

= The Phantom Tollbooth =

The Phantom Tollbooth is a children 's fantasy adventure novel written by Norton Juster with illustrations by Jules Feiffer , published in 1961 by Random House (USA) . It tells the story of a bored young boy named Milo who unexpectedly receives a magic tollbooth one afternoon and , having nothing better to do , drives through it in his toy car , transporting him to the Kingdom of Wisdom , once prosperous but now troubled . There , he acquires two faithful companions and goes on a quest to restore to the kingdom its exiled princesses ? named Rhyme and Reason ? from the Castle in the Air . In the process , he learns valuable lessons , finding a love of learning . The text is full of puns and wordplay , and many events , such as when Milo unintentionally jumps to Conclusions , an island in Wisdom , explore the literal meanings of idioms .

In 1958 , Juster had received a Ford Foundation grant for a children 's book about cities . Unable to make progress on that project , he turned to writing what became The Phantom Tollbooth , his first book . His housemate , Feiffer , a cartoonist , interested himself in the project . Jason Epstein , an editor at Random House , bought the book and published . It has received strong acclaimed reviews and has sold in excess of three million copies , unexpectedly more than its predictions . It has been adapted into a film , opera , and play , and translated into many languages .

Though the book is on its face an adventure story , a major theme is the need for a love of education ; through this , Milo applies what he has learned in school , advances in his personal development , and learns to love the life that previously bored him . Critics have compared its appeal to that of Lewis Carroll 's Alice 's Adventures in Wonderland and to L. Frank Baum 's The Wonderful Wizard of Oz .

= = Plot = =

Milo is a boy bored by the world around him ; every activity seems a waste of time . He arrives home from another boring day at school to find a mysterious package . Among its contents are a small tollbooth and a map of " the Lands Beyond " , illustrating the Kingdom of Wisdom (which will also guide the reader from its place on the endpapers of the book) . Attached to the package is a note " For Milo , who has plenty of time " . Warned by an included sign to have his destination in mind , he decides without much thought to go to Dictionopolis , assuming this is a pretend game to be played on the floor of his room . He maneuvers through the tollbooth in his electric toy car , and instantly finds himself driving on a road that is clearly not in his city apartment .

Milo begins with Expectations , a pleasant place where he starts on Wisdom 's road . In Expectations , he seeks directions from the Whether Man , who is full of endless talk . As Milo drives on , he daydreams and soon is paying no attention at all , and gets lost in the Doldrums , a colorless place where nothing ever happens . Milo is soon joining the inhabitants , the Lethargarians , in killing time there , a pastime angrily interrupted by the arrival of Tock , an oversize talking dog with an alarm clock on each side (a " watchdog ") , who tells Milo that only by thinking can he get out of the Doldrums . Head abuzz with unaccustomed thoughts , Milo is soon back on his road , and the watchdog joins him on his journey through Wisdom .

Milo and Tock travel to Dictionopolis , one of two capital cities of the divided Kingdom of Wisdom , and home to King Azaz the Unabridged . They meet King Azaz 's cabinet officials and visit the Word Market , wherein are bought and sold the words and letters that empower the world . A fight between the Spelling Bee and the blustering Humbug breaks up the market , and Milo and Tock are arrested by the very short Officer Shrift . In prison , Milo meets the Which (not to be confused with Witch) , also known as Faintly Macabre , long in charge of which words should be used in Wisdom . She tells him how the two rulers , King Azaz and his brother , the Mathemagician , had two adopted younger sisters , Rhyme and Reason , to whom everyone came to settle disputes . All lived in harmony until the rulers disagreed with the princesses ' decision that letters (championed by Azaz) and numbers (by the Mathemagician) were equally important . They banished the princesses to the Castle in the Air , and since then , the land has had neither Rhyme nor Reason .

Milo and Tock leave the dungeon . King Azaz hosts them at a banquet where the guests literally eat

their words , served to them on plates . After the meal , King Azaz lets Milo and Tock talk themselves into a dangerous quest to rescue the princesses . Azaz flatters the Humbug into being their guide , and boy , dog and insect set off for the Mathemagician 's capital of Digitopolis as they must gain his approval before they can begin their quest .

