



Missy's Epic Novel

Marica Bernstein

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Missy's Epic Novel

Other works by Marica Bernstein:

Miss Missy's School Book I: A Pack of Farm Dogs Starts a School (ages 7-12 & older; 2021)

Miss Missy's School Days (ages 7-12 & older; forthcoming, 2022)

Aubrey's Odyssey (3rd in the *Miss Missy's School* series; ages 7-12 & older; forthcoming)

Miss Missy's School's Out for the Summer (ages 7-12 & older; forthcoming)

An American Foursquare: Walls Do Talk (young adult; forthcoming)

Missy's Epic Novel

The Times Before
Miss Missy's School

Marica Bernstein

Missy's Epic Novel
The Times Before Missy Missy's School

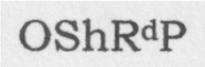
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Old Schoolhouse Road Publishing

The logo for Old Schoolhouse Road Publishing, featuring the letters 'OShRdP' in a stylized, serif font. The letters are white and set against a dark grey rectangular background.

For Readers of *Miss Missy's School*

Cover art by Caroline Cooper.
The first drawing of Missy and Rocky, *ever!*

*Reading maketh a full person, confidence a
ready person, and writing an exact person.*

Francis Bacon (1561-1626)
“Of Studies”

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Contents

| | |
|--|------|
| Foreward..... | xiii |
| A Note from Marica..... | 2 |
| <i>I Missy Begins in the Middle.....</i> | 10 |
| <i>II Missy's Epic Novel (so called)....</i> | 18 |
| <i>III Have I Missed Something?.....</i> | 26 |
| <i>IV It's Epic.....</i> | 37 |
| <i>V Marketing Strategy.....</i> | 46 |
| Epilogue: Old Things & Ways Explained | 53 |
| Afterword..... | 69 |
| Acknowledgements..... | 71 |
| About the Author..... | 72 |

Another one?

Forward

The short stories in *The Times Before Miss Missy's School* series are suitable for children (ages 7-12), young adults, and their grownups— whole families! The stories are episodes from the earlier lives of Missy and her pack— including Tiger the Cat— in *Miss Missy's School Book I: A Pack of Farm Dogs Starts a School* (2021).

[Please note that the collections of short stories were formatted by the author, not a professional book designer. The books are professionally designed and formatted. This is the author's way of saying, sorry for formatting mistakes here!]

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A Note from Marica

DEAR READERS,

The little *Epic Novel* seed was planted in Missy's fertile brain way back in August 2016. Here's how it got there. Missy, Rocky, and I were back in the den. (The den is what we call the master bedroom of the farmhouse. It has Missy's and my desks, and all sorts of places for Rocky to relax in comfort with his detective stories.) Missy politely asked if I had a minute— which for Missy and Rocky I always do— so I asked her what was up.

Marica Bernstein

“Well,” she said, “while you have been off reading about the Geeks, I have been...”

“RUFF!?!”

“Greeks, Missy, not geeks. Rocky, don’t poke fun.”

“Oh my! But of course. I did know that. Slip of the tongue— I’ve been ever so worn out these last few weeks,” Missy explained.

“Ruff,” Rocky concurred.

“I did notice you’ve been slowing down a bit, Missy. Is everything alright?” I asked her.

“Ruff?”

“And you, Rocky, are you well?”

“Ruff,” he answered.

“Well,” Missy began, “that little Bebe is running me to death, Marica. She is so full of energy! All she wants to do is play and

swim and fetch that stick of hers. And she expects me to keep up with her! Bebe's energy is boundless but alas, mine no longer is."

"Did I hear my name?" Bebe came running into the den. "Is someone talkin' 'bout me? Whatdyasay? Whadysay? Who's talkin' 'bout me? Who, who, who? Did someone say 'fetch'? Where's my stick? Where's my stick? Who, who, who's talkin' 'bout me?" Bebe had only moved to the Farm about six months earlier, and she had yet to learn the niceties of polite conversation. In fact, she had yet to learn quite a number of things, but that's another story.

"Good grief, Bebe, you sound like an owl. Hush!"

"Rrrufff," Rocky warned Bebe mildly.

Marica Bernstein

“Nobody ever wants to talk to me. Why doesn’t anyone ever talk to me? I’m just gonna go over here and chew on this old shoe. Someday you’ll be...”

“Bebe! Please!” I said and pulled my new sandal from her mouth. “Now, Missy, you were saying...?”

“Ruff?”

“Thank you,” Missy said. “As I was saying, while you have been reading about the Greeks, I have been perusing some back issues of our little weekly newspaper, and I see that some school children cannot read. Can it be, Marica, that some children do not enjoy reading?”

“RUFF?!?”

“Sadly, it is true, Missy.”

“It’s enough to make me weep— if I were able,” Missy said, and it sounded as if she may indeed break down and cry. “I cannot imagine life without Louisa May Alcott’s books, or the *Secret Garden*. Or without Aesop, or *The Little Mermaid*. And how does one learn without reading? Oh my! So sad.” Missy closed her eyes and slowly shook her head.

