

## PAMELA BROWN'S *THE SWISH OF THE CURTAIN*: A PROGRAMME FOR LIFE?

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I LIKE to think that we who work on juvenilia are examining the *real* Children's Literature: that is, literature *by* children, not just *for* them. Pamela Brown's *The Swish of the Curtain* of 1941, however, is both *by* a juvenile, and *for* juveniles; it is also *about* them. Young Pamela Brown was just thirteen when she began her novel. It presents a group of stage-struck young people who find a deserted chapel, convert it to a theatre, and proceed to stage shows there with great success. Pamela wrote in Colchester in England, on the threshold of the Second World War; but the experience she drew on, the amateur theatricals she performed with her young friends, was undertaken before the war, and the war itself, which was exploding all around her as she wrote, does not figure in her narrative. She finished *The Swish of the Curtain* "soon after her fifteenth birthday," says the book's blurb, "which fell in 1940."<sup>1</sup> It was published the next year, when she was sixteen, by Thomas Nelson and Sons, who remained her publishers over many years. The book was a remarkable success, reprinted in 1942, 1944, 1946 ... and many times since. And it is still in print.

Pamela Brown wrote several sequels, besides many other books; but none seems to have been so successful, nor to have had so many reprints, as the one written by the teenager. Besides its long shelf life as a book, *The Swish of the Curtain* became a radio series on BBC, and in 1980 it was adapted as a three-part television serial, which can still be found. It is lovingly done, preserving all seven of the original novel's young protagonists.<sup>2</sup> It seems, then, that for many decades now the book has been a rallying-call for all stage-struck young people. Even today there is a drama school for young people called "Swish of the Curtain," with branches in several counties in England, and summer productions of such shows as *Peter Pan* and *Annie*.

Not bad, for a book written *and published* by a teenager! And it is interesting to me that though Pamela Brown went on to write many books for young readers as well as radio and television scripts (she was a mainstay of the BBC Children's Hour programs), it is her youthful achievement that continues to outshine all the later

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works. No doubt part of this novel's success with young people was the fact that it was by one of themselves; but this "first, fine, careless rapture" of a girl who went on to become a prolific novelist certainly stands as a shining example of successful teenage authorship.

Despite being both successful and prolific, Pamela Brown may not be familiar to scholars of juvenilia today, nor *The Swish of the Curtain* either. Writing for children seldom achieves classic status. So a brief synopsis with commentary may be in order. Seven talented young people from three contiguous households in the fictional town of Fenchester share an ambition to make it big on the stage, and they luck into a disused chapel, which they are allowed to convert into a theatre: they call it the Blue Door Theatre. Each has a salient talent. The eldest, Nigel Halford, is an aspiring artist and becomes a scene painter. Of his twin siblings, Vicky does acrobatics and hopes to be a dancer; "Bulldog" is a general handyman, lighting expert, and contriver of the curtain that is finally made to "swish" in a satisfying manner. Jeremy Darwin, next door, shines in music, plays the violin and the piano, and prolifically composes songs. His sister Lyn is the most dedicated actress and producer, temperamental and ambitious. Sandra Fayne, besides being thoughtful and tactful, has a good singing voice, and a talent for designing and sewing costumes—this makes her the perfect wardrobe mistress. And her sister, Madelaine, or "Maddy"—at nine the youngest of the group—is a budding character actress, and source for chaos and humour. *There* is a microcosm of the performing arts for you!

This specialization among the characters allows for appropriate and recognizable dialogue—something we also find in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, one of the many novels Pamela invokes in *Swish*. Right from the opening exchange we can learn the characteristic attitudes of Jo, Meg, Amy and Beth:

"Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents," grumbled Jo, lying on the rug.

"It's so dreadful to be poor!" sighed Meg, looking down at her old dress.

"I don't think it's fair for some girls to have lots of pretty things, and other girls nothing at all," added little Amy, with an injured air.

"We've got father and mother, and each other, anyhow," said Beth, contentedly, from her corner. (Alcott 1)

Brown was to produce a television movie of *Little Women* in 1950, and she scripted a program about Alcott called *Louisa*, which she afterwards turned into a novel, about Louisa May Alcott's youth.<sup>3</sup> As her own book's jacket blurb notes, there were clear affinities between Brown and Alcott. Both wrote as children, and *for* children; both wrote plays, both loved the theatre and wanted to become actresses.