Along the way , they meet such characters as Alec Bings , a little boy suspended in the air who sees through things and who will grow down until he reaches the ground . Milo then loses time in substituting for Chroma the Great , a conductor whose orchestra creates the colors of the world .

In Digitopolis , they meet the Mathemagician , who is still angry at Azaz , and who will not give his blessing to anything that his brother has approved . Milo maneuvers him into saying he will permit the quest if the boy can prove the two have concurred on anything since they banished the princesses . To the number wizard 's shock , Milo proves that the two have agreed to disagree , and the Mathemagician gives his reluctant consent .

In the Mountains of Ignorance , the journeyers contend with demons like the Terrible Trivium and the Gelatinous Giant . After overcoming testing obstacles and their own fears , they reach the Castle in the Air . Princesses Rhyme and Reason welcome Milo and agree to return to Wisdom . Unable to enter the castle , the demons cut it loose , letting it drift away , but Milo realizes Tock can carry them down because time flies . The demons pursue , but the armies of Wisdom repel them . Rhyme and Reason heal the divisions in the old Kingdom of Wisdom , Azaz and the Mathemagician are reconciled , and all enjoy a three @-@ day celebration .

Milo says goodbye and drives back through the tollbooth . Suddenly he is back in his own room , and discovers he has been gone only an hour , though his journey seemed to take weeks . He awakens the next day with plans to return to the kingdom , but finds the tollbooth gone when he gets home from school . A note instead is there , " For Milo , who now knows the way . " The note states that the tollbooth is being sent to another child who needs help finding his direction in life . Milo is somewhat disappointed but agrees and looks at a now @-@ interesting world around him , concluding that even if he found a way back , he might not have time to go , for there is so much to do right where he is .

= = Writing = =

Architect Norton Juster was living in his hometown of Brooklyn , after three years in the navy . In June 1960 , he gained a \$ 5 @, @ 000 grant from the Ford Foundation to write a children 's book about cities . Juster argued that the young baby boomers would soon have responsibility for the cities , and many lived in the suburbs and did not know them . In his proposal , he said he wanted " to stimulate and heighten perception ? to help children notice and appreciate the visual world around them ? to help excite them and shape their interest in an environment they will eventually reshape . " Beginning with great enthusiasm , he ground to a halt with too many notes and too little progress . He took a weekend break with friends at Fire Island , and came back determined to put aside the cities book and seek inspiration in another writing project .

Juster 's guilt over his lack of progress on the cities book had led him to write pieces of stories about a little boy named Milo , which he began to develop into a book . Juster quit his job so that he could work on the book . His imagination fired by a boy who approached him on the street and with whom he discussed the nature of infinity , Juster wanted to finish the story about " a boy who asked too many questions " before returning to the book on cities . Juster shared his house in Brooklyn Heights with cartoonist Jules Feiffer whose bedroom was immediately below , and who could hear him pacing in the night . Feiffer was surprised to learn that his friend 's insomnia was not caused by the cities book , but by a book about a boy . Juster showed Feiffer the draft to date , and , unbidden , the artist began sketching illustrations . Feiffer knew Judy Sheftel , who put deals together in the publishing trade and was his future bride . Sheftel got Jason Epstein , an innovative editor at Random House with a deep appreciation for children 's literature , to agree to review the manuscript . Some at Random House considered the book 's vocabulary too difficult : at the time , educators advised against children 's literature containing words the target audience did not already know , fearing the unfamiliar would discourage young learners . Based on seven chapters of manuscript ,

plus a three @-@ page outline of the rest of the story , Epstein bought the book .

Since Juster did the cooking for the housemates , if Feiffer wanted to eat , he had to do the drawings . Feiffer quickly realized the book would require illustrations of the type and quality that John Tenniel had created for Lewis Carroll 's Alice 's Adventures in Wonderland and although a nationally @-@ known artist , doubted his competence to do the text justice . Feiffer considers the double @-@ spread illustration of demons late in the book to be a success and one of his favorites . It differs from his usual style (which would involve a white background) , and instead uses Gustave Doré 's drawings as an inspiration .

