DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 085 080 PS 006 846

AUTHOR Luecke, Fritz J., Comp.
TITLE Children's Books; Views and Values.
INSTITUTION Xerox Education Publications, Middletown, Conn.
PUB DATE 73
NOTE 92p.

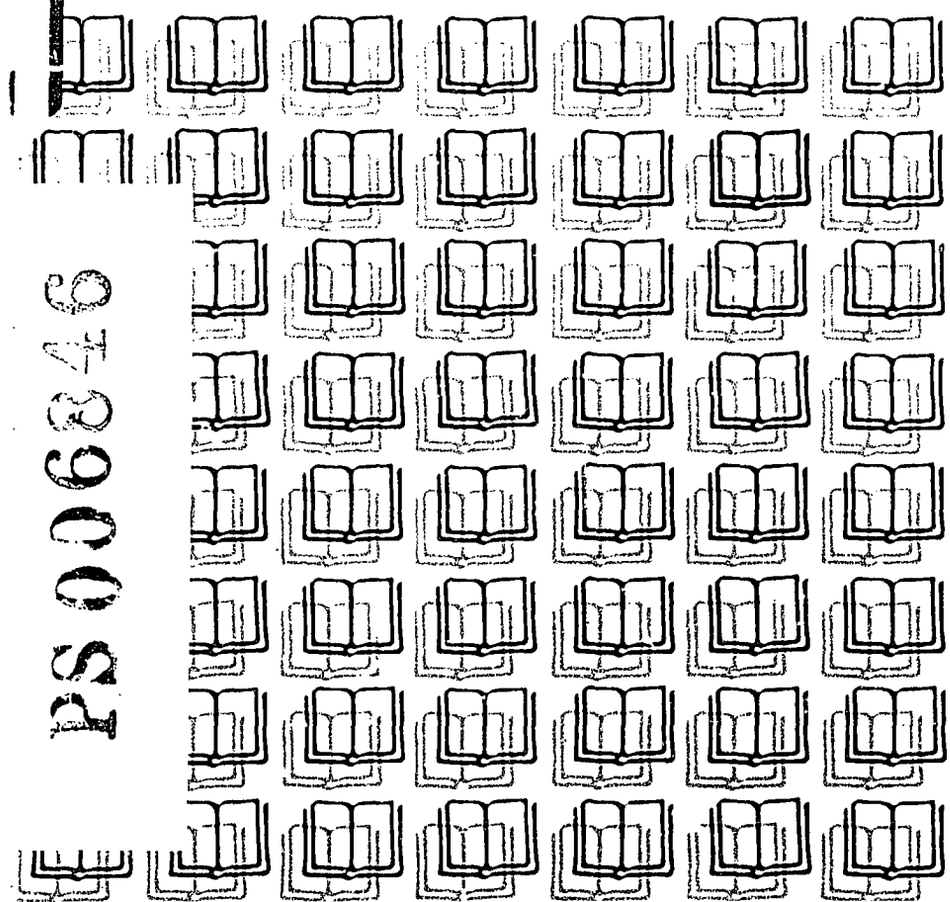
EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Booklists; *Childrens Books; Death; Racial Integration; Sex Discrimination; *Sociocultural Patterns; *Stereotypes; *Values; Violence

ABSTRACT

This book contains a collection of articles on children's books and is written for teachers. The problems, the trends, and the future of children's books are discussed in terms of sexism, realism, ethnicity, violence, racial integration, death, and moral values. (SET)

Children's Books Views and Values

Compiled by Fritz J. Huecke



CHILDREN'S BOOKS:
VIEWS AND VALUES

Children's Books: Views and Values

Compiled by **Fritz J. Luecke**

Xerox Education Publications

XEROX

Publishing, Executive, and Editorial Offices:
Xerox Education Publications
Middletown, Connecticut 06457

Library of Congress Card Catalogue No. 72-91771

1 2 3 4 5 / 77 76 75 74 73

Contents

Foreword

Today's children are fortunate, very fortunate, because they have available to them more and better books to choose from than ever before. No matter what your students' interests happen to be, there is something in book form for them to read.

Are they interested in ghosts, witches, animals, TV characters, cartoons, sports, adventure stories, the classics, or mysteries? If so, they will find numerous books available.

But what about those students who are just starting to think about and discuss current sociological concerns—poverty, war, riots, drug addiction, women's liberation, and racial and religious prejudice? Yes, now books are available for these students as well—books that allow children to explore, evaluate, and make their own decisions.

The articles in this book give you, the teacher, a cross section of recent professional material written

about children's books—the problems, the trends, and the future. It will help you better understand how children's books are keeping up with the rapid changes taking place in today's world.

Fritz J. Luecke

CHILDREN'S BOOKS:
VIEWS AND VALUES

1 A Feminist Look at Children's Books*

BY Feminists on Children's Media†

Is the portrayal of females in children's books sexist? That is, are girls and women assigned only traditional female roles and personalities? And when the female foot fails to fit that often too-tight shoe, is the girl or woman then seen as an unfortunate, troubled human being?

These questions were the basis of a group effort to scrutinize some of the more highly praised children's books. In our view, a non-sexist portrayal would offer

†The *Feminists on Children's Media* are a collective of women that includes mothers, high school students, librarians, and other professionals in writing, publishing, and education. This article was part of a media presentation on *Sexism in Children's Books* presented in cooperation with the *Authors' Guild* on October 15, 1970.

the girl reader a positive image of woman's physical, emotional, and intellectual potential—one that would encourage her to reach her own full personhood, free of traditionally imposed limitations.

In selecting books to examine, we consulted a number of influential lists. These were the *Notable Books of 1969* (American Library Association), the Child Study Association's annual recommendations for that same year, and the Newbery Award winners.

It was a shock to discover almost immediately that relatively few of the books on these lists even feature female characters—let alone what we would consider *positive* female characters. Of all 49 Newbery Award winners, books about boys outnumbered books about girls by about three to one. On that score, the years have brought little improvement. The ALA list for 1969 gave us a ratio of over two to one.

The Child Study Association list for the same year proved more difficult to analyze. It is very long, divided into innumerable categories, and many of the books can't yet be found in the libraries. However, we made a separate check of several categories. Under the heading of "Boys and Girls" we found a male to female ratio of two to one. Under "Growing Up" the ratio was over three to one. And "Sports," of course, like certain bars we could formerly name, was 100 percent male. The rest of the book list may not follow the pattern of this sampling, but suspicion runs high!

What would we like to see in children's books? What were our criteria? We wanted to see girl readers encouraged to develop physical confidence and strength

without the need to fear any corresponding loss of "femininity." We would have liked to see the elimination of all those tiresome references to "tomboys." Why can't a girl who prefers baseball to ballet simply be a girl who prefers baseball to ballet?

Many women have to—or simply prefer to—earn a living. Can't we encourage girls to find satisfaction and fulfillment in work, and lay forever the suspicion that work outside the home for a *woman* is primarily proof of her inability to love a man, or to land a sufficiently lucrative one? Women do study seriously, work with enjoyment—or at least pride in their competence—get promoted, and (of course) fight sexism at work and in their families in order to progress. Let's show them as no less "feminine," despite the assertiveness and firm sense of self required in this untraditional role.

Margaret Mead has written that "man is unsexed by failure, woman by success." That's another brutal truth we'd like to see changed. And while we're about it, let's not overlook the fact that boys, too, are denigrated and cramped by sexism. Our current rigid role definitions require that a boy be all that a girl should not be: unafraid, competent at "male" jobs, strong. A weeping boy is a "sissy." Words like "sissy"—and "hero," too—should be dissected and exposed for the inhuman demands they make on growing boys. Children's books could help.

We object to a woman's being defined by the man she marries, or the children she bears, or the father she once obeyed. Let's see women who are people in their own right—independent of such compensatory affilia-

tions. And if a woman doesn't want children, or even a husband, must this be seen as peculiar? Why not encourage girls in a search for alternate life styles? Give a girl all the possible options you give a boy for her future life choices, all his freedom to inquire and explore and achieve. Her options don't have to be slanted toward certain currently socially imposed preferences.

There are books on superwomen. Okay. Superwomen do exist. But many more books are needed on women who simply function very well and freely wherever they choose—or are forced—to apply their abilities.

We are bitterly tired of seeing depictions of the woman as castrator. Even a well-known writer, whose portrayal of girls we frequently admire, slipped badly in some recent picture books. In one of these, the mother reproves her son for spilling the mud he is playing with—even though the scene is outdoors! In another, little sister (and we know where she learned *her* lesson) reproves brother for accidentally spilling paint off his easel. Little girls are as capable of making a casual mess and as freely lost in creative play as little boys. A picture book that does that beautifully is *Rain Rain Rivers* by Uri Shulevitz (Farrar, 1969) which we were delighted to find on both the ALA and CSA lists. (We were as pleased to find the two previously mentioned books ignored by both lists.)

And when, as must sometimes happen if books portray real life, there is an overcontrolling or too-bossy woman, she should not be made a fool or villain. A little understanding—of her problem, her frustration at not being allowed to play an equal role in her family or her

world, and her consequent misuse of energy to project her ideas and ego through the lives of others—is long overdue.

How about books showing more divorced and single-parent families? And, for heaven's sake, every divorced or widowed mother does not solve her problems through remarriage—or even wish to do so. (Few do, you know!) Maybe she can start on that career she never had—and discover a new concept of herself. The difficulties and the loneliness are real, as are the child-care problems. But let the woman find a new self-reliance in fighting her own battles—and joy in winning at least some of them.

There is also the question of language. No more automatic use of "he" to mean "child," or "mankind" to mean "humankind." If at first the alternatives seem forced—and they will—they won't sound that way for long.

Despite our criticism of socially assigned roles, we don't meant to diminish or ignore the mother or housewife. She is often a strong, wonderfully rich human being. Her role can be vital, and sometimes she finds satisfaction in it. But let's not insist on that as *her* role. Men can also cope skillfully with household tasks—and not necessarily look for a woman or daughter to take them off the hook.

Sexist Books

The books we read—most from the lists mentioned earlier—fell, or were pushed by our merciless analysis, into several categories. One, plain and simple, was the

Sexist Book, in which girls and women are exclusively assigned traditional female roles—although the material may, unhappily, be fairly true to life.

We were forcibly struck by the purposeful sexist propaganda between the covers of some of the recommended children's books.

