

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-70325-3 - Outsiders: A Collection of Fiction and Non-Fiction

Edited by Roy Blatchford

Excerpt

[More information](#)

1 Fictional outsiders

This section introduces a number of celebrated fictional characters who, in their different ways, are on the outside of their communities. For example, you will meet here Michael Morpurgo's Birdman, who has been isolated by the island people around him but who arrives to save their very community. In strong contrast is Graham Greene's wonderful creation, the Third Man, whose very name sets him apart in the novel he haunts.

Activities

- 1 Think about novels, poems and stories you have read in which 'outsiders' in some shape or form are an important ingredient. Make brief notes on how they are presented as characters, and the actions they take.
- 2 Now think about television programmes and films you have seen which feature 'outsiders'. Talk about them in your groups. Are there common ways in which 'outsiders' are presented in fiction, both in books and on the screen?
- 3 Look at the titles of the texts in this section, listed on the contents page. In groups, choose three titles and brainstorm what you think these texts might be about. When you work on these texts later, you can see how your original ideas compare. Discuss which of these titles would most prompt you to read on, and why.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-70325-3 - Outsiders: A Collection of Fiction and Non-Fiction

Edited by Roy Blatchford

Excerpt

[More information](#)

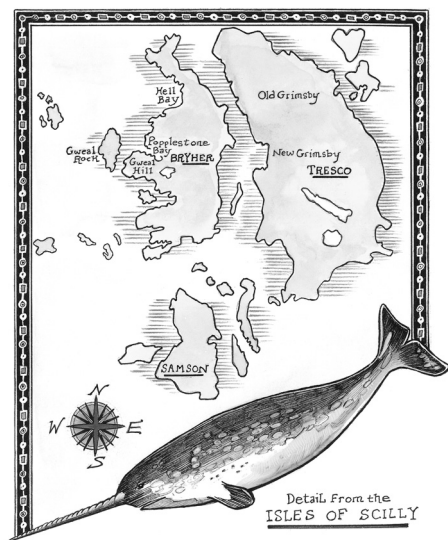
2 Fictional outsiders

Why the Whales Came

by Michael Morpurgo

The book from which this extract is taken is set on the Isles of Scilly, a scattering of tiny islands kicked out into the Atlantic by the boot of England. The date is April 1914 and the story is told through the eyes of ten-year-old Gracie Jenkins. The book is drawing to a conclusion and here we discover the power of the Birdman, who has been treated as an outsider by his fellow islanders for many years.

We did all we could to discourage the whales from coming in too close to the shore. Shouting and screaming at the water's edge, we hurled stones and driftwood at them but most fell far short and those few that did hit them did not seem to deter them. The Birdman's flock of gulls wheeled noisily overhead, but the whales took no notice of them either. All the time they were drifting closer and closer to the beach and disaster. Every faint whistle from the stranded whale seemed to drive the others out in the bay to distraction, sending them rolling and plunging in amongst each other and precipitating a chorus of thunderous



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-70325-3 - *Outsiders: A Collection of Fiction and Non-Fiction*

Edited by Roy Blatchford

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Why the Whales Came 3

snorting and whistling that subsided only when the whale lay still and silent again on the sand. But each furious flurry of activity left them that much nearer the shore and there seemed nothing we could do now to stop them beaching themselves.

‘Gracie,’ said the Birdman, ‘you go back to the whale and try to keep her happy. Stroke her, Gracie. Talk to her, sing to her, anything so’s she doesn’t call out.’ And he took off his sou’wester¹ and handed it to me. ‘It won’t do to let her get too dry either, Gracie. You can use this for a bucket.’

So I went back and forth from the water’s edge to the whale with the Birdman’s sou’wester full of water. I began at her head, pouring the water all over her eyes and mouth. She seemed to relish it, blinking and rolling her head from side to side as the water ran down over her skin and into the sand, and all the while I talked to her quietly. I remember thinking as I looked into her eyes that she could understand me, that she could understand every word I said.

I was kneeling in the sand beside her head, stroking her behind the blowhole above her eyes, when I saw them coming back. They were hurrying along the path under Gweal Hill, Big Tim running out in front. It looked as if he had brought most of the island with him. Everyone had a weapon of some kind in his hand, a fork, an axe, a hoe or a scythe; and Daniel’s father carried a harpoon over his shoulder. I looked for Mother amongst them but could not pick her out. The Vicar was there, his cassock tucked up into his trousers, and Mr Wellbeloved was there too, striding out with his stick alongside Daniel’s father.

