger, more vulnerable counterpart.

Beyond nostalgia, school stories provide a platform for exploring timeless themes and universal experiences. Friendship, rivalry, betrayal, and the pursuit of dreams are intricately woven into the fabric of these narratives. Such themes resonate with adults, as they continue to navigate similar dynamics in their personal and professional lives. The struggles and triumphs depicted in school stories serve as allegories for the broader human experience, allowing readers to find solace and inspiration in the characters' journeys.

Furthermore, school stories often serve as a lens through which societal issues are examined. These narratives provide a microcosm of the real world, addressing issues such as diversity, social class, and the impact of authority. By tackling these subjects within the confines of a school setting, authors can present complex societal problems in a more accessible and digestible manner. Adults, grappling with these same issues in their daily lives, find resonance and relevance in the exploration of social dynamics within the school context.

The coming-of-age aspect inherent in school stories is another factor contributing to their appeal for adults. The characters undergo profound

personal growth, facing challenges that force them to confront their own limitations and beliefs. Adults, no strangers to the continuous process of self-discovery, appreciate the authenticity with which these narratives capture the transformative nature of growing up.

In short, the allure of school stories for adults lies in their ability to evoke nostalgia, provide a lens for self reflection, explore universal themes, address societal issues, and capture the timeless essence of the human experience. These narratives serve as more than mere reflections of adolescent life; they are mirrors that reflect the complexities, joys, and struggles of adulthood. Through the pages of school stories, adults find a bridge to their past, a mirror to their present, and a window into the enduring tapestry of the human condition.

As far as I am concerned, while nostalgia was part of the attraction the school stories held, I was also attracted to them by the extremely intelligent and interesting plots that many of them had. The three writers covered in this book are typical of this. As the book says, detective fiction and school stories have this attraction and a combination of a mystery, and a school story is perhaps the ultimate in creating a large readership of all ages.

If the Reader will permit me to give a brief account of my own school days, these were a mixed bag as indicated earlier. My first real school was in Calcutta, and I did well in my class coming second overall. There were no sports there however, and so my introduction to games was a bit delayed and had to wait till I joined La Martiniere College in Lucknow.

The College was a revelation to me as up to now my schools were traditional schools patterned mainly on an Indian system of education with a token curtesy via an 'English medium' to the way the daily routines were organized. This was especially the case in my second school in Calcutta. Sports consisted of badminton and basketball and nothing else. In retrospect, some of the teachers were brilliant while others were unfortunately not really quite up to the mark.

So La Martiniere was a total change for me and the daily non class routines were closely patterned on an English school. Sports was given the importance it deserved and so was discipline. I started tennis and badminton and found I had a flair for both. Another game I instinctively took a liking to and played moderately well was cricket. All these sports also served me well in adulthood and resulted in my circle of friends expanding. This benefit was something I had not known when I started playing them.

I learnt a whole new range of schoolboy slang and took great delight in using the words constantly, much to my father's delight and mother's dismay. My accent improved beyond recognition and so did my clothes sense. The teachers had nicknames given by the students but none of them were in bad taste. Half the students were boarders and had their own routines after class; but these made me familiar with their world and so I could understand and relate to the school stories of Wodehouse. The concept of the various houses in which students were placed had the benefit of making me understand the inter house rivalries so vividly described in the Mike and Psmith stories of Wodehouse, as well as the role of the House Master. The role of the Head Boy of the College and the Head of the Houses also became familiar along with the duties of a Prefect.

Again, in retrospect, the main benefit of attending La Martiniere College was to make me familiar with how a school in Britain functioned. This was of enormous benefit in writing this book as there were no mysteries lurking in the language of the stories of the three writers analyzed. I felt that I was among friends. The main difference in the uniforms was that we did not wear caps and so the routine of 'capping' a master was not there.

La Martiniere also introduced me to the world of English Literature and especially Shakespeare. I still remember the opening words of the master who taught this subject; "Shakespeare's plays are meant to be enjoyed, so there is no need to be scared of them." Prophetic words which ring true even today. The play was "The Merchant of Venice" and I still have a soft corner for this play because of Mr. Skinner.

When Mike or someone else describes the school buildings so lovingly, I can well understand their emotions.

La Martiniere, Lucknow, like its counterpart in Calcutta, expanded rapidly after the rebellion of 1857. There were 148 students on its rolls in 1859, but the number had increased to 277 by 1862. Boarders came from all over the province from districts like Pratapgarh, Mirzapur, Gorakhpur, Allahabad, Kanpur and Etawah. The records show that in 1865 over 120 boys qualified for admission to the higher department of the Civil Engineering College at Roorkee.