Young women who have found it an uphill struggle to identify with the popular female image will recognize it as propaganda—and not simply as a natural reflection of life. Unfortunately the girl reader is not yet so experienced. Books that outline a traditional background role for women, praising their domestic accomplishments, their timidity of soul, their gentle appearance and manners, and—at the same time—fail to portray initiative, enterprise, physical prowess, and genuine intellect deliver a powerful message to children of both sexes. Such books are a social poison.

Take, for a horrible example, the attitude exemplified in the following line: "Accept the fact that this is a man's world and learn how to play the game gracefully." Those words fell from the lips of a *sympathetic* male character in Irene Hunt's 1967 Newbery winner *Up a Road Slowly* (Follett, 1966). Or take this juicy bit from the 1957 winner *Miracles on Maple Hill* by Virginia Sorenson (Harcourt, 1956).

> For the millionth time she was glad she wasn't a boy. It was all right for girls to be scared or silly or even ask dumb questions. Everybody just laughed and thought it was funny. But if anybody caught Joe asking a dumb question or even thought he was the littlest bit

> scared, he went red and purple and white. Daddy was even something like that, old as he was.

Does that passage describe real life? Indeed it does! But a good book for children should comment and leave the child feeling something is wrong here. This one does not. In fact, we voted it our supreme example of the most thoroughly relentless type of sexism found in children's literature. The girl, Marly, never overcomes her hero worship of brother Joe or her comparative inferiority. And it certainly would have been relevant to explore the toll that maintaining hero status takes on Joe's character.

Such perfect examples, of course, are not the rule. But there was a surplus of books whose thesis might seem less obvious, but whose refrain was predictably the same. A little girl in the 1955 Newbery winner *The Wheel on the School* (Harper, 1954) asks her boy playmate: "Can I go, too?" And the response is "No! Girls are no good at jumping. It's a boy's game." Meindert DeJong leaves it at that—and another eager little girl reader is squelched.

Those fictional girls who join the prestigious ranks of male adventurers often do so at the expense of other members of their sex. And small wonder, the tomboy-turned-token-female is simply the other side of the coin. The message is clear: if a girl wishes to join the boys in their pranks and hell-raising, or to use her imagination and personality in leading them, she renounces all claim to supposedly feminine characteristics—tears and fears and pink hair ribbons. The line

between traditionally assigned sex roles is drawn sharp and clear. The girl who crosses that line is forced to desert her sex rather than allowed to act as a spokeswoman for a broader definition.

Take *Lulu's Back In Town* (Funk & Wagnall, 1968). The proof provided by author Laura Dean to show Lulu's final acceptance by the boys is the clubhouse sign: "FOR BOYS ONLY. No Girls Allowed. (Except Lulu.)" This is seen by the author, who unfortunately happens to be a woman, as a satisfactory ending. But our committee was not so pleased. (Except to find that neither ALA nor CSA had listed it.)

Cop-Outs

The Cop-Out Book is often the most insidious. At its worst, it promises much and delivers nothing. But the better ones are the most infuriating, for often they are only a step away from being the exact kind of literature we'd like to see for girls *and* boys *about* girls. The actual cop-out may be only a crucial line, a paragraph, the last chapter. But somewhere a sexist compromise is made, somewhere the book adjusts to the stereotyped role of woman, often for the sake of social pressure and conformity. The compromise brings with it a change, and this change is not only disturbing, but often distorts the logical development of the character herself. Suddenly her development is redirected—or, rather, stunted.

The many Cop-Out Books we found are probably a fair reflection of the social uncertainties and inner con-

flicts of writers, publishers, and reviewers in our sexist society.

Caddie Woodlawn by Carol R. Brink (Macmillan, 1935) is a Newbery winner. Not a recent one, but still extremely popular. Caddie is a young pioneer girl, allowed to run free with her brothers. She is happy and strong in her so-called tomboy role. Though her mother pressures her to become more of a "lady," the reader feels serenely certain that Caddie will remain her own person. Alas, as the book draws to a close, Caddie's father pleads: "It's a strange thing, but somehow we expect more of girls than of boys. It is the sisters and wives and mothers, you know, Caddie, who keep the world sweet and beautiful. . . ." Thus subdued, she joins the insipidly depicted girls at the weaving loom. True, the boys do ask her to teach them how to weave. Apparently they may choose to join women at their work, but no longer may Caddie choose to run free in the woods. And we are left feeling cheated. Why should it be the *right* choice for her obediently to join the "sweet and beautiful" women of the world on their pedestals? Why shouldn't she continue to struggle for a life in which she might fulfill some inner potential?

The linking of a girl's growing up to the abandoning of her "tomboy" ways is a depressingly frequent theme in these books. As a stage in growing up, tomboy behavior appears to be acceptable. But the girl must in the end conform to more socially approved behavior. In a widely used bibliography compiled by Clara Kirchner in 1966 entitled *Behavior Patterns in Children's Books* there is an entire section called "From

Tomboy to Young Woman." Here are two random descriptions:

> *A Girl Can Dream* by Betty Cavanna (Westminster, 1948): Loretta Larkin, tops in athletics but poor in social graces and jealous of a classmate who shines socially, finds out that being "just a girl" can be fun.
>
> *Billie* by Esphyr Slobodkina (Lothrop, 1959): Billie, who wore faded jeans and played boys' games because she didn't like being a girl, came to think differently after she took ballet lessons to limber up a sprained ankle.

These books fit into the following categories: Womanliness, Growing Up, and Popularity.

Young readers of such grievous cop-outs are forced to believe that the spunk, individuality, and physical capability so refreshingly portrayed in tomboy heroines must be surrendered when girls grow up—in order to fit the passive, supposedly more mature image of a young woman. But where is that earlier energy to be spent? Is depression in the adult woman perhaps linked to the painful suppression of so many sparks of life?

In a way we would call the Cop-Out Book the "co-op" book, for it permits the tomboy reader to believe she can pass comfortably over into that other world at a safely future date. Real life is rarely like that.

A new book recommended on both the ALA and the CSA lists is Constance Green's *A Girl Called Al* (Vik-

ing, 1969). The main character comes across as a nonconformist who truly enjoys her individuality, and throughout most of the book she eschews traditional female worries—how she looks, hooking boyfriends, etc. Wonderful. But the ending is a neat little all-American package. Al gets thin, gets pretty, and now she will be popular. All these sudden switches hit the reader in the last few pages. Her pigtails make room for a feminine hairdo. Her closest friend explains: "Her mother took her to the place she gets her hair done and had the man wash and set Al's hair, and now she wears it long with a ribbon around it. It is very becoming, my mother says. She is right. But I miss Al's pigtails. I wanted her to wear it this way but now that she does I'm kind of sorry. She looks older and different, is all I know."

Again, we are led to believe that another character in our long line of individual heroines will conform to the role society has rigidly defined for her. We find it hard to buy the sudden change in Al. And we also miss the pigtails.

Sometimes it is the focus of a book that makes it a cop-out. When we read the 1959 Newbery winner, Elizabeth Speare's *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* (Houghton Mifflin, 1958), we praised Kit's independent spirit, her rejection of bigoted values, and her truly striking courage at a time when women were burned for witchcraft. From a feminist standpoint, the book is marred only by the plot's revolving around the standard question: "Whom shall Kit marry?" In too many

books we find the male character worrying about *what* shall he be—while the female character worries about *who* shall he be.

Only a few hairs are out of place in *Next Door to Xanadu* by Doris Orgel (Harper, 1969), also listed by ALA and CSA. The main character faces the too-often very real hatred of pre-teen boys toward girls. She meets it with strength, earning respect. The only boy-crazy girl in the book is deemphasized. But one important scene allows our society's pervasive sexism to come shining through: the girls are told who they will marry, not what they will be.

At the risk of carping, we felt that such a fine book as *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeline L'Engle (Farrar, 1962), the 1963 Newbery winner, had a hint of acceptance of woman's second-class status. This is almost the only science fiction book in which a girl is the main character. We even find a mother who is a scientist, perhaps one of the only scientist moms in juvenile fiction. But why did father have to be a super scientist, topping mom by a degree or two?

Positive Images

Happily, if not of course, there are some books for children which show female characters in flexible, diverse roles. They allow for character development beyond the stereotype and do not disappoint us in the end.

At first we tried calling these "Non-Sexist." But we found many books were not precisely either. Sexist or Cop-Out, though somehow they did not quite fit our

exacting feminist standards, usually because they did not deal with the questions they posed in a sufficiently clear, real, and affirmative way. The rare book that did succeed, even in this, is our Positive-Image Book.

Certainly, these categories overlap a bit. *A Wrinkle in Time* really belongs among the Positive-Image Books. We just couldn't resist putting down papa's degrees. Unfair, we admit, because of the especially fine, honest relationship between Calvin (the boy who is a friend, as opposed to Boy Friend) and the girl protagonist. They respect each other's heads, and his ego does not stand in the way of her saving the day with an act of courage that rescues her little brother from it. We also applauded the image of the mother as a brilliant scientist who instills pride in her children.

Another Newbery we salute is the 1961 winner, *Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O'Dell (Houghton Mifflin, 1960), one of the rare books showing a girl with strong physical skills. She kills wild dogs, constructs weapons, kills a giant tentacled sea fish, and hauls a six-man canoe by herself. The Indian girl protagonist, Karana, spends 18 years alone on a bleak and lonely island. And there we are indeed tempted to ask why such a marvelous heroine can only be encountered alone on an island—and never in the midst of society?

While on the subject of positive images, there is a new book we hope will appear on the 1970 recommended lists. *Rufus Gideon Grant* by Leigh Dean (Scribners, 1970) is about a boy, but we were taken by the following reference to a woman: "There inside this magazine was this lady, climbing giant trees and

playing with wild chimpanzees. . . ." And Rufus asks: "Can a boy be a zoologist?"

If we had time we would also like to discuss such essentially positive-image books as *Strawberry Girl* by Lois Lenski (Lippincott, 1945), *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* by E. L. Konigsburg (Atheneum, 1967), Vera and Bill Cleaver's *Where The Lilies Bloom* (Lippincott, 1969), and *Pippi Longstocking* by Astrid Lindgren (reissued in paper by Viking, 1969). Padding our Positive-Image list a bit we might add commendable classics like Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (first published in 1865), *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy M. Montgomery (Grosset & Dunlap, 1908), and *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* by Kate Douglas Wiggin (Macmillan, 1903). Of course there are some positive books that escaped our notice, just as some of the negative ones may have slipped by, but we wanted to cover a fourth and extra category that seems to overlap all the others.

Especially for Girls

This category appears on a number of publisher's lists and on lists of recommended books. It's called "especially for girls." The reason advanced by librarians and publishers for having such a category at all is that while girls are perfectly happy to read "boys'" books, no self-respecting boy will read books about girls.

