



A Traveller in Time

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While visiting Thackers Manor in 1934, dreamy Penelope becomes involved in a 16th century plot to rescue Mary, Queen of Scots. A beloved time travel story that has endured for generations.

A Traveller in Time Details

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Author : Alison Uttley

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Hilary says

We really loved this book. Penelope goes to live at her Aunt's manor house and farm, and finds herself slipping back in time to visit ancient relatives that are caught up in the Babington plot, seeking to overthrow Queen Elizabeth and replace her with Mary, Queen of Scots. This book was slow to get into but we loved it more and more. There are long descriptions which probably lend more to reading to self than reading aloud, but did give a great insight into daily life in Elizabethan times. We found the details of what they ate and how they lived fascinating. We thought perhaps this book had inspired The Children of Green knowe, but if it did, they are both very different, but both very great childrens books. There were several derogatory terms for women that I feel don't have any place in a childrens book, but perhaps these words were not so offensive when the book was written. The other minor downside of this book is that since it is set in rural 1930s it sometimes was not always easy to tell when the time had changed. However this is still a very poignant book about loyalties, family, and attachments to homes and history and how memories of people live on.

Bex says

I was given this book for Christmas but I'd never heard of it before. It was a nice surprise to find it a really good read.

A young girl, Penelope, visits her aunt and uncle's house and finds herself transported to Elizabethan times and embroiled in the plot to free Mary Queen of Scots, who is imprisoned in a house nearby. Only in the present is Penelope aware of the tradgedy which lies ahead, drawing closer whenever she travels back in time.

As a backdrop to the unfolding drama is the slow country life of twentieth-century Derbyshire, vividly and beautifully described.

I'll be keeping this on my shelf next to the classics.

Sarah Sammis says

You'll probably notice the different spelling. I'm going with the British spelling as A Traveller in Time by Alison Uttley is a British novel. As the title implies, the novel is a time travel story but the time travel is a method for uniting the present (1934) with a wonderfully told historical fiction set around the Babington Plot.

Penelope Thacker is a bit fey as apparently all the Penelopes in the Thacker family and she begins to experience things from the past but try as she might, she cannot change them. As Penelope begins to live half her life in the past she learns how to live in the 1580s. Alison Uttley fills the world of the Thacker Manor with the mundane details of running a home and farm along with the big events surrounding the imprisoning

of Mary Stuart.

Uttley's novel has enough historical information to teach the basics of the Babington Plot without hitting one over the head with facts, dates and figures. Readers knowledgeable of the events will enjoy filling in the missing details. Readers not as familiar with the history can still follow along and enjoy the time travel aspects of the novel.

Margaret says

I don't think this is a well-known fantasy novel, but it certainly deserves to be. When Penelope stays with her aunt and uncle at Thackers farm, she slips back in time to the 16th century, when the Babington family lived at Thackers and plotted to help Mary Queen of Scots, imprisoned by Elizabeth I. Uttley evokes both Penelope's life on the farm and her experiences in Tudor England with a sure touch and lovely language, and although *A Traveller in Time* is quietly written, it's haunting and emotionally powerful, as Penelope is drawn further and further into the events of the past, knowing that she can't change history but becoming attached to her Elizabethan life and friends.

Hannah says

Absolutely enchanting YA novel. I only wish I had read it as a young girl, so that I could have fond memories of it!

The black & white illustrations are a bonus :)

The house, *Thackers*, has been added to my "houses as characters" category. Like Mary Stewart's *Thornymore*, it forms a strong presence in the story. I would adore living there...