All the young people in *Swish* are more or less writers as well as performers, and they frequently write their own scripts, including song lyrics; moreover, these compositions are often fully included in the narrative, which presents a number of plays-within-the-novel. Much of the narrative of *Swish*, in fact, is made up of generous excerpts from their various productions, which essentially provide the main episodes

of the novel. The young people's first production at the Blue Door Theatre is a variety show featuring a Spanish dance, a comedy interlude showing an agonizingly bad ballet lesson, and a romance about lovers who are on different sides of the English Civil War. At Christmas they do a Nativity play for children; in summer scenes from Shakespeare for the Vicarage fête, and then a *Cinderella* pantomime for the following Christmas. Meanwhile their school lives are progressing; they approach and Nigel takes the daunting "School Cert." (now called O Levels), and they face careers.

The staunch adult supporters throughout are the Vicar and his wife, soon joined by the Bishop, who believes in their talent and their shared vocation to turn their Blue Door Theatre project into a professional repertory company. The three sets of parents, on the other hand, are impatient for their offspring to grow out of this theatre nonsense. So there is a sense in which the parents are the antagonists who must be overcome—though these are good law-abiding Anglican families, wanting the best for their children. Although none of the parents directly quotes Noel Coward's hit 1935 recording, "Don't Put Your Daughter on the Stage, Mrs. Worthington," the title of this song from Pamela's youth aptly conveys the fictional parents' prevailing sentiment. Nevertheless, the Bishop persuades the parents to strike a bargain: If the Blue Door team can win the prize at the coming competition for amateur companies in presenting a one-act play, then the parents will send them to drama school. So the climax of the book's action is the competition, for which the Blue Doors write their own one-act play, set in a circus.

Well, of course they do win; and in winning the trophy, the applause, and the detailed praise of the adjudicator, they have also won their hearts' desire, the means to go to drama school in London and become full-fledged professional performers. This satisfying conclusion is all brought about very convincingly, with remarkable specificity on matters like staging, costume design, lighting, and makeup, as well as sustained and entertaining excerpts from their scripts. The accounts of song-writing are not always convincing. In movies about musicals we are familiar with the convention that composers of new songs sit down at the piano and bingo! start warbling a new song right off the bat. We know that in reality the process of composition is more agonizing and more time-consuming—but young Brown cheerfully exploits the convention. When the Blue Doors are contemplating their pantomime, we learn,

Jeremy sat down at the piano and sang  
 I wonder why  
 The day's so long  
 And holds no song  
 For me.  
 I wonder why?  
 I wonder why  
 I feel so sad,  
 There's nothing glad

In me.  
I wonder why? (*Swish* 257)

On hearing this, Jeremy's friends chorus "Marvellous! ... Splendiferous!" Pretty hackneyed and unconvincing, one might think. But it is worth remembering that an inexperienced young teenager is actually cooking this up as she goes along—no mean feat in itself.

The first sequel to *Swish, Maddy Alone* of 1945, started as a radio serial on BBC's Children's Hour, and Brown dedicated this second novel to her producer, "John Keir Cross, remembering some happy days at Broadcasting House." For the radio version of *Swish of the Curtain*, she recalls, he "wrote the music" of Jeremy's song (*Maddy Alone* vi). Brown's mother wrote to thank Cross for his "very sweet and appropriate air 'I Wonder Why,'" adding that "my husband must be quite tired of hearing me sing it."<sup>4</sup> Who knows but Irving Berlin was inspired by that song when he came to write his hit song of 1950, also titled, "I Wonder Why!"<sup>5</sup>

Like most young writers, Brown is interested in the matter of love and sexuality. The problem for her young people, though, is the prudery of the *adults*. When they plan their Civil War romance, they discuss the casting:

"A heroine can't be kissed by a hero if he has to stand on tiptoe to do it."

"Golly! Are we going to have kissing in it?" Bulldog looked shocked.

"Of course," said Lyn scornfully. "Have you ever seen a play or a film that hasn't any?"...

