



# Nightbirds on Nantucket

*Joan Aiken*

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## **Nightbirds on Nantucket** Joan Aiken

Having had enough of life on board the ship that saved her from a watery grave, Dido Twite wants nothing more than to sail home to England. Instead, Captain Casket's ship lands in Nantucket, where Dido and the captain's daughter, Dutiful Penitence, are left in the care of Dutiful's sinister Aunt Tribulation. In Tribulation's farmhouse, life is unbearable. When mysterious men lurk about in the evening fog, the resourceful Dido rallies against their shenanigans with help from Dutiful, a cabinboy named Nate, and a pink whale.

## **Nightbirds on Nantucket Details**

Date : Published October 25th 1999 by HMH Books for Young Readers (first published 1966)

ISBN : 9780395971857

Author : Joan Aiken

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# From Reader Review *Nightbirds on Nantucket* for online ebook

## Tabitha Suzuma says

One of my favourite childhood authors.

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## Abigail says

Dido Twite returns for her first full-length adventure in this third installment of Aiken's *Wolves Chronicles*. Rescued from the North Sea by the whaler Sarah Casket, Dido eventually finds herself on Nantucket, where she must cope with her whiny young companion, Dutiful Penitence, and a harsh task master named Aunt Tribulation. Uncowed and unimpressed, Dido is more than a match for her adversary. But as yet another nefarious plot to assassinate Good King Jamie begins to unfold around her, it will take all of her considerable resources to foil this latest Hanoverian outrage.

The fun continues as one of the most level-headed and common-sensical heroines in children's literature confronts some of the zaniest and most hilariously convoluted plot twists known to melodrama. With her penchant for whimsically appropriate names, the surprise appearance of a character from the beloved *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase*, a suitably improbable plot, and a humorous send-up of Melville's *Moby-Dick* in the form of Captain Casket's obsessive quest to find the "great pink whale," *Nightbirds on Nantucket* is sure to please.

Like the earlier *Black Hearts in Battersea*, this title was originally illustrated by Robin Jacques, and it is a shame that his drawings were not retained in later editions.

**Addendum:** Because the reading order of this series is somewhat complicated, I have included this handy guide, which is organized by publication date, and which I recommend to prospective readers of the series, rather than the one offered here on Goodreads:

Reading Order for the Series:

- 1) *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase*
- 2) *Black Hearts in Battersea*
- 3) *Nightbirds on Nantucket*
- 4) *The Whispering Mountain*
- 5) *The Cuckoo Tree*
- 6) *The Stolen Lake*
- 7) *Dido and Pa*

8) Is Underground

9) Cold Shoulder Road

10) Dangerous Games

11) Midwinter Nightingale

12) The Witch of Clatteringshaws

A few notes:

-- Is Underground is the American name for the British original, Is. Similarly, Dangerous Games was originally published in Britain as Limbo Lodge.

-- The Wolves of Willoughby Chase features two characters that recur, but the two young heroines do not.

-- The Stolen Lake is the point at which the chronology becomes somewhat complicated, as it is the sixth book, but chronicles events that occur in between Night Birds on Nantucket (#3) and The Cuckoo Tree (#5).

-- Is Underground (or Is) and Cold Shoulder Road both feature Is Twite, cousin to the main heroine, Dido. They occur alongside the other books, and their position in the series is not chronologically relevant.

-- Dangerous Games (Limbo Lodge) is another title that backtracks in the chronology...

--Although not technically part of the series, Aiken's Midnight Is a Place does occur in the same alternative timeline, and is set in Blastburn, the same imaginary city that features in the other books.

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## **Züleyha says**

Çocuklu?umda okudu?um macera romanlar?na benziyordu. Heyecanla ve keyifle okudum.

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## **CLM says**

Reading this to my nieces. I read this so many times as a child but it is obvious to me now that Aiken had read a lot of Georgette Heyer - Dido uses a lot of slang that I have encountered nowhere else. I think that I as a child figured out all these expressions by context and it is interesting to see that the younger niece does that automatically and the 7th grader wants instant explanations. It will be nice when we reach the Twite books I never read.

The Wolves of Willoughby Chase, Black Hearts in Battersea and Nightbirds on Nantucket comprise an amazing trilogy, and one I reread many times in elementary school. I guess the real reason that I didn't embrace her later books in the series with the same enthusiasm is that most of them came out after I was in high school and had moved on to other authors. I have now collected most, and hope that my nieces, just

introduced to the first three, will continue enthusiastically although they do not seem to love historical fiction as I did. Note to self - must go to Nantucket some time!