Caren says

Feeling a bit overcome by stress this time of year, I decided I needed to escape into a classic British children's book, books which are not just for children, after all. For the past several days, I would look forward to retreating to bed early, entering the world of Penelope Taberner Cameron. I would have loved this book when I was young, as I have always been fascinated by time travel. As an adult, I loved the story, but also appreciated the rich, evocative language and the dream-like, wistful style of writing. Penelope lives in the early twentieth century, but is able to pass into sixteenth-century England when she is visiting her family's manor house in the country. Here is the classic British plot of three children being sent away from London to stay with older relatives in a very old country house which holds secrets from its past for the right person to discover. Penelope, the youngest of the three children, is considered a bit dreamy, so her sister and

brother don't pay much attention to her mentions of her travels. Her aunt, however, is aware that some family members, through time, have had this gift, and validates Penelope's experiences. Over several years of visits to the house, as Penelope is growing up, she travels back to a specific time in the life of the house, a time when the Babingtons owned the house and Penelope's ancestors were servants there. The Babingtons were involved in a plot to unseat---in fact, to murder---Queen Elizabeth in order to place Mary, Queen of Scots on the throne and restore the Catholic religion to England. Penelope is well aware the plot failed, with tragic ends for Mary as well as the Babingtons. As she continually visits the past, she comes to love the Babingtons and their servants. In particular, she quietly falls in love with the younger Babington son, Francis, a feeling which is reciprocated. While she visits the past, time stands still for her in the present, so that she returns to just the moment she had left. While in Elizabethan England, she is uneasily, subtly aware that tragedy looms, but she is unable to quite realize it, thoroughly voice it, or stop it while she is in that time. There is a sort of nightmare feel to that, and , indeed, the author notes in a foreword that some of the scenes in the book came directly from dreams she had. Some of the closing scenes describe Christmas celebrations in Elizabethan England, which include the visit of mummers to the manor house. (This tied in nicely for me with the season and with another book I was reading.) This book is superbly written and , having originally been published in 1939, has stood the test of time. I read its wistful ending with a sigh, knowing my visit with Penelope was at an end. What a lovely read!

Choko says

*** 4 ***

I love the way this author tells a children's story! It has the feel of a fairy tale, but using time travel as a means to connect a girl living in the 1930's Chelsea, England with the 16th century Tudor period. The book itself was published in 1939 and the author was one of J. R. R. Tolkien's favorites:) And since everyone who loves stories of this sort likes to compare them to Narnia, I would say that C.S. Lewis took some inspiration from Ms. Uttley's, much earlier book:)

A group of siblings visit their aunt and uncle in a country farmhouse for a time and Penelope, who is a dreamer, finds herself traveling through time and connecting with the people who used to live in this place in the 1500's... It so happens that they were supporters of the exiled Queen Mary, and were involved in an attempt to free her from her house imprisonment. Penelope wants to warn them and desperately wishes she could change their faiths, but she learns that history is very stubborn and doesn't allow meddling with it.

I have very fond memories of the first time reading this book. I have always been a devoted fan of children's tales, Fantasy of any kind and history. This is a gentle mixture of all of them, very accessible to children and as it did in my case, makes you want to learn more about the Tudor period and the whole line of Tudors as a whole. I can honestly say that this was the first book that made me want to read more about British History, since that was not a point of great educational focus for the Bulgarian School curriculum.

Overall, I think this is a wonderful read for young people and a very gentle tale. May awaken their historical curiosity as it did mine.?

Judith says

Am enjoying this - took it to Dublin with me as it's rather lighter than the Ken Follett - lol!

Now I've finished it - well worth reading - well written & good plot, despite knowing what's going to happen - a beautiful book.....

Pam Knox says

Lovely writing. I felt like I was there, both in early 20th century England and In 16th century England. Also fun to look at pictures of the actual house Dethick Manor in Derbyshire, which is now a B&B. I wish I had read this years ago. I don't know how I missed it growing up. Just came across the word Dumbledores "Dumbledores boomed as they struck our dresses..." Old English for bumblebees.

Pondering Pig Newton says

Is there an American anywhere in this country who lives in the same house where his great-grandmother was born? This story is set in a world so foreign to us it might as well be fantasy, a world where families and the land they live on are deeply bound together -- forever, it would seem. A self-sufficient world where money is nearly irrelevant. Actually, it is the common world as people experienced it before the Industrial Revolution -- when most never travelled farther than a day's walk from home. But, rather than dwell on the isolation, frustration suffocation etc etc that industrial people tend to imagine that world would be like, Uttley finds deep roots and full-throated pleasures, a society where, for example, girls sing rounds together at their work without self-consciousness.

