Three Burnt Books:

An Unconventional Conservation Narrative

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The Bruised Book

Preface

It is the illustrator-husband, not the author-wife, that assured *Children's Children* a place on the shelves of the Mackintosh Library. Gertrude Bone's prose idealises the lot of the rural labourer and ruminates upon the land-tied destiny of the next generation. Muirhead Bone's illustrations portray the countrymen and countrywomen as beasts of burden, knotted with toil, finding existential solace in their (briefly) carefree progeny. Time may misshape and blemish the physical form, but the gift that time bestows is knowledge and insight – qualities that engender empathy and the ability to nurture.

That is all I will write upon the conceptual mien of the novel and its novelish embellishments.

Pages within the book have developed unusual discolourations as a consequence of the trauma of the 2014 Mackintosh fire and its aftermath. The first distinctive characteristic is the chromatic palette that reminds one of the ripening of soft tissue contusion. Of course, in biological organisms such as the human species,

bruising is caused by blood pooling into the skin epidermis: as cell proteins degrade, oxygen in the haemoglobin is dispersed; the richly oxidised red and purple bruise that appears soon after the trauma turns black and blue in a matter of hours as oxygen levels decrease; as the damaged red blood cells die, the haemoglobin converts to a bilious green pigment, biliverdin, which further degrades into yellow bilirubin. However, a book is flesh-less and blood-less. The chemical components of dyes can explain the reds and purples, black and blues, greens and yellows that have developed within the inks and book cloth, as well as the species of moulds that colonised the object, ingesting and assuming the properties of those dyes. The second distinctive characteristic of these discolourations is their bilaterality, and one rapidly makes an association with the Rorschach inkblot test. Whilst in human test cases, the Rorschach is a means of assessing and identifying psychological disorders such as depression and psychosis (including any psychotic disorder or a mood disorder with psychotic features such as post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD) by means of asking patients to interpret ten ambiguous inkblots, in this instance I encounter a nonhuman test case assuming the anthropological vocabulary of inkblots.

With forensic study it is possible to deduce, Ah, yes – the spine faced into the library space and thus was exposed to excessive temperatures causing greater heat damage to the book in that area, or As we can see, the pages are mulched at the foot of the book and

at the outer extremities, indicating that water used to extinguish the fire penetrated an upright standing book, likely still on its shelf; however the evidence that the dampness only penetrated the book block some of the way suggests that the book was compressed, quite likely by other books on the same shelf, or The specificity of the chromatic spectrum of damage is the combined result of the circulation of oxygen, water penetration, mould species and dye components, or The survival of the book, and the evidence of its found location within the library provided by the archaeological excavation team demonstrates that the book was well protected from further damage by surrounding fire debris, &c.

However, it is curious that the discolourations materialised in this particular spectrum (suggesting a physical trauma) and in this particular arrangement (suggesting the language of the psychoanalyst). These patternations have ascended from the book's material and immaterial (or experiential) realities as (in Jungian terms) a shadow, a literal darkening of the page. The overt shadow manifests in the arts and dreams as the doppelgänger, demons, devils, djinns, spirits, ghosts and reflections. The overt shadow is a physical incarnation of the covert shadow, or the unconscious, representing not only buried impulses but also instinct, intuition and insight. I am led to hypothesise that the damage sustained to the book is not merely a physical, chemical and biological reaction to the forces at play within the Mackintosh Library in the six months after the fire, but is the manifestation of the object's existential trauma.

Abuse, assault and combat are amongst the traumatic

stressors that can lead to PTSD in humans. The condition characterised by intrusive thoughts, dissociative amnesia, hyperarousal and startle responses, flashbacks and nightmares. Trauma alters brain structure and function with the most impacted brain regions being the hippocampus, the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala, demonstrating that psychological trauma damages the body as tangibly as physical injury can manifest as psychopathology. Those who have PTSD re-experience traumatic imagery, meaning they have lost the ability to distinguish between past events and the present moment. I assert that the book is trapped in a perpetual state of reliving its experiences and that this trauma has manifested as bruise-like inkblots. I propose to adopt Hermann Rorschach's psychodiagnostic method to make sense of the trauma via the analysis of the material damage. However, my reading of the trauma will be a fabrication of my inherent human-ness, for I am flesh and blood. The book experienced the fire and the ensuing conditions

A portrait is a co-creation between artist and object, and the object offers the portraitist nothing more than a façade: I am not who you think I am; I am not who I think I am; I am who I think you think I am.

within the burnt-out library by way of its inherent book-

ness. The question is, can I do justice to its traumatic

experience?

