



## Hawkwood Books Blog : March 2020

### **Goodnight Mr Tom**

Shortly before the current lockdown, I'd bought a charming hardback copy of *Goodnight Mr Tom* by Michelle Magorian. Over the years I'd heard of it, of course, because it's a classic, but for some reason never read it. If I was of a mystical nature, I'd say this was because it was waiting for the right time, and this was the right time. Full of warmth, affection and astonishingly vivid characters, it was a lifesaver. As the world turned to fear and isolation, Mr Tom turned my thoughts to hope, kindness and that overused word, love. Not the meaningless, suspiciously selfish, broadcast love we've become accustomed to, but the private, almost sacrificial love that gives all and asks nothing.

A week later and I still find myself thinking more about these characters who never existed than those in the real, tangible world where we are in danger of becoming statistics in a pandemic maths exercise. How is it possible that creations from a young woman's imagination can be more powerful and real than reality itself, and invoke deeper emotions than oceans of broadcast suffering? I don't have an answer, but it was a treasured experience to read this book at this particular time.

I don't think there is a way to analyse any book to say why it 'works', in other words, why it has some special quality which, if lost, would impoverish the world. It's as if the author is invisible and the 'story' tells itself, flawless and powerful. Too often, the author is ever present and the story feels artificial, but the classics which stand the test of time offer something else, a glimpse of truth in a fog of lies.

At this crucial time, when some unseen threat forces each of us, regardless of all considerations, to face extreme uncertainty, it is strange that the written word can offer comfort. We each find comfort in different ways, but I will forever be grateful to Michelle for giving us all Tom, Will, Zack and friends, and to chance for saving her remarkable story, at least for me, until this particular moment.