I remember fondly the NY Betsy-Tacy group's visit to Books of Wonder to meet the now deceased Joan Aiken, and read sadly recently that her sister, Jane Aiken Hodge, passed away.

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### **Kirsten says**

Dido Twite awakens on a Nantucket whaler, having slept for ten months after being rescued from a shipwreck in the arctic. Now, before she can make her way back to her beloved England, she must help Captain Casket's daughter Dutiful Penitence face her fear of everything other than Bible study and needlepoint. No easy task in the face of Pen's new guardian, the sinister Aunt Tribulation! But is Aunt Trib all she appears to be? This is a mystery, an adventure story, and a very, very funny book.

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### **Katrina says**

This is a daft but fun read.

<https://piningforthewest.co.uk/2018/0...>

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### **Rebecca says**

Okay, this is actually the third book in the series. The series goes as follows:

1. The Wolves of Willoughby Chase
2. Black Hearts in Battersea
3. Nightbirds on Nantucket
4. The Stolen Lake
5. The Cuckoo Tree
6. Dido and Pa
7. Is
8. Cold Shoulder Road

There are more, but these are the best.

You can read them in order, or not (I didn't, and I actually recommend reading Nightbirds on Nantucket first, reading the other two as prequels, and then continuing on in order), but you absolutely must read them, because they are adventurous and funny and scary and sad and feature the strongest, most capable, most realistic, and least obnoxious heroine that I have ever had the pleasure of meeting—the incomparable Dido Twite!

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## **Mariel says**

Man, I love these books. The Wolves of Willoughby Chase is really good, and deservedly a classic, but where's the love for Dido Twite? Most people I know don't realize that this was a series (the connection to 'Wolves' is a loose one). I love the little spitfire. Anyway, these were so much fun that I skipped a bunch of classes to read them. Good times. Not that I'm condoning truancy, I'm merely condoning reading these books (stay in school!). Not all of the Dido books are as good as this one, however. I've found the best rule of thumb to use is publication date. If it is from the '70s or '80s, avoid it. Fortunately the last book, The Witch of Clatteringshaws, was good again (Aiken's last. R.I.P). Nightbirds and Blackhearts in Battersea are my top two favorites. You can't go wrong with attempted assassinations and long-range canons.

We Americans struck gold in the cover art department. Edward Gorey's covers (he also did new versions before he died in 2000. R.I.P) are the best. I feel sorry for England (and they had to suffer those ugly Harry Potter covers, as well!). For some reason Aiken maintained that she liked the UK covers. As if, man, as if.

Dido gets a bag put over her head in pretty much every book. You'd think she would be ready for it at some point...

Did street urchins of the day (yeah, I know this is alternate-history-reality) really talk that way? "Flash cove" and "I twig your lay"? (I'm impressionable 'cause when I read all these books, my speech became a lot more colorful. I should have stayed in school.)

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## **Beth (bibliobeth) says**

This novel is the third in The Wolves Chronicles books by Joan Aiken that I've been steadily reading with my sister and fellow blogger, Chrissi Reads for our Kid-Lit challenge over the past few years. We absolutely adored the first novel in the series, The Wolves Of Willoughby Chase and quite enjoyed the follow-up, Black Hearts In Battersea so were both intrigued to see how the series was going to continue, particularly with the emergence of beloved character Dido Twite. Sadly, I'm not sure if the books in this series are getting weaker or if it's just when I read them as an adult, I seem to have lost some of that old childish magic/sparkle that would ordinarily keep me gripped within an adventure story just like this. There are of course some wonderful things that would appeal to a younger audience in this novel and at some points, it really feels like a classic piece of literature, giving me all the old Blyton "feels" that I used to experience every time I cracked open a Secret Seven, Famous Five or Faraway Tree book but unfortunately, I didn't feel the plot was as strong compared to Aiken's previous novels in the series.

In this third book in the series, we see the triumphant return of fan favourite, Dido Twite who was first introduced to us in Black Hearts In Battersea and for a short time, I felt incredibly irritated by until the story developed further and she became more endearing than annoying! In Nightbirds On Nantucket, after the dramatic (almost cliffhanger events) of the second novel, Dido finds herself on a strange ship bound for an isolated island. She is tasked with taking the Captain's anxious daughter, Dutiful Penitence under her wing, bringing her out of her shell and encouraging her that living part-time on the island of Nantucket with her Aunt Tribulation wouldn't be a bad thing. However, when the two girls reach Nantucket, they realise that things aren't all they seem to be. A plot to overthrow the King Of England, a mysterious pink whale and some very shady characters are just some of the things Dido and Pen must deal with if they are to convince the local community of the dangerous plans afoot.