I

What is it like, I asked Alison Stevenson, GSA's Head of Library & Archives, to handle an object that has come out of a fire?

She considered the question for a moment.

'It's ... surprising,' she said, and paused again, 'because it has been through this incredible inferno of fire and yet some of it still exists, because the books that didn't survive they were just dust and charcoal around the edges and they got swept up and we never even looked at them ...'

So much had been lost to the fire, the damage to the Mackintosh library had seemed so complete.

'The books that came out and we had to handle and look at, it was surprising that they had survived at all from my point of view and because they had not only survived the fire, but they'd survived sitting in this pile of rubble for a couple of months before we could start the archaeological salvage.'

Stone had split and glass had crazed, not to mention the volume of combustible materials that went up in flames. The archaeologist, Gordon Ewart, had encountered 'a great big smoking heap of broken material' the day after the fire.ⁱⁱⁱ

'The library was burnt, it was gone,' explained Alison Stevenson.' There had been nothing that could be done in the immediate aftermath of the fire. Priority had to be given to what could be saved such as the archives situated in the Mackintosh's basement.

'It really felt dead to me,' Stevenson continued, 'like it had died, and that persisted while it stayed in this lumpen state, it stayed quite static for quite a while until we got the archaeologists in. Nothing happening. No movement. No life to it at all.'

But there was life.

Finally, in the autumn of 2014 the excavation commenced. The archaeologists laid down and dug into their grids and the materials that were sifted from the debris were removed and taken to the neighbouring McLellan Galleries to be processed by the conservators.

Ewart recalled, '[The fire had] happened in May. We didn't get in there till October. That heap had mouldered merrily over the summer, and one of the hazards that we became quickly aware of was spores and mould as well as the weather and the exposed nature – because there was no glass in the windows – so it was open to the elements, and it was wet, you know, soaking wet and dark.'vi

Yet, even in destruction there can be beauty too.

Gretel Evans, AOC's Conservation Manager, had seen 'an awful lot of weird and wonderful life forms' thriving on the rotting remains. vii

Evans' colleague Natalie Mitchell remembered, 'That a lot of the paper had really unusual staining. Depending on the fastness of their dyes and the chemical components of the dyes when they break down, the dyes have dispersed and settled and dried leaving different colours.'viii

'I would say that pattern up the spine,' Emma Dadson of Harwell had suggested, 'where moisture has travelled up or down through the spine and then it's seeped in through the spine into the centre of the text block because it's been wet for so long – I'm 99% sure that's all associated with mould, because if you think about volumes – like books – they're quite tightly packed and so, although a fire might cause quite a lot of damage on the outside, you have to work quite hard to completely destroy something that's so tightly packed as a book because there's not enough oxygen to sustain combustion, whereas water can seep in quite easily.'ix

Dadson continued, 'When you have mould growth that's associated with actual physical water damage, it tends to be much more kind of kaleidoscopic in terms of the colour and what often happens – it's partly an issue to do with what species of mould it is – but often moulds will take on the colour of the binding.'x

The mould seemed to root from the inside of the books and grow outwards,' said Mitchell, 'and I think these life forms formed these amazing patterns and colours, and we saw some beautiful, quite stunning patterns and effects from these different moulds that just grew like new life out of the books and stems of bright vivid yellows and greens and blues.'xii

Compression controlled the rate and depth of water penetration. The species of moulds and the chemical components of dyes and inks within the materials of the book carried by the water, determined the colours that emerged. The moulds would absorb and assume the colours of the dyes and spread them as their colonies grew.

Confronted with the objects excavated from the library, Mitchell, the objective conservator, would discover herself marvelling at the weird beauty within some of the books:

'Sometimes you'd be looking at a book and [it] might not necessarily be in the context of, "Ooh, that's nice pictures! [sic]" or whatever it was. You'd open it up and think, "Wow! look at that!"