‘Stay where you are, Gracie,’ the Birdman told me, ‘and keep her quiet if you can.’ By the time they reached the beach, the Birdman, Daniel and Prince stood between them and the stranded whale. No one spoke for a moment. They all stood looking incredulously at the Birdman and the whale, at Daniel and me, whispering anxiously amongst themselves. It was only

¹**sou’wester** waterproof hat

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-70325-3 - Outsiders: A Collection of Fiction and Non-Fiction

Edited by Roy Blatchford

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4 Fictional outsiders

when they noticed the rolling black backs breaking the water out in the bay that they began to talk aloud.

‘See,’ Big Tim shouted in triumph, pointing his machete. ‘Didn’t I tell you? Didn’t I tell you? There’s dozens of them out there. I said there was.’

‘It’s a narwhal,’ said Mr Wellbeloved. ‘Yes, I do believe it’s a narwhal. Well I never. Only the males have tusks, you know. He’s a long way from home. That’s the kind of whale that the Eskimos hunt off Greenland. Quite what he’s doing here I cannot imagine. If I might take a closer look . . .’ As he stepped towards us Prince began to growl, his lip curling back above his teeth, his neck tense with fury. Mr Wellbeloved stopped where he stood.

‘Look here, Mr Woodcock,’ Daniel’s father said, taking Mr Wellbeloved’s arm and pulling him back, ‘we don’t much care what this thing is. Whale, narwhal, it doesn’t matter to us. All that matters is that there’s meat on it and ivory too by the look of it. That’s money to us, Mr Woodcock. Anything washed up on our beaches is ours by right, always has been, Mr Woodcock; you know that.’ The Birdman said nothing but looked along the ranks of islanders that faced him. ‘And as for you, Daniel Pender,’ Daniel’s father went on, pointing at Daniel, ‘you can come right back over here, else I’ll take a strap to you right here and now in front of all these people. You’ve no business to be here with this man. You’ve been told time and time again.’ Daniel stayed where he was alongside the Birdman.

‘You can strap me all you want, Father,’ he said, ‘but you got to listen to Mr Woodcock. You got to listen to him. If you don’t, then we’re done for, all of us. You got to do what he says, Father.’

‘Mr Woodcock,’ Daniel’s father said, his patience fast vanishing, ‘are you going to move that dog or am I? Now I don’t want anyone to get hurt . . .’

‘He can’t hear you, Father,’ Daniel said. ‘He’s deaf. Gracie and me, we’re the only ones he can understand.’

‘Deaf?’ said Daniel’s father, and he was clearly taken aback. ‘All right then, you tell him for us, Daniel. You tell him that the

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-70325-3 - Outsiders: A Collection of Fiction and Non-Fiction

Edited by Roy Blatchford

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Why the Whales Came 5

whale belongs to all of us and we aim to kill it and those out there in Popplestones as well. They're ours by right and he can't stop us. Tell him to stand aside.'

Daniel interpreted quietly and the Birdman nodded his understanding, putting his hand on Daniel's shoulder. He straightened up and faced Daniel's father. 'Then you will have to kill me first,' he said. 'This whale must go back to the sea where she belongs. Then we must drive them all back out to sea. If just one of them dies, the curse that fell on Samson when I was a boy will fall on you, and Bryher² will be cursed forever. You must help me before it's too late.'

'Oh come on,' said Big Tim pushing his way through. 'We don't have to listen to this old fool. Those whales out there could turn round any minute and head back out to sea and we'd lose the lot of them.' And the crowd began to move slowly in towards us.

'Stand aside, Mr Woodcock,' said Daniel's father. 'You know we're within our rights. Out of the way now.' At once Prince was on his feet and the growl had turned to a snarl. Those just in front of him fell back, but the rest kept coming until we were almost surrounded. At that moment the whale must have sensed danger for she raised her head and whistled again, twisting and turning and thrashing the ground behind her. Popplestones Bay suddenly boiled with life.

'Don't do it, please Father,' cried Daniel backing down towards me. 'Don't do it. Listen to him. He's telling the truth. I know he is.' But I could see from the hardness in the faces around me that they were ignoring him, that they were no longer even listening as they closed in around us.

'Wait!' It was a voice from the back of the crowd, a voice I knew well. 'Wait!' Everyone looked round. They hushed instantly, and then stood to one side as my mother came forward, Aunt Mildred beside her. Mother looked first at me and

²**Samson** and **Bryher** two of the Scilly islands

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-70325-3 - Outsiders: A Collection of Fiction and Non-Fiction

Edited by Roy Blatchford

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6 Fictional outsiders

then at the Birdman. 'You were up early this morning, Gracie,' she said. 'I wondered where you'd got to.'