It became a game , with Feiffer trying to draw things the way he wanted , and Juster trying to describe things that were impossible to sketch . These included the Triple Demons of Compromise ? one short and fat , one tall and thin , and the third exactly like the first two . Feiffer got his revenge by depicting the author as the Whether Man , clad in a toga .

Repeated edits altered the protagonist 's name (originally Tony) , removed his parents entirely from the book , and deleted text attempting to describe how the tollbooth package had been delivered . Milo 's age was removed from the text ? early drafts have him aged eight or nine ? as Juster decided not to state it , lest potential readers decide they were too old to care .

= = Themes = =

Since no one has ever bothered to explain the importance of learning to Milo , he regards school as the biggest waste of time in his life . Juster intended that the book speak to the importance of learning to love learning . Teaching methods that might bore children , by memorization for example , are mocked in the book , as in the case of the Spelling Bee . Like the Bee , the Humbug 's insult to his fellow insect goes over Milo 's head , but possibly not the reader 's : " A slavish concern for the composition of words is the sign of a bankrupt intellect . " According to Mary Liston in her journal article on law in fantasy realms , " The Phantom Tollbooth concerns the difference between education and wisdom and what processes are conducive to synthesizing both , so as to encourage an attitude of engagement , alertness , and responsibility within an increasingly autonomous individual . "

Another theme is the need for common sense to back up rules . Milo journeys through a land where , without Rhyme or Reason , the art of governance has been lost , leading to bizarre results . Milo repeatedly meets characters to whom words are more important than their meaning . The Whether Man , for all his talk , is unable to provide Milo with the information or guidance the boy wants , while Officer Shrift 's investigation of the overturning of the Word Market contains the forms of law , without justice . The denizens around Digitopolis are little better ; the twelve @-@ faced Dodecahedron , named for what he is , turns the logic of his naming on its head when he asks if everyone with one face is called Milo . The attitudes now displayed by the adherents of both brothers are summed up by the Dodecahedron , " as long as the answer is right , who cares if the question is wrong ? "

As Milo struggles with words and begins the process of making himself their master , he also has difficulty with numbers , especially when he speaks with .58 of a child , who with parents and two siblings (whom Milo does not meet) makes up an average family . Milo has had problems in school with mathematics and problem solving ; his reaction to this encounter is to protest that averages are not real . The partial child enlightens Milo that there is beauty in math beyond the tedium of learning an endless set of rules , " one of the nicest things about mathematics , or anything else you might care to learn , is that many of the things which can never be , often are " . Late in the book , Princess Reason counsels Milo , who has much learning ahead of him , not to be discouraged by its complexity , " You must never feel badly about making mistakes ... as long as you take the trouble to learn from them . For you often learn more by being wrong for the right reasons than you do by being right for the wrong reasons " . An index card in the Juster papers sets forth the germ of the princess ' " memorable " counsel to Milo , " Quite often the road to Rhyme + Reason is through the right mistakes . "

Although Milo is bored with learning , that does not mean he knew nothing before his journey . He

exhibits characteristics of a well @-@ schooled child of his time ; his speech is polite and peppered with " please " and " thank you " , and when he unexpectedly encounters the partial child , he requests pardon for staring . He can count to a thousand , though his tact in bringing up the subject in the presence of the numbers @-@ hating King Azaz is not the best . Mindful of his mother 's admonition to eat lightly when a guest , he initially orders a light meal at the banquet , only to find the waiters bringing in insubstantial light beams . Not realizing he will be asked to eat his words , he then makes a plausible start at a speech before being interrupted by the king . The Phantom Tollbooth displays Milo 's growth ; Leonard S. Marcus in his notes to its annotated edition writes that the boy learns to think in the abstract , pledging after his unintentional jump to Conclusions that he will not make up his mind again without a good reason . Milo does not accept the word of the demon of insincerity that he is a threat and is rewarded by learning he is not . Just for a moment , Milo is able to float in the air beside Alec Bings and see things from the perspective he will have as an adult , allowing the young reader to contemplate what it will be like to do the same . According to Liston , Milo " transforms himself from an unthinking and compliant Lethargarian to a young adult with greater consciousness , a firmer sense of self , and a newly found set of responsibilities " .