We're some of the only people that got to see that sort of thing and I suppose at the time it's not necessarily something that you'd be pondering over or thinking as particularly wonderful, because at the end of the day it's really sad this book has been so damaged. It was, I suppose, this ... discreet, curious thing to look at, you could think, "That's beautiful.""xiii

II

I close my eyes.

The slack spine of *Children's Children* presses into the crook of my thumb as the curling plastic reference label cat-licks the Mount of Venus. It is fridge-chilled sponge-cake cold. Its topography is an undulating landscape of soft mounds and hollows. Manipulated by many hands, squeezed onto bookshelves, tossed onto desks and into bags, the book has affected the contorted gait that comes with years of use.

I open my eyes.

Fingertips scratch across the book cloth, across the murmuration of the weft swooping over the warp. The timbre changes depending on where the book cloth is intact or has loosened from the board.

Where the book cloth adheres, dark and tight, the sound waves penetrate thick and dull. Where the buckram pales and bubbles, the vibration is high and airy.

The book cloth is treacle brown, except for two rectangles that rise out of the soiled cover. The inner rectangle is tawny pink, the hue and texture of an *Elastoplast* fabric plaster, implying this would have been the original colour of the book cloth. A second, larger and dirtier, rectangle skirts the first.

Both rectangles are masked areas, protected by other, now disappeared, volumes. The smallest must have been a slim book or pamphlet pressed hard against *Children's Children*.

The smaller object compromised the second since a filthy tidemark is clotted within its imprint.

There is no evidence either volume survived. I surmise that it is unlikely they burned up in the 2014 fire since their proximity would have caused more combustion damage to the book rather than the heat, smoke and water damage that is apparent. Perhaps the disappeared volumes dissipated in the damp and the dark of the library after the fire was put out, a gradual decline into sludge.

'CHILDREN'S CHILDREN' is tooled in gold letters across the treacly book head.

A golden circlet frames the figures of a mature male and a small child as they stand hand-in-hand on the road through a flat landscape.

Where the wet has got in at the foot edge, fragile letters announcing the author and illustrator have washed away, leaving only:

The top edge of the book block is gilt, but its sheen is tarnished to brass and spotted black with mould at the spine. There is no gilding on the fore edge and foot edge. This is not uncommon, as often only the top edge is gilt to protect a book standing on a shelf from dust.

While the gilt top edge is flush, at the fore and foot edges the signatures jut out erratically. Some pages are as much as 2mm shorter than others. Some are blade-cut. Some have a deckled edge.

I open the book.

The paper is rigid and yellowed with oxidation. The gilt has seeped about half a millimetre into the page. Smokey snake tongues flick into the book at the fore edge. Invasive damp and mould have masticated the foot edge. Exposure to water weakens cellulose, breaking the chemical bonds, reducing paper into pulp.

The plane of the page hip-pops as it struggles against my attempt to turn it. The stubbornness of the gutter partially arises from the gritty, sticky ash particles that hug the binding thread and burrow into the stitch holes and mizzle onto the pillow beneath.

As I loosen my grip to turn the next page, the first page snaps back to its original position. I drag my fingertips across the page. The paper emits a rumbling growl.

I close the book and begin again at the beginning.

The front endpaper clings desperately to book block and book cover. The mull that supports the hinge has rotted, weakening the fragile endpaper which has torn at the gutter, revealing the intimate place of the book. At the tear is a blemish that spills out from the hinge, leeching across the spread of the endpaper, each side a reflection of the other.

I turn the tattered page.

Stickers and stamps, a librarian's penmanship and a bookseller's pencil scrawl, are arranged within the space. Occupying most of the left-hand page is a GSA Library bookplate. Opposite is a scanner barcode, in cohabitation

with three ink stamps: a GSA Library stamp, a Mackintosh Library stamp and a Reference stamp. On the top left-hand corner, handwritten and underlined in blue ink is '10309'. Below the division line, BIP is handwritten in red ink (referring to the *Books in Print* bibliographic database). On the top right-hand corner, the bookseller has written 8/6, *Children's Children*'s selling price of eight shillings and sixpence.