'Had to go, Mother,' I said, standing up. 'I had to. Daniel came for me. Big Tim and all of them, they were going to attack the Birdman's cottage. Daniel heard them planning it, so we had to warn him, didn't we?'

'Were they indeed?' said Mother, looking around her. There was a hard edge to her voice I had never heard before. 'Did you know that, Mr Pender?' she asked, and Daniel's father looked hard at Big Tim.

'Well he deserved it,' said Big Tim. 'He was signalling to German submarines, I know he was. We seen him, didn't we?' But none of his friends supported him now.

Mother walked across to Big Tim and looked him in the eye. 'You know nothing, Tim Pender; because you don't think, you never have. You know only what you want to know. You're a bully and a coward and you should be ashamed of yourself.' And she turned and spoke to the crowd. 'This old man helped me and Gracie. He left honey and milk and bread on my doorstep when we needed it most. Just like you, I've known him all my life and never spoken to him, but in all that time I've never known him harm anyone. Yes, every one of us is frightened of him and we tell our children to keep out of his way; but what has he ever really done to harm any one of us?' There was silence. Mother came over to me and took me by the hand. 'I don't know what Gracie and Daniel have been up to, and I don't know why Mr Woodcock wants to save these creatures. I do know we owe it to him and to the two children at least to listen to them, to hear them out. If after that you still want to kill the whales, then you can. They'll still be here.' She did not wait for approval, she assumed it. She turned to Daniel. 'Tell us, Daniel. Tell us all about it.' And not a word was raised against her.

I wondered at the time that she was able to command such instant obedience. On reflection I think everyone was as shocked as I was at the sudden transformation in her. I certainly had never seen her so authoritative and passionate. All I

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-70325-3 - Outsiders: A Collection of Fiction and Non-Fiction

Edited by Roy Blatchford

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Why the Whales Came 7

know is that without a murmur, even from Big Tim, they all backed away and waited shamefaced for Daniel to begin.

Daniel turned to Mr Woodcock. 'Shall I tell them?' he asked, and the old man nodded.

'Tell them,' he said, 'tell them everything. But hurry, Daniel, hurry. There's no time to lose.'

They listened intently as Daniel told them of how the Birdman and his mother had witnessed the massacre of the whales on Samson all those years ago, how they had tried to stop it and failed, that it was the islanders' greed and cruelty that had brought the curse down on Samson. He told them the whole terrible story of the death of Samson, of the ghostship, of the starvation and disease that followed, of all the ships drawn to their destruction on the rocks off Samson, of the dogs the people had to eat to survive.

As the truth behind the age-old rumours came out, the islanders listened all the more closely. They heard how the people left one by one until finally the well had dried up and forced the Birdman and his mother off the island.

For some time no one said anything. They looked at each other uneasily, and then it was Big Tim that spoke up. 'So what? We don't know that any of it's true, do we? He could be making it all up, couldn't he? Where's the proof?'

'The proof's on Samson,' Daniel said. 'I've seen it – and Gracie's seen it too. We've seen the horn, haven't we, Gracie? In Mr Woodcock's cottage on Samson it was, hanging above the stove. Just like that one, it is,' he said, pointing at the whale.

'You been over there, Gracie?' Mother asked me. 'You been over to Samson?'

'We couldn't help it, Mother,' I said. 'It was that night we went out fishing and the fog came down. Never told you before 'cos I knew you'd be angry. Didn't know where we were, Mother, honest. Couldn't see a thing. Then we saw this light and rowed towards it. We thought it was Bryher at first, but it turned out it was the Birdman's fire on Samson. He lights a fire on Samson whenever there's bad weather. It's to keep the ships away from the rocks.'

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-70325-3 - Outsiders: A Collection of Fiction and Non-Fiction

Edited by Roy Blatchford

Excerpt

[More information](#)

8 Fictional outsiders

Suddenly Mother was beside me. Hands on hips, she faced the crowd. ‘Well?’ she said. ‘What are you waiting for? If we don’t hurry, every one of those whales will be on the beach and then we’ll never be able to get them off. We need a sail to roll her onto and we need ropes. We’ll need a horse, or a donkey, both maybe to haul her back into the sea. Hurry now.’ This time there were no arguments. On the contrary there was a sudden stir of excitement. Somehow, Mother had galvanised³ the whole island into action. The Vicar and Aunt Mildred organised every spare man, woman and child into an extended line at the water’s edge. There must have been a hundred people there advancing into the sea to keep the whales from coming in. Waist high in the water they were whistling and shouting and splashing, whilst behind them the rescue began.