“Ruff,” Rocky agreed.

“I know, Dear Friend! What would you do without your British detective novels?”

“Ruff!”

“I love to read! I love, love, love to read!” Bebe said. (Of course, when this conversation had taken place, Bebe hadn’t really learned to read on her own yet. What she meant was that she loved to memorize

Marica Bernstein

the stories the other dogs and people read to her.) “I love to read and read and read. I’ll read right now! Where’s *Peter Rabbit*? Where’s *Peter Rabbit*? Once upon a time. Once upon a time there were four little rabbits....”

“Please, Bebe,” Missy pleaded. “We’re happy you love to read, but read quietly to yourself. Not out loud.”

Those who have read *Miss Missy’s School* can imagine how distraught Missy was when I confirmed that some children do not like to read. From her first days here Missy had immersed herself in Farther Along Farm’s rather large library, and she couldn’t fathom pups and kids who didn’t love to read. Even

back then, Missy knew that if you can read, you can learn and do just about anything.

But what was she to do about this sad state of affairs? Crying over it wouldn't change anything. But if you know Missy, you know that she is a dog of action! It was a mighty challenge, under what were unfavorable conditions, but that little seed soon germinated. She tended to it by reading lots of classic children's literature, and before any of us knew it, the seed had sprouted into a full-fledged idea in her brain!

And that's the beginning of how Missy's *Epic Novel* came to be. Hope you enjoy the rest of the story!

Love,

Marica

Marica Bernstein

Chapter I: Missy Begins in the Middle

DECEMBER 2018

“Pardon me, Marica,” Missy sat down in front of Marica’s desk. “Do you have a moment?”

“Why certainly, girl,” Marica replied, “What’s up?”

“Ruff?” Rocky asked.

“What are your thoughts on in me-dI-us rez?”

“Ruff?!?” Rocky scoffed.

Marica Bernstein

“What?”

“Me-dI-us rez. Surely you know the term, Marica,” Missy answered. “It’s a literary device meaning ‘to being in the middle of things’.”

“Ruffruffruff,” Rocky chuckled.

“Well, Missy,” Marica said holding back a giggle, “It’s pronounced ‘in ME-dE-as race’. I thought you knew Latin pronunciation.”

“I don’t know what you think is so funny, Dear Friend,” Missy scolded Rocky. “You have a vocabulary of *literally* one word. And I am quite certain I am enunciating it properly, Marica. It derives from the French, I’m sure.”

“Ruff,” said Rocky shaking his big bulbous head.

“In any case, what are your thoughts on this device?” Missy continued. She had been sidetracked far too many times by these sorts of disagreements with Marica and her Dear Friend, Rocky. She wasn’t going to let it happen again.

“Well. Let’s see,” Marica thought for a moment, “I’d say pretty much everything begins in the middle of things when you get right down to it.”

“Ruff, ” Rocky agreed. “Ruff?”

“Good question, Rock. Why do you ask about *in medias res*?”

“Well,” Missy sighed and slowly slid all the way down to the floor. “I am in the early stages of planning my first novel.”

“RUFF!?!”

Marica Bernstein

“And I am considering beginning it in the middle of things,” Missy continued, ignoring Rocky’s utterance of disbelief. “As you know, many of the classics begin in me-dI- ..., I mean in ME-dI-..., in the middle of things. And as I intend for my novel, nay, my *Epic Novel*, to become a classic, I am considering— pardon the vulgarity— “hooking” my audience right from the start.”

“I think hooking your readers right up front is a fine way to begin, Missy,” said Marica. “But I really wouldn’t know because I’ve never written a novel— much less an *Epic* one.”

“Ruff?”

“Thank you for asking, Dear Friend. I have not yet finished the plot line but in the most general of terms, it is a story—

naturally about canines— of courage, honor, justice, friendship, good temper....”

“So, the virtues?” Marica asked.

“Exactly,” Missy replied. “But I seem to be missing a couple.... Oh! Truthfulness, wit, magnanimity, temperance...”

“Temperance. That’s a good one, Missy,” Marica interrupted and winked at Rocky. “What have you learned about temperance in your studies?”

“Ruffruffruff,” Rocky chuckled. He could see where this was headed!

“Well, Marica,” Missy sat up straight and assumed her schoolmarm demeanor, “as you know, temperance had a somewhat different meaning for the Ancients than it does for the common folk today. Aristotle believed as a virtue, temperance was very

Marica Bernstein

similar to courage. Temperance was a mean with regard to all pleasures, not simply drink. The vicious extreme most common is self-indulgence or the inability to control one's desires."

"Ruffruffruff!" Rocky was rolling belly up on the futon laughing his head off.

"Could you give us an example of intemperance?" Marica asked.

"Of course, one comes quite readily to mind," Missy said. "Tiger the Cat's inability to ration his food. I mean really! Have you seen how he eats? One big mouthful and it's all gone and he's howling around for more within an hour!" Missy said excitedly.

This was too much even for Marica. She burst into laughter and had she been a dog,

or younger, she herself would have been rolling on the floor laughing her head off.