In our male-dominated society, unfortunately, this is probably true. But listing a separate group of books for girls provides boys with a list of books *not* to read, further polarizing the sexes.

There seems only one possible justification for a separate category of books for girls: to spot and recommend those books which, according to our highest, most stringent feminist standards, are not sexist. Pursuing this logic, when children's literature no longer supports sexism, there will no longer be any reason to list books "especially for girls."

The current lists of girls' books promoted by publishers, show a preponderance of stories about love, dating, and romance. And there are the companion books about young girls with problems like shyness, overweight, glasses, acne, and so on, that are supposed to interfere with romance. Certainly, problems facing young girls should be dealt with in the books they read, but we resent the implication forced on young girls that romance is the only fulfilling future for them. Boys, too, are involved in romance, but their books are about other things.

The lists for girls also include career books about nurses, secretaries, ballet dancers, stewardesses. Why not more female doctors? Bosses? Pilots? Aquanauts? Present books simply reinforce the sex roles imposed by society—and even then virtually all the careers end in a cop-out. When the girl marries she gives up the career. But *must* marriage and career be mutually exclusive? These books are justified by their publishers in terms of the market—they are meant to sell rather than to edify. We happen to believe that career books that edify will also sell, and far more lastingly, as women gain struggle for their freedom.

But what about those lists of currently recommended

books that *are* intended to edify? In 1969, for example, the Child Study Association listed eight books "Especially for Girls." Of all of these, we were disheartened to find that only one was free—or almost free—of sexism. Two more were Cop-Out books. The rest were middling to very bad.

Let's start with the best. The *Motoring Millers* by Alberta Wilson Constant (Crowell, 1969) not only shows delightful girls and women behaving responsibly and delightfully—and doing many things the men do, but the question of sex roles is specifically aired. In the story, the winner of an auto race turns out to be a young girl. When the wife of a college president says to her: "I want you to know that I am highly in favor of your driving in this race. Women should advance their cause in every field," the winner replies, "I didn't think about that. I just love to drive. Taught myself on our one-cylinder Trumbull when I was ten." We welcome both reactions.

Two more books on this list, *A Girl Called Al* and *Next Door to Xanadu*, have already been described above as Cop-Outs, though we did consider them both *almost* commendable. To those three acceptable books, we would also add *Julie's Decision* by Rose A. Levant (Washburn, 1969) except that we were disturbed by what seemed a paternalistic white attitude especially inappropriate in a book about a black girl.

But, after these titles, the CSA girls' list deteriorates into sexism. It is shocking to find "recommended for girls" a book like *The Two Sisters* by Honor Arundel (Meredith, 1969), which not only reinforces the stereo-

type of girls as romantic, clothes-crazy, and spendthrift, but whose moral says that, when all is said and done, love is a woman's proper vocation and her future ought to be subordinated to her husband's. The young heroine in *The Two Sisters* has just told her father that she may abandon her university scholarship to follow her husband who has gone off to find a better job in another city. Her father says gently: "Geoff's quite right to be ambitious and you're right not to stand in his way. A man who doesn't get a chance to fulfill his ambition makes a terrible husband." It doesn't occur to either that a woman who sacrifices her potential can also end up making a terrible wife.

John Rowe Townsend's *Hell's Edge* (Lothrop, 1969) is just as bad. The motherless teenage heroine cooks all the meals and does the housework for her teacher-father, whose domestic ineptitude is paraded as one of his endearing qualities. A pair of sisters in the book are set up with mutually exclusive stereotyped female traits—and then shot down for them. One is described as a "half-wit" for being concerned with looks and clothes; the other sister, a bookworm, is denigrated for not caring about her looks or clothes. Damned if you do and damned if you don't.

In another CSA recommendation, the boys in the family are considered more important than the girls, even though the book is supposedly for girls. (Well, it happens in real life too!) The name of that prize is *One to Grow On* by Jean Little (Little, Brown, 1969).

In *A Crown for a Queen* by Ursula Moray Williams (Meredith, 1969), the plot revolves around—get ready

—a *beauty* contest with the boys as judges! The most memorable (and most offensive) line occurs when the heroine, Jenny, finally gets the beauty crown. As we might predict, she "never felt happier in her life." This is scarcely the positive female image we'd be looking for, even if we could all be beauty queens.

As our consciousness of "woman's place" changes, our recommendations of books for girls must change. As must books themselves. Eventually, we will have no more need for any list recommended "Especially for Girls."

2 Peter Rabbit . . . Say Good-bye to Snow White

You're both outdated, but we hate to see you go°

BY Jane Yolen

A dear friend of mine recently gave me a pin with the words "Peter Rabbit" on it as a token of my involvement with children's books. And although I thanked her for her beautiful gesture, it occurred to me that the pin could easily be a symbol of most adults' acquaintance with my field—amused interest, but a lack of understanding of juvenile literature. After all, it's not all Peter Rabbit.

Too often the public equates children's literature with the fey, with fairies and elves and princesses and talking animals, and with the kind of coyness that made

°Reprinted by permission of Curtis Brown, Ltd. This article first appeared in *Publishers' Weekly*. Copyright © 1972 by Xerox Corporation.

Dorothy Parker once review a Winnie the Pooh book with the dismissal line, "Tonstant Weader fwowed up." While some of the best and most enduring and deepest of the books for children fall into that hazy world best described as "fantasy," there is another area as well. Realism. Not the pseudo-realism of the Hardy Boys or Bobbsey Twins or Horatio Alger or Elsie Dinsmore or Tom Swift and his magic whatever, on which most adults cut their literary teeth. But nitty-gritty, raw, down-to-the-bone realism; books that are precursors of an adult appreciation of Mailer, Roth, Baldwin, Bellow, the entire lot of 20th-century gut-writers.

It is in the area of this "realism" that many a novice writer today, attempting to write for children, is mired in the deepest kind of quicksand—that of believing that certain things should be taboo for children simply because they are children. That old-fashioned view of the young reader's mind is no longer in style. Even those last holdouts—librarians—are beginning to accept the fact that children know a lot. Much more than we, the adults, give them the credit for.

Perhaps it is television with its instant replay of the Vietnam War, the Black Revolution, the student uprisings, the birth control battles. Or perhaps it is the superabundance of brightly colored magazines that talk about drugs, divorce, and brutal death in the same attractive fashion in which they tout cigarettes and beer. For certainly the reading public has changed. Children who were once-upon-a-time chained to long days in a factory are being compulsorily and compulsively "educated." Reading is no longer the royal pre-

rogative of the privileged upper classes. Children at all levels of society are opening books and opening worlds.

Only recently, though, has a large body of the literature directed towards young readers made concessions to the fact that children are very aware of the real world. Sex. Death. Drugs. Drunkenness. Divorce. Poverty. Hunger. All the seven deadly sins. Suddenly they are all becoming the subjects of children's books.

This frightens many adults. But it shouldn't. After all, these are all subjects children have heard of. They whisper about them in the dark corners of cloak rooms or read about them surreptitiously on bathroom walls. And would we rather have the children read about these subjects in a well-written novel that sheds light and truth—or learn about it in the gutter with the rest of the boys? The underground subjects—simply because they are underground—are all legitimate subjects for wonder. And children are the prize wonderers of us all. Yet the adults for years closed their eyes and ears to this small truth and assumed that children only knew—and wanted to know—about Peter Rabbit.

Today there is a large movement towards the writing of "relevant" stories for young readers—stories that utilize the strong, realistic material already familiar in other forms to children. The worst of the modern books merely exploit this material. The best explore. A good exploration leads the young reader to deeper insights and knowledge of problems, some of which he or she might share directly. And through these insights may come a gradual solving of some of those problems.

Books like Newbery Award winner *Sounder* take a

look at brutality, poverty, injustice; *My Darling, My Hamburger*, at premarital sex, pregnancy, and abortion; *I'll Get There, It Better Be Worth the Trip*, at divorce, homosexuality; *The Pigman*, at senility, irresponsibility. But at the same time, these books also look at hope, perseverance, determination, strength, dedication, belief, and all-encompassing love.

As a writer of fantasy and only an occasional "relevant" book, I find myself constantly questioned by well-meaning parents and librarians. Which ones—they ask—do the children really like? Really need? Fantasy. Reality. Isn't the answer obvious? They need both.

A child too totally absorbed in the real world needs a dose of fantasy as surely as a child surrounded by walls of imagination needs a peephole into the real world. While I cannot wholly agree with Julius Lester (whose book *To Be a Slave* was a Newbery runner-up) when he writes, "In a world in which a child can be dead of an overdose of heroin at age 12, Snow White is not only inadequate, it is in danger of being vulgar." I can still agree with his premise. The real things—like the facts about heroin—should not be hidden, locked away on adult bookshelves. Exposure does not automatically equal temptation. And after all, if these subjects already touch the children directly, there has to be a legitimate way that children can touch back. And one of those ways is through books.

Snow White may not satisfy that touch-back instinct, but it is not totally irrelevant, inadequate, verging on the vulgar. It satisfies yet another need. It is another door, another opening, another kind of experience.

Whimsy, fantasy, stories of the unreal hone an aesthetic appreciation in a young child, teaching him of the finer things that can be found in life, in art, in the realms of the imagination.

But a good dose of reality is necessary, too. Some children *need* relevant books because, as Lester writes, they have "to be an adult to cope with the world in which they live." He speaks from personal experience. He grew up in a ghetto in which "there were no Winnie the Pooh or Cinderella . . . they had no meaning in the context of the . . . slum." Other children *need* relevant books simply because they *have not* had to be adults yet. And the relevant books can lead these children to an understanding of other worlds, other people, other life styles, other problems.

So much for the word "need." What about desire? Do children really *want* these kinds of books—books that deal overwhelmingly with reality? Certainly in the past children have bootlegged such books, making them their own. *A Tale of Two Cities, Oliver Twist, Robinson Crusoe, Moby Dick*—these "classics" of childhood were never meant for children at all. Yet the young readers adopted them and their messages of suffering, sacrifice, brutality—and love. In the present, beside these old blood-curdlers, they continue to adopt Salinger, Hemingway, Steinbeck, Claude Brown. Books that were not meant initially for children can still speak to them, especially if they recognize themselves therein. We must recognize this as a literary fact of life.

Children are not as frightened of reality, perhaps, as

we adults are. Neither are they as frightened of the goblins of our minds. To make our children stronger, more able to cope with things of this world and out of it—when they are adults—they need and want stories that touch both bases. Realism and Fantasy.