Dampness has rinsed out the blue inks, printing shadows of the words and letters onto the opposite page. The next page is also blemished, a slight variation of the page before, as is the next page, and the next. Each page presents a new swirling whisper of a form until the blemishes fade and vanish the closer the pages are to the centre of the book block. If it were possible to flick the book from beginning to end, each blemish would merge seamlessly into the next as a single lithe entity.

I close the book to turn it over and repeat the process in reverse.

The back endpaper weeps Turkish delight, liquorice, lemon sherbet and caramel: luscious residues rinsed from a GSA Library stamp. Each page vibrates with the gorgeous effect of decomposition, and from the decay, new life is suggested in the forms of beetles, hummingbirds, orchids, irises.

III

Front endpaper

The gutter is torn, foot to head. Three ribbons of deep ochre sweep horizontally from torn gutter to fore-edge. Smoke blue blooms from the tear at the midway point. Water has flooded the foot of the endpaper, and withdrawn, leaving a dirty tidemark. Smoke has swept in at the fore-edge and deposited sooty streaks.

The silence is charged.

With a twist, darkness ignites.

Bookplate page

The gutter is torn, foot to centre. A damp tear, now dried. The ochre has congealed and darkened into a thumbsmear. The blue bloom has set too. Black spots of mould have colonised the uneven line of the tidemark and the straight edges of the library bookplate.

Curved horns rise from a carpet of rolling ash and smoke; and the ash and smoke punch out to the corners, then plume upwards and inwards.

Once, horned deities, male and female, were associated with creation myths, the wild-places and the other-places. Then the Christians corrupted their image, re-presenting them as diabolic.

Title page

The gutter is torn, foot to centre. The ochre has softened, weakened, drifting away from the gutter. The blue bloom drifts too, drifting away from twisting copper curlicues that track the line of the tear. Without the edge of a bookplate to glean to, mould has not colonised here. Beneath the tidemark, the page darkens to dull lavender.

The firebird ascends. Mighty wings, white gold and blue plumes, fill the height of the library. Its beak agape in song — or silent scream.

Dedication page

The tear cuts through the lower third: a flap of loose paper on either side of the gutter. The pale ochre disperses and dissipates. The blue intensifies into a deep zigzagging flash. The copper curlicues flex into tight coils. The lavender clouds gathering at the foot-edge blush darkly.

A moth, foolish in her attraction to the sadistic flame, dances about the light, and is sizzled for her curiosity.

Chapter I

The torn flap disfigures the lower third. The deep blue contracts and condenses, persistent in its situatedness. The curlicues blur. The blushing lilac clouds dissipate.

The ravishing fire.

Ravishing = Captivating.

Ravishing = Consuming.

pp. 8-9

The tear has diminished into three serrated puncture marks. The deep blue blackens. The curlicues have blurred into wavy fuzz. The foot-edge clears, but black mould gently freckles the foot of the gutter.

The shy moth hides away in the darkness. She is the nocturnal antithesis of the sun-worshipping butterfly, and while the butterfly represents the conscious aspect of the psyche in psychology and art, the moth represents the unconscious, dwelling in the other-realms of dreams and death.

pp. 10–11

Two punctures now. The black—blue fades, clotting at the rounded shoulder of the gutter. The copper fuzz fades. A black trail of mould meanders along the gutter shoulder.

Without doctrinal guidance or constraint, purgatory in art is inventively unpleasant. This correctional facility for the recently deceased is a desolate landscape, while in other hands it is all the pandemonium of the circus, but without the laughs.

The soul that dwells in the waiting room to heaven is harried by the pikes of foul abominations until it is purified by the prayers and payments of indulgences, and then, finally, the soul is plucked out of that long, long night and carried forth by golden angels to eternal glory.

The teasing monsters are inspired by the physiology of microscopic and invertebrate opportunists. Insects, arachnids, fungi, bacteria and viruses are essential cultivators of the ecosystem. Without the pollinators and the decomposers, this world would be a hellish landfill.

pp. 12–13

The black—blue and the copper amass on the shoulder of the gutter. Black mould smatters the foot of the gutter.

Persephone resides as Hades' consort in the underworld for six months. Pwyll enjoys Arawn's hospitality in Annwn for one year. Ishtar descends to the land of no return. Aeneid descends to the land of the dead. Jesus rises from the grave.

pp. 14–15

The black—blue and the copper have merged as bronze. The black mould is gone.