“What, pray tell, are you two laughing about?” Missy asked. “This is a matter for serious discussion!” she said sternly.

“I’m sorry, Missy,” Marica said wiping a tear from her eye, “But I seem to recall a bit of intemperate behavior from you just the other day.”

“Ruffruffruff!”

“Why! I never! Whatever are you talking about, Marica?” Missy said indignantly.

“Ham bone,” was all Marica said.

“Ruffruff,” Rocky was getting exhausted from all this laughing.

“Oh,” Missy said as she lowered her eyes. “My, I do suppose that was very intemperate of me, wasn’t it?”

Marica Bernstein

“Well,” said Marica softly, “Don’t worry about it too much. Nobody can be virtuous all the time. It *was* a big bone.”

“Delicious, too!”

Chapter II: Missy's Epic Novel (so called)

JULY 2019

“Hey, Missy! How’s your novel coming along?” Marica asked and leaned back in her chair.

As was their summertime late-in-the-afternoon custom, Marica and Missy were working at their desks in the den while Rocky settled in for a good read.

Marica Bernstein

“Sweepingly, Marica. Just *sweepingly!*” replied Missy looking up from the pile of notebooks, books, and devices on her desk.

“Ruff?” Rocky questioned.

“Um, Missy... don’t you mean ‘swimmingly?’”

“*Swimmingly!?!?*” Missy cried out. “What does *swimming* have to do with *Epic Novel* writing? No, no. I mean *sweepingly*. I read the reviews, Marica. All epic novels are sweeping.”

“I see your point, Missy,” Marica agreed.

“Ruff,” Rocky mumbled as he yawned and stretched out on the bed. Frankly, he was more than tired of Missy’s *Epic Novel* (so-called). “Ruff,” he mumbled again.

“So if you’re not too busy, Missy, tell us how it’s coming along.”

“Well, Marica, as you know I’ve been hard at work for months. And it is hard work, let me tell you!” Missy said most emphatically, as she took the reading glasses from her long snout. “I have now worked out the story arc. As you know, I begin *in medias res* and...”

“Very nice, Missy!”

“Thank you. I’ve been practicing,” Missy said proudly. “I begin *in medias res* and have developed the plot according to Aristotelian *mythos* regarding the subordination of character to the plot. I thought this particularly important, since— as you know— my tale is one of vices and virtues and how they manifest in not just the main, but also in the minor characters. I have thus

Marica Bernstein

far developed this plot to the point of denotation and somewhat more roughly...”

“Ruff?” Rocky asked Marica in a muffled tone.

“I think she might mean ‘dénouement,’ Rocky, but really I have no idea what she’s talking about,” Marica whispered back.

Missy-ism

Missy said denotation (from the verb ‘denote’) which means a name or designation. The smiley emoji is a denotation for happiness.

She should have said *dénouement* (pronounced day-noo-mah) which is a literary term that refers to the point in a story, usually in the last chapter or two, where everything begins to make sense.

“My chief difficulty will be, given the number of characters, ensuring tempo- and

spacio-cohesion among them,” Missy finished.

“Well! That sounds fascinating, Missy. Just fascinating!” Marica was pretty impressed. If nothing else, Missy had clearly done some back-ground reading on the subject of epic novel writing. “Here’s a question, though. Who is the target audience for your *Epic Novel*?”

“Children and young adults,” Missy answered firmly. “Children and young adults. I was ever so dismayed when, years ago, you confirmed that some children do not know how, or even worse, do not *want* to read. So very very sad. I believe it is my calling to write for these poor dears, to offer up to them a world of sterling characters,

Marica Bernstein
exquisitely crafted dialogs, and soaring
adventures.”

“Ruff,” Rocky rolled his eyes.

“My goodness! That’s wonderful!” Marica
exclaimed. “But what I was wondering is if
the intended audience is canine or human?”

“Ruffruffruff,” Rocky chuckled.

“Oh my! Silly me!” Missy giggled. “Why,
of course I hope for my *Epic Novel* to be read
by all, Marica! While I applaud my Dear
Friend’s bullish species-ism regarding dogs
versus cats, I myself have a more inclusive
attitude. I long for all creatures— great and
small, to coin a phrase— to become virtuous
little scholars.”

“Ruff?!? Ruff?!?” Rocky objected
strenuously.

“Rocky’s right, Missy. That phrase has already been coined.”

“Are you quite certain?”

“Yep,” Marica got up and started poking around the shelves. “Here,” she said as she handed Missy an old book.

“Well, I’ll be! I did not know,” Missy exclaimed. “I must be more careful. I certainly do not wish to become known as a placatist!”

Missy-ism

Missy said placatist but there is no such word. To placate means to calm or appease, as in ‘He was angry, but placated by a hug’.

She meant to say plagiarist which is a person who steals someone else’s writing, music, or art and passes it off as his own.

“You mean ‘plagiarist’? I wouldn’t worry too much about that, girl,” Marica grinned and gave Missy a big old scratch behind the

Marica Bernstein

ears. “You’re such a sweet girl. Your novel’s going to be just epic, Missy. You keep up the good work!”