Sandra said slowly, "This is rather an awkward point. Of course, the play must have a romance in it, but will all the old ladies in the audience stand for it?" (*Swish* 80)

The solution for this occasion is to cast a brother and sister as the lovers, by way of *not* shocking the old ladies. The Blue Doors get bolder, though, and when they do a version of the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, the lovers are not related, but the scene is superbly successful. For the most part, however, Brown stays with wholesome chastity among her young people, even when she follows them into their late teens.<sup>6</sup> When Nigel and Lyn dispute the right way to represent Romeo and Juliet, the Bishop dismisses them: "As neither of you knows anything about love ... don't you consider this argument rather futile?" (207)

Aside from the omission of the War, of course the book is of its time, and there are many period reminders, even besides the extraordinary cheapness of things: one-and-six to get a chimney swept! In fashion, the new presence of "slacks" among the girls—duly resented by the boys—reflects changes both in fashion and the status of women. The place of women had notably improved since so many of them had entered the work force at the start of the war, and this change finds its way into the novel. When Nigel hears Lyn and Sandra discussing homes, he says to them,

“I thought you wanted careers.”

“I want a career, then a home.”

“You’re greedy,” Jeremy told her. “And I don’t think women ought to have careers.” He knew this always made Lyn see red, and winked at Nigel, who said seriously, “A woman’s place is in the home.”

“The time has gone when women spent their lives being unpaid housekeepers,” replied Lyn cuttingly. (28)

It sounds second-wave feminist!

INASMUCH as Lyn is about the closest we have to an on-stage Pamela Brown (a role she perhaps shares with Sandra, who is sometimes the spokeswoman of the company), should we relate this exchange to Brown’s later life? A career she certainly had. And she did marry, as well; her husband seems to have collaborated with her in certain professional ventures.<sup>7</sup> But I find no record of children. Perhaps her multiple readers sufficed.

A notable difference between *Swish* with its sequels and today’s young adult fiction is the plentiful literary allusion. These kids are already familiar with many Shakespeare plays, and much besides. To succeed in an artistic endeavour, they reasonably believe, you need to be familiar with other people’s artistic endeavours. And references to Bernard Shaw, Tennyson, the *Alice* books, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and other novels come thick and fast: young as they are, the Blue Doors read widely and quote frequently. They even play a “Quotations” game—I remember playing it myself at school—in which you must cap a line quoted by someone else with another line that contains one of the same words. For instance, when Nigel quotes the aphorism, “If wishes were horses, beggars would ride,” Sandra promptly responds with Alfred Noyes: “And the highwayman came riding, riding, riding, up to the old inn door” (189). And so on.

Readers too are expected to pick up on allusions: “‘Words, words, words,’ she [Lyn] quoted to herself” (291)—and that “quoted” challenges the reader to recognize the fragment from *Hamlet*. In “The Rainbow Caravans,” a later story about a girl who wants to become a writer, the young narrator laments being removed from school, “because if you’re a writer you need to have a good education so that you can quote Shakespeare and Milton and people like that” (*Ballerina* 157). This unashamed literariness contrasts sharply with today’s practices. In my own fiction for young adults the editor was constantly on my case to delete allusions. “Kids don’t recognize them and don’t like them,” I was told. Recognizing them, of course, is all the less likely if the young reader is never exposed to them. Pamela Brown’s kids, by contrast, are dyed-in-the-wool literary, and proud of it.

“The liveliness, skill, humour, and precision” of *Swish*, says the book’s blurb, “augurs well for the carry-through of creative art.” And sure enough, it was followed by four sequels, from *Maddy Alone* of 1945 to *Maddy Again* of 1956, besides many other novels. I have not yet read them all, but among those I have read I do recognize a recurring pattern. A young person—most often a girl—wants to do something really

difficult—ballet, or skating, or acting in a travelling family theatre company—and after many difficulties, succeeds. These are up-beat stories, but challenges are presented realistically, and success has to be *earned*, by hard labour as well as talent.

Nearly all the Blue Door novels are illustrated by Newton Whittaker, with coloured dust jackets (see for instance fig. 1) and frontispiece, and about ten black-and-white scenes from the action through the book.<sup>8</sup> The drawings are of their period, but stylish and accurate; and they present the young people not as cute kids or scruffy Bohemians, but as well-grown young people, leggy and with quite sophisticated clothing and hairstyles. The drawings, in other words, present the novel's protagonists as “young adults” of the day, ready to provide respectable role models (fig. 2).

