



How the Whale Became and Other Stories

Books Reviewed:

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Issue:

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Reviewer:

[Clive Barnes](#) [3]

~~Not a choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

These creation tales are nearly 40 years old, but age does not weary them. Inventive, spare and tough, and suitable for anyone over 7 or 8, they look not only to an imaginary time when life was scarcely formed, but also at human behaviour in its rawest state. Although ending on a high note with the noble elephant, the collection often features animals that display the most unattractive of our traits, whether it is pride, ambition, selfishness, cunning or foolishness. The interest in this new edition lies in Morris's illustrations, and here I will declare a preference. I would much rather do without illustration at all. In fact, best of all, I would listen to Hughes himself telling the tales on tape. The stories are written as if told. They take place in an unknown landscape; they feature animals that sometimes have not yet assumed their familiar shapes or dimensions; and they include God, whose own size and appearance are always a problem. Morris takes a largely conventional approach to all this. Her animals are as they are now, and God is the familiar human sized Judaeo-Christian model. - Her illustrations, all in colour, are undeniably accomplished and attractive but they cannot be said to interpret, complement or add to the text. Their function, which they fulfil beautifully, is to bring lavish decoration to a high-class production.

Running Order:

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