

Horizon Sequel (June 1940)

Harold A. Albert:

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.

Frank Richards:

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 Richards’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.