“AMONG the many literary forms with which juvenilia intersect, biography and autobiography are arguably the most significant,” writes Christine Alexander (154). And it is of course always fascinating to observe the interaction of life with literary production in a young author. Unfortunately, we do not know a great deal about Brown's life, and information on it is scarce. (For instance, the archives of her publishers Thomas Nelson and Sons have been scattered and destroyed.) Born at the very end of 1924 (December 31 in fact) and dying at sixty-four in 1989, Brown “was passionate about the theatre, and from an early age, put on plays with her friends,” says the Wikipedia article on her. No surprise there! She grew up in Colchester in Essex, but moved with her family to South Wales while she was still writing *Swish*, keeping her friends in Colchester informed of her progress. But further personal information is hard to find. The record switches to her professional life; and here we have the long list of her novels for children (the term “young adult” had yet to be invented), and her many credits as a script-writer and producer for radio and television. From her publications we can discover a little more, such as the fact that she travelled fairly widely,<sup>9</sup> and that she was deeply interested in theatre history.<sup>10</sup>

*Life worked into writing* is what we find in Pamela Brown's later novels; indeed, it is what we expect to find in a young writer, as well as in mature ones. Aspiring writers are typically advised to “Write what you know”—and what can one know better than one's own life?<sup>11</sup> But to find *writing worked into life*—That is, writing that is a sign-post of aspects of life yet to come: we can hardly expect that. It seems to me, however, that young Pamela Brown, in composing *The Swish of the Curtain*, was in some sense laying down a program for her future life and career. The grand motive of the Blue Door Theatre troupe is to get to drama school and become professionals. And that is what Pamela Brown proceeded to do herself. Her writing became, in fact, a stepping-stone, an enabling factor, in achieving this ambition. She did indeed qualify to go to RADA, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, in London, starting in 1942 and graduating in September 1943.<sup>12</sup> And she used her earnings from the publication of *Swish* to help pay her fees. That is turning writing into life with a vengeance! And from RADA she did proceed to become an actress. In a letter to her producer of July 1943, when she was still only eighteen, she wrote, “I am now playing in ‘The Man Who came to Dinner’ at the Savoy Theatre”;<sup>13</sup> so we know she made it to at least one West End production, besides working for ENSA, the organization set up to entertain the armed forces during the War.<sup>14</sup> The work for the BBC also included some

dramatic performance. On the casting for the radio version of *Maddy Alone* Cross the producer wrote to her, “Yourself, of course, will be Sandra,” Maddy’s sister.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, though, the record of Brown’s acting career peters out, in part because there was another actress, a few years older, registered with the name Pamela Brown; and Equity, the actors’ union, will not register more than one performer under the same name. *Our* Pamela had to re-name herself Mela Brown. I would dearly like to discover which repertory company she joined and what roles she played, but that information is elusive.

