NOTES ON OUR EDITS

Townsend Library classics have been edited to make them more accessible to today’s readers. But the books have not been “abridged” in the sense of shortening them by sacrificing story development, character richness, and the author’s voice. In our experience, abridged books result from a simplistic removal of large chunks of material or a formulaic “translation” that robs a book of its distinctive flavor. By contrast, as we produce a Townsend Library title, we seek to edit the material carefully and respectfully in order to preserve the qualities that have made the book a classic.

TL editors approach every book entirely on its own merits, guided constantly by these questions:

• “What will get in the way of a reader’s enjoyment of this wonderful story?”

• “How can the story be made more readable while preserving the integrity of the original book?”

Here are examples of editing choices made for two TL titles:

Dracula
1. This story was written for people who were familiar with 19th century European geography, and the original contains countless pages of detail about cities, towns, rivers, ports, and travel routes that would make many 21st century readers’ eyes glaze over. Such detail, not at all integral to the story, has been reduced.

2. Stoker was very excited about the new technologies of his day—such as shorthand writing and Thomas Edison’s “dictaphone” machine, which recorded the human voice on wax cylinders—and in the original Dracula, he goes on for many pages about these “modern” inventions. We minimized the number of details about these outdated inventions in order to get on with the story.

3. We also replaced words that might be unfamiliar or confusing to today’s readers: for instance, the old French word “diligence” is changed to “stagecoach”; the phrase “toilet glass” is changed to “shaving mirror.”

Jane Eyre
1. Revising Jane Eyre was mostly a matter of slightly simplifying complex sentences and deleting or explaining unfamiliar 19th-century English terms.

2. For instance, a reference to the valuable “plate” in a house is changed to “silver”; the phrase “a false front of French curls” is changed to “a wig of French curls”; the word “benefactress” is changed to “guardian.”

3. The original sentence, “Or was the vault under the chancel of Gateshead Church an inviting bourne?” is changed in the TL version to, “Did I really think that the cemetery at Gateshead Church would be an inviting home?”

A COMMENT FROM A TEACHER

“I can tell how the editors love reading and love these books. I have taught for many years and have long been disappointed with ‘abridged’ books. But I compared books in the Townsend Library to the original source text, and in each case I have been amazed at the sensitive and precise treatment of Townsend’s editors. They have preserved the tension and magic of the original stories. Nothing is lost except those things which would be obstacles to today’s students.”
A NOTE ON READABILITY

Readability describes the ease with which a book or other written work can be read.

Readability tests use mathematical formulas in an attempt to measure readability, but such tests must be taken with a grain of salt. A readability test cannot, for example, account for such important factors as interest in a subject or background knowledge about that subject, to say nothing of the overall clarity and logic of the writing!

What about the readability of the books in the Townsend Library? All of our books have been carefully edited to make them more readable. (All the books fall within a sixth- to tenth-grade reading level, which is the usual level of writing for the general adult public.) Even so, some of them are easier to read than others. Based on our own experience and on feedback we have gotten from participants in our nationwide reading contest, here is a sequence of our books, from easier to more difficult.

Easier
Reading Changed My Life! Three True Stories
Quadalupe Quintanilla: My Story
Maria Cardenas: My Story
Rod Sutton: My Story
From Best Friend to Bully
Rosa Parks and the Bus to Freedom
Lost on the Mountain
Swamp Curse
Everyday Heroes
The Bluford Series (all 20 books)
Second Wind
Rebounding
Letters My Mother Never Read
It Couldn’t Happen to Me: True Stories of Teenage Moms
Surviving Abuse: Four True Stories
Facing Addiction: Three True Stories
Great Stories of Suspense and Adventure
The Wizard of Oz
The Wind in the Willows
The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood
The Jungle Book
Dracula
Tarzan of the Apes
The Return of Tarzan
The Beasts of Tarzan
The Princess of Mars
The Gods of Mars
The Warlords of Mars
Ten Real-Life Stories
Jackie Robinson: An American Hero
Roberto Clemente: The Story of a Champion
Great Moments in Sports
Animal Rescue
Ragged Dick or Street Life in New York
Pollyanna

Mid-Range
The Call of the Wild
White Fang
Up From Slavery: An Autobiography
Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass
Uncle Tom’s Cabin
Harriet Tubman: Freedom Leader
A Dream Fulfilled: The Story of Barack Obama
The Adventures of Tom Sawyer
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
The Prince and the Pauper
The Swiss Family Robinson
Ethan Frome
Laughter and Chills
We have always been surprised that *A Tale of Two Cities* is on the reading lists of so many American schools. It is a challenging book to read. While TP has edited the book to make it more readable, it is still a complex story—and is better read, along with *Great Expectations*, *Last of the Mohicans*, the sophisticated satire *Gulliver’s Travels*, and *The Odyssey* as one of the last books on the list.