No, it's not all Peter Rabbit. It shouldn't be. But for every Farmer MacGregor hoeing his difficult row, beset by crop failures, droughts, foreclosures, or other acts of a seemingly unkind God, there should be an irresistible and mischievous bunny. And rabbit pins to remind us of both.

3 The New Realism*

BY Robert Burch

I do not know what is so new about the New Realism. It would seem to me that realism dates back as far as mankind itself. And sometimes we get ourselves in trouble if we fail to take the past into consideration. Sometimes we get ourselves in trouble if we do. For instance, during 1970 Southern Baptists voted in Nashville to give sex-education courses in their churches, based on "a sound Biblical approach"; and one newspaper columnist could not resist pointing out the kind of Sunday School discussions that could possibly result from such an approach. He could visualize a poor teacher fielding questions from children about some of the stories that appear in the Bible, giving as examples: Abram lending his wife to the Pharaoh, the account of

*From *The Horn Book Magazine*, June 1971.

Lot and his daughters, and the way Moses and his band slew the men of Midian and many of the women, but kept thirty-two thousand virgins for themselves. The columnist added that there would be some people who would contend that such material has no place in our nation's churches, and he hoped the Baptists would not get themselves arrested.

But realism, whether new or not, is being discussed nowadays. In an article for *The New York Times*, Mr. Isaac Bashevis Singer[1] said that "Stories for children are now being written without a beginning, middle, or end." It bothered him, and it bothers me—but not much, because I agree with him that children probably will reject them. His way of putting it was that from his own experience, he[2] knew "that a child wants a well constructed story with clear language and strict logic . . . ." I am glad that variety is offered children, but I am also glad that they do not accept everything that is offered them.

I have never found those slice-of-life stories, or whatever they are called now, very satisfactory reading experiences. And I do not care much for slice-of-life plays either. I remember the first one I saw; I was living and working in New York at the time. The playwright was gifted, with a keen ear for the speech patterns of New Yorkers; and the actors were enormously talented. During the first act I said to myself, "This is wonderful.

[1]Isaac Bashevis Singer, "I See the Child as a Last Refuge,'" *The New York Times Book Review*, Part II (November 9, 1969), p. 66.

[2]*Ibid.*

The characters on stage are so real! Why, they sound exactly like my neighbors arguing." It continued, nothing much happening—no rising action and, as far as I could tell, no character development—but still with realistic dialogue. And by the third act I was saying, "I might as well have stayed home and listened to my neighbors." But the show was "in" at the moment, it was being talked about at parties, and I wanted to know about it, so I would have gone, even if I had known that it would bore me. We adults are like that. I am glad children are not. Mr. Singer[3] says "it's a lot easier to hypnotize grown-ups than children . . . easier to force . . . [us] to eat literary straw and clay than an infant in kindergarten."

Mr. Singer's article did a great deal to renew my faith in the state of children's books, for, the previous season, one of the special newspaper supplements on children's books had worried me. You will probably consider me the biggest prude you ever met when I tell you that it was a review of a picture book that bothered me. It mentioned the "New Realism," a phrase which caught my eye. The book, by a talented team and published by a fine firm, was *Bang Bang You're Dead* (Harper). In one comment on it, the reviewer[4] said: "Some parents may not relish reading to a 4-year-old such luscious lines as 'Give up, puke-face. You don't have a chance,' to which the dainty rejoinder is 'Up your nose you freak-out.'" Well, I hope there are

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] Nora L. Magid, "Picture Books," *The New York Times Book Review*, Part II (May 4, 1969), p. 53.

some parents who would not relish reading it. That is how square I am. Some parents will approve, while others may not, but will accept it rather than be labeled old-fashioned.

A woman I know, an authority in the book field, defended *Bang Bang You're Dead.* She said that in using such words as puke-face in picture stories, we let the child know that we know that he knows and uses such words, helping to strengthen our lines of communication. I am not sure she is right. I do not know what a child thinks, but neither am I sure that when I was young I would have been wildly pleased to know that adults knew that I knew and used certain words. Would the words not have become respectable somehow, and we children have been put to the trouble of finding new ones—new till some well-meaning adult got around to making them respectable, too? I do not know that children want us to communicate with them to such an extent.

Another argument for that particular book is that our language is changing, and, of course, it is—constantly. In a *Look* magazine article[5] on language, I read that "so much irrational emotional baggage has been heaped on so many words that our ability to voice a gut-felt notion is stifled." Perhaps so. But I do not know that I am quite ready for gut-felt picture books. The same article[6] also stated:

[5]William Hedgepeth, "Growl to Me Softly And I'll Understand," *Look* (January 13, 1970), p. 48.

[6]*Ibid.*, p. 50.

> Speech doesn't have to be linear; it can come out as a compressed overlay of facts and sensations and moods and ideas and images. Words can serve as signals, and others will understand. The way a man feels can be unashamedly expressed in sheer sound, such as a low, glottal hum, like the purring of a cat, to indicate contentment.

Are you ready for that? If not, I am ahead of you. It has already come to our house. One of my nephews, a high-school junior, often answers me with something of a grunt or a groan, and occasionally a more contented sound. I had accused him of being lazy in his speech, but I suppose he is merely advanced. He is not mumbling; he is giving me a compressed overlay of facts and sensations and images.

But I want to discuss the trend toward the so-called "New Realism." I have defended realism in children's books for a long time. You might say I have had to defend it, since I have been criticized at times for some of the grim details I have used in stories for the young. I have tried to use such details for a purpose, the purpose not being to shock but to give as accurate a picture as possible of the events taking place in a story and of the time and place in which it is set. If a story set in the Depression years tells only of church suppers or of all-day sings, what sort of picture of the times would that be? On the other hand, stories can be overloaded with details of a period. If my main purpose were to give the reader facts about the Depression, then I would write a nonfiction book.

I believe that Flannery O'Connor once said that in the South we like to write stories because we have the Bible and a little bit of history. In several books, I have used a little bit of that little bit of history, drawing background material from the Great Depression itself. However, my most recent book is a modern-day story, *Simon and the Game of Chance* (Viking), much of which is based on the premises found in Ecclesiastes. I have been accused of presenting it in a negative view of Bible-belt Christianity, but I hope that I did not. I tried to show the misuse of dogma and its effect upon the lives of those touched by it. In any event, I believe in realism in stories for the young and favor the trend toward what May Hill Arbuthnot[7] called "a frank treatment of the grave and often tragic social problems [young people] are encountering and talking about today."

Since I am primarily interested in junior novels with realistic settings, I am vitally concerned about the changes that are taking place in this kind of novel, and I find the trend toward stronger realism healthy. I do not think we should scare children, but on the other hand we should not lie to them by pretending that the world is entirely safe. C. S. Lewis[8] said it better than I can. He said that we need not try to keep out of a child's mind "the knowledge that he is born into a world of death, violence, wounds, adventure, heroism

[7]May Hill Arbuthnot, *Children's Reading in the Home* (Illinois, Scott, Foresman and Company, 1969), p. 174.

[8]C. S. Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children," *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories* (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1966), p. 31.

and cowardice, good and evil . . . ," which he says would be "to give children a false impression and feed them on escapism in the bad sense."

If we could guarantee children that the world out there would be completely safe, then fine, we could afford to give them only stories that leave that impression. But until we can, in whatever we present as being realistic, is it not cheating for it to be otherwise? No doubt, there are some books that still distort or mislead, but there are an increasing number each year that do not.

One I enjoyed recently was *Where the Lilies Bloom* (Lippincott) by Vera and Bill Cleaver. A fourteen-year-old girl in the mountains of North Carolina struggles to keep the children in the family together in ways that are sometimes sad and sometimes hilarious, but she always does so with a fierce dignity and the rejection of charity. This book has a strong impact, an impact I think right for the children of today. If they are so far removed from poverty themselves, why should they not see that it does exist?

Another of my favorite books of recent years is Theodore Taylor's *The Cay* (Doubleday). It says more about loving our neighbor than any sermon I have heard in a long time, although it does not preach. Good stories never do. I suppose *The Cay* could be called an adventure story—there is a shipwreck, an attempt by two people, a man and a boy, to survive on a coral island. The boy is blind; the man is black. The man dies before there is any sign of rescue. While reading *The Cay*, I forgot that I was reading it—so to speak

—as homework, finding myself thoroughly engrossed in it, and I thought of another comment by C. S. Lewis[9] who said that he was "almost inclined to set it up as a canon that a children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's story."

Another book I especially like is *Let the Balloon Go* (St. Martin's) by Ivan Southall. It is not perfect in every way, but what book is? It tells of a sad situation, the central character being spastic, but young people can read the book as a tale of challenge and excitement —because it is that, with a great deal of suspense—and if they get a glimpse at the same time of what it is like to be a spastic, then so much the better. I know that I felt involved in it to that extent. And no brochure from the March of Dimes campaign, or anything else, has made me feel that the cause is as urgent as I consider it since reading *Let the Balloon Go.* It is a simple story of a twelve-year-old boy and his longing to do something other children his age take for granted: to climb a tree.

Such situations are sad, but it does not hurt the child to read about them unless his gradual development of a concern for others is considered wrong. Tragedies in literature do not depress any of us in a really harmful way. Lloyd Alexander[10] has reminded us in *The Horn Book Magazine* of a comment attributed to De La Rochefoucauld, which was: "We all have sufficient strength to endure the misfortunes of others." I am not

[9]*Ibid.*, p. 24.

[10]Lloyd Alexander, "No Laughter in Heaven," *The Horn Book Magazine* (February 1970), p. 14.

sure but that we draw strength from such misfortunes. Occasionally, we all need to escape into a fantasy world, but perhaps it is good also to escape at times from our own real world into someone else's real world.

Maybe it is the same with children, and it does not matter whether a story teaches them anything or not. Mr. Singer[11] in his article in *The New York Times* said that not everyone would agree with him, "but that we are living in a time when literature aspires more and more to be didactic and utilitarian. It doesn't seem to matter what lesson it teaches—a sociological, psychological or humanistic one—as long as it teaches." He also said that he did not know "of a single work of fiction in our time which has contributed much to psychology or sociology, or helped the cause of pacifism."

I do not know if any of the children's books of recent years will seriously contribute to these areas, but I have been interested to hear of one college that is using some of them in child and adolescent psychology courses. The students read from a list of junior novels and discuss them in class each Monday. The only drawback, it has turned out, is that they have become so interested in the experiment that book discussions run over into midweek when other ground is supposed to be covered. I think it speaks well for today's realism that the professor saw these books as a basis—or as a springboard—for discussions, and that the students were enthusiastic about them, whether or not we agree that works of fiction should teach anything.

