



The Lady of Shalott; Beowulf; The Highwayman

Books Reviewed:

[The Lady of Shalott](#) [1]

Books Reviewed:

[Beowulf](#) [2]

Books Reviewed:

[The Highwayman](#) [3]

Issue:

[118](#) [4]

Reviewer:

[George Hunt](#) [5]

News & Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Keeping's illustrations are amongst the most powerful images ever to have appeared in children's literature. His intricate line drawings, often inspired by the flow of woodgrain and water, fabric and hair, could depict scenes of both poignant delicacy and shocking violence. This trio of reprints presents a broad spectrum of his work, and gives teachers and parents an opportunity to introduce readers to the achievements of this much missed artist, while at the same time exploring three fascinating stories.

Noyes' poem about the self sacrifice of an inn keeper's daughter who warns her lover of an ambush by shooting herself is a well known classic, but Keeping's fidelity to the passionate undercurrents of the story is revelatory: his depiction of 'sweet black waves in the moonlight' as the victim unbraids her hair for her lover is echoed a few stanzas later in a dreadfully bloody image of her corpse at the climax of the story.

The sedate incantations of Tennyson's narrative about another doomed female are matched by the artist's idyllic pastorals of life on the road to Camelot, but as the imprisoned Lady of Shalott spies on young lovers, and the dashing Sir Lancelot appears in her magic mirror, Keeping expresses the suppressed eroticism of the poem ever more graphically.

Kevin Crossley-Holland's prose translation of **Beowulf** is a stirring read in its own right, its descriptive passages incorporating the alliterations and kennings with which the Anglo-Saxon bards embroidered their stories. This tale of the Geat hero's struggle against the man eating Grendel and the monster's vengeful mother would seem to offer Keeping an ideal opportunity to open wide the blood sluices, but, amongst the shrieking faces and dismembered carcasses, there is a great deal of subtlety in his images of bleak northern wildernesses: here he abandons the fine line technique, and expresses the gloom of mist and rain drenched stone in nebulous washes of black and grey.

Keeping's drawings dominate these books, but these drawings are inspired by a vivid appreciation of the essence of the three stories. They will fascinate children, but they will also draw them into the spell cast by the words on the page. Be

warned that this is strong stuff, but at less than a fiver a book, you would be cheating yourself by not partaking.

Running Order:

56

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Links:

[1] <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-lady-of-shalott>

[2] <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/beowulf-0>

[3] <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-highwayman>

[4] <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/118>

[5] <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/george-hunt>