In the years following the uprising, the city of Lucknow, now under the British Crown, was redesigned. La Martinière emerged as an outpost of the British Empire and it acquired the traditions of English public schools. La Martinière College is an elite private educational institution located in

Lucknow, the capital of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. The college consists of two schools on different campuses for boys and girls. La Martinière College (for boys) was founded in 1845 and La Martinière Girls' College was established in 1869. La Martinière Boys' College is the only school in the world to have been awarded royal battle honours for its role in the defence of Lucknow and the Lucknow residency during the Indian Rebellion of 1857. The two Lucknow colleges are part of the La Martinière family of schools, founded by the French adventurer Major General Claude Martin. There are two La Martinière Colleges in Calcutta and three in Lyon. The schools cater for pupils from the age of 5 to 17 or 18, and are open to children of all religious denominations.

The Economist has described its Constantia building as “perhaps the best preserved colonial building in Lucknow” - brick by brick”. (*The Economist*. 22 October 2016. ISSN 0013-0613).

Most of my initial introduction to British schools was through the book “Tom Brown’s Schooldays” by Thomas Hughes written in 1857 the year of the Mutiny. Personally, I do not like the word Mutiny to be used for this event but prefer to call it the First War of Indian Independence. But to get back to the book, a main element of the novel is Rugby School, with its traditions, and the reforms that were instituted there by Dr Arnold (1795–1842), the Headmaster of the school from 1828 to 1841. He is portrayed as the perfect teacher and counsellor, and as managing everything behind the scenes. In particular, he is the one who “chums” Arthur with Tom.

The novel is essentially didactic and was not primarily written as an entertainment. As Hughes said:

Several persons, for whose judgment I have the highest respect, while saying very kind things about this book, have added, that the great fault of it is ‘too much preaching’; but they hope I shall amend in this matter should I ever write again. Now this I most distinctly decline to do. Why, my whole object in writing at all was to get the chance of preaching! When a man comes to my time of life and has his bread to make, and very little time to spare, is it likely that he will spend almost the whole of his yearly vacation in writing a story just to amuse people? I think not. At any rate, I wouldn’t do so myself.
—*Thomas Hughes, Preface to the sixth edition*

All this changed when I came across the modern writers of school stories, mainly those who figure in this book.

It was a revelation.

The humor, the tricky plots and the vividly portrayed characters all conspired to take me to another world where sometimes to the annoyance of my parents I would not or could not hear them calling me. Other than creating a love for these school stories, they also vastly improved my vocabulary and sense of humor. I also began to see the beauty of the way language could be used as it developed into a malleable tool in the hands of these writers. The range of books usually read by young adults is wide and for those who love books, the fare available is equally varied. So there are school stories, westerns, crime, detection, exploration, and supernatural stories into which the reader can plunge and let the hours slip by unnoticed. The choice of stories is thus very varied and everyone will find something of interest. It just so happened that the school stories were my first exposure to reading such stories which is why I decided to write this book. It is not that I am not fond of the other types. In fact, I am now writing a book on the prose styles of Conan Doyle, Ian Fleming, and P.G. Wodehouse which naturally includes the detective and spy genres. The latter stories depend on the specific experience the writer had of what he was writing about to give them the ring of authenticity. School stories do not have this problem as everyone would have attended some type of school or the other. All the stories need is a little embellishment based on the school experience to captivate the reader, and they are more dependent on the imagination of the writer to give them their added interest.

Perhaps the main reason why school stories are the favorites of a number of adults is that they take the reader back to the days of innocence, and freedom from large and small worries. By reading them the adult remembers his or her own schooldays and can get - for a few short hours - lost in those days which are now being vividly recalled in the book he or she is reading. The worrying then was about examinations, strict teachers and small quarrels with friends; these seem laughably insignificant when adulthood strikes all too soon. And as Wodehouse once remarked, the person also recollects the unique atmosphere of the classroom which was a mixture of the smells of ink, small boys, and books.

I am sure that you the Reader will like what is to follow in the coming pages and will after reading the book start reading the stories referred to and others of the same type with a new mental perspective or at the very least, a curiosity which was not there earlier.