Uttley pulls this off because she is a brilliant writer. I felt like I had gone time travelling myself and wandered into an Elizabethan era farm in Derbyshire. Her prose is delicious and wholesome, like the world she describes.

I think this book could be opened at random and read as an meditative exercise. There is a plot of sorts, but just enough of it to hang a different world on. It concerns a pre-adolescent girl living in pre-WWI England. She has the gift of 'second sight', and finds herself pulled into a drama unfolding on the same farm three hundred years before she is born.

Uttley wrote this in the late 30s, as war clouds loomed over England and, as she looks back on the rural world of her childhood and the older Elizabethan world, I couldn't but feel a sense of sadness and loss brooding over the pages.

It's really a most remarkable book. Thanks to Goodreads friend Anne for pointing it out.

Particle_Person says

This is one of the best books I have ever read. The ending is both wistful and sad and inevitable. Penelope repeatedly slips back in time at her family's ancient country farm, Thackers, to the 1580s and then back to her present, 1906-08. Penelope's ancestors were servants to the Babingtons, who are fundamentally nice

people (with a few exceptions). She becomes part of their family, in the 16th century, accepted as a sort of cousin who nobody can quite place and who tends to vanish without notice. The eldest Babington son, Anthony, is deeply involved in a plot to spirit Mary, Queen of Scots out of England to France. Mary is being held prisoner in the farm next to Thackers and Anthony is excavating a tunnel. Penelope knows from the outset that he doesn't succeed, that he eventually dies, but Penelope finds she can't make big changes to history. (This also has the effect of ridding the book of time travel paradoxes.) She can change how people feel about events but not the events themselves. This becomes the true subject of the book: how people feel about history as they are living it, and later looking backward. The reader and Penelope and the Babingtons know how it will end. They hope otherwise, but they know. Anthony knows he is doomed but he tries to save Queen Mary anyway, because he loves her. Penelope knows she can't save them but she keeps returning because she loves the Babingtons. And the house, Thackers, is always there.

Side note: If you love old houses, this is a book you should read.

CLM says

A must read for anyone who loves history and time travel and Mary Queen of Scots!

Laura says

Big Toe Books from BBC Radio 7. The plot seems to be interesting.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00xlw17>

Christopher Newton says

One of the best time travel fantasies ever - beautifully written, soft yet exact, with a feeling for the English countryside that made me think of the young D.H. Lawrence.

Richard says

Alison Uttley is well known for her children's stories such as those featuring the Little Grey Rabbit and Sam the Pig. She also wrote books for older readers and one of the finest is the wonderful YA novel, "A Traveller In Time".

The book uses the device of "time slip"--which is the fantasy equivalent of the time travel devices used in science-fiction. Time slips involve some transferral of consciousness to a different time period. Some other examples are "Portrait of Jennie" {both the wonderful

I learned about this book from an interview with Ian Mortimer, author of "The Time Traveler's Guide to Medieval England," a history book that takes the novel approach of presenting itself as a guide of useful practical information you'll need to fit in in medieval England. I'd never heard of this book before and apparently it only had a limited U.S. release on its publication in 1939. Too bad, because this fits solidly within the Chronicles of Narnia magic-and-boarding-school-England genre and I would have read the covers off of it as a kid!

As an adult reading it for the first time, I was a more critical audience, noting inconsistencies in the rules of its world and Penelope's never-explained ability to travel through time -- but only to one specific Elizabethan period, in chronological, linear visits. The ending left me unsatisfied, since it didn't really explain the how, what, or why of the heroine's time-skipping adventures. The most intriguing plot point -- a hint that present-day Penelope may be the reincarnation of her own great-great-grandmother, and lived other lives all over the Taberner family tree -- is left sadly undeveloped.

However, the rural English setting, both present-day and past, is almost unbearably cozy and charming, and sure to delight any city reader who occasionally fantasizes about keeping chickens, churning butter, or baking in a wood-fire oven (guilty). Uttley's writing is evocative and richly detailed, and I'm trusting Ian Mortimer when he vouches for the top-notch authenticity of her research.

If you know a young reader who is just getting into classic children's lit, hunt down a copy of this book - you might just make a history lover out of them!

