This large format, illustrated ?collectible first edition? is published for the gift-book market. The story is one of the great classics of literature for children. Does it need further embellishment?

Perhaps, for The Secret Garden is a hefty read and in an age when many children will have encountered the film first, the visual can provide a way in, though maybe not this illustrated edition. Moore?s illustrations have fuzzy, unfocused backgrounds onto which figures and details look as if they have been superimposed. Sometimes this results in a cut-out look with outlines all too visible? Mary on the front cover, for example, doesn?t comfortably relate to the ground she?s skipping over.

The design of the book is distracting too, hampered by its attempt to be lavish. There is a wide range of types of illustration from full page garden scenes, with and without borders, line drawings, half pages, tiny vignettes, some of them hardly relating to the page at all while others do so almost slavishly, cutie cartoon mice and squirrels alongside well-observed animal drawings, sudden occasional shadowy trails of ivy through the text of an odd page, and perhaps worst of all, in attempting to express the wonderful burgeoning of the garden, pages of assorted wildlife giving the impression more of a parkland than the enclosed world of the garden with all that that conveys in the context of the story. Moore?s moorland scenes work well, but she?s not able to capture facial expression well enough to convey the archetypal emotions of the book. It?s a physically weighty book too, needing to be read at a table or on a lap rather than curled up with.

Once again, I see a publisher trying to push a book filled with complex themes and ideas, not to mention language, down the age-range by illustrating it in what, at first glance, seems an attractive style. It will probably sell well, but mistakenly so in my opinion.