“Ruff,” said Rocky shaking his big bulbous head.

“I shall, Marica. I shall. And thank you for your support.”

Chapter III: Have I Missed Something?

JANUARY 2020

“Marica?” Missy got up from her desk, laid down her reading glasses, stretched, and asked, “Do you have a minute?”

“Sure, Missy! What’s on your mind this cold and gloomy day?”

“Ruff?” Rocky, too, was curious.

“Well,” Missy heaved in a big breath of purified air in the way that one heaves in a big breath when one has a big

Marica Bernstein
announcement, and said, “I am nearly
done!”

“Done with what?” Marica asked.

“RUFF!?!” Even Rocky knew what Missy
was talking about— it’s nearly all she’d been
talking about for over a year.

“Why! My *Epic Novel*, of course!” Missy’s
was somewhat dismayed that Marica even
had to ask.

“Oh my gosh, Missy. I’m so sorry! I’ve so
been wrapped up in other things. I’m sorry,”
Marica apologized.

“That’s alright, Marica,” Missy could tell
it was a heartfelt apology and she did not
want to make Marica feel any worse. “In any
case, I am nearly finished!”

“Ruff!!” Rocky said excitedly. He was
more than ready to move on to other

conversational topics. Indeed, he had in mind that, as the weather was cold and damp, they should read some British detective novels together.

“Missy, that’s just wonderful! I know you’ve been working very hard on it,” Marica said.

“Indeed, I have. But I wonder if I might please ask for some help, here in the late stages?” Missy asked.

“Sure! How can we help?”

“Ruff?”

“Oh, my Dear Friend!” Missy said to Rocky, “You have helped more than you know! Explaining to me the masculine psyche must have been quite an undertaking for you. I thank you again! I well understand the motivations of my *Epic*

Marica Bernstein

Novel's heroines. But I could not have come to appreciate what transpires in the heart and mind of an epic hero when faced with Herculean tasks— tasks that would extinguish a weaker soul— were it not for your expedition on the subject of the male ego and...”

“Exposition?” Marica asked.

“That’s what I said, Marica. Do you need to get your hearing checked? I think you just might. In any case, Dear Friend, I thank you from the bottom of my heart!” Missy said to Rocky.

Missy-ism

Missy said expedition meaning a long journey for a specific purpose.

She should have said exposition meaning a very clear explanation.

“Ruff,” Rocky said humbly. He was a male of *literally* one word, not prone to going on and on, nor to seeking out this sort of lavish attention. He had, in fact, found the rough passages Missy had asked him to read quite good. Credit where credit’s due, he had to admit she was a keen observer of both canine and human behavior— feline, too, though given the weirdness of Tiger and Snaps, the two cats she most frequently observed, he was not sure how well those observations generalized.

“What can I do?” Marica asked.

Missy returned to her desk, retrieved a ream of printed pages, and— finding not a square inch of empty space on Marica’s desk— laid the pages in her lap. She began,

Marica Bernstein

“Not only has Rocky been most helpful, but so too were that ol’ hippy, Gilbert, and his sidekick, Bebe. I sent the manuscript to Gil electronically, to conserve paper. He reviewed it with a special focus on Aristotelian virtues and modern-day virtue ethics, á la Elizabeth Anscombe. And of course I was interested to hear what my precocious little friend, Bebe, had to say about the story. She seemed to quite like it, though I am not certain she understood the subtlety and nua... Oh my.” Missy cleared her throat.

Missy had taken to heart the criticism that she sometimes rambled unnecessarily. She had rehearsed her request to Marica, and she realized that she’d gone off script.

“I wonder if I could impose upon you the task of a final edit? I know you and John prefer editing hard copy, so I printed out my *Epic Novel*— double spaced and with margins wide enough for marginalia. Again, I know this is an imposition on your own writing time but I would be ever so grateful!”

“Oh, Missy! That’s so thoughtful!” What a dear she is, Marica thought. “I don’t actually have ‘writing time’ but I would be honored to read your manuscript,” Marica said, looking down at the ream of pages.

Many long moments passed as Marica flipped haphazardly through the manuscript. Meanwhile, Missy relaxed at Marica’s feet, and Rocky faded away... wondering why... no Staffordshire Terriers... in ...

“rruuff.”

Marica Bernstein

“Umm... Missy?” Marica said after a while.

“Yes?!? Yes?!?” Missy jumped up in anticipation of Marica’s initial reactions. “What do you think so far?”

“RUFF!” Rocky woke abruptly.

“Well, Missy. Have I missed something? I mean, this looks wonderful and your inclusion of the ‘List of Illustrations’ is fabulous,” Marica complimented. “But what’s *the title* of your *Epic Novel*? Where’s the title page?”

“Ruff??” Rocky was wide awake now.

“Missy?? Missy!!” Marica shouted louder and louder to get Missy’s attention.

“Ruff?? Ruff!!” Rocky did the same, to no better affect.

Missy was just sitting there, still as a statue, her eyes a glaze.

“Rocky! Rocky!! Do something!” Marica commanded.