Even though the day is won by Milo and his fellow questers , it is a great but not a permanent victory , as he hears the kingly brothers begin to argue again as he departs . Juster has written that it was his intent to get Milo out of there as quickly as possible , and that " the fight would have to be won again and again " .

Milo 's trip through the lands beyond the tollbooth teaches the previously bored child to appreciate both journey and destination . This is a lesson that had been unlearned by the citizens of Wisdom , as exemplified by the described fate of the twin cities of Reality and Illusions . Although the city of Illusions never actually existed , Reality was lost as its residents concentrated on getting to their destination as quickly as possible , and , unappreciated , the city withered away , unnoticed by the busy people who still hasten along its former streets . Milo meets his trials by defining himself as different from the kingdom 's inhabitants , who either demand or accept conformity , as enforced by the kingdom 's laws , which discourage (and even outlaw) thought . Milo cannot accept such laws , beginning when , in the Doldrums , he thinks , thus violating a local ordinance and separating himself from the thoughtless inhabitants . Liston opined that because the Kingdom of Wisdom 's " laws require the impossible , they contradict what it means to be fully human " .

= = Influences and comparisons = =

The Phantom Tollbooth contains allusions to many works , including those loved by Juster in his own upbringing . Some of Juster 's favorite books as a child , including *The Wind in the Willows* , had endpaper maps ; Juster insisted on one for his over Feiffer 's opposition , going so far as to sketch one and require that his collaborator reproduce it in his own style . Juster was also inspired by his father Samuel 's love of puns , with which the book is more than sprinkled . In his childhood , Juster spent much time listening to the radio . According to Juster , the need to envision the action when listening to radio serials helped inspire *The Phantom Tollbooth* , as well as yielding the character of Tock , based on sidekick Jim Fairfield from *Jack Armstrong* , the All @-@ American Boy . Jim gave Tock his wisdom , courage , and adventurous spirit . As a child , Juster had synesthesia , and could only do arithmetic by making associations between numbers and colors . He remembered that the condition affected word associations . " One of the things I always did was think literally when I heard words . On the Lone Ranger [radio serial] they would say , ' Here come the Injuns ! ' and I always had an image of engines , of train engines . "

Some of the incidents in the book stem from Juster 's own past . In Digitopolis , the Numbers Mine , where gemlike numerals are dug for , recalled one of Juster 's architecture professors at the University of Pennsylvania , who compared numbers and equations to jewels . The Marx Brothers films were a staple for Juster as a child and his father would quote lengthy passages from the movies ; this inspired the unending series of straight @-@ faced puns that fills the book .

Growing up in a Jewish @-@ American household where the parents demanded high achievement , Juster was intimately familiar with expectations , though in his case many of his parents ' hopes

were centered on his older brother , an academic star . The Terrible Trivium , the well @-@ dressed , polite demon who sets the questers to mindless tasks , was Juster 's way of representing his own tendency to avoid what he should be doing in favor of a more congenial occupation , such as his evasion of the grant project to write The Phantom Tollbooth . Juster drew on Feiffer 's life experiences as well ; the Whether Man 's adage " Expect everything , I always say , and the unexpected never happens " was a favorite of the cartoonist 's mother .

