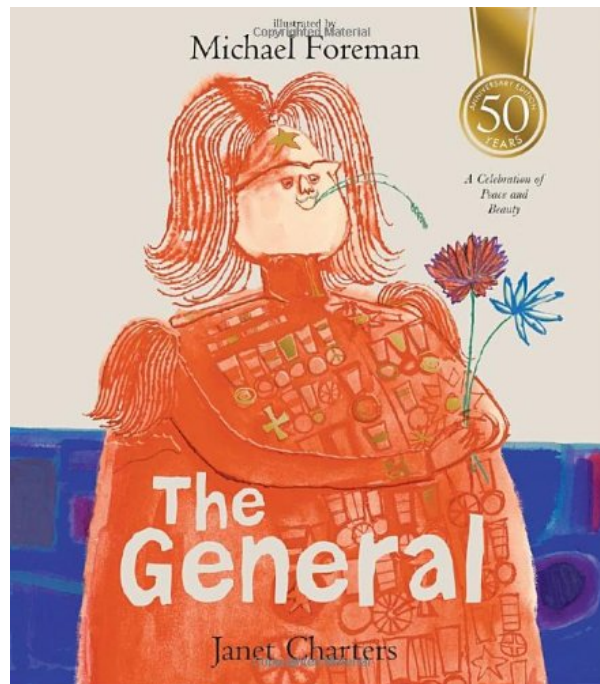
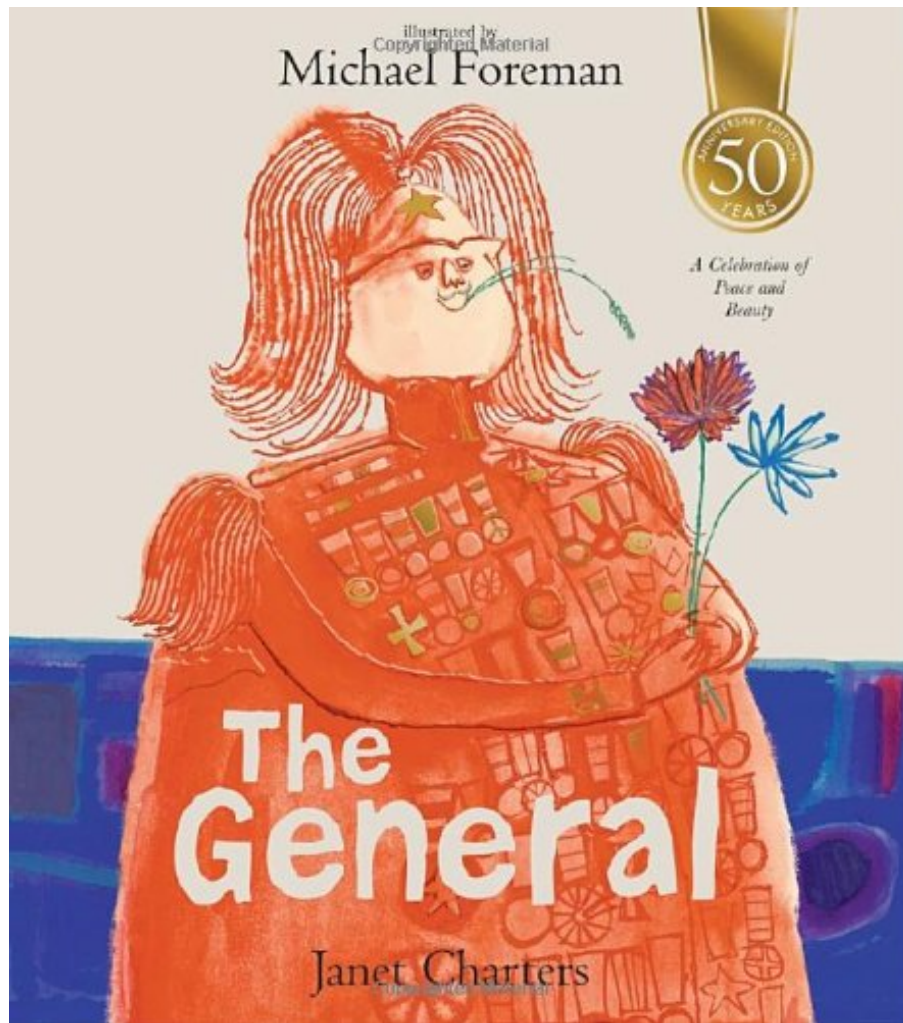


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Review

"When we worked on *THE GENERAL* we wanted to produce a fun and lively story for children, but one to encourage a sympathetic outlook on the world." — Janet Charters — Quote

"My first book, *THE GENERAL* was about a general who made his country the most beautiful in the world instead of the most powerful. Fifty years on, it seems even more relevant as the threat to the environment, hinted at in *THE GENERAL*, (not to mention the threat of war) is now plain to see — even by politicians." — Michael Foreman — Quote

About the Author

Janet Charters studied painting in Poole, Dorset, and London, England. *THE GENERAL* was her first picture book. She now lives in London.

Michael Foreman created *THE GENERAL* to impress potential freelance employers while he was still at art college. It became his first published book. One of the foremost illustrators of his generation, Michael Foreman lives in London.