“RRRRrrruuuuffff!” Rocky jumped from the bed, tucked his bulbous head into the side of his right shoulder and like a line-backer, targeted his whole 45 pounds straight into Missy’s furry neck.

“RUFF!” he said after impact, and, after a little shake, said, “Ruff.”

“Missy?!? Missy?!?” Marica helped Missy to her paws, “Are you okay? What’s wrong?”

“Well. My. I... I...” Missy stammered.

“Shake it off, girl!”

“Ruff!”

Missy did a good shake and sat down. “Why I don’t know what came over me,

Marica Bernstein

Marica. I believe I was paralyzed by embarrassment,” she shook a bit more. “Thank you, Dear Friend, for knocking some sense back into me.”

“Ruff,” Rocky mumbled and walked into his box. Too much excitement.

“Oh, Missy, nothing to be embarrassed about. Happens to everyone,” Marica consoled. “It’s easy to get so wrapped up in writing that you forget to tend to the obvious. Why, just the other day I published a blog post....”

“Excuse me, Marica,” Missy’s senses had fully returned. “As much as I enjoy your little blog, it is *not* of the same, shall we say, elevated literary strata as my *Epic Novel*. No, no. Most certainly not,” she insisted.

“I suppose that’s right, Missy. But that still leaves your *Epic Novel* with no title.”

“I am now painfully aware of this,” Missy said shaking her head and getting to her paws. “Would you mind opening the back door for me? I could use some fresh air and some time to myself.”

“Sure, Missy, c’mon,” Marica said as they walked out of the den.

“Ruffruffruff,” Rocky chuckled to himself when they were out of earshot.

Chapter IV: It's Epic!

MARCH 2020

“Marica? Do you have a minute?” Missy asked as she closed the lid to her laptop.

“Of course, Missy! What’s on your mind today?” Marica replied.

“Ruff?”

“I’m just curious. Have you read the *Harry Potter* books?”

“No, Missy, can’t say as I have, though they are on my shelf and my to-be-read list,” Marica said.

“Dear Friend,” Missy turned to Rocky, “I don’t suppose you have, either?”

“RUFF!!” Rocky emphatically denied such a question. Good grief. Missy knew he did not care for that genre. “Ruff!” he volunteered that he certainly was a fan of the *Cormoran Strike* series of detective novels by the same author.

Missy sighed, “I see.”

“Why do you ask, Missy?” Marica wondered.

“Well, Marica, as you know, my *Epic Novel* is completely completed and... .”

“Ruff?” Rocky interrupted.

“With a title and everything?” Marica asked.

“Yes, yes. Title, front matter including ISBNs and Library of Congress Card

Marica Bernstein

Number, contests, list of illustrations, dedication, epigrams from the ancients for each chapter....”

“You mean, ‘epigraphs?’” Marica corrected.

“Gosh, Marica, that’s what I said, ‘epigraphs.’ You really must consider getting your hearing checked,” Missy counseled, and then continued, “epigraphs, glossary, and index to key concepts.”

Missy-ism

Missy said epigram which is a short poem with a witty turn of thought.

She should have said epigraph which is a quotation placed at the beginning of a book or its chapters.

“Ruff! Ruff?”

“That’s great, Missy, but what did you title your *Epic Novel*? We’ve been waiting weeks to find out!”

“Ruff?” Rocky asked again. He could see that the end of the *Epic Novel* project was in clear sight and he just wanted to reach this destination as soon as possible so they could get on with their normal routines.

“*Vitiosus Canes, Virtutum Actus,*” Missy replied quite proudly.

“Oh my! That’s so lyrical, Missy. In fact, it’s *epic*! Well done!” Marica complimented.

“Ruff?!?” Seriously?!? As a well-educated dog, Rocky’s appreciation for Latin was just as steady as the next well-educated dog’s. But seriously? As a proud American who could trace his British ancestry all the way back to the days of Francis Bacon and

Marica Bernstein

beyond, he wondered what in the world was wrong with plain spoken English? *Vitiosus Canes, Virtutum Actus*. How about *Vicious Dogs, Virtuous Acts*? What was wrong with that? Sounded lyrical to him. “Ruff, ruff,” he grumbled as he retreated into his box with an Agatha Christy novel.

“Why, thank you, Marica,” Missy said and ignored Rocky’s grumblings. “I thought the play on ‘vitiosus’ was quite clever on my part!”

“But, getting back to *Harry Potter*, why do you ask? What does *Harry Potter* have to do with your *Epic Novel*?” Marica wondered.

“Well, Marica,” Missy slowly slid down onto the floor at Marica’s feet and began, “I have been cogitating and considering the all too obvious truths about the *Epic Novel*

Writing Business. *Consider* that my goal is for my *Epic Novel*, to reach as many children, pups, and kits as it can in order that these poor poor dears be swept away by the greatness of an epic tale of the vices and virtues— an ages’ old struggle— so that they may be encouraged to practice virtuous behavior and to come to love to read. *Consider* that in order to achieve this goal, I must publish and market my *Epic Novel*. *Consider* that despite its clear loft and worth, most publishers are— when you come right down to it, Marica— species-ists. Rocky calculated that the probability of my *Epic Novel* being published by a top-notch publisher was... how did he report it?... ‘next to zero’. *Consider* that it must be published!”