Juster had not read Alice 's Adventures in Wonderland when he wrote The Phantom Tollbooth , but the two books , each about a bored child plunged into a world of absurd logic , have repeatedly been compared . According to Daniel Hahn in his 2012 article on the Juster book , " Alice is clearly Milo 's closest literary kin " . Milo 's conversation with the Whether Man , which leaves him no more comprehending than when he came , recalls that of Alice with the Cheshire Cat . The questions of authority (something omnipresent for a child) and of justice run through both books ; the Queen of Hearts ' arbitrary justice is echoed , though with less violence , by Officer Shrift . Alice 's sovereigns , representing the authority figures of Victorian childhood life , rule absolutely (though not necessarily effectively) ; a child of the post @-@ World War II world , Milo journeys through a more bureaucratic realm . His quest is far more purposeful than the frustrating journey Alice experiences , and the outcome differs as well ? Milo restores his kingdom while Alice overturns hers . Carroll leaves us uncertain if Alice has learned anything from her adventures , but Juster makes it clear that Milo has acquired tools he will need to find his way through life .

= = Publication and reception = =

The Phantom Tollbooth was published in September 1961 . Its competition among new books for the minds and hearts of children included Roald Dahl 's James and the Giant Peach . The Bronze Bow , set in Biblical times , was newly available , and would bring Elizabeth George Speare her second Newbery Award in three years . Neither publisher nor first @-@ time author expected many sales for The Phantom Tollbooth , but Juster was nevertheless disappointed not to find his work on store shelves . His mother , Minnie , did her part , as her son put it , " terrorizing " bookstore owners into displaying it .

Juster says the book was rescued from the remainders table when Emily Maxwell wrote a strong review of it in The New Yorker . Maxwell wrote , " As Pilgrim 's Progress is concerned with the awakening of the sluggardly spirit , The Phantom Tollbooth is concerned with the awakening of the lazy mind . " Hers was far from the only positive piece ; children 's author Ann McGovern reviewed it for The New York Times , writing " Norton Juster 's amazing fantasy has something wonderful for anyone old enough to relish the allegorical wisdom of Alice in Wonderland and the pointed whimsy of The Wizard of Oz " . John Crosby wrote for the New York Herald Tribune , " In a world which sometimes seems to have gone mad , it is refreshing to pause and consider for a moment a book for children which contains a character called ' Faintly Macabre , the not @-@ so @-@ wicked Which . ' The name of the book is The Phantom Tollbooth and it was written by a bearded elf named Norton Juster and illustrated by Jules Feiffer , who is the cleverest of the young neurotics " . Dissenting was the Bulletin of the Center for Children 's Books , which in March 1962 deemed the book an " intensive and extensive fantasy , heavily burdened with contrivance and whimsy " .

In 1962 , the book was published in Britain . Siriol Hugh @-@ Jones wrote for The Times Literary Supplement , " The Phantom Tollbooth is something every adult seems sure will turn into a modern Alice ... The obvious guess is that the appeal of this sort of writing is directed towards just the sort of adults who derive a perfectly grown @-@ up pleasure from regularly rereading the Alices . As one might expect , it is illustrated by every grown @-@ up 's favourite child @-@ like pictures with the built @-@ in sad sophistication , the work of Jules Feiffer . " Jennifer Bourdillon reviewed it for The Listener , " This is the story of an imaginary journey , a sort of Pilgrim 's Progress of a little boy in his car ... One would hardly have thought from the sound of this that it would have so magnetic an appeal , but the brilliant verbal humour and the weird and wonderful characters (the Dodecahedron. the Watchdog , Faintly Macabre) make it that rare delight , a book which parents and children can share . " It reached Australia in 1963 ; The Canberra Times ' reviewer , J.E.B. , deemed it

memorable , causing readers to quote from it and leaf through its pages again .

= = Later history , editions and adaptations = =

After publication , Juster sent a copy of the book to the Ford Foundation , with an explanation of how the projected book on cities had transformed into The Phantom Tollbooth . He never heard back from them , and learned years later that they were delighted by the turn of events . With the book having become an unexpected hit , Juster found himself answering letters from young readers , and a few parents . He found that children understood the wordplay at different ages , and heard from the occasional college student as well . Some students wrote a second time after a gap of years " and they 'll talk to me about a whole different book , normally . But now they 've got a lot more of the words right . A lot more of the fun kind of crazy references " . He learned too that readers were capable of more than he had intended , as in the case of the letter sent by the Mathemagician to King Azaz . Composed entirely of numbers , some readers assumed it was a code and set about breaking it , only to appeal to Juster for help when they were not successful . The numbers were not intended to have any meaning , and were used to convey that the Mathemagician 's letter could not have been understood by Azaz or his advisors .