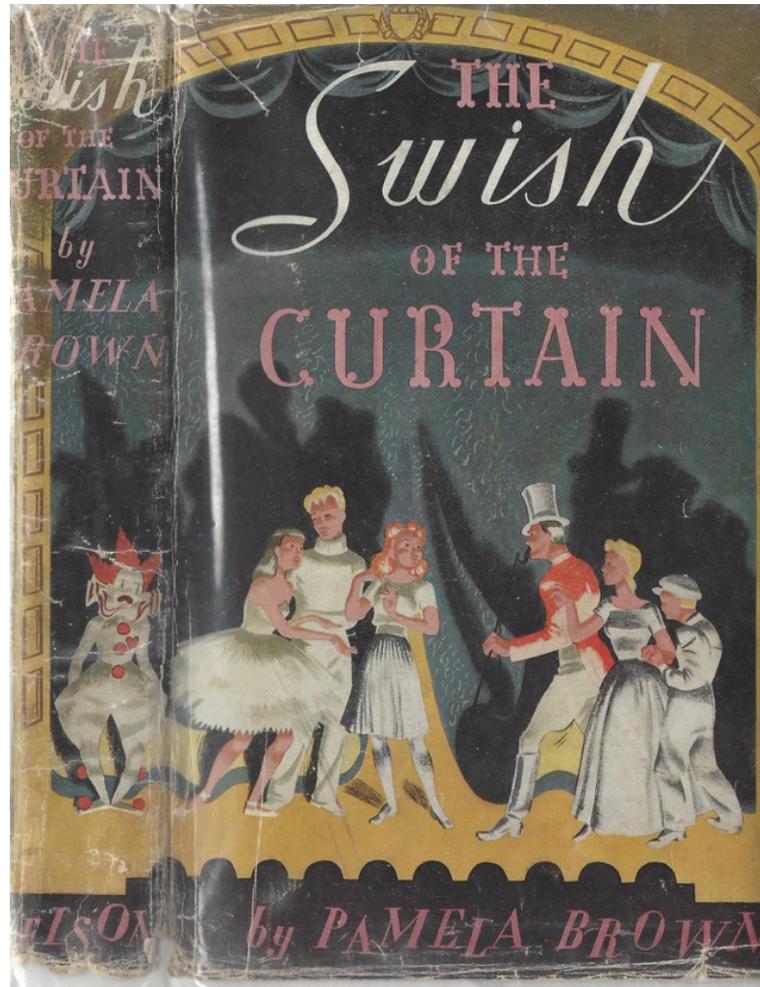


Fig. 1. Dust jacket by Newton Whittaker for *The Swish of the Curtain*, first edition.

However, as an *author*, our Pamela kept her full name, and of the two careers, actress and author, the author in time began to predominate. And of course, though *Swish* is most obviously about the stage vocation, it is also about composition, so in this, too, the early writing worked its way into later life. Composition is going on in *Swish* throughout the company’s various shows. When the Blue Doors are performing

their one-act play in the competition, the judge, impressed, “glanced at her programme for the author of the play, and saw to her amazement ‘by the company’” (*Swish* 334). Thomas Nelson, on reading *Swish*, must have been equally amazed to learn it was by a teenager.

Brown, it seems, continued to support her acting career by her writing. While she was still at RADA, and still only seventeen, she wrote two scripts for BBC radio, one on the sonnets of Shakespeare and Sidney, and one on Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*. (That literary knowledge was standing her in good stead, it seems.) In 1944, at nineteen, she collaborated in adapting *Swish* as a three-part serial for BBC radio, and of course this helped considerably with the sales of the book. Her mother wrote to John Keir Cross from her home town of Brecon in Wales:

There has been great enthusiasm in this small town over the broadcasts, and everyone seems to have listened—from the Dean and Director of Education down to the butcher and baker! W. H. Smith had 25 copies of the third edition of the book and when we went in yesterday to buy one, only one still remained. They have already sold over a hundred.<sup>16</sup>

The *Swish* serial was broadcast again in 1948 and 1957. Those royalties must have been welcome to a struggling actress.

The time came when RADA itself was willing to employ Brown’s services as a writer. Her play “The Children of Camp Fortuna” was performed by RADA students before she wrote it up as a narrative and published it in 1952 in a collection titled *To Be a Ballerina and Other Stories* (vi). And it was as a writer rather than as an actress that Brown was to make her mark, although performance of some kind continued to be a mainstay of her subject matter. In a story included in the same collection, called “The Rainbow Caravans”—where, I note, the circus is prominent again, a kind of irresistible metaphor for performance—we have a young first-person narrator whose ambition is to be a *writer*. The emphasis now has shifted: Her best friend Jean, she writes, “wants to be an actress, which I think is a jolly good thing to want to be, but it makes her show off rather. And she is pretty, which will help for being an actress, but which makes her show off even more” (160). Sally the narrator, on the other hand, is “very plain,” she says, with spots (158). (One wonders whether Brown’s appearance was a handicap in her acting career.)

Sally Dimble is still in elementary school, daughter of a widowed mother who runs a boarding-house in East-End London: *not* a privileged situation. “Sometimes I despair of ever being a writer, as I have nothing to write about,” moans Sally (*Ballerina* 157). But she conscientiously keeps a diary; and when a circus comes to the bombed site on her street, she finds her inspiration, especially when the girl who trains the performing dogs invites her into her caravan. Much to her chagrin her diary and a story she calls “The Rainbow Caravans” disappear for a while; in due course it emerges that that one of her mother’s lodgers is a publisher’s reader, and he has taken her work to show his boss. Sally receives a letter from the Managing Director of

“Mason and Sons, Publishers”—clearly a fictionalization of Thomas Nelson and Sons, Brown’s own publisher—inviting her to come to see him.

