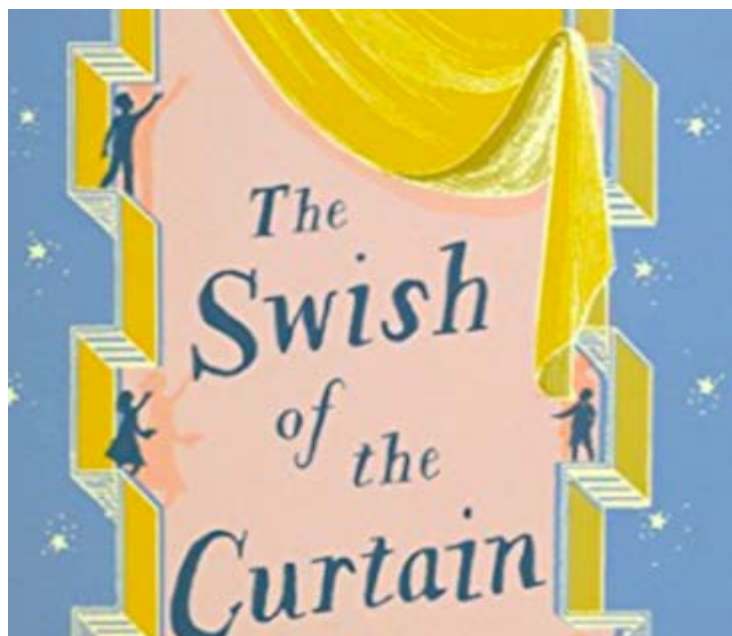


Saturday, April 6, 2019

*Book & Film*  
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# Swish Swish