Belinda says

I enjoyed this book because it's well written, describes the beauty of a lost world (pre-Wars, horses, fires to warm rooms) and captures the life and morals of a family.

I liked Penelope too, her Aunt and Uncle, and Francis Babington. There's real warmth in the relationships and a nostalgia for the past and the rapidly changing present. I grew almost wistful for the world of Thackers myself, it seemed so ideal.

SPOILER

But underneath it all there is the darkness of a cruel history (although inaccurately chronicled in Traveller in Time), the threat of loss, and the wish to be in two worlds at once that suggests that Penelope is struggling with her change from child to adult and her discomfort with entering the reality of the world her parents inhabit.

My only bugbear was the romanticisation of Anthony Babington. I read more about him after I'd finished the book and he was no innocent man, plotting to kill Queen Elizabeth and put Mary on the throne. He reads as vain and self serving and certainly appears to have acted in such a foolhardy manner that he ended up causing Mary's death. I would have liked to have had this explored a little more.

Still, this is a pioneering fantasy young adult/childrens novel and deserves its place as a classic.

Melissa says

If you like time travel and English history and wistfulish endings, this is the book for you. I loved it! Yes, it does take a little bit to get into it, but once you're in, you're in! Penelope's longing to help her friends from the past is always unfulfilled, but I kept rooting her on, willing her to try again, hoping maybe someone would hear her. I loved the way "Greensleeves" was wound in and out of the story plot. I admit, after reading this book, I came away with more sympathy for the Babingtons and Mary Queen of Scots than I expected to. I've always been staunchly for Queen Elizabeth, but I wholly agreed with Dame Cicely when she says, "I say 'God save Queen Elizabeth,' but I would like the poor Scottish Queen, who has seen such terrible trouble, to be safe and sound overseas." That was the very best statement about being loyal to Queen Bess, and still being kind to Queen Mary that I ever read.

I also felt badly about Francis. Oh, how I wanted Penelope to stay back with him, or for him to escape the trouble and trials by coming back with her! Of course, I knew he would never desert his brother, and Penelope loved her family far too much, but still...!

Manybooks says

As a young teenager, I both dreamed of and desperately wanted to open a door and be magically transported into the past and thus Allison Uttley's A Traveller in Time (where young Penelope Taberner does precisely that) was right up my proverbial alley so to speak (especially since she is transported into the past of the United Kingdom). However, as Penelope is caught up in the life and times of a rural Tudor manor house and the Babingtons' striving to save Mary Queen of Scots, both her and also the reader's infatuation with especially young and dashing Francis Babington is clouded by the knowledge of the future (of British history), that the family's plot to free Mary Queen of Scots from imprisonment is doomed to epically fail (and the first time I read A Traveller in Time knowing what would happen, being painfully aware of the fact that the Babingtons would not succeed, did bother me a tiny bit, but it also piqued my historical interest and made me engage in supplemental research on Tudor England which definitely helped me in grade nine when we were taking the history of the British and Scottish monarchies in Social Studies).

Although readers not all that versed in Tudor history (and especially the religious conflicts of the time between Church of England Queen Elizabeth I and her Roman Catholic cousin Mary Queen of Scots) might find A Traveller in Time potentially a trifle difficult and challenging, the novel is indeed (and in my humble opinion) a simply and utterly wonderful, enlightening sojourn and romp, not only into the past to which Penelope travels, but also into 1930s rural Derbyshire from where or perhaps more to the point from whence Penelope opens her aunt's farmhouse doors into the past, into Tudor era Derbyshire. And while the pace of A Traveller in Time is indeed rather slow and descriptive, this is to and for me precisely what has always made this novel such a constant and perennial favourite (although if a potential reader really does need and require constant action and adventure, then A Traveller in Time would likely not be that good a choice or that successful a reading fit).

Lidija says

This isn't a story, it's a gateway into another world.

I've read this book so many times and still find it beautiful and utterly believable: you can smell the herbs in the linen chests, hear the singing, feel the breeze on your face. I'm still a bit in love with Francis Babbington, and let me warn you, it's fictional heroes like him that cause little girls to grow into women with unrealistic expectations of men.