It was Daniel’s father who directed the delicate task of engineering the stranded whale back into the sea. ‘Got to launch her gently, just like she was a boat,’ he said. They dug a deep trench to one side of her and when the sail came they laid it in the bottom. Then they dug away the side of the ditch she was lying in and eased her sideways, rocking her gently until she slid down onto the sail. It took twelve men pushing, the Birdman, Mr Wellbeloved and Daniel’s father amongst them, before the whale was finally in place.

All through the rescue I stayed by the whale’s head whilst an endless relay of children with buckets, Big Tim and his friends mostly, fetched and carried water to keep the whale’s skin wet. She was tiring quickly now. Her flourishes were less and less frequent and she had fallen almost silent. She moved quietly from time to time, her tiny eyes often closing for minutes on end so that sometimes I thought she might be dead. A bucket of water poured gently over her head seemed to revive her, but each time it took longer. She would open her wedge-shaped mouth under the horn and allow the water to trickle in through her teeth. I talked to her all the while, reassuring her as well as I

³galvanised stirred

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-70325-3 - Outsiders: A Collection of Fiction and Non-Fiction

Edited by Roy Blatchford

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Why the Whales Came 9

could that it would not be long now before she was back with her friends and out at sea again. I could feel her breath on my fingers as I stroked the top of her head around her blowhole. She was breathing less often now and more deeply, almost as if she were going to sleep. Or was she dying slowly?

Friend and another donkey were hitched up already to the sail. At first it looked as if they would not be strong enough for the task. Their feet sank deep into the sand as they pulled and the whale did not move. What the Birdman said into Friend's ear no one knows, but whatever it was was enough, for they were soon hauling the whale down across the wet sand towards the sea. There were a dozen men or more straining at the sail at each side, so that the whale was returned to the water cradled in a kind of hammock. I stood back and watched with the others as the waves washed over her and she gradually came back to life. On the Birdman's advice we left her there wallowing in the shallows for some time, giving her time to regain her strength, to feel her buoyancy. Then to our delight she began to heave and thrash again and she let out a long wailing whistle. That seemed enough to satisfy the Birdman and we gathered around her and pushed her through the water towards the others that lay waiting for her out in the bay. There was a flurry out in the middle when she joined them and much rolling and groaning and whistling, an exultant chorus of joy at their reunion. Then she became one of them, and I was never sure which she was after that.

I thought, as everyone thought, that the job was done then, that once reunited they would turn for the open sea; but for some reason they seemed reluctant to leave the bay in spite of all we did to frighten them away. Big Tim it was who suggested that banging on tin trays and corrugated iron might do the trick, so we children were all sent home to fetch back any bit of sheet metal we could find that would serve as a drum. It was a good idea and the first time we all thundered on our makeshift drums it seemed to have an effect, for they turned and swam away; but then they stopped at the mouth of the bay and turned

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-70325-3 - Outsiders: A Collection of Fiction and Non-Fiction

Edited by Roy Blatchford

Excerpt

[More information](#)

10 Fictional outsiders

back again setting up such a row of whistling, whooping and snorting so that you would almost have thought they were talking back to our drums. Far from driving them away, the drumming only seemed to interest them and excite them.

All day long the islanders sustained this frantic effort. Everyone took turns in the water now, for it was too cold to stay there long. Hot soup and bread were brought out to the beach and kept warm over a fire in one corner of the beach, so that a ready supply of food was on hand all day. We had one brief taste of success when a pair of the whales was spotted swimming out to sea, past Gweal Rock. However the others did not follow, so that by nightfall most of the whales were still trapped in Popplestones, unable or unwilling to find their way out.

The Birdman, Daniel and I were sitting drinking our soup by the fire when the Birdman had the idea. His face was ashen with cold and exhaustion, but suddenly there was an urgency in his voice. 'Look where they are,' he said, getting to his feet and pointing out into the bay. 'Look at them.' The whales were lying together in a pack in the dark waters on the far side of Popplestones. 'It's the fire,' he said. 'It's the fire. They're as far from the fire as they can be. They don't like fire.'

Flaming torches, oil lamps, piles of burning brushwood and driftwood, we used anything, anything that would burn. We lit fires all along the rocks around the bay; and then the Birdman, with a long line of islanders on either side of him waving their torches above their heads, waded out into the sea towards the whales. We children were told to stay on the beach. It was too dangerous now, out in the dark water with the whales' flailing tails and the sea whipped up into a frenzy by a fresh offshore wind. So we stayed and watched the line of torches as they moved out into the bay.

Only minutes later they brought the Birdman back, Daniel's father and the Vicar carrying him out of the sea. A wave had knocked the breath out of him, Daniel's father said as they laid him down by the fire beside us.