We would all agree, however, that a story should en-

[11]Singer, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

tertain the reader, in the sense of holding his attention and making him care about it; and I feel it is more apt to do this, that the characters and the action are more likely to ring true, if the person writing the story can discuss whatever matters most to him. Maybe this is why I am excited about the New Realism. While C. S. Lewis[12] said that "Anyone who *can* write a children's story without a moral, had better do so—that is, if he is going to write children's stories at all"; from my standpoint I cannot see how anyone could put the required amount of time and energy into a book unless he is holding it together, or trying to hold it together, with a theme of importance to himself. And I cannot imagine a theme in a children's story strong enough to hold anything together that does not, in the final analysis, turn out to be moral, or at least morally sound. Stronger stories in every sense are likely to result when the writer is free to tackle whatever is meaningful to him. And if it is to find a young audience, it must be with material meaningful to young people—no matter what the subject.

But subjects alone, no matter how important, do not make a good story. However timely and appropriate they may be, unless they are fleshed out with believable characters—I would go so far as to say with at least some characters the reader cannot only believe in but care about—and unless something resembling a plot is provided, the finished item is not likely to be a good

[12]Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

junior novel. John Rowe Townsend,[13] the British author and critic, said that "you can't turn a bad novel into a good one by filling it with pregnancy, pot and the pill." A story should never be merely a platform from which to discuss a topic, although I admit that the themes of my stories are figurative soapboxes or platforms from which to express my own outlook on life. But a soapbox and nothing else is a rather dismal sight.

For the fun of it, I have looked back to what people were saying not so very long ago—five or ten years or thereabouts—about realistic stories for children. C. S. Lewis,[14] who was discussing fantasy, touched on realism in an essay, saying:

> I think what profess to be realistic stories for children are far more likely to deceive them [than fantasy]. I never expected the real world to be like the fairy tales. I think that I did expect school to be like the school stories. The fantasies did not deceive me: the school stories did.

He went on to say that "All stories in which children have adventures and successes which are possible . . . , but almost infinitely improbable, are in more danger than the fairy tales of raising false expectations," and I agree with him. But today, the kind of realistic stories

[13]John Rowe Townsend, "It Takes More Than Pot and the Pill," *The New York Times Book Review*, Part II (November 9, 1969), p. 2.

[14]Lewis, *op. cit.*, pp. 28–29.

he had in mind are not as likely to find a publisher—or, if they do, a reader. Surely not as many of them nowadays raise false expectations about the world in which we live, and there are school stories now that are like school.

Another quote, this one by Elizabeth Enright,[15] whom I admired so much and whose death was a loss to all of us. She said this seven or eight years ago about realism in children's books: "It is apt to be kinder than the real thing; also neater, more just, and more exciting. Things turn out well in the end." Today, not always. Sometimes they do; sometimes they do not. She went on to say,

> But unlike life, the end of the story comes at the high point. We do not have to go on with these people through high school, college, marriage, mortgage payments, child rearing, money worries, dental problems . . . or any of the rest of it. It is our privilege to leave them in their happiness forever . . . .

I am glad that there are still books that end happily. I hope there will never be a brand of realism that rules out happy endings. But I somehow get the feeling that realism to some people has come to mean only the harsher side of life. Surely, in life there are as many happy endings as sad ones, so to be truly realistic, should books not average out accordingly?

For all children, whether they face the world as

[15]Elizabeth Enright, "Realism in Children's Literature," *The Horn Book Magazine* (April 1967), p. 168.

gradually as we would have them, or have to face it earlier, I think that when it comes to realism in their stories, honesty is what we owe them. Is it too much to ask that anything we present as being realistic be realistic?

4 The Dawning of the Age of Aquarius for Multi-Ethnic Children's Literature

BY David K. Gast

For the past nine years I've been interested in the depiction of non-white minority Americans in teaching materials and especially in children's literature. I feel like an old-timer in this field because my study (begun in 1961, finished in 1965, and reported as "Minority Americans in Children's Literature," in *Elementary English*, January, 1967) was started before the events in Watts and Detroit and the rise of minority power politics. These events turned both public and academic communities to a serious and active consideration of inequalities in our society including inequities in the schools and in teaching materials. But really, I'm not an old-timer, because the study of the portrayal of

minorities in teaching materials has been periodically investigated for the past thirty-five years. Any decent review of the literature in this field would reveal the names of pioneer scholars including: Davis-Dubois, Rollins, Baker, Taba, the ACE Committee on the Study of Intergroup Relations in Teaching Materials, Tannenbaum, and Marcus. Though it's a sad commentary that, despite the findings and suggestions which were made over the years to bring about a culturally fair portrayal of minority Americans, no great interest was shown on the part of a smug and complacent dominant public, the publishers, and sadly enough, educators themselves, until our cultural sore spots festered into violence, civil conflict, assassinations, and the politics of confrontation. It was the social action that spoke louder than academic words which really brought about the clamor to integrate school textbooks and to do something about the all-white world of children's literature.

A few short years ago the band wagon started rolling and in the recent past we've witnessed some very constructive changes. Along with these changes we've observed a great deal of retrospective breast-beating and cries of mea culpa on the part of guilt-ridden middle-class whites. At the same time, academic hacks have enjoyed a journalistic field day gleefully rediscovering previously noted inequities in teaching materials. One segment of society viewed any attempt to portray a multi-ethnic society and contributions of minorities to American life as a Communist plot. And for their part, the militants have sounded ominous warnings that the

pedagogical change we see is too slow, too piecemeal, a cop-out concession to the racist establishment which will be corrected only by a massive change in myth—a pantheon of new gods.

Well, it hasn't been easy or at all times gratifying to be a constructive part of this social and educational revolution. But it has been exciting. And as the old vaudeville master of ceremonies used to say, "You ain't seen nothing yet, folks!" There's more to come because we have inextricably moved into a new age—the dawning of the Age of Aquarius for Multi-Ethnic teaching materials and children's literature.

I'd like to make a few observations on the present state and possible future of multi-ethnic children's literature, hoping, of course, that my comments might serve to elicit discussion. Let me start out by disclaiming any great expertise in the field of children's literature. My training has been in the social scientific and philosophic foundations of education. With this background I made my now reasonably well-known study in children's literature. Of course, I got hooked on it. So you're listening to a fellow who divides his academic interests between philosophy of education and children's literature, at first thought, an unseemly combination, but in reality a rather delightful one. My comments are random rather than organized.

First, let me say that we educators and scholars find ourselves all too often on the trailing edge of innovation in education and society. Quite often we know what needs to be done but we are seldom innovators

partly because we fear taking a stand, partly because we have little direct influence, and partly because we might lose our heads and our academic respectability in going for a "cause." The real innovators can mainly be found in the creative arts. Surely the search for tomorrow is taking form in the heads and hearts of those who risk their respectability by disavowing belief in a deterministic world dominated by old myths.

Our problem with children's literature and teaching materials (and with all other areas of education as well) is that of keeping the human spirit and potential in stride with our free-wheeling technology and the social implications this technology has. Because, as we ought to know, technology is a two-edged sword. Among other things, technology has made us aware of poverty in a consumer-product oriented America and our ability to do something about it if we decide to. So we have increasing educational concern in our day for the social imperative voiced about 200 years ago by Immanuel Kant: "Man is to be treated as an end, not a means."

You are probably in agreement with this last sentiment or you would not be concerned that educational literature should reflect a viable past, present, and future for minority Americans. And I surely believe most of you are interested in dispelling old myths about minorities.

Children's literature is a conservative media in a traditionally conservative social institution. But as a number of scholars have shown, children's fictional literature has been a more flexible, up-to-date vehicle for

mirroring social reality than the media of textbooks. This will probably continue to be the case for some time even though some publishers are giving up "mint julep" editions of their various lines of textbooks. So we have hope. But we also have some problems. How do we presently view minorities in children's literature? How will we view them in the future?

Let's take a look at some past, present, and possible future approaches to the treatment of minorities in the literature. The categories that I enumerate here are not mutually exclusive. I've been somewhat factitious in labeling them but I think you'll recognize them.

#1—*The Invisible Man Approach.* Perhaps the worst treatment of minorities is no treatment at all. A number of studies have indicated that our literature is guilty of sins of omission. The minority American is the man who just doesn't enter into the picture when we reflect upon our society.

#2—*The Noble Savage Approach.* Since Rousseau, Western man has had a fondness for the ideal of the noble savage, the simple natural man who lives a rugged and virile life close to nature without the bonds of complex social restrictions. Of course this is a hopelessly romantic view that overlooks actual hardships and implies a separatist existence with little interest on the part of the minority portrayed as desiring integration or holding dominant American values. American Indians and Mexican-Americans have typically been portrayed in this way. It's interesting to note that many

liberal middle-class whites now view Negroes in this light, somewhat jealous of the alleged black freedom of physical expression.

#3—*The White Man's Burden Approach.* A familiar approach in older texts and children's literature is the explicit or implicit idea that the minorities portrayed are dependent upon white benefactors. This view is inherent in darky-on-the-old-plantation settings. It is also the message when history books talk of immigrants as being social problems. Recent literature has largely moved away from this kind of patronizing.

#4—*The Minstrel Show Approach.* Largely limited to children's books about Negroes, this approach portrayed the Negro as a happy-go-lucky, tattered, "coon." Low comedy was achieved through situational farces and stereotyped dialect. Inez Hogan's *Nicodemus* books were typical of this category and were printed up until 1945. We no longer tolerate such books.

#5—*The Queer Customs Approach.* Literature in this category is usually a well-meaning attempt to illustrate the unique cultural traditions and beliefs, generally of American Indians, Spanish-Americans, or Chinese-Americans. Most books about Indians fall into this category as well as books like Leo Politi's *Pedro, The Angel of Olvera Street*, and *Moy Moy.* At worst, such books stereotype minority Americans in regard to dress, occupation, and life style. At best, children should not be fed a steady diet of these books. A related and disturb-

ing fact is that many teachers assume that books dealing with life in the land of natural origin will provide sound generalizations for understanding a minority American. I'm thinking particularly of reading about life in Mexico in order to understand a bicultural person, the Mexican-American.

#6—*The Multi-Ethnic Dick and Jane Approach.* This is a new approach and in many ways a viable one. In primary and easy reading books children are portrayed in multi-ethnic settings in school. They are all getting along well with one another. This approach illustrates an ideal but is subject to the same kind of criticism leveled at Textbook Town—too aseptic, too goody-goody, and artificial.