The library settles into Dreaming:

Dormant-not-dead,

Now and beyond-now,

Here and beyond-here.

Two tarnished bronze lines mark the shoulder of the gutter.

pp. 18–19

The two lines fade.

Chapter II

The lines fade.

рр. 22–3

They fade.

pp. 24–5

Fading.

pp. 26–7

Whispers.

I stand at the edge of the abyss,

pp. 28–9

Slighter than whispers.

I peer into darkest winter,

рр. 30–1

Memories of whispers.

I measure my mortality,

рр. 32–3

Whispers of memory.

... and contemplate eternity.

Chapter III

Chapter IV

Chapter V

Chapter VI

Chapter VII

Chapter VIII

Chapter IX

Chapter X

Chapter XI

Chapter XII

Chapter XIII

A sulphuric mottling at the masticated foot-edge.

Chapter XIV

The mottling flattens into a sulphuric line that traces the foot-edge.

Chapter XV

The line brightens and bows into a bronze and blue hillock.

pp. 258–59

Pale bronze and pale blue smatter the masticated footedge.

pp. 260-61

The bronze shadow forms a 'U' at the foot of the spine. Blue dapples the 'U'.

рр. 262-63

A blush of rose rises along the lower third line. The bronze shadow forms a 'V' at the foot of the spine. A suggestion of blue spans the blush and bronze.

pp. 264–65

Pale rose warms the lower third line. The bronze shadow nuzzles the foot of the spine. Smoke blue encircles the rose and bronze.

The chemical signatures of meaningless words are mindlessly ingested.

рр. 266-67

Saffron yellow stretches horizontally across the lower-third, mid-way and upper-third lines. Pale rose rises along the lower-third line, near the fore-edge. The bronze shadow nuzzles the foot of the spine. Smoke blue hovers heavy at the foot-edge. A small tear has loosened away a corner of the page close to the foot of the gutter.

Fodder for fungi and flora and fauna.

pp. 268-69

Smoke blue rises from the foot-edge, gently staining the lower half. Penny-sized dots of saffron yellow punctuate the blue. Pale rose rises into pools along the lower-third line, near to the fore-edge. Black mould colonises the bronze shadow at the foot of the spine. A small tear has loosened away a corner of paper close to the foot of the spine.

Aspergillus, Chaetomium, Cladosporium, Epicoccum, Penicillium, Stachybotrys, Trichoderma. These brainless, boneless conquistadors know where the gold is. Diaphanous filaments feel it out. And when they find it, they nuzzle in and plunder the mine. Under the microscope, the fungi resemble glassy wildflowers and spiny sea urchins. Each translucent arm holds aloft a fruit, viscous with amber. The ripe fruit pop and expel tiny spores, and the conquest continues.

The Stachybotrys chartarum fungus produces mycotoxins that can cause pneumonia — and death. There was a dank hotel on a Welsh hill. I developed pleurisy. My breathing petrified overnight. The X-ray showed an opaque white shadow had burrowed into my lungs.

pp. 270-71

Smoke blue rises from the foot-edge, gently staining the lower half. Saffron yellow licks the foot-edge. The rosy pools settle. Black mould has colonised the bronze shadow at the foot of the spine.

The proud bloom sticks out its three yellow-tipped tongues, pleased with its unnaturalness.

The iris is a stately flower that thrives in the most barren of soils. Rhizomes were planted on the graves of Greek women so the messenger deity, Iris, would guide their souls from the mortal realm, across the rainbow bridge to the afterlife.

Printer's page

Gangrenous blue reaches in from the fore-edge and footedge, in towards the gutter. Saffron yellow licks the footedge, gently swirling vertically. The pools burn crimson. Black mould has colonised the foot-edge near the gutter forming a 'U' shape. The binding has weakened, separating the signatures.

A burnished beetle.

Once, I was mauled by beetles on Annapurna, Nepal. I had been climbing the steep-stepped trail for days and was weak with gastroenteritis. I collapsed on a hillock. I barely noticed my flustered guide brushing my arms, heaving me back onto my feet. Numbly, I looked down at my limbs, I saw, but could not feel, blood flowing freely from tiny punctures in my skin.