Marica Bernstein

“True enough, Missy, but, ummm, *Harry Potter?*” Much as Marica enjoyed chatting with Missy...

“I’m getting to that, Marica, be patient!” Missy drew a deep breath and continued, “*Consider*— and let me tell you I have done *considerable* research on this, Marica— *consider* that there is such a thing as self-publishing! There are dozens of self-publishing web sites and they are quite personalized, no matter one’s species. Several ask the potential self-publisher to characterize herself by seeking to discover what published author she most resembles. And so I took a quiz....”

“And you’re J.K. Rowling?” Marica asked knowingly. “Oh, Missy, you know those internet quizzes are hokum! Please don’t...”

“No. No! This one was quite accurate. It described me as a ‘high achiever’ in line with Rowling. Perfectly competent to not only write an *Epic Novel*— which, obviously I have— but to publish my *Epic Novel* as well! I don’t think you or my Dear Friend will quibble with the idea that I *am* a high achiever, will you?”

“Ruff,” Rocky agreed from somewhere deep in his box.

“I agree, Missy. I’m just asking you to be skeptical.”

“Marica, I have spent years studying the Ancients. Skepticism is my middle name!” Missy reassured her. “And now, since neither of you is familiar with *Harry Potter*, I will set that aside— the results of the quiz suggested I not get sidetracked by the

Marica Bernstein
perfective matters— and return to the task
at hand, designing an arresting website
through which to introduce my *Epic Novel* to
the world!”

Missy-ism

Missy said perfective which means trying to
make perfect.

She should have said peripheral from the
term periphery which means away from the
main or central part of something.

“Wait. What? Oh never mind,” Marica
said. “Let me know if I can help.”

“Ruff,” Rocky grumbled shaking his big
bulbous head. Will it never end?

Chapter V: Marketing Strategy

JUNE 2021

“Hey, Missy? Do you have a minute?”
Marica asked.

Missy looked up from an enormous pile of open books, maps, and notebooks on her desk and peered over her reading glasses. “*What?*” she asked.

“Do you have a minute?” Marica asked again.

“Why, sure, Marica. What can I help you with?”

Marica Bernstein

“How’s your book doing?”

“Well,” said Missy, “I’ve still quite a number of researches to do, especially with regard to *Purgatorio*, but I’d say it’s coming along quite nicely, thanks for asking.”

“Ruff?” asked Rocky.

“Dear Friend, Marica asked how the book was doing and I answered,” Missy replied. “I don’t understand your confusion.”

“What are you talking about, Missy?”
Marica echoed Rocky.

“My book. Tentatively titled– because I’ll not make that mistake again!– *Veiled Virtues*, though I haven’t yet worked out the Latin.”

“Ruff??” Here we go again, thought Rocky. He had sorely hoped Missy’s attentions would be wholly consumed by

Miss Missy's School and its students, but apparently he was mistaken. "Ruff," he said as he picked up his copy of *The Oxford Book of English Detective Stories* and headed into his box.

"Okay, Missy. Let me see if I have this straight. You're writing another book?" Marica asked.

"Yes," Missy replied. "Summer vacation affords me the opportunity to be very productive. Just like John."

"That's just wonderful! I'm looking forward to hearing more about it," Marica said. "But I was asking about *Vitiosus Canes, Virtutum Actus.*"

"Ruffruff," Rocky grumbled from somewhere deep in his box. As he had said many times, he didn't know what was wrong

Marica Bernstein
with plain spoken English. *Vicious Dogs*,
Virtuous Acts sounded to him like a perfectly
fine title. “Ruffruff.”

“Oh my! How silly of me! I haven’t
checked in a month or so. Let’s see,” Missy
said as she opened her iDevice and put on
her reading glasses. “My goodness! It’s doing
wonderfully, Marica. Look at this! It’s #43 in
Children’s Fantasy, right behind *Where the
Wild Things Are*. Oh! And even better! It’s
#15 in Children’s Classics, right behind *The
Hobbit*. My *Epic Novel* is a classic!”

“Good heavens, Missy! You are in some
amazing company!” Marica was truly
impressed. She had, of course, read Missy’s
book— and it was indeed an epic tale! But
she thought not of the sort that would have

garnered such popularity. “How did you do it?”

“RUFF!?!” Rocky was most impressed, too.

“Do what?”

“Sell so many books? Get so many readers? Engage so many people?” Marica asked. “What was your marketing strategy?”

“I’m not sure I had one, Marica. As you know my goal was not primarily to sell books, but rather to get my *Epic Novel* into the hands of as many of those poor dears who don’t care to read as possible. I would not have minded if only one-thousand copies had been sold, if each of those had been passed around one-hundred times,” Missy explained.

Marica Bernstein

“But you must have done something! You published the book yourself. Self-published books don’t find their way into the hands of hundreds of thousands of kids with no effort at all on the author’s part,” Marica was astounded. Surely Missy had done *something*. “What’s your secret?”