#7—*The Reversed Stereotype Approach.* We are still trying to overcome occupational and life-style stereotypes that have dominated the literature for many years. One surefire but questionable way to do it is the stereotype switch. We've seen this in the media of television and in some books. For example, showing all blacks as middle-class professionals is likely to cause problems of reader identification among ghetto children. One must say however that such books are in the American tradition of encouraging middle-class values and virtues.

#8—*The Tell-It-Like-It-Is Approach.* This category is perhaps the most popular genre in children's literature today. Few punches are pulled. Ghetto and tenement

living are shown. Discrimination, racial conflict, family hardships are all dealt with in a realistic fashion usually devoid of moralizing. Dorothy Sterling's *Mary Jane* was one of the first books about Negroes with this approach. Clyde Robert Bulla's *Indian Hill* shows the problems of Indians trying to make a life for themselves in the city.

9—*The Remanufactured Past Approach.* Although we have a great distance to go in honoring the historical contributions of various minorities to American arts, letters, and science, some pitfalls are apparent. We must avoid the hastily contrived out-of-context appendix to history. And we must also avoid giving the false notion that minority American inventors, professionals, and artists were as numerous and prolific as their white counterparts. Let's face it, social conditions didn't always foster minority contributions. History has been interpreted, rewritten, and fictionalized as long as man has been on earth. It's a natural part of man's tendency to seek mythic support for his beliefs. The question is how scholarly and objective do we wish to be.

I am sure that you can think of other categories, especially possible categories of future depictions. And that brings me to another consideration. What are the present and future taboos in children's literature dealing with minority Americans and multi-ethnic portrayals? An advertisement of Houghton Mifflin Company Children's Book Department claims, "So far as we know there is no taboo against fantasy, against discus-

sions of unpopular politics, sex, booze, integration, mischief, and mayhem . . . " But surely there are taboos dictated by present attitudes and tastes, sales appeal, reading level, maturity level of reader. What are the taboos? At what grade levels and in what ways can social problems and conflict situations be introduced? Or should conflict situations be the only thematic vehicle for bringing about intergroup understanding?

Some of our recent Tell-it-like-it-is books are hard hitting accounts of social realism including topics of: black power, poverty, fierce racial pride, integration, inner-city living, and family disorganization. When are we going to approach interracial dating and marriage, mixed marriages, Oriental war brides, and Eurasian children? Take note of a new book by John Neufield entitled *Edgar Allan* about a white family who adopts a Negro boy. To what extent are these areas taboos?

In closing I'd like to say that children's literature can be an effective means of transmitting values and attitudes about minorities and their relationship with white Americans. You all realize its tremendous potential in what we might call "culture therapy" and also bibliotherapy.

We should not forget that children's literature has a mythic quality and function. Otfried Müller has told us that myth is a narrative that unites the real with the ideal. We have cultural ideals and we have manifest cultural reality. We need to unite the two. And it seems to me that this is part of the reason for producing and using children's literature. Any culture in which reality

and ideal are greatly separated is a culture which suffers from what Durkheim called *anomie* with the resultant alienation of individuals and social groups. We'd hope that literature could help prevent cultural disintegration by reflecting a rapprochement of the ideal and the manifest culture in acceptable mythic form.

Yet, there are some cautions. Back in 1908 Georges Sorel suggested that myth was the most effective political and ideological weapon known to man. Ernst Cassirer reiterated this view in 1945 when he said that myth is "a thing of crucial importance. It has changed the whole form of our social life."

So for those of us interested in the minority Americans in children's literature—teachers, scholars, authors, publishers, librarians—the basic questions remain philosophical: What ideals do we wish to promote? How far beyond the present social status quo do we go in depicting the future reality our children will be living with? How can we help promote the good life and the good society for all citizens? In short, ladies and gentlemen, it is the dawning of the age of Aquarius for multiethnic portrayals in children's literature. We've all got a lot to live. So—Where are we going? How will we get there? And how will we know we've arrived?

5 If Not Busing, How About Booking?*

BY Barbara Glancy

Most of those who have not abandoned the goal of racial integration on philosophical grounds seem to have done so for practical reasons. They ask, for instance, "How can we integrate schools when our neighborhoods are segregated?"

This kind of question can't be answered with more talk about the values of integration. Those who still believe in integration will have to come up with concrete solutions, alternatives which somehow help children confront discrimination, analyze prejudice, and learn to empathize with others whose circumstances differ from their own.

One approach which I have explored over the past

*Reprinted with permission from *K-EIGHT*, September-October, 1971.

several years is the use of children's interracial literature for achieving at least some of the objectives of racially integrated education.

In the summer of 1970, I worked with Mrs. Mary Jane Cox, a school librarian, in organizing a weekly book discussion group. The upper elementary students came from the suburban Chevy Chase Elementary School, Maryland and from Clark Elementary School in Washington, D.C. These two schools had been working together for almost two years, exchanging students and carrying on pen-pal correspondences under the sponsorship of a joint "Interact Committee."

Thus, our discussion was integrated but we believe the format we used would work as well with racially isolated children. The key to our project was the development of questions for getting at inter-group issues. We have reprinted many of the questions with the hope that they will be useful to anyone else using books for integration.

We began with *Emilio* by Bourne, a story about a city boy with nothing to do. The text implies that the family is quite poor; the illustrations show a hot, crowded neighborhood with no place to play other than the street. Many of the characters have Spanish-sounding names; all are dark-skinned.

In the story, Emilio wanders restlessly through his neighborhood looking for his friend Willie and for something to do. He finds nothing until the street-washing truck attracts all the children to its cool spray. We asked:

> What is Emilio looking for? Have you ever done some of the things that Emilio does in the course of the day? Why did he hide his baseball cards from his sister? How is his neighborhood like yours or different from yours? What things does he do that you would like to do?

The questions were chosen to get the children to notice both the differences in life styles and the similarities of human experience in spite of superficial differences. We tried to get the youngsters to identify with the characters. Race was not an issue in the story but poverty was. We wanted to get at the meaning of poverty in the life of an urban family.

Our students, of course, were free to respond in any way they wished. One suburban youngster wistfully announced that he had never gone to the store on an errand. Several of the city children said that splashing in the wake of a street-washer sounded delightful but was something they had never done.

Our other book for the first week was Weiss' *Horse in No Hurry*, a lighthearted story set in the country. It featured two boys—one black, one white, a girl, a sleepy horse, a rambunctious dog, and assorted adventures. The questions we used were:

> Can you point out in the illustrations which boy is Paul and which John? How did you know? What were some of their zany adventures? How does the mood of this book compare with that of *Emilio*? Which book sees things more from a child's point-of-view?

Again, our emphasis was on having our students identify with the characters' interests and feelings. We wanted to see if the children would read critically enough to note which character was which in the illustrations.

None of the children had noted that *Emilio* had an all-black cast while *Horse in No Hurry* was all-white except for one character. I commented on this as I introduced the next book, *Anchor Man* by Jesse Jackson. Charley, the hero, is the only black youngster in a suburb until a fire closes the nearby rural school. Poor white and black students are then bussed to suburban Arlington while their school is being repaired. Charley had been there so long that everybody accepted him. The black newcomers, however, bring out buried prejudice. While some of the characters seem dated, the story, featuring sports, is a favorite with the boys. There are some unpleasant but interesting characters who add spice to the tale which illustrates the way hasty judgments by one group lead to similar excesses by the opposite group.

These were our questions:

> Who were the characters you liked/disliked? What were your reasons for these feelings? After discussion —try to think of something they said or did that made you somewhat sympathetic. How did Duke's brother's treatment by his manager make Duke feel? How did the girls and boys in Arlington treat the newcomers? Early in the story there were comments about how Mike had felt about Charley being on the team. What were they? Were there any other characters who dis-

> trusted whites besides Duke? Is there anything that Charley did that you would have done differently? or Duke? The boys in this story had to decide at several points which side of an argument they would choose. Would you have made the same decisions? Why? How did the coach try to bolster Charley's spirits? What did Charley's mother do for this same purpose? What are "freedom papers" and how did one get them? What makes people cause trouble?

We wanted to emphasize the motivation of some of the unpleasant characters. We also wanted to discuss economic as well as racial segregation in the book's setting. *The idea that liking one member of another race does not necessarily eradicate prejudice startled many youngsters.* They could see how difficult were some of the decisions that the characters made.

Bimby, a recent book by Burchard, was the selection for the fourth week. This beautifully written book has powerful characterizations; it is also available in paper. The story is about Bimby, a ten-year-old slave, who has been protected by his mother from the harsher aspects of slavery. We see Bucky, a slave but also an overseer, who takes out his frustrations on those below him. We see Jesse, a highly trained slave, who feels Bimby's mother is wrong in protecting him so. Jesse dies in an accident while trying to prove (to himself?) the freedom of his spirit. Bimby determines to run away while the slaves are distracted by Jesse's death and the master distracted by the picnic for his white guests.

Since the book was so much more sophisticated than

the previous selections, we were able to probe more deeply with our questions.

> Why was Bimby so happy about the picnic? How old a boy was he in comparison with you? What kind of work did he do as a slave? What were his feelings toward Bucky? Why was Bucky mean? Why did he pretend that he did not know that Bimby was supposed to ride with Jesse that day? Where would Jesse fly if he had wings? Why did he say it was too late? Who was Miss Fannie and how did she feel about slavery? How did she help Bimby's mother? How did Bimby's family fare before his father was killed running away? Why did news of the impending auction frighten Bimby? Had they told him what had happened to his father? What did Jesse say about the way Bimby's mother had protected him? Why had she done so? What were auctions like? What kind of master was theirs? Why did Jesse decide to race the master? Was this a "wise" decision for a slave? Did Jesse's death have anything to do with Bimby's decision to run away? What did "Better to be dead than have your spirit cut to ribbons" mean? Were so-called kind masters careful about their slaves' physical needs? What other needs do people have? Would you have been able to run away alone if you were in Bimby's place?

With such complex characters, we were able to look at the relativity of certain actions, such as a mother's using her favored status to protect her son. We talked about the "pecking order" phenomenon. The kindness of the master and his tolerance of a slave's imperti-

nence contrasted neatly with his acquiescence to the demands that the picnic continue after the accident. The children got a picture of the hierarchy of slaves, their treatment under a "not-so-bad" master, the psychological destruction due to the lack of freedom, the power of slaveowners and helplessness of slaves, the insensitivity of most whites concerning black people. Selections from Lester's collection of first-hand reports of slaves, from *To Be A Slave*, helped the children gain an understanding of how slaves were treated as non-humans.