For the interview with the publisher Sally buys a hat with a veil in order to look “sophisticated,” as well as to hide her spots. The publisher tells her,

“We are looking for some new authors for full-length books for children, and, while we know you are still a school-girl yourself, we do feel that the atmosphere of your work is the sort of thing that we want. Real happenings to ordinary children .... What we want is the effect on a twelve- or thirteen-year-old of a circus coming into her life ....” (207)

At this Sally is so overwhelmed that she bursts into tears. “I could have died,” she writes. “I tried to blow my nose, and got caught up in the veil, and oh! it was awful” (208). Once she has got her sophisticated hat off, however, and can have “a good blow,” she settles down to sensible talk about revising her story for publication:

“We liked your title, *The Rainbow Caravans*, but we don’t want your heroine to run away in the end—that is rather too fictional. ... You could write it in diary form if you liked. It would have to be at least seventy thousand words in length. Now, do you think you could do it?” (*Ballerina* 207–08)

Brown’s “The Rainbow Caravans” is a brief story, and far short of seventy thousand words. But it *is* in diary form. So, in a sense, it is about itself. Of course I would love to know how much of Brown’s own experience as a young girl writer feeds into this story of the negotiation with the publisher. It seems entirely likely that Thomas Nelson, or his “Managing Director,” would also have stipulated for realistic content—“Real happenings to ordinary children”—and if this was indeed the case, then perhaps it is also the case that the negotiation with the parents in the final, published version of *Swish* has taken the place of some original, wilder resolution, such as the Blue Doors making a smashing success of their theatre without ever receiving professional training!

I am not the first person to guess at a personal connection in this story. A BBC representative, when offered an adaptation of it by Brown and her husband, wrote to a colleague, “It *may* be founded on fact. After all Pamela herself got the contract with Nelson when she wasn’t much older than the heroine in this story.”<sup>17</sup> Did a hat with a veil figure in Pamela Brown’s interview? We will never know. But I do like to think that memory was working alongside invention when she wrote this story. In works later than *The Swish of the Curtain*, as we might expect, memory plays a large role, since as the years and the experience accumulate there is more to remember. *Maddy Again* is the last of the Blue Door series, published relatively late in 1956. By this time Brown’s career had progressed considerably, and she had many writing credits, not only for her novels but also for a number of screenplays and adaptations for the BBC—including, for instance, *Anne of Green Gables* (1952). And in *Maddy Again* Brown



*Fig. 2. Illustration by Newton Whittaker, in The Swish of the Curtain, first edition.*

draws on her own career in BBC television. Maddy is now among the junior students at “BADA” (“The British Academy of Dramatic Art,” as she fictionalises RADA). Television has become the dramatic genre of choice, and we get plenty of instruction on how the stage actor must tone down voice and expression for this more intimate and in-your-face medium. A significant minor character is “Miss Tibbs,” the writer for a series about children encountering other children from different cultures. In writing the script for the interviews, Miss Tibbs must be on her toes and ready to adapt at short notice. When a cheerful black woman shows up as Maddy’s chaperone, the producer takes a hasty decision to include her in the show:

“You write her just a few lines, Miss Tibbs, but make them good ones. Can you do that by tomorrow?”

“Trust me,” said Miss Tibbs stoutly, nodding her head in determination. (*Maddy Again* 129)

It is worth noting that, though she appears to take a subordinate role to her male boss, Miss Tibbs was actually the one who initiated the idea. And though Miss Tibbs is described as “an elderly woman, with cropped grey hair” (129), the Miss Tibbs in the coloured illustration to this episode looks much closer to Brown’s own age of thirty-two at the time (fig. 3). I like to think it could be a portrait.

Though Miss Tibbs here has the subordinate role as writer, by the time she wrote *Maddy Again*, Brown had often taken the boss’s role of “producer.” Television was not yet on the scene when young Pamela Brown undertook writing *The Swish of the Curtain* in the late ’thirties, so we cannot expect her to have dreamed up a career for herself in it. But there is a producer in stage productions too. And young Brown had already imagined herself in that role. Lyn, Brown’s partial alter ego in *Swish*, is most committed as an actress, but she is also the “producer” of the young people’s shows. (Today we call the role Director.) As the various amateur companies bustle about getting ready for the one-act play competition, and the Blue Door girls are ready to go on stage, Miss Hanston of the Hanston Dramatic Class

... looked hard at the girls as they stood, arms linked, in the wings.

“Who is your producer?” she asked them, in a kind but patronizing tone.