As the book became acclaimed as a modern classic , it began to be used in the classroom , and Juster corresponded with some teachers . After the book 's readers attained adulthood , they wrote of its influence on them . Novelist Cathleen Schine recalled , " it was as if someone had turned on the lights . The concepts of irony , of double entendre , of words as play , of the pleasure and inevitability of intellectual absurdity , were suddenly accessible to me . They made sense to me in an extremely personal way . " British fantasy writer Diana Wynne Jones read her copy so often it fell apart : " it didn 't occur to us that it might be about something . It struck us as a little like The Wizard of Oz , only better . " One reader , signing himself " Milo " , wrote to Rolling Stone in 1970 , " If you want to get freaked out of your undernourished head , pick up The Phantom Tollbooth , by Norton Juster . They tell you it 's a kids ' book , but take my word for it , no one who reads it is ever the same . No hype . "

The book continued to garner positive reviews and comments . In 1998 , Amanda Foreman wrote for The Sunday Times of London , " I want to shout about The Phantom from the rooftops . I want to stand in Waterloo and press copies into people 's hands . This is a book that should be in every home Whether you are 8 or 88 Juster 's mixture of allegorical wisdom and logical whimsy will take you on a journey of the spirit . The Phantom is a mappa mundi of our hearts , proving once again that in laughter and simplicity lies the truth of life " . In a 2011 article written for the book 's fiftieth anniversary , Adam Gopnik wrote , " The book is made magical by Juster 's and Feiffer 's gift for transforming abstract philosophical ideas into unforgettable images . "

The book has been translated into many foreign languages , including Chinese , Croatian , Japanese , Korean , Russian , Thai , Turkish and three different Spanish editions : one for Spain , one for Latin America , and one for Spanish speakers in the United States . Juster states that he does not know if the wordplay of the original carries through to the translated works . In 1970 , Chuck Jones made it into a musical film of the same name , with Milo 's room in live action , and animation beyond the tollbooth . Juster dislikes the film , describing it as " drivel " . In February 2010 , director Gary Ross began development of a remake of The Phantom Tollbooth , with the first draft of the script written by Alex Tse .

In 2011 , The Annotated Phantom Tollbooth was published , which includes sketches and copies of Juster 's handwritten drafts and word lists , Feiffer 's early drawings , and an introduction and annotations by Leonard S. Marcus . A fiftieth anniversary edition was also published , with appreciations by Maurice Sendak , Michael Chabon and Philip Pullman . More than three million copies have been sold of the original book in the U.S. alone . It has been adapted into a small @-@ scale opera with music by Arnold Black , and book by Juster and Sheldon Harnick , produced by Opera Delaware in 1995 . It was then revamped into a musical that had its debut to strong reviews at the Kennedy Center in Washington , D.C. and then made a national tour .

The Phantom Tollbooth remains acknowledged as a classic of children 's literature . Based on a

2007 online poll , the U.S. National Education Association named it one of " Teachers ' Top 100 Books for Children " . In 2012 , it was ranked number 21 among all @-@ time children 's novels in a survey published by School Library Journal .

Juster feels that his book still has relevance today , although children 's lives have changed since 1961 :

When I grew up I still felt like that puzzled kid ? disconnected , disinterested and confused . There was no rhyme or reason in his life . My thoughts focused on him , and I began writing about his childhood , which was really mine ... Today 's world of texting and tweeting is quite a different place , but children are still the same as they 've always been . They still get bored and confused , and still struggle to figure out the important questions of life . Well , one thing has changed : As many states eliminate tolls on highways , some children may never encounter a real tollbooth . Luckily there are other routes to the Lands Beyond . And it is possible to seek them , and fun to try .

= = Other works cited = =

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= = Selected editions = =