Back endpaper

Gangrenous blue marbles the entire lower third. Pyrolysis has taken hold at the top- and fore-edges, blackening the paper. Saffron yellow licks the foot-edge. The crimson pools have appeared from and bleached out a GSA Library stamp. The 'U' tear at the foot of the gutter pulls away from the spine.

The rouged face: the trickster and tale-teller.

The blushing face: the teller of mortifications.

The bruised face: the teller of brutalities.

i Stevenson, Alison (2017). 'Interview Transcript: Alison Stevenson', vol. 1 of this thesis, p. 224–25.

ⁱⁱ Stevenson, Alison (2017). 'Interview Transcript: Alison Stevenson', vol. 1 of this thesis, p. 225.

iii Ewart, Gordon (2017). 'Interview Transcript: Gordon Ewart', vol. 1 of this thesis, p. 350.

iv Stevenson, Alison (2017). 'Interview Transcript: Alison Stevenson', vol. 1 of this thesis, p. 220.

^v Stevenson, Alison (2017). 'Interview Transcript: Alison Stevenson', vol. 1 of this thesis, p. 220–21.

vi Ewart, Gordon (2017). 'Interview Transcript: Gordon Ewart', vol. 1 of this thesis, p. 367.

 $^{^{}vii}$ Evans, Gretel (2017). 'Interview Transcript: Gretel Evans', vol. 1 of this thesis, p. 317.

viii Mitchell, Natalie (2017). 'Interview Transcript: Natalie Mitchell', vol. 1 of this thesis, p. 344.

ix Dadson, Emma (2017). 'Interview Transcript: Emma Dadson', vol. 1 of this thesis, p. 237–38.

 $^{^{\}rm x}$ Dadson, Emma (2017). 'Interview Transcript: Emma Dadson', vol. 1 of this thesis, p. 238.

xi Mitchell, Natalie (2017). 'Interview Transcript: Natalie Mitchell', vol. 1 of this thesis, p. 345.

xii Mitchell, Natalie (2017). 'Interview Transcript: Natalie Mitchell', vol. 1 of this thesis, p. 345.

xiii Mitchell, Natalie (2017). 'Interview Transcript: Natalie Mitchell', vol. 1 of this thesis, p. 345–46.

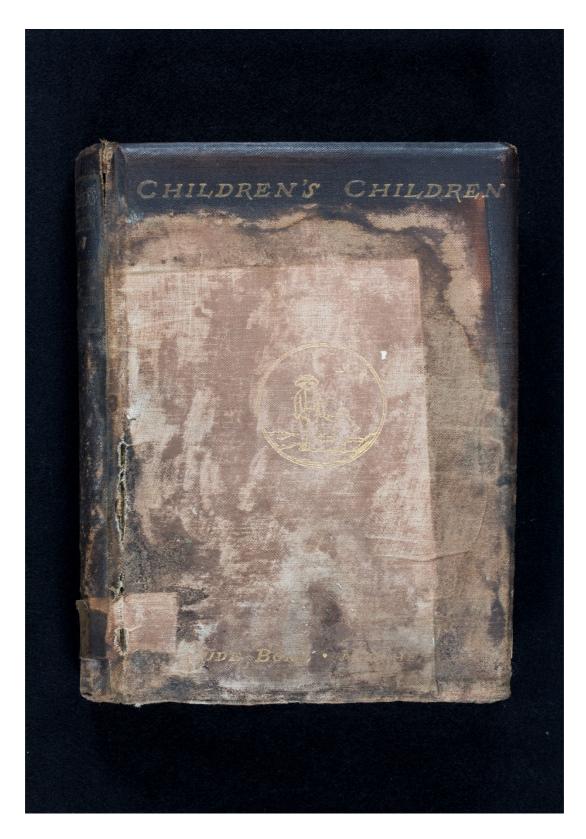


Plate 2.1 Children's Children by Gertrude Bone (credit: Ruudu Ulas)

