



[Home](#) > Into the Forest

Into the Forest

Books Reviewed:

[Into the Forest](#) [1]

Issue:

[150](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Clive Barnes](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

A small boy is sent, like Red Riding Hood, to take a basket of food to his sick grandmother. He walks, in his bright green and yellow striped jumper, down a pristine white path through a monochrome forest. There he meets other children, as grey as the forest: a boy leading a cow, a girl who is described as having golden hair, and a boy and a girl huddled around a fire under a tree. Beyond them, within the trees, fragments of their own stories appear in the twisted forms of the trees: a giant's club, three bears, a child in a cage. If this recalls other, sunnier picture books, there is no doubt that here we are in familiar Browne (and Bettelheim) territory, where fairy tale is a way of dealing with the solitude of childhood and the disconcerting and even threatening shape of the adult world. At the beginning of this tale, the father of the boy has unaccountably disappeared and it is only after his journey through the forest and the discovery of his recovered grandma that the boy's family is reunited in full vibrant colour. The book is, as ever, self referential, and some older readers may feel Browne has done it better before. Some child readers might very well wonder why the boy's mother hadn't told him where his father was in the first place. However, Browne's images, in their metamorphic ambiguity, are as powerful and resonant as ever: trees that twist into living shapes, stiff as horns or hooves, pliant as limbs or hair; and intricately defined fallen leaves that might be as soft as feathers or as sharp as spear points. The pictures are full of tension, not least between the delicate precision of their execution and the emotional disturbance they evoke.

Running Order:

57

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[1] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/into-the-forest>

[2] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/150>

[3] <http://pop.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/clive-barnes>