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- 48 pages

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A small classic

By john c wilson

I agree with Max Hasting's preface that this well crafted little book is a classic of World War I literature.

22 of 23 people found the following review helpful.

A MASTERPIECE

By Brian Libby

This is one of the best books I have ever read. I bless the day many years ago--in college, I think--when I found it in a bookstore quite by accident (for I am not a naval buff and have read none of the Hornblower novels.) It was out of print for many years, and I welcome it back.

This is an anti-war novel written by a military historian who grieves over the way his country fought the Great War. It has parts which are hilariously funny (Curzon's courtship and marriage, the family he marries into, the wedding night (nothing graphic here, of course--Forester is a gentleman); it offers a scathing view of England's class system at work; it is dead right (is there a pun here?) in dealing with trench warfare.

Buy it, savor it, re-read it. If you happen to teach, assign it to your students along with All Quiet on the Western Front. This is a GREAT book!

13 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

Classic novel of the first world war.

By Marshall Lord

This is one of C.S. Forester's first novels about war, published in 1936 and hence pre-dating Hornblower.

Like almost all the novels which Forester wrote before he created the Hornblower books, this is brilliant, far less well known today than it deserves, and consequently quite rare. The author H.G. Wells described "The General" as "a magnificent piece of work."

Some of Forester's other books, particularly those describing battles against opponents of whom he strongly disapproved of such as Hitler's nazis or indeed Napoleon, can come over as patriotic to the point of jingoism or chauvinism. This story does not come into that category and it would not be far from the truth to call it one of the first great anti-war novels.

If you collect books about war, and you are fortunate enough to find a copy of "The General" for sale at a remotely reasonable price, buy it at once.

This novel describes the military career of a fictional first world war general. It begins and ends between the wars, with a sharp pen-picture of the retired general Curzon sitting in a bathchair on Bournemouth Promenade, having lost his leg during the great war and never managed to learn to walk properly with an artificial one.

Then the story goes back to Curzon's first battle as a subaltern in 1899 during the Boer war, and follows him through to the climax of the book at the battle of St Quentin on March 21st 1918 when the last desperate German offensive nearly snatched victory from the jaws of defeat.

Forester appears to have set out to do three things; to entertain, inform, and explain. He entertains with an engaging story; he informs by describing the ghastly conditions and waste of life which was the first world war in the trenches; and he tries to explain one possible answer to the question of how British commanders could possibly have given the orders which sent hundreds of thousands of young men to their deaths.

One of the most memorable passages in the book describes the debate as generals and senior staff officers of an army corps prepared a report of why the attack they had just organised had failed and how to succeed next time. "In some ways it was like the debate of a group of savages as to how to extract a screw from a piece of wood. Accustomed only to nails, they had made one effort to pull out the screw by main force, and now that it had failed they were devising methods of applying more force still ... they could hardly be blamed for not guessing that by rotating the screw it would come out after the exertion of far less effort".

But that does not mean that Forester is simply repeating the popular caricature of First World War generals as dangerous idiots. Although he is critical of the mistakes of the generals who wasted so many lives, his criticism is far more sophisticated than the old "Lions led by donkeys" cliché.

Although Curzon, the central figure of this book, is old fashioned and conventional, he is intelligent enough to change his mind when confronted with clear evidence of the need to do so, and decisive enough to enforce that change of mind on others when many men would freeze in panic. Had he been as stupid as some reviewers make out, Curzon would not have survived the first few months of World War 1, let alone been rapidly promoted.

He is intelligent enough to realise that his men need to eat and to make sure that they are fed properly, and to make use of officers who understand newfangled things like engineering, railways, or how many men it takes to carry a gas canister. He is ruthless enough to sack staff officers who are not up to the job even when one of them is his wife's cousin.

Within minutes of arriving at the front and seeing what artillery and machine-guns can do, Curzon abandons his pre-war attitude of deliberately evading training on how to dig trenches, and instead orders his men to dig for their lives, demanding compliance from junior officers who are afraid that the men might get dirt on their uniforms. "God damn it, man!" he explodes, "Get your men digging, and don't ask damn fool questions."

In the first round of battles in the Great War, heroic efforts from Curzon in the face of greatly superior German numbers prevent the British from being flanked and probably defeated at the First Battle of Ypres. Having fought with distinction up to this point, he is promoted to much more senior positions. But then things start to go wrong.

Forester makes a great many good points about the need to use the tactics which will win the current battle rather than the last war: indeed, that even the tactics which won earlier battles of the current war should be dropped if they are out of date. But that is not the only message he is trying to put over.

The main theme of "The General" is a World War One version of the Peter Principle. The very qualities which make Curzon successful on the battlefield up to and including the command of a brigade have disastrous consequences for England when he is a Lieutenant-General commanding an army corps, and when both he and all the other senior officers of the army are still displaying the characteristics which colonels and brigadiers need to hold their regiments in the line.

Forester states quite explicitly in the book that the very strengths of the World War One generals, not just their weaknesses, were part of the problem. I quote - "It might have been ... more advantageous to England if the British Army had not been quite so full of men of high rank who were so ready for responsibility, so unflinchingly devoted to their duty, so unmoved in the face of difficulties, of such unfaltering courage."

This book is an unforgettable classic.

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