*We've Got an Abandoned Meeting Hall, Let's Put on a Show!*

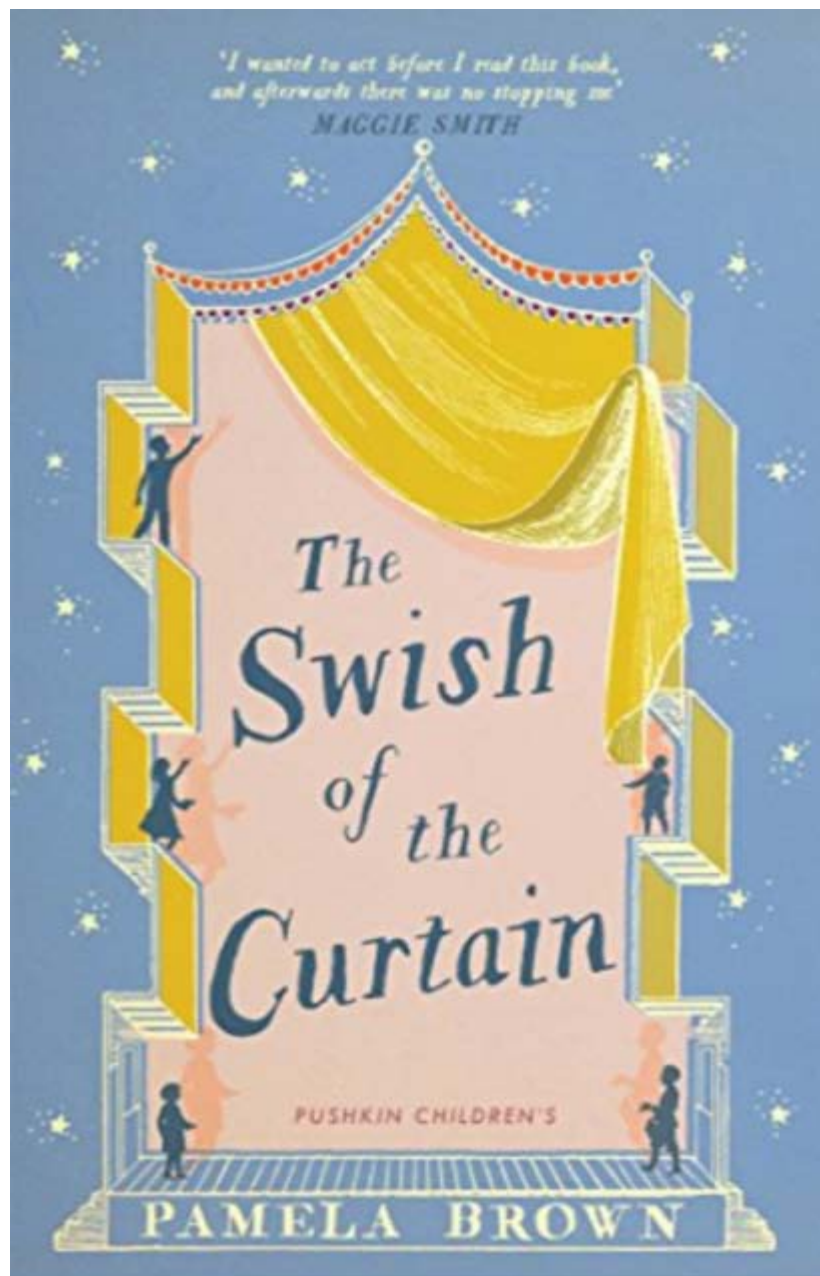
March 25, 2019

Michael Giltz

Long ago, the British perfected a certain type of children's book. Think of the 1930's *Swallows and Amazons* by Arthur Ransome. In that delightful classic, the children of two families meet during vacation and have modest adventures of the sort children have. The stakes are typically quite low and thus—to the children involved—immeasurably high. Invariably the kids display diverse and vivid personalities, clash a little, learn a little, and have a jolly good time.

When done decently, a book in this genre can be as satisfying as a cozy mystery to Agatha Christie fans. When done very well, they can be corkers. Pamela Brown did it quite well indeed with *The Swish Of The Curtain*, first published in 1941 (when she was just 16!).

*The Swish Of The Curtain* involves best friends from two families who befriend the kids in a third family just arrived at their small town. Bored and restless, they stumble across an abandoned meeting hall perfect for putting on theatricals. In the blink of an eye, the industrious children clean it up, dub themselves the Blue Door Theatrical Company, create their own evening of entertainment from scratch (including original songs, some dancing, skits, a melodrama and so on) and mount it to roaring approval.



Roll credits? Not quite. In the many pale imitations of strong books like this, the evening of the big show would be the finale. But this triumph occurs only a third of the way into the book. Author Brown then depicts how out of sorts the kids are in the days and weeks after their great success. Reading about the high of the big game feels familiar. But reading about the low that can follow feels like a refreshing dose of life as it's really lived.

That honest practicality gives this book and its four sequels a unique appeal. *The Swish Of The Curtain* details the hard work involved in actually doing what they do, even in a small way in a small town. Our troupe performs other pieces, so they might refashion a cape from one skit into a skirt for a show months later. Brown presents this idea of recycling costumes and props (a mainstay of theatrical companies) without fuss, but it's merely one element in the novel's realism.

The kids fight and bicker, with an unspoken attraction between two of them simmering in the background. They never act on or even speak of it, which is almost shocking. More radically, the kids become obsessed with greasepaint and the spotlight. Some coolly calculate which courses at school they can backslide. Another

intentionally fails an entire year of education to devote more time to the violin, consequences be damned. He has no intention of going into business and must focus on an upcoming audition for a musical conservatory.

Two years pass, with the kids performing at everything from outdoor fetes to fundraisers to entertaining little kids with a Christmas pageant. All the while, their families wait for this silly fad to pass or start putting their feet down. “Now enough of this nonsense!” they say.

The Swish Of The Curtain doesn’t suggest following your heart is easy or delightful or destined to pay off, not by any means. But it does make clear in a simple, straightforward manner that nothing should stop you from trying.

Substitute any passion for that of the theater and you can imagine how appealing this book is to kids...and how frightening to sensible parents. Pushkin Press is reprinting all five books in the series this year. If you have kids of your own, beware.

**Pushkin Children’s Books (March 12, 2019)**

Tags: Pamela Brown, The Swish Of The Curtain

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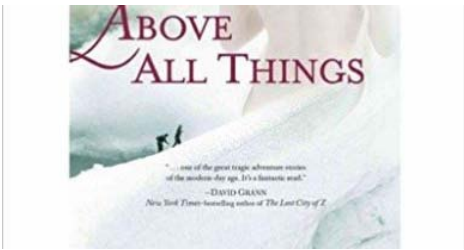
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## Michael Giltz

Michael Giltz is a freelance writer based in New York City covering all areas of entertainment, politics, sports and more. He has written extensively for the New York Post, New York Daily News, New York Magazine, The Advocate, Out, Huffington Post, Premiere Magazine, Entertainment Weekly, BookFilter, USA Today and the Los Angeles Times. He co-hosts the long-running podcast Showbiz Sandbox.

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