Mrs. Cox used an excellent filmstrip, "Folk Songs from American History: the Civil War," at the end. She asked if there was anything about the generally good filmstrip that they felt inaccurate. The filmstrip had softened the harshness of slave life with a comment that "some" slaves were mistreated. A picture accompanying a caption noting the solicitude of good masters depicted the slave, living in a squalid hut who was being brought medicine by the master. There was no mention of blacks on the Underground Railroad. The pressures that slavery put upon the minds of slaves, which was so beautifully brought out in *Bimby*, were in stark relief against the paler glimpse of slavery from the more general presentations of the filmstrip.

The assignment for the final week included a warning: we told the children that Taylor's book, *The Cay*, might offend them when a character expressed deep-seated racial hatred. We asked them to finish it to see how the conflict was resolved.

The excellent book relates the evolution of a boy's

feelings, from one of enjoyment while watching the "happy natives" of Dutch Curacao to a genuine feeling of equality with one black man. Phillip, a young boy, is blinded in a torpedo attack as he is returning to his mother's Virginia home. He and an old black crew member are adrift in a lifeboat, with no one else in sight. They eventually land on an out-of-the-way island. The story has a Robinson Crusoe appeal stemming from the castaways' gradual reconstruction of civilization on their island. The roles are reversed, however, as Timothy plays the role of Crusoe with Phillip totally dependent upon him initially. These were our questions:

> Why was his mother homesick for Virginia? When do you first realize Phillip's bad feelings toward Timothy? How does Timothy talk? What were your reactions to this dialogue? How does Timothy show his wisdom on page 38? Why does Phillip feel angry about being given only a half cup of water by Timothy? Does Phillip realize the seriousness of the situation? Was there any clue earlier to Phillip's racial attitudes toward the dock workers? How does Phillip feel the first time Timothy leaves him alone? Why was he so upset? What was so bad about the island they were on in terms of their chances of being rescued? When Phillip learned that Timothy cannot "spell," i.e., read, did he let on that he knew? Why not? What does Phillip's pretending that Timothy can read tell you about his attitude now? Why, a few pages later, does he confront Timothy with the fact of his illiteracy? Have you ever said

> something when you were angry that you were sorry for later? How does Phillip try to make Timothy feel better later? What does he mean when he says that Timothy does not feel black or white? Why was Stew Cat a source of comfort to Phillip? What does Timothy mean when he says "Young bahss, be an outrageous mahn if you like, but 'ere I'm all you got"? What preparations did they make before the hurricane? What sacrifices did Timothy make for Phillip during the storm? Note that the dedication is "To Dr. King's dream . . . " What does this mean?

This rare children's book enabled us to see how deeply prejudice can be buried, how it can masquerade as tolerance, how it can be passed on from parent to child. It provided an opportunity to see the development of character. We probed the children's reactions to Timothy's dialogue, a factor in the former racial stereotype in books. We asked them to compare the knowledge of the two castaways—one with formal education; the other with an observant eye, a vibrant heart, and a lifetime of experience. The children became skilled at reading between the lines to understand many of Timothy's responses. They saw the growing bond between the two as they shared experiences and came to know one another's minds. It was a most appropriate book for culminating the discussion sessions.

On anonymous questionnaires filled out afterwards, the children unanimously endorsed the program. Mrs. Cox and I felt that we had achieved our objectives of proving the usefulness of books of this kind.

In the fall, Mrs. Cox continued the program with groups from the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. There were more volunteers than space for them. This shows, I think, the feasibility of using the interracial literature approach even in non-integrated schools.

At the same time, Mrs. Dorothy Anderson, a parent, carried on the experiment at the third grade level. She used Lexau's *Striped Ice Cream*; McGovern's *Runaway Slave*, a biography of Harriet Tubman; and Bertol's *Charles Drew*.

The positive results indicate to us that age is no barrier to developing inter-group understanding through books and stories.

One final point: we chose books mainly aimed at boys because, such is the nature of our society, girls will read about boys but not the reverse. Perhaps the new women's rights movement will effect cultural changes so that we will soon be able to use books about girls in groups containing both boys and girls.

6 Violence: Factors Considered by a Children's Book Editor*

BY James C. Giblin

In the last few years "violence" has become—for better or worse—one of the most-used words in our language. Every day it seems we read, see, or hear news about new "outbreaks of violence" somewhere in the world. Closer home, many commentators have labeled ours a "violent society." Politicians attempt to make capital of our fears of "violence" in the streets, parks, and apartment buildings of our cities.

As with all words that are used to the point of overuse, it's easy to read along and accept that we know what "violence" means. But do we? *Webster's* lists the following definitions:

1. Physical force used so as to injure or damage; roughness in action.
2. Natural or physical energy or force in action; intensity, severity; as, the *violence* of the storm.
3. Unjust use of force or power; as in deprivation of rights.
4. Great force or strength of feeling, conduct, or language; passion, fury.
5. Distortion of meaning, phrasing, etc., as to do *violence* to a text.
6. Desecration; profanation.

Interesting definitions. Some—like physical force used to injure or damage, and unjust use of force or power—are obvious and obviously negative. In fact we usually think of violence as something that's negative. But then how are we to deal with some of the less obvious definitions—for example, great force or strength of feeling, conduct, or language; passion, fury? Aren't strength of feeling and passion qualities we admire in human beings, and in human behavior? What about Joan of Arc? Tchaikovsky? William Faulkner?

Perhaps we need to readjust our attitudes a bit and think of violence as a force that can be constructive as well as destructive. It may make the subject harder to grapple with, less clearcut—but it may also get us closer to the heart of it.

Violence, children, and children's books. That's a pretty broad topic. Let's try to make it a little more specific. It seems to me that two types of violence merit discussion in this particular context. First, there's the

external violence in the world around him that the child or young person is exposed to. It may be as close to him as a violent quarrel between his parents in the kitchen or as far away as a TV news report of a massacre in Vietnam. But however close or far, however deeply or lightly it touches him, it will inevitably become part of his life experience, something he must cope with and absorb.

Second, there's the internal potential for violence that I think we can agree is present to a greater or lesser degree in every human being—children as well as adults. Dealing with external violence is difficult enough, but it's often nothing compared with the problem of handling one's own violent feelings. Especially for a child. As a baby, maybe he smashed his plate on the floor when he got angry. But what does he do when he's older and knows better—but still gets angry and frustrated?

This is where children's books enter the picture—whether they are factual or fictional, a picture book text, a poem, or a novel for young teens. At their best —and more of that later—books can explore the two kinds of violence we've just discussed, external and internal, and help a young reader to perceive the connecting links between the two.

For to understand and try to deal with the violence we see other human beings doing to one another, we first have to understand and deal with the potential for violence within ourselves. Good books can help us make the connection. And more important, they can help us turn our intensity, strength of feeling, and pas-

sion toward constructive ends and away from destruction, whether it be of another person, or his property—or of our own selves.

Of course, books for children and young people are only one of the influences on a young person as he is growing up—probably for most a much less important influence than family, friends, teachers, television, and performers on records. But they are still an influence, and this puts a tremendous weight of responsibility on all those who work to bring them to the attention of young people—authors, artists, editors, critics, librarians, teachers. Especially if the material deals with as loaded a subject as violence.

Each adult whose work involves bringing books and children together faces a different set of problems, depending on his particular professional situation. You as teachers face one set; I as an editor another. But there are similarities in our positions, at least in the matter of children's books. You judge finished, bound books and I judge manuscripts, but we're both concerned with content and treatment. So I thought you might be interested in some of the major factors I consider when I'm reading a manuscript that deals in one way or another with violence.

First, there's the matter of appropriateness. This is not, to my way of thinking, necessarily the most important criterion, but since it's often the most controversial, I thought I'd mention it first and get it out of the way.

Over the years there's been much discussion about the inappropriateness of violence in books for young

people, especially in books for young children. At one period, as you'll probably remember, Grimm's fairy tales came under sharp attack. My own feeling is that today very few subjects are inappropriate in and of themselves; it's all in how the author treats them.

Of course a gang rape would not be a fit subject for a picture book, although it might well be treated significantly in a book for teens. On the other hand, I could imagine a powerful picture book being written about a child who seriously hurts another child—or is himself hurt. It would all depend on the insights and form the author was able to bring to his material.

Actually, it seems to me that the smooth, unfelt, superficially pleasant and happy picture book may actually do more violence in an indirect way to the child reading or looking at it. For one thing, it may cause him to bottle up his own strong feelings instead of releasing them in a healthy way. For another—to go back to one of the definitions of violence—it may do violence to the child's own intuitive, probably inarticulate sense of reality by in effect denying it.

That leads to the second criterion I have for a manuscript that deals with violence. Is it realistic? Does it portray the necessary facts of the situation, ugly as they may be? This makes me think of some of the recent controversies surrounding stories set in the inner city. Librarians, parents, teachers have found some of these stories too crude and raw in detail and argued their unsuitability for children and young people. My own feeling is that it's never the reality of the surface—the description of a street or of a rundown apartment

house—that's of prime concern, but rather the emotional reality of the characters involved and of their actions in the course of the story. It goes without saying that we don't want or need manuals *for* violence in books for young people, but I think we could use more manuals for personal survival in violent situations.

Criterion number three—honesty—is closely related to the question of reality. Does the author portray fully and fairly both sides, say, of a racial conflict that erupts in violence? Does he give his villains as many dimensions as he does his heroes?

Now we get to the less obvious and sometimes harder-to-define criteria. The first of these is depth. Does the author perceive themes, nuances, patterns, connections within his material and convey them to the reader?

In a time when the individual is confronted by so many fast-paced but essentially superficial cultural experiences—brief TV news reports, 30-second commercials, jump-cut movie sequences—the authors of books have an opportunity to fill a needed gap in the reader's knowledge and give him a textured, many-leveled experience he cannot get elsewhere. This is especially important, it seems to me, when the subject matter is concerned with violence. By greater depth I don't mean greater length. Often just the opposite is the case. A four-line poem may contain more levels of feeling and experience than a 400-page novel.

The next question I ask is: Does the author write with feeling, with emotion? Perhaps this is the most important quality of all.