It is fashionable (if that is the right word) to think of one's school days with nostalgia. This nostalgia grows with the passing of years and can be a very nice feeling. The danger is that this feeling often masks the unpleasant events which occurred in school. I have tried my best not to let nostalgia mask the realities of school life in this book and the reason was that I wanted to portray school life as it really was. Of the three writers who figure in this book I would say that Richmal Crompton described school life realistically with the Outlaws being punished for their misdemeanors without compunction. Enid Blyton also showed that young adults can be very critical of their schoolmates who behave differently. But it was Wodehouse who, according to me portrayed school life in all its ways- both good and bad. This rather important point is covered in detail in the forthcoming chapters of this book. For the record Wodehouse also said that his schooldays were the happiest and only held pleasant memories for him.

The unpleasant aspects of school life were mainly two as far as I am concerned. The first was bullying and the second was sadistic teachers who liked punishing for its own sake. Unfortunately, in my schooldays there were no guidelines for teachers about all this and so they very much did whatever they wanted by way of punishment in their class. Caning was a popular form of punishment as was being sent out of the classroom and made to stand outside. Naturally this would have resulted in the teachers being disciplined if it happened today. But the nostalgia I referred to earlier removes the dislike one felt for all this and by and large adults always refer fondly about the schools they attended.

INTRODUCTION

The first time I read a Wodehouse novel was when my father introduced me to the writer when I was in my mid teens and said he was confident I would turn into a fan. He had never read an Enid Blyton book or any of the William stories and so could not understand my love for these books. Neither did he read Ian Fleming even though I exhorted him to do many times; perhaps I should have been more insistent. He was an excellent bridge player and I told him about the very well written beginning to *Moonraker* by Ian Fleming. He was a fan of Edgar Wallace, John Masters, Aldous Huxley, Nevil Shute and writers of that generation and strangely enough did not move further forward. He was also an admirer of British literature, culture and customs though he was naturally all for India getting her Independence.

I do not remember too clearly how I started reading Enid Blyton. But I must have been around eight years old at the time. She was very popular amongst my classmates so chances are one of them recommended reading her. As to the William books, my first of the many I was destined to read was given by a friend. The thought that one day, very far into the future, that I would write a book about them, never even entered my mind. This book has later on commented with regard to the pull school stories have on readers of ages which cover a broad range. The marketing of these books is a key factor (this is nothing new) and none of the three writers did this as they seemed to have depended on word of mouth publicity. Along with this they also relied on the impact their earlier books had.

Enid Blyton was unique in combining the school story with the detective story and we have covered this point in the section relating to her output. This combination was the mark of a person who knew the meaning of the word marketing before it became the buzz word it is today.

Combining school stories with detective narratives creates an ideal mix for young adults, blending the relatable challenges of adolescence with the thrill of mystery solving. This genre fusion offers a captivating backdrop where the familiar setting of a school—full of friendships, rivalries, and everyday dramas—intersects with the intrigue of detective work. Imagine a story where a group of high school friends stumbles upon a series of mysterious events or a puzzling crime within their school. The stakes are personal as

they navigate social hierarchies and academic pressures while unraveling clues and confronting suspects. This hybrid genre not only keeps readers engaged with suspenseful twists but also finds an echo with their own experiences, providing a sense of empowerment as the protagonists use their wits and teamwork to overcome challenges. The blend of academic life and investigative excitement creates a dynamic and immersive reading experience that can easily capture the imagination of young adults, making it a recipe for a potential bestseller.

It should be clarified at this point that the analyses of the stories and characters in this book is not restricted strictly to the school stories. The Reader should be able to get a much broader picture of the technicalities which went into the writing of the three writers after reading this book; this would not have been possible if the stories analyzed were confined only to those which had schools in them. So, while schools are definitely there, the book in fact covers a larger landscape.

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Two of the most important features for which all the three writers who figure in this book had an instinctive feel, were:

- How to balance the stories so that the aspect of realism pulled them into the arena of making the reader believe in their plots and narratives
- How to create characters who were not caricatures in order to give the reader a cheap thrill. So even the strictest Headmasters and bullies do not get carried away and end up being characters of themselves who are too pronounced in their behavior to be true to life.

This aspect of being true to life is easily ignored by many unsuccessful school story writers who perhaps wrongly felt that readers would have a good laugh at their improbable creations. Added to this (and it has been commented on in detail in the book) is the blending of an exciting school match (cricket, rugby, boxing etc.) into the plot to give the added punch. And this book has also commented on how important it is for the writer to have been a keen sportsman who is aware of both the good and bad things which occur in matches. There is - obviously - nothing that can replace this knowledge of the inside track. It can be observed mainly in the stories of Wodehouse (boxing, cricket, rugby, and golf in the later non school stories), Enid Blyton (lacrosse, hockey). Richmal Crompton depended on the