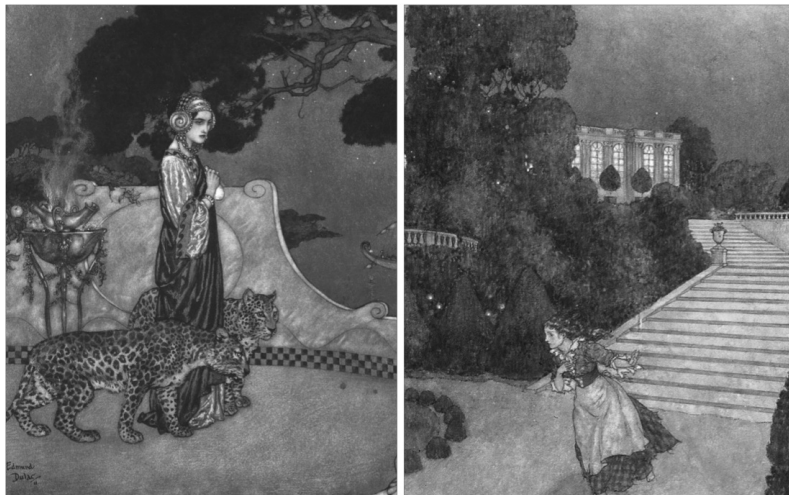


ARTS

Arts Editor: Mark Greaves
Tel: 020 7448 3603
Fax: 020 7256 9728
E-mail: mark@catholicherald.co.uk



Two illustrations by Edmund Dulac: Left, unnamed; right, 'She made her escape as lightly as a deer', from 'The Sleeping Beauty and Other Tales'

Ghoulish horror in the nursery

The Age of Enchantment

DOLWICH PICTURE GALLERY, UNTIL FEB 17

It is hard to forget children's books illustrated by artists like Arthur Rackham and Edmund Dulac. Rackham drew pictures of trees with gnarled roots inhabited by menacing elves and Dulac brought the exotic life and colour of the Near and Far East into many blameless, middle-class nurseries. *The Age of Enchantment: Beardsley, Dulac and their Contemporaries 1890-1930*, mounted by Rodney Engen, shows that this was a far from innocent world. The sinister artistry of fin de siècle children's book illustration lay in decadence, and decadence formed an unpredictable background to enchantment. Parents who gave these books to children were probably unaware of their subliminal influence and it is disquieting to consider what malign effects the illustrations might have encouraged in later life.

This is a running theme of Rodney Engen's approach. In his catalogue he raises the subject to a level of seriousness that many would think misplaced, but which turns out to be justified. It is a masterpiece of recondite information and analysis. Not least, Engen praisers the technical accomplishment of the work at a time when artists are no longer trained to draw, paint or use precedent. These lavish books were the fruit of perfectionism, craft, detail and neurosis.

They opened a world of lyricism and poetry that has faded from the modern consciousness and were a potent force upon ways of seeing.

Aubrey Beardsley was not concerned with children but his black-and-white illustrations for *The Yellow Book* and the publications of the Bodley Head inspired a visual imagination that developed after his early death of consumption in 1898. *The Yellow Book* was eclipsed in the mistaken belief that a copy had been carried by Oscar Wilde on his arrest in the Cadogan Hotel in 1895 and the glare of yellow became phosphorescent with decay. In reality, Wilde had been deliberately excluded as a contributor. Yet Beardsley's innovations led to the golden age of the illustrated book. He was the father of all that followed and a poignant exhibit in the small, commonplace kitchen table, painted black, on which he worked.

Children's illustrated books originated in Walter Crane, Randolph Caldecott, Kate Greenaway and the fairies of Richard Doyle. Beardsley himself developed from Morris and Burne-Jones and became influenced, by Japan, but his school imbibed "the poisonous honey of France" and that meant Huysmans, Baudelaire and Symbolism. It set in motion strange, often sinister, manifestations in the work of Lawrence Housman, Sidney Sime and Harry Clarke, but Fairyland came to the rescue and the innocence and naivety of childhood provided a fertile field for illustration. Artists of

the Glasgow school, like Jessie King and Annie French, provided a graphic pendant to the architecture of Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and J.M. Barrie and Peter Pan introduced the genius of Arthur Rackham and the lavish colour-plate gift books that remained popular through the 1920s. Rackham and Dulac were the leaders of this Edwardian development. Rackham alone created about 150 illustrated books, published 3,000 illustrations as well as painting works

It is disquieting to think of the malign effects these illustrations might have had on children

for galleries. He inhabited a private world from which the horrors of the Great War were excluded but which was occupied by ghoulish horrors of his own. In contrast, Dulac's exotic illustrations opened the marvels of the Orient and the Near East in *Stories from the Arabian Nights*. They unlocked a refreshing new aesthetic which is hard to appreciate now that the Near East no longer exerts a benign force on the popular imagination. Omar Khayyam, Simbad the Sailor and the Arabian nights have become bad dreams associated with Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda rather

than colourful fantasies. Publishers made fortunes from these books.