This series has everything going for it, including fantastic characters, classic villains and real, "feel good" endings. I enjoyed the inclusion of the pink whale and the development of Pen as a character in particular. She went from a terrified little girl who was afraid of her own shadow to a determined and loyal young friend that found some admirable inner strength when people she loved were in trouble. I think Nate, the cabin boy that Dido and Pen meet had the potential to be a good character and an interesting side-kick for the girls but wasn't explored as much as he could have been. Plus, his eternal singing kind of got on my nerves a little bit! Nevertheless, I think Aiken choosing to focus on two female leads was a work of genius, especially considering how much bravery and fight they displayed when times got tough.

Joan Aiken has legions of fans across the world for this series and I can definitely see why - it's packed full of adventure and mystery with the addition of the lovable characters I mentioned earlier. I'm not entirely sure why I didn't connect with this book as much as I have done with the previous stories in the series, there was just something about the plot that I couldn't quite get on board with. However, I can one hundred percent understand why it continues to have such appeal and holds a special place in people's hearts.

For my full review and many more, please visit my blog at <http://www.bibliobeth.com>

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## **Orinoco Womble (tidy bag and all) says**

The first of the Wolves Chronicles that I ever read, and still my favourite. I have no idea how many times I've read this but at least ten or fifteen since I first ran across it in the elementary school library when I was about 8. I had no idea it was part of a series, as I remember only this and *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase* were in our library in those days. I read it again and again in school, and even borrowed it from a friend and never gave it back--sorry, Sarah. I still have it and it's in pristine condition, but I have no idea where you are these days, or even if you are. And I have read it repeatedly since I "grew up" (or at least stopped growing taller). With summer temperatures above 41°C, this tired woman of a certain age has turned to Aiken's alternate England for entertainment.

What I love about these books is that they can be read as stand-alones (at least for the most part, I haven't read the whole series). Aiken gives you just enough backstory to understand and not so much that you fear you might be "missing something"--you aren't. If you can suspend disbelief on some minor details (like putting an 11 yr old child into a clock as punishment--yeah, right, like she'd fit), they're just crazy adventures, no more "unrealistic" than say Harry Potter. In fact I'd say they are much more realistic than that guff. The details didn't bother the child-me a bit.

The wicked Hanoverians are back, but this time on the other side of the pond. Dido is with us again, but no longer as the snotty little brat; eleven months in a coma seems to have done her a world of good. She is now self-reliant enough to take Dutiful Penitence Casket under her wing and teach her to face down Aunt Tribulation, who owes more than a little to Red Riding Hood's wolf.

I never read *Moby-Dick*; or, *The Whale* till I was in my mid-thirties, so it took that long to realise that this is not exactly a parody but perhaps what filmmakers would call an "homage" to that in spots, with references to *The Adventures of Doctor Doolittle* n passing as well. Aiken doesn't seem to know much about how whales actually swim, and she patently doesn't care. Neither will the reader.

After 42 years it's still a good read, and I'm sure I'll read it again some day.

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## Chris says

Writing a successful novel is sometimes a little like inventing a recipe for a special dish. *Take a dash of Jules Verne, add essence of Charles Dickens, several pinches of Herman Melville and season with adventure.* Would that it was as simple as that. What you need is the main ingredient, the protein in the dish, and in *Night Birds in Nantucket* that is provided by the indomitable figure of Dido Twite.

When we last saw Dido she'd been lost at sea somewhere off the northeast coast of England, presumed dead. That was December, 1833. It is now ten months later, and the poor lass has lain in a coma after having been picked up by the whaler *Sarah Casket*. Like an amalgamation of Snow White and *Moby Dick's* Ishmael she is found in a wooden straw-filled coffin-like box on the other side of the world, north of East Cape on the Russian side of the Bering Straits (the East Cape -- Cape Dezhnev since 1898 -- was then popular with whalers). She has been looked after by young Nate Pardon all the while, and when she finally awakens it is to find it could be months before she is in a position to head back to England. And while she waits she finds that those on board the *Sarah Casket* are a very strange bunch indeed.

