BOOKS I HAVE READ: BEDTIME STORIES

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Category: Observations

One of my earliest memories is of scanning the large bookshelves in my childhood bedroom, looking for a book to read before going to sleep. The bottom two shelves contained my books; all of which I'd read many times and the shelves higher up contained some of my dad's books all of which looked thoroughly boring.

I still have the same problem, I'm an inveterate reader and find it hard to sleep without reading a chapter or two of something. Very often, I'll pick something off the shelf that I've read many times before, sometimes just to peruse a chapter other times to read the whole book.

At various points during the year I reread the following books.

Lord of the Rings. To be honest, I've no idea how many times I've read this. I've probably read it once every year or two since my mid-teens. Sometimes I skip the boring bits (Frodo and Sam getting to Mordor), but this year I read the whole lot again. The characters are one dimensional and the plot has more holes than a piece of Swiss cheese, but I love it nevertheless. Middle Earth is a nice comforting familiar place to end off the day before falling asleep; to dream of elves and orcs.

Another comfortable place to spend the last half hour of the day is Narnia; and this year, I reread what have come to be called the Chronicles of Narnia. The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe is the first book that I ever read through in one sitting; I was around ten at the time. Let's be honest, the books are a bit twee and some of the 'spiritual bits' owe more to Plato than to Christianity, but hey they are good stories and it's nice to go back to Narnia every now and then. It's also true that Aslan is a brilliantly drawn character.

The last comfy bedtime place I've been this year is the bank of the Thames. The Wind in the Willows is a constant delight and I turn to it again and again. Mr Toad is a wonderful creation and very prescient; ever time Apple releases a new phone or gadget, you can see the Mr Toad's lining up to get their fix of the latest gear. "Poop-poop." While on the banks of the Thames, I also reread Three Men in a Boat; a work of comic genius.

Very often, if I don't want to read a chapter of a book or start a new (or old) novel, I'll dig out one of Wainwright's guides and relive a climb up a Lakeland fell in the ten minutes before I turn the light out. I've not read any of these books through; but I've dipped into chapters again and again.

I can't do 'heavy reading' before sleep, it just doesn't work. But good books can take me to places that have never existed or that have changed beyond recognition or they can take me back to places I know and love. It's a nice way to draw the day to a close.