

LETTER OF THE MONTH

DEAR SIR,

As a professional writer, I have been uncommonly interested in the great controversy on Boys' Weeklies, but both Orwell and Richards miss a main point. Current in Fleet Street there is a very simple and credible explanation on why *The Magnet* and *The Gem* stories give such scant reflection of the modern world and seem scarcely to have changed in thirty years. It is due, it would seem, neither to the vile machinations (? casual control) of a Tory millionaire on the one hand nor that alleged out-datedness of Mr. Richards on the other. It is merely that, so editorial gossips tell me, *The Magnet* and *The Gem* stories regularly revolve in an eight-year cycle. Every eight years, so they say, the old stories are touched up and painted over, to appear again with fresh gloss and entertain a new generation of boys.

I have not the time necessary for research to confirm this. Mr. Orwell has obviously missed it, but what does Mr. Richards say?

If the stories are recurrent, much is explained. It fully shows why they smack of 1910, clears up Mr. Richard's otherwise inexplicable literary output, and puts boyhood on its proper level of timelessness.

Besides, I much prefer the picture of Mr. Richards touching up his past work to the awful ordeal of an author condemned to inventing new Greyfriarsiana every week for life.

Yours sincerely,

HAROLD A. ALBERT

In reply, Mr. Richards writes:

Mr. Harold A. Albert tells us that he is a professional writer, on gossiping terms with editors who in their gossipy moments appear to have been pulling his leg to a considerable extent. I prefer to take this charitable view rather than to believe that Mr. Harold A. Albert is an unsuccessful scribe whose way to the editorial sanctum is barred by some inexorable Cerberus, and who, consequently, like so many disappointed Peris at the gate of Paradise, allows his judgement of those within the magic portals to be clouded by his irritation. In either case Mr. Harold A. Albert is talking nonsense.

Mr. Harold A. Albert states that it is "current in Fleet Street" that *The Magnet* revolves in an eight-year cycle, and at these regular intervals, old *Magnet* stories are touched up and reprinted; which, says Mr. Harold A. Albert, explains "why *The Magnet* gives such a scanty reflection of the modern world" – an utterly unfounded statement, by the way. Mr. Harold A. Albert must have provided himself with an Ear of Dionysius seventy-seven times amplified, to hear even a whisper of such gossip in Fleet Street. He tells us that he has no time to confirm this. Mr. Harold A. Albert's time is no doubt extremely valuable, but a few precious moments should have been sacrificed to confirming such a statement before chucking it at the public. It would have been easy to examine an old file of *Magnets*, which would have led Mr. Harold A. Albert to the startling discovery that every *Magnet*, from the first issue, had contained a new and original story. The same characters, certainly, appear each time, but the plots are infinitely varied, many of them connected with current events that could not possibly serve a second or third time. And – though I do not expect Mr. Harold A. Albert to understand it – *The Magnet* gives a faithful reflection of life at the very hour of printing. *The Magnet* author knows

his business so well, that every number is right up to date, the fact that the characters have been before the public for thirty years makes no difference whatever to this.

There were strikes, slumps, unemployment, Socialism and Communism and other blunders and imbecilities, before 1910, and Frank Richards left them alone then, as he leaves them alone now, because they are not proper subjects for healthy young people to contemplate. The Human Boy is Frank Richard's subject, and except for "light externals", the Human Boy has not changed since Tom Brown went to school. Frank Richards keeps a careful eye on those externals; for the rest he is content with human nature, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.

Frank Richards will write of Socialist schoolboys, or Communist schoolboys, or schoolboys deeply concerned with the influence of blue in the arts, when he finds such schoolboys in actual existence. So far, he has never had the misfortune to encounter any such young asses.

From HORIZON - JUNE 1940

To the editor

DEAR SIR,

Mr. Richards scored his point in our correspondence on the Boys' Weeklies last month...and spoiled his reply with gratuitous invective. Despite the paper shortage, I hope you will allow me to reply to his slanderous hint that I may be 'an unsuccessful scribe whose way to the editorial sanctum is barred.' Far from being the case, the editorial article in the May *Writer* describes me as 'the most successful free-lance journalist in this country'. This sets me blushing, but perhaps Mr. Richards' face is also red.

Haslemere, Surrey

HAROLD A. ALBERT

From HORIZON - JULY 1940