Hodder and Stoughton were the leaders, sales soared and various editions from the deluxe to the popular poured from the press. Dulac alone published 116 titles, his work was reprinted in America and editions appeared in French, German, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, Russian and Portuguese. The arrival in London in 1911 of the Ballets Russes intensified the Orientalist ferment and the costume designs of Leon Bakst for *Sheherazade* injected the illustrators' colouring with new vibrancy. Bakst even influenced the staid world of Wedgwood, which manufactured a new line of fairy lustreware designed by Daisy Makeig-Jones, brilliant in technical accomplishment and colour, if repellent in sentiment.

The Great War had dented, but not destroyed, the age of enchantment. As quickly as it arrived, the fashion for the illustrated gift book disappeared at the time of the world recession of 1929. Almost overnight, economic reality left the artists marooned, disillusioned and mined. They found it hard to understand what had happened and some survived – embittered, reclusive, unappreciated – long after the Second World War. Engen brings this ephemeral, blighted world to life and he explains a power of enchantment that is now almost impossible to retrieve.

Anthony Symondson SJ

A posh melodrama with a forgiving heart

FLM REVIEW
Freddie Sayers

Chromophobia

15 CERT, 136 MINS

Since its unveiling as the closing film of the Cannes film festival in 2005, *Chromophobia* has languished unloved and unreleased: this week it finally arrived in British cinemas. The critical consensus has been that it is pretentious melodrama – the kind of inward-looking middle-class claptrap that should never have been made. I feel I must stick up for it. Perhaps I am too middle class and inward-looking to see it for what it is, but I must say I enjoyed it. It is not a great movie, but if you have a long afternoon to waste during the Christmas holidays, *Chromophobia* might just be your ticket.

Chromophobia, basically, attempts to be a patchwork masterpiece in the mould of *American Beauty* or *Magnolia*. It follows a group of interrelated plots and characters that centre around the rather grand Aylesbury family: Marcus (Damian Lewis), the son of a senior judge (Ian Holm), with a country house and a castle in Scotland, is a shopping addict who wants a boob job and is worried her wayward son Orlando is spending too much time with his gay art-dealer godfather Stephen (Kal Pennes). Meanwhile, representing the "other half" in modern London, a social worker called Colin (Rhyon Fiano) becomes emotionally attached to apparently his only case – a cancer-stricken prostitute (Penelope Cruz) with a young daughter. Wedgwood's lives fall apart, and the extent of their interconnectedness is revealed when Marcus's dodgy dealings at work for a high-profile client are exposed by a journalist (Ben Chaplin) posing as a new best friend.

Let me say first of all that I accept it is melodramatic – there is something slightly over the top about the whole thing. Take the sets: the stunning country house and massive Scottish castle are implausibly impressive, Marcus's modernist architectural house is like an all-white theatre set and even Gloria the prostitute's slum dwelling is cosy, nicely lit, twice. All the characters are strangely glamorous, like a posh English version of *Dallas*. The way they are waterlogged is tedious at best

(Gloria buys a dress that Iona gave to a charity shop, for instance) and, with its categories of "the suffering poor" and "the spoilt rich", cannot help but seem slightly patronising. The writing is patchy, and has a slightly try-hard ring to it, and the music – as goth – it swings between balletic strings and inappropriate classics like David Bowie's "Heroes".

But you know what? It is highly enjoyable. Once you decide to go with the flow, there are some really funny and insightful moments. The fact that Marcus calls his wife "fish face", for example, gives a nice vignette of his insensitivity – "You know I feel very sexually frustrated and inadequate and I have no idea what you want," she blurts out over breakfast, and he just rolls his eyes, baffled. Their 10-year-old son is a little terror. Pointing his plastic gun at his parents he says, merrily: "You are not my father. You are not my mother. You are the weakest link there ever was. Bang." "Too much television," they conclude hilariously.

Everyone in this story is lonely, detached and a little bit desperate. There is a sense of foreboding, like they are all hurtling towards disaster, and when the disaster comes it is suitably apocalyptic. Trent, the handsome journalist who calls Marcus "the Earl of Posh" listens to his drunken confession of all his illegal activities and records it. Even Marcus's father somehow gets dragged into the scandal. Stephen the gay art-dealer suffers a strange fate when he is attacked by schoolboys who he invited into his flat, and Gloria is stricken with cancer.

What I liked about all this gloom and doom is that it is oddly forgiving, and that what starts out as a very cold story is revealed by these disasters to have a heart after all. Everyone has a secret, it seems to say, everyone transgresses, and rather than being frightened of them it holds up these secrets as the most alive parts about us. Even the minor characters are morally rather dubious: Colin's infatuation with Gloria starts being less saintly and more creepy when she takes her dancing when she is at death's door, dragging her weak body around the empty dancefloor like a rag-doll.