“Well, Marica,” Missy sighed and thought for a moment. “I suppose the first thing I did was write a captivating tale that swept the dear children— and I imagine their grownups as well, as they are the ones buying the book— into a time and place wherein their souls could fly....”

“It was a captivating tale,” Marica interrupted. “But once the book was written and published, *what did you do?*”

TO BE CONTINUED
JUST AS SOON AS I FIGURE OUT WHAT
MISSY DID.

Epilogue: Old Things & Ways Explained

A Note from Marica

Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888; pg. 4) wrote the much-loved children's book, *Little Women* (1868), among many other books and short stories. *Little Women* is the first children's novel, written by an American, to become a classic— a book cherished by generations of readers. As a young girl, Louisa was very influenced by two of her father's friends, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, very important

American thinkers and writers of the 19th century.

The Secret Garden (1911; pg. 4) was written by Frances Burnett (1849-1924), and is set at Misselthwaite Manor (a small castle) in Yorkshire, England. Mary, a spoiled and sickly little girl, is sent to the manor after her parents died. She is a very disagreeable child to begin with, but almost magical things begin to happen when she discovers the door to the secret garden.

Who doesn't love ***Aesop's Fables?*** (pg. 4) "The City Mouse and the Country Mouse" is a favorite on Farther Along Farm. We don't know a lot about Aesop. He may have been a slave on the Greek island of Samos about

Marica Bernstein

500B.C. Over the years, fables written by others were surely added to the collection of *Aesop's Fables*. Fables are very short tales with talking animals taking the place of wise, and foolish, people. They were written to teach lessons to children and to adults. The lessons, though, are not about moral virtues, but rather about the plainer goodness of common sense. For example, "The Ant and the Grasshopper" teaches that there's a time for work and a time for play.

The Little Mermaid (1837; pg. 4) by the Danish writer, Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875), is a fairy story about the daughter of a mer-king (sea-king) who is allowed to go to the water's surface and observe life on land. While there, she rescues

a shipwrecked prince and falls in love. Thinking he may return her love if she takes human form, she begs the sea-witch to make her tail into legs. But she pays a horrible price for this wish. Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* is a much more moving tale than the Disney cartoon movie.

Chapter I: Missy Begins in the Middle

In medias res (pg. 11) is Latin for “in the middle of things” or events. As Missy explains, it is a literary device— a writing technique used to achieve a specific effect. A story that begins *in medias res* begins at a very exciting part of the plot, in order to capture the readers’ attentions. The events

Marica Bernstein

that take place chronologically before the beginning of the written story are told later using analepsis, or flash-backs.

If this is confusing, think what *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* would have been like if Beatrix Potter had used *in medias res*. The story may have begun with Peter being chased around the garden by Mr. McGregor, and then being caught in the gooseberry net. While Peter was sobbing, he flashed-back and remembered his mother telling him earlier in the day to not go into the garden. After he remembers that scene, the story returns to Peter wiggling out of his blue jacket just in time to escape Mr. McGregor.

What other books or tales have you read that begin *in medias res*?

Have you ever wondered— maybe on a chilly, rainy Saturday afternoon— what it would be like if the world depended on *you* to take a great journey, perhaps lasting years and years, in order to save the world, and everyone living in it? On this journey you'd come face to face with unimaginable challenges and unspeakable evils. You may start out alone, or with a band of friends, but in the end, it's what you do (and don't do) that will determine whether the world is saved, or if it perishes along with you.

Strictly speaking, an **epic** (pg. 12) is a long poem that tells a story about the heroic deeds of men and women chosen by the gods to preform superhuman feats to save their countries, the world, or all of humanity. Odysseus (or Ulysses as he is also known

Marica Bernstein

as), and Penelope, both from the *Odyssey*, are two such heroic humans. The classic epics are Homer's (ca. 750B.C.) *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's (70–19B.C.) *Aeneid*, Dante's (1265A.D.–1321) *Divine Comedy*, and Milton's (1608–1624) *Paradise Lost*. All of these have been retold as stories for children.

We now use the term, epic, for any long story that takes place on a grand, sweeping scale. J.R.R. Tolkien's (1892–1973) *The Lord of the Rings*, and C.S. Lewis's (1898–1963) *The Chronicles of Narnia* are modern epics.

The Virtues (pg. 12) refers to a collection of human characteristics. These are not traits like eye color that a person is born with, but rather traits that people who wish

to live a good life need to learn, practice, and nurture. They all involve making the right choices about what to do, and how to act, in certain circumstances. Missy named many of the Aristotelian moral virtues (named after the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle; 384–322B.C.), but other philosophers and religions have collections of moral virtues, also.

People who have thought very hard about the virtues use courage as an example of an Aristotelian moral virtue. Remember the first scene in *Miss Missy's School* where Missy and Rocky find the poor homeless hound dog and her pup in the yard after the storm? Rocky barks his fiercest growl and even Missy barks her best dog bark. The dog (later named Aubrey) is scared to death.