“I am,” said Lyn sweetly, looking about six in her ballet frock.

(*Swish* 331)

And when the Blue Doors win the competition, it is Lyn as producer who collects the trophy:

In a dream Lyn walked up to the footlights, her cheeks flushed to match the red velvet of her dress.

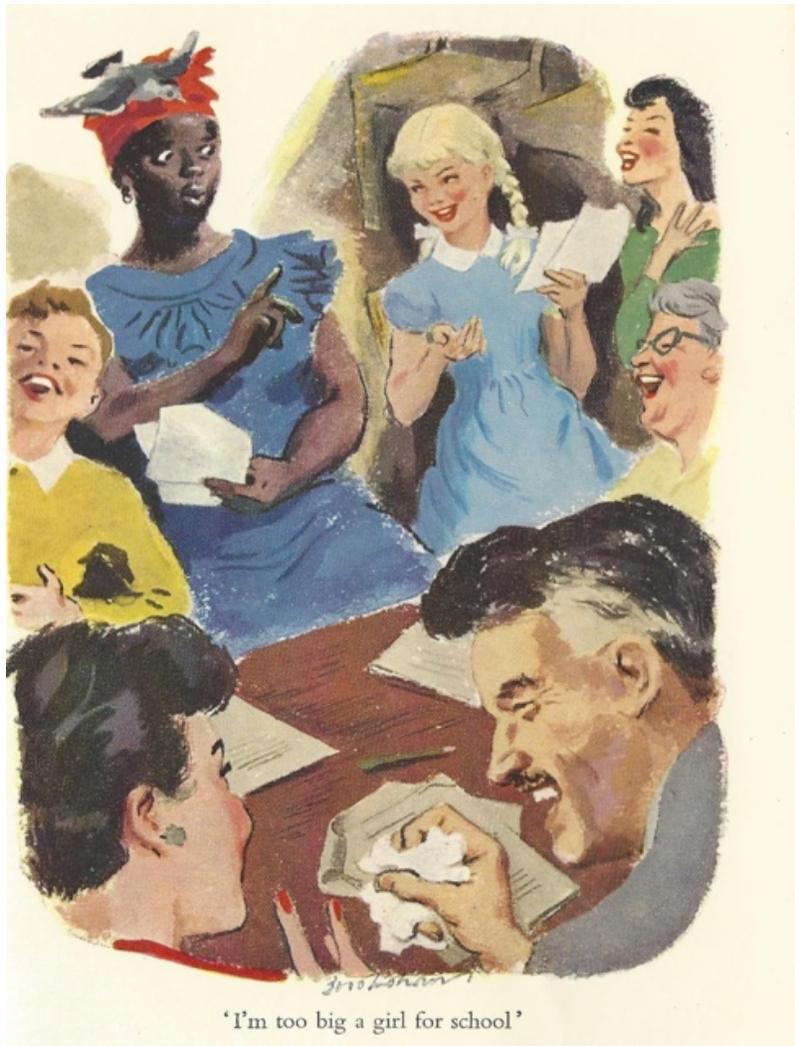
“Are you the little producer?” she was asked by the amazed Mrs. Seymore [the judge].

“Well, yes, in name,” she replied, smiling up into the friendly eyes, “but the play produced itself.”

She took the heavy statue and turned to the applauding audience.

(341)

So the final triumph of the book focuses on the producer, as well as on the astonishing youth of the company.



'I'm too big a girl for school'

Fig. 3. Colour illustration by Drake Brookshaw, in *To Be a Ballerina and Other Stories*.

ULTIMATELY it was as producer, as well as writer, that Pamela Brown too was to flourish. And though I have failed to find much about Mela Brown the actress, there is no shortage of evidence of Brown's success as a producer for television. In the 1950s alone she produced eighteen television shows, some of which were series, some based on stories that she had written and adapted herself.

The 1980 television adaptation of *Swish* must have seemed like the consummation most devoutly to be wished of her career, where the aspirations she had celebrated as a teenager came together in the new medium that she had made her own. In *Swish* "the play's the thing," and the focus is on the stage, as it continues to be in today's string of drama schools for young people named after Brown's novel. Its first sequel, *Maddy Alone*, is the story of the making of a film. And in the last, *Maddy Again*, the centre of action is television. The series thus provides a microcosm not

only of Brown's own developing career, but of the evolution of performance media. She would no doubt have made an arresting narrative out of social media and the digital revolution, had she lived long enough.