First there is Jabez Casket, the Quaker captain from Nantucket, who addresses everyone as "thee" and has a singular mission on his mind. Then there is his daughter, Dutiful Penance, who has chosen to remain below unseen from grief at the loss of her mother. What about the rascally Ebenezer Slighcarp, the first mate -- what's his game? And who is the mysterious woman Dido finds below decks who threatens Dido if her presence is revealed? As the whaler makes its way back to the North Atlantic Dido discovers the Captain's obsession is with a pink whale, but it is not until they reach Nantucket seven months later (in April or May 1835) that Dido goes ashore to find that the story is not over yet.

It's hard to review the third of the Wolves Chronicles without revealing too much of the story, but by referring to the previously mentioned three authors I hope to indicate how intricately Joan Aiken plots what many might regard as 'only' a children's book. Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865), set at the end of the American Civil War, features a manned projectile being sent to the earth's satellite. One of the proposals involves building a giant cannon to the plans of J T Marston, and the contemporary book illustration I'm sure furnished the inspiration for one of the main narrative devices. Meanwhile, Dickens (or indeed any of his contemporaries) wrote several plots about orphans and suchlike being badly bullied and manipulated by adults who should have known better; this is certainly the case with Dutiful Penance and Dido, both of whom who have lost at least one parent.

Lastly, Melville's most famous novel *Moby Dick* is clearly a part model for *Night Birds in Nantucket*: a pink whale called Rosie Lee and the madly driven Captain Casket parallel the white whale Moby Dick and Captain Ahab, and a ship is indeed sunk by the action of the whale -- though not in the way one would guess, let alone expect.

Amazingly there is even an assassination attempt on the British monarch in this novel, much like the young Queen Victoria who nearly lost her life by a bullet at the end of May 1842. The more one reads, the more one's impressed by Aiken's rich and inventive imagination. But without the central figure of the resourceful, irreverent, brave and intensely likeable Dido, who affects virtually everyone she comes in contact with, it would matter not a jot how cleverly the story is plotted. By the end of *Night Birds* the reader will be agog to know what happens to the young heroine next.



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## Nicole McGovern says

One of my favorites as a child!

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## Julie says

This is an old book with a fun little story that was engaging and quick to read. Essentially about a whaling family who spends time searching for a pink whale, rescues a girl from the ocean, and destroys an evil plot to another nation. I won't give more details but I just found it fun and delightful to read. That said, I wouldn't bother buying it out but if you get a chance to borrow it then go for it.

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## Hank Horse says

Oh boy! This may be my favorite of all the Joan Aiken books. Dido Twite is simply one of the greatest characters I've ever read. I wonder if anyone writing today could handle the challenge of a story with an adult Dido as protagonist?

some book-learnin':

"At the beginning, Dido is an eccentric, somewhat snappy child, with little to endear her. It is not long, however, before Simon and the reader begin to see something attractive in the 'brat' (p. 23). Initially it is her 'forlorn, neglected air' but soon her quirky slang language becomes her hallmark. At first it is the odd word or phrase: 'jellyboy' or 'wotcher my cully.' But once she gets into her stride, Dido's language increases in its use of original early nineteenth century slang, her variations upon it, and a totally made-up but authentic-sounding idiolect. Into the first category come words such as 'havey-cavey,' 'mint-sauce,' and 'sapskull.' The second includes 'betwaddled,' and 'tipple-topped.' In the last come words for which I can find no dictionary meaning: 'croopus!', 'lobbed his groats' and 'in the nitch.' Although Dido is not the sole user of dialect or slang, the originality of her speech is intrinsic to her character and helps endear her to the reader. Her language is evocative and does not necessitate a constant recourse to the dictionary: a meaning can always be derived from the context. What it evokes is the language of the time and it epitomises Dido Twite."

--Lathey, G. A havey-cavey business: language in historical fiction with particular reference to the novels of Joan Aiken and Leon Garfield in Historical Fiction for Children: Capturing the Past, F.M. Collins, and J. Graham, eds., London: David Fulton Publishers, 2001.

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## Wordwizard says

A fun read, but not up to the standards of the rest of the giant heap of "should've read this ages ago" books I've been going through. The main threat is just silly (a giant gun that will shoot across the Atlantic to kill

King James in London, the recoil from which will push Nantucket into New York Harbor). Silly in a good way, of course--I don't mean to be a wet blanket here--but, given the context in which I read it, not nearly as realistic as I'd expect. I mean, THE BOY JONES was real within itself in a way this wasn't, if that makes sense...

Oooh, Neil Gaiman would have fun with that idea.

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