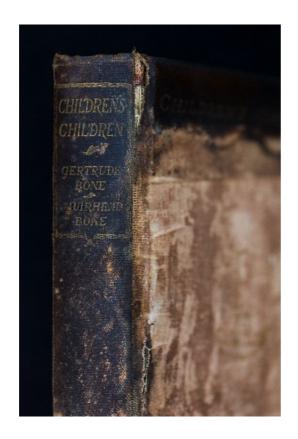


Plate 2.2 Detail of *Children's Children* spine (credit: Ruudu Ulas)



Plate 2.3 Detail of *Children's Children* spine (credit: Ruudu Ulas)

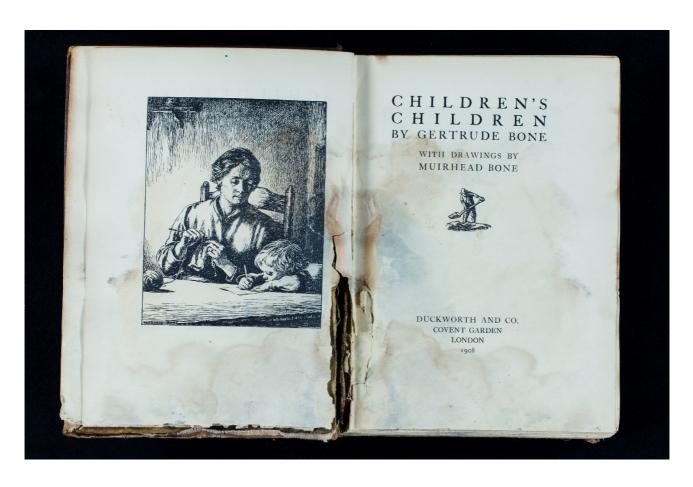


Plate 2.4 Children's Children title page (credit: Ruudu Ulas)

Plate 2.5 Children's Children pp. 8–9 (credit: Ruudu Ulas)

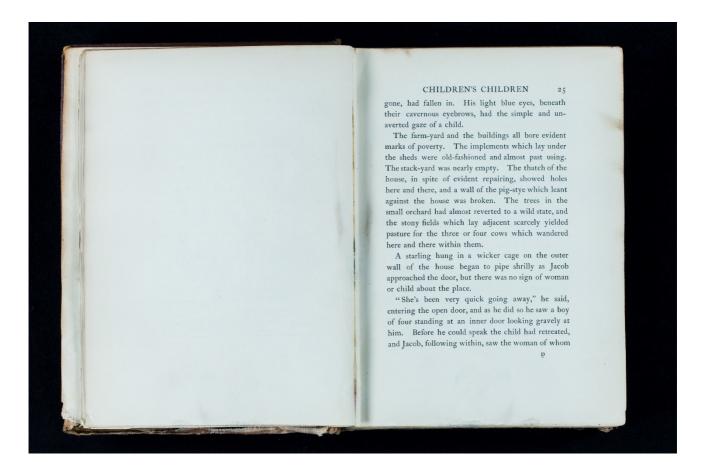


Plate 2.6 Children's Children pp. 24-5 (credit: Ruudu Ulas)

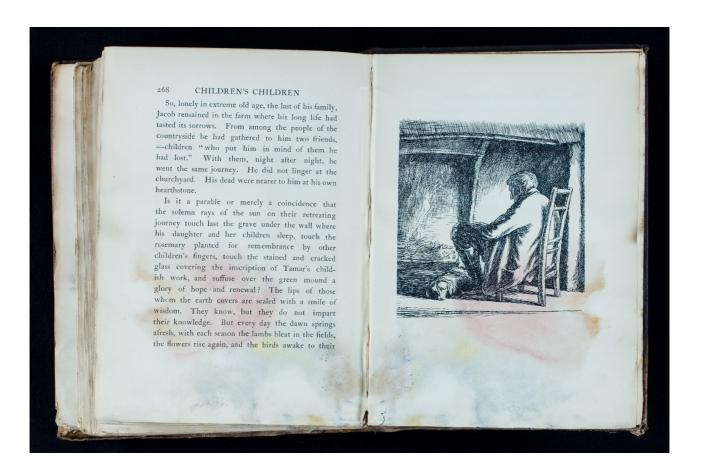


Plate 2.7 Children's Children pp. 268–69 (credit: Ruudu Ulas)



Plate 2.8 Children's Children back endpaper (credit: Ruudu Ulas)