*Swish* is a shapely tale. At the beginning the seven protagonists, overlooking the sea, announce their various ambitions; and at the end they gather at the same lofty viewpoint, and Sandra—here speaking for Brown, it seems—reflects, “All our dreams have come true; all our ambitions have been realized; and all our castles in the air are now solid ones” (343). We might call *The Swish of the Curtain* the castle in the air that Brown, through the course of her career, managed to turn solid.

## NOTES

1. Dust jacket of *The Swish of the Curtain*, by Pamela Brown (1941), 1946 reprint.
2. “Seven children is a difficulty,” wrote her producer John Keir Cross of the BBC before the radio serialization. But the problem seems to have been differentiating the children's voices for only audio transmission. Letter of 30 May 1943, BBC Archives.
3. She subsequently turned the program into a book on Alcott called *Louisa*. Brown's book concentrates on Alcott's early life, and the book ends with the opening sentences of *Little Women*, quoted here (172).
4. Letter to Pamela Brown, 30 January 1944 from “Sepha. I. Brown,” BBC Archives. If “Sepha.” is short for “Seraphina,” as seems likely, then there is a further compliment to her mother in Pamela Brown's *Family Playbill* of 1951, where Seraphina Mannering is the heroine's mother, and the leading lady of a Victorian touring drama company. The book is dedicated “For my Parents.”
5. From the Broadway musical of 1950, *Call Me Madam*. The song was recorded in the following years by teams of artists, including Dinah Shaw, Perry Como, and Bing Crosby and Louis Armstrong. Two songs, “I Wonder Why?” and “The Swish of the Curtain,” are included in the BBC television series of *Swish* of 1980.
6. Brown seems to rejoice that the principals in this scene are played by actors of the correct age. The heroine Lexy in *Family Playbill* (1951) likewise scores her first acting success as Juliet, partly because she is of the right age for the role. Why snatch the rightful property of young people to give to seasoned actors?
7. She married the actor Donald Masters (1916–1962), and it seems she collaborated with him in some writing ventures. My thanks for this information to Adela Burke, who has been a very able research assistant in my study of Pamela Brown.
8. The exception is *Maddy Again* (1956), which is illustrated by Drake Brookshaw.
9. “The Children of Camp Fortuna” and “Citizen of Cairo,” in *To Be a Ballerina and Other Stories*, are set in or near Cairo, and show an intimate knowledge of it. *Maddy Alone* likewise shows she knows Paris and its environs.
10. *Family Playbill* (1951), for instance, convincingly presents a Victorian family troupe, the Mannerings, and their travels and provincial performances. *Romeo and Juliet*, apparently Brown's favourite Shakespeare play, figures prominently again, and the youthfulness of the principals seems to have been a large part of its appeal to her.
11. For instance, Jane Austen wrote to her niece Anna Austen, commenting on the draft novel Anna had sent her, “you had better not leave England. Let the Portmans go to Ireland, but as you know nothing of the Manners there, you had better not go with them.” *Jane Austen's Letters* 269.
12. “She is listed as Pamela Beatrice Brown, from South Wales, aged seventeen and a quarter. She took her entrance test on 25/2/42, and started courses in the Academy in April. We have her listed for four terms and taking her ‘finals’ in the summer of 1943. She also took the option of studying French for an extra guinea.” E-mail from James Thornton, RADA Librarian, 25 April 2017.

13. Letter of 12 July 12. BBC Archives.
14. See Mrs. Brown to John Keir Cross, letter of 20 February 1944, BBC Archives.
15. John Keir Cross to Pamela Brown, letter of 14 May 1943, BBC Archives.
16. Mrs. Brown to John Keir Cross, letter of 20 February 1944, BBC Archives.
17. Memo 14 March [1955], signature illegible, BBC Archives. This BBC official's response to the story is derogatory, describing it as "Not a bad story (but only a children's version of a Women's Magazine success story) .... I think No." A colleague agrees: "A very conventional story, ... clumsily adapted." One would expect warmer commentary for this long-serving member of the Corporation. But the response may be influenced by pique, since Brown had recently announced her intention of "turning to the jungle of the free-lance." Letter to Josephine [Plummer?] of 14 March [1955?]. BBC Archives.

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