Marica Bernstein

What choices did she have? She could have chosen to act cowardly, picking up her pup and running away even though she knew the pup needed shelter. Worse yet, she could have left her pup and just run away herself. Acting cowardly is a vice, the opposite of a virtue. On the other hand, Aubrey could have acted rashly, attacking Missy and Rocky even though they are larger and stronger than she. In the worst-case scenario, they would have had to defend themselves, and her pup may have become an orphan. Acting rashly when you are scared is a vice at the opposite end of the spectrum from being a coward. But somewhere in the middle lays the virtue of courage. Aubrey acted courageously under the circumstances. She stepped out into the

light, and even though she was scared, she asked for help.

Each of the other virtues is like this, too. For each virtue there are two vices, one in which you don't behave with enough of what's called for in the situation, and the other you respond with too much of what's called for. But somewhere between the two vices lays the virtuous behavior. Aristotle called the place on the spectrum where the virtue lays the Golden Mean.

Chapter II: Missy's Epic Novel (so called)

All Creatures Great and Small (pg. 21) is the title of a series of books by British veterinarian James Herriot (the pen name of

Marica Bernstein

James Alfred Wight), published in the United States in 1972. The books, and the movies and television shows they inspired, tell the stories of Herriot's small and large adventures caring for the animals of the dales, or valleys, in Yorkshire, England.

The title, *All Creatures Great and Small*, came from an old Anglican Church hymn, "All Things Bright and Beautiful."

Chapter III: Have I Missed Something?

The word "ethics," as it is used in the phrase, **Aristotelian virtue ethics** (pg. 28), refers to a branch of philosophy. (Philosophy is a discipline taught in high school and college, just like biology, mathematics, and history.) Ethics scholars

think about what the best ways are for people to live and behave in society. Some ethicists think that Aristotle's virtues provide the best guidance.

Modern day virtue ethics traces its roots back to ancient Greek philosophy, but in the over 2000 years since, many other ethicists have had more ideas on the subject. It's very interesting, and a subject you may want to learn more about as you get older.

Can you think of any well-known short sayings that suggest how people should behave toward one another?

Marica Bernstein

Chapter IV: It's Epic

The **Front matter** (pg. 45) of a book consists of all of the pages that come before the first page of the Introduction or first chapter. These include the half-title and title pages, copyright page, and contents page. Depending on the sort of book it is, front matter may also include a list of illustrations and the pages they are on, one dedicating the book to someone, and another with an epigraph.

The copyright page is almost always the page after the full title page, and includes important publication information. Two terms Missy mentions that you may not know are **ISBN** and Library of Congress Control (or Catalog or Card) Number. An

ISBN is the International Standard Book Number. It is unique to the book and its format. For example, *Miss Missy's School* has three different ISBNs, one for the hard cover, another for the paperback, and a third for the eBook. ISBNs have only been used since the mid-1960s.

Library of Congress Control Numbers (LCCNs) are much older than ISBNs. The first LCCNs were issued in 1898— so if you have a book that doesn't have a LCCN, you know it's more than 120 years old! Like ISBNs, each book has a unique number beginning with a code for the year in which it was published, followed by a serial number. One of the things LCCNs do is help libraries and bookstores organize and catalog, or keep track of all of the books, in

Marica Bernstein
a uniform way. That makes it easier for you,
the reader and customer, to find the books
you want no matter what store your
shopping at!

Chapter V: Marketing Strategy

Purgatorio is the second book of Dante's epic poem, *The Divine Comedy* (see 'epic' above). The first book is *Inferno*, and the third, and last, is *Paradisio*. Translated from Italian, the books are *Hell*, *Purgatory*, and *Paradise*, referring to the three places of the afterlife that people of Dante's time believed in. When Missy says she needs to do more research on *Purgatorio*, she's hinting that her next epic novel will be written in the style

of *The Divine Comedy*. It will be a journey that begins in a bad place with wretched beings, will progress through places with being who show the entire range of human possibilities, and ends very happily in paradise.

Afterword

If you've already read *Miss Missy's School Book I: A Pack of Farm Dogs Starts a School*, I hope you enjoyed reading this short story about how Missy's *Epic Novel* came to be. I think it's always fun to go behind the scenes of characters' lives, don't you? There will be more short stories coming up soon. They will be posted at missmissysschool.com

If you haven't read *Miss Missy's School*, I hope this story gives you a little taste of what the book is like. Of course, the book has

more characters, and more action than this story. And it has more fun things to learn!

If you want to preview *Miss Missy's School Book I: A Pack of Farm Dogs Starts a School*, and soon see a preview of the second book, *Miss Missy's School Days*, go to missmissysschool.com.

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About the Author

Marica Bernstein lives with her husband, John Bickle, their two dogs, two cats, one donkey, and one not too bright sheep on a farm in rural Mississippi. Marica is the author of *Miss Missy's School Book I: A Pack of Farm Dogs Starts a School*, the first in a series of four *Miss Missy's School* books.

You can contact Marica at marica@missmissysschool.com. She'd love to hear from you!