But this film is warm rather than judgmental. Instead of indicting the characters, the catalogue of disasters seems to release them from the powerless patterns of their lives. In the lane of the tabloid scandal, Iona suddenly needs to love and protect her husband and son; there is solace and a better future for Gloria's little girl, and even the wicked Trent, who breaks down at the horror of what he has done to Marcus, seems to find a heart. Yes, it is cheesy, and a little bit awful, and no, it is not very realistic or subtle, but it is sumptuous and waterlogged and right good fun.

Deadlines for Advertising

If you are placing an advert with us at *The Catholic Herald* and providing copy yourself, we must receive all artwork here by **Tuesday at 12noon** prior to your chosen publication date.

If you have queries about any of these production details, then please contact Miss Terhi Raukko on 020 7448 3613 or email: terhi@catholicherald.co.uk



St. Joseph's Hospice

Your generous support helps us continue to care with faith, hope and love

Thank you

For further information or to make a donation, please telephone us on 020 8525 6000 or visit our website www.stjh.org.uk or write to us at

Mare Street, Hackney, London E8 4SA

Registered, Charity No. 1113125

Classic suicide comedy

THEATRE REVIEW

Absurd Person Singular

GARRICK THEATRE

Alan Ayckbourn's comedy, a modern classic, takes place on three consecutive Christmas in three different households in three different kitchens. In the first act an ambitious property developer entertains a bank manager, an architect and their respective wives. His house-proud, accident-prone wife, whom he constantly bullies, is happy only when she has something to clean. In the second act the philandering architect is about to leave his pregnant wife. Who would have thought suicidal despair could be so hilarious? She tries jumping out of the window. Knifing herself, gassing herself, hanging herself and taking an overdose of pills. The other people in the kitchen are so busy cleaning a dirty oven, unblocking a sink, and mending a faulty light fitting that they don't even notice. The second act is hilarious; the third act is darker. The play is excellently cast and a splendid treat for all those who like comedy to be serious as well as funny.

A Christmas Carol

YOUNG VIC

At Charles Dickens's funeral in Westminster Abbey in 1888 the Rev Dean Stanley preached that Dickens's novella was the finest Christ-

mas sermon in the English language. Here it is given an original interpretation by the Isango/Portobello Company from South Africa. Scrooge is a woman (Pauline Maitland) and the manager of a mining company. She is confronted with video images of her younger self and the poverty, prostitution, Aids and death in the townships during the apartheid era. Tiny Tim is a crippled girl looking for sponsorship to go to school. The singing and the gum-boots and bare-foot dancing are thrilling. The acting is amateurish, but the message is crystal clear. A child, we are told, dies of ignorance every three minutes.

Cinderella

OLD VIC THEATRE

Cinderella has had a long and popular stage history since it first appeared at Drury Lane in 1830, inspired by the success of Rossini's opera. Stephen Fry's version must surely be the very first gay version. Here Buttons is in love with Dandini. Prince Charming strips to his underpants ostensibly to take a shower. Dandini strips for no reason at all. The Ugly Sisters are ugly and crude and not remotely amusing. The double entendres in pantomime are traditionally vulgar but Fry's vulgarity is such that it is impossible to recommend to children.

God in Ruins

SOHO THEATRE

It is amazing that Michael

Boyd, artistic director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, should programme a play without even seeing the script. The result is an overwhelmingly appealingly slipshod reworking of *A Christmas Carol*. It begins promisingly enough with a reformed Scrooge finding himself no longer welcome at Bob Cratchit's home because his over-the-top benevolence and childish cheeriness makes everybody thoroughly miserable. This amusing idea is not developed and instead Neilson concentrates on a self-loathing television producer who has made a lot of money out of producing trashy reality shows.

Nicholas Nickleby

GIELGUD THEATRE

This brilliant revival of David Edgar's skilful and affectionate adaptation is a joyous occasion teeming with Dickensian exuberance and not to be missed on any account by anybody who loves theatre and Dickens. Twenty-seven actors play over 100 parts. They all look as if they have stepped out of Dickens's drawings. *Romeo and Juliet*, as performed by Vincent Crummies and company, is the best *Romeo and Juliet* I have ever seen.

Robert Tanitch

Robert Tanitch's lavishly illustrated, year-by-year chronicle, London Stage in the 20th Century, is published by Haus Publishing

Catholic Children's Society (Westminster)

Crusade of Rescue

25% of children live in poverty.
YOUR donation can help a child in need TODAY.

SEND YOUR DONATIONS TO:

Catholic Children's Society
73 St. Charles Square, London W9 6EJ
www.cathchild.org.uk
info@cathchild.org.uk



For Children and families across the spectrum
Registered Charity Number: 210920

SOUTHWELL BOOKS

Unique range of orthodox Catholic titles

Have you visited our website yet?

Bibles, Catechisms, History, Parenting, Children's, Catholic Fiction, Prayer Books, Saints, Spirituality, Latin Missals, Apologetics, etc.



01235 521224

www.southwellbooks.com

PO Box 547, Abingdon, OX14 9DR