We hear so much today about the dehumanization of our life—the lack of feeling we have for one another. It's often cited as one of the chief factors leading to violent social outbursts of one kind or another. Commentators have charged that our educational process has been and is geared to the individual's intellectual development at the expense of the emotional. Certainly, in the quest for an ever-greater Gross National Product, our manufacturers and retailers have tried to convince people that their greatest joy and emotional satisfaction will come, not from human interaction, but with the purchase of a new color TV, a menthol cigarette, or a sleek sports car. Perhaps this too has watered the roots of anger, hostility, and violence in our society. Certainly it has fed the frustrations and dissatisfaction of many people, old, middle-aged, and young.

In this, as in the matter of depth of treatment, the author of books for young people has the opportunity to counteract the prevailing trend. Whatever his subject, whatever the book, the portrayal of genuine human feeling is, it seems to me, of prime importance. Without it, dramatic situations in fiction become thin and schematic, nonfiction accounts become mere recitals of dates and facts.

Misguided or irrational as they may be, it is internal human emotions that lead to external acts of violence, large and small. If an author fails to perceive and convey them, then his book is not worth publishing or reading, no matter how accurate and timely it may be in other respects. For if a book lacks feeling, it will ultimately do nothing to broaden the understanding of

the young person who reads it. It may even harden certain unfeeling attitudes about others and about himself that already threaten to become ingrained in him.

The final basic quality I look for when I read a manuscript dealing with violence is also the most elusive one. For want of a better word, I'll call it thoughtfulness. Does the author evince a spirit and breadth that extends beyond his particular subject, leaving echoes in the reader's mind and heart, suggestions of parallels with other topics, of the subject's place within the wide framework of American life—of life in general?

Too many young people's books of the past, especially in the area of younger nonfiction, have lacked this quality of thoughtfulness, of seeing the subject within a broader context. How steel is made, how roads and tunnels are built, how electricity was discovered and developed. All these topics were treated individually, in separate books, usually structured around the theme of progress—man lacks light at the beginning, his homes, towns, and cities are all electrified at the end, and the prognosis is for ever more technological progress in the future—equated with ever-increasing benefits to man. Well, we know better now.

You'll remember that one of the meanings of the word violence is desecration. Wouldn't our desecration of the environment then qualify as a form of violence done to our rivers, lakes, landscape, the air itself, and ultimately to ourselves—often in the name of technological progress? And hasn't our way of thinking of things in separate, unrelated terms contributed to the problem? By themselves, the piping of sewage, the

emptying of barges laden with garbage, and the dispersion of industrial and chemical wastes might not have severely harmed any of our great waterways. But taken together, they have. Wasn't a sense of thoughtfulness, of the inter-relatedness of actions lacking? I think so. That is why I feel it's a terribly important quality to seek in books for young people.

Acts of violence aren't really isolated. There are connections between a community callously cutting down trees in a wood to make a parking lot, and young people callously wrecking a playground in that community. Between gentile parents who casually include anti-Semitic remarks in their dinner-table conversation and their teenage children who, in a gang, set fire to a synagogue.

Isn't the ability to make these and similar connections, to offer a wider framework for understanding, one of the main results we hope to achieve when we offer young people books dealing with violence?

Granted a manuscript has all these qualities—and more I have not mentioned. It is published, well-reviewed, bought by schools, libraries, and parents across the country, and, hopefully, read and discussed by many young people. What real impact does it have on their lives?

Who can accurately measure this? I don't know, and I doubt if anyone does. But I'm convinced books can be an important part of a young person's total cultural experience.

Will that young person join mindlessly, in an attack on a fellow pupil or an act of vandalism? Will he inject

a needle filled with heroin into his arm? Will he help to plant a bomb in a laboratory? Or will he help to bridge human gaps his parents may have failed to bridge? Will he help to reclaim a vacant lot instead of dumping garbage on it? Will he find ways to expand his consciousness without drugs? Will he protest against injustices out of strong feelings combined with reason, rather than strong feelings combined with unreason?

If, because of his total cultural experience, he opts for the positive courses, then I think the thoughtful books he has read as a child and young person can justly claim some small part of the credit. That's what makes the effort of writing, publishing, and bringing them to young people worth sustaining.

7 Death in Children's Literature*

BY Judith P. Moss

By some strange reversal, discussion of death—the end of life—has become obscured by all the evasiveness that used to attend discussion of life's origin. Dying has replaced reproduction as the hush-hush topic between parents and children, and to a large extent in modern literature for children.

In the novels of Dickens or Louisa May Alcott, death was a familiar event. Writers of the last century reflected in their works the high rates of infant and young-adult mortality. Further, they reflected the fact that children were not shielded from death scenes and funerals as they are today. In *Little Women*, Beth's sis-

ters watch her slow death, mourn for her, and are intimately involved with the activities and emotions surrounding her death. Fictional treatment of death may have been over-sentimental, but it existed. Sexual matters, on the other hand, were avoided; babies appeared as if out of bushes in the Victorian story.

Today, we ply children with pamphlets, films, and gorgeously illustrated books on birth, while we ignore death. The general avoidance of an honest treatment of death and its repercussions on a family, reflects our society's wish to deny the matter. Perhaps it has something to do with the cult of the Young in America and England, with its accompanying fear of aging. Perhaps it stems from an attempt to shield young people from a painful awareness. But to imagine that children have not already wondered about death, formed their own ideas—some realistic, some fantastic—is to be blind to the evidence of child psychologists and to that of our own ears.

As early as three, our children began asking questions about dying. Checks with other families indicate that they were not unusual in their curiosity. Apart from the motive of shielding children from a painful subject, parents and teachers are prevented from open discussions with children about death, by their own fears, misconceptions, and deep wish to deny life's inevitable end. Others are reluctant to admit to children that they have no answers and can offer only ambiguity and uncertainty, imagining that the children are not already pondering the riddle of death.

Motives aside, the entire evasion can only be termed

dishonest and damaging to the emotional and intellectual development of the child. Literature, apart from entertaining and instructing, can aid people in coping with life situations. Many children will have to face the death of a close relative. If they are somehow spared, they will probably know classmates who need support and understanding in their grief. An ostrich-like approach to death will only hamper the child's achievement of a mature attitude toward human life and endeavor.

With the foregoing arguments in mind, I recently went in search of some books to read with or to children who are facing the loss of a dearly loved relative. Librarian after librarian was unable to come up with anything other than the already familar *Charlotte's Web* by E. B. White. *Bambi* was suggested, as was *Babar* and numerous fairy tales in which no one dies but the deserving evil witch.

Eventually, I located six books—four fiction, two nonfiction, that might form the basis of a library shelf on the subject. The novels are fine stories in their own rights. In addition they show a special sensitivity to the emotions of fear, shame, anger, and the difficulty of adjustment following the loss of a loved person.

Charlotte's Web merits inclusion not only because it evokes a reverence for life—spiders included—but because it affirms regeneration and the value of a life spent in service, leaving behind love and happy memories. After Charlotte has cleverly saved the life of Wilbur, a prize pig, by spinning exotic webs over his stall, she comes to her inevitable death. A great point is

made of the preservation of Charlotte's eggs, the future generations which Wilbur loves and protects. Even while Wilbur is mourning for Charlotte, and waiting for her eggs to hatch, White writes, "Life is always a rich and steady time when you are waiting for something to happen or to hatch" (p. 176).

Readjustment to life without the loved person is also implicit. Although Wilbur grows to love the spider's children and grandchildren no one ever quite replaces Charlotte in his heart.

Vera and Bill Cleaver, in their novel *Grover*, deal with a boy whose mother commits suicide to avoid a long and painful terminal illness. In the early scenes, the authors have captured precisely the language of adults who are trying to hide something important from children. It is made clear that Grover is aware of the deception. It is also suggested that it is better to tell children openly of family crises than to leave them to imagine even worse happenings.

Through the understanding of a housekeeper who arrives after his mother dies, plus that of his friends, he gradually comes to terms with his loss. His adjustment is contrasted with his father's unwillingness to begin anew. In the father's prolonged mourning, he shames Grover for doing natural things such as fishing. He also insists on having his dead wife's room kept just as it was when she was alive. It is perhaps straining to put this sensitive novel to the pragmatic test, but I believe that a child reading *Grover* will gain a deep insight into the process of grief and an understanding

that adults can be capable of foolishness in their own pain.

Also by the Cleavers, and also offering insight into bereavement, is *Where the Lilies Bloom.* Four motherless Appalachian mountain children have to bury their father in secret to avoid being sent to a county foster home. The narrator, the second oldest girl, is so busy trying to keep them alive during the bitter mountain winter that she has no time for comforting her brother and sisters, and no time to express and experience her own grief. Further, she tries desperately to keep promises she made to her dead father. The emotional resolution of the story comes when she realizes that she has great pent up grief and that she cannot keep promises to the dead, because life changes.

Home From Far by Jean Little, handles the problem of a dead brother. When one of a set of twins is killed in an automobile accident, the family adopts two foster children, one the same age as the dead brother. The girl twin suffers from unexpressed grief. Her mother rarely mentions the dead son and the daughter concludes that she no longer misses him. Eventually the mother discovers her daughter's need and explains that she avoided mentioning the brother because, as a child, she had been subjected to excessive memorializing of a dead cousin. It is made clear in this novel—again speaking therapeutically—that children, like adults, need someone to share their grief and love.

Another point touched on is the guilt the girl feels when she is happy in her own life. Her mother helps her see that she can keep loving memories of her

brother without depriving herself of a normal life. This book succeeds in being "problem oriented" and entertaining fiction as well.

I include *Lillan* by Gunilla B. Norris, as the fifth book of fiction although technically Lillan's father is not dead. He deserts his wife and daughter and goes to South America from Sweden, where the book is set. For all practical emotional purposes he is totally lost to them. Lillan experiences feelings which must be common to bereaved children. For example, she fears that since her father went away, her mother will do the same. She suspects that she had some fault or failing which caused her father to leave. When her mother begins dating another man, Lillan's fears of being excluded are brought to the fore. Lillan tries stealing at one point to have something of her mother's for her own, and later to give something to her mother. The resolution is a happy but honest one.

In the nonfiction line, is Earl Grollman's *Talking About Death.* Framed as a dialogue, it is really a monologue with some questions a child might ask about death interspersed in the text. A selection: "Are you surprised that I don't know all the answers about death? Don't be. Even though no one really understands it, death is something we must accept . . . . We can talk about it. We can help each other." The book dispels many misconceptions children hold about death: that expressing grief is "sissy," that the child is in some way responsible for the death, that the person left because he didn't love him any longer, that the child shouldn't talk about it.

The book is marred by excessively arty ink-wash drawings which actually interfere with reading of the text.

Last to be discussed, but first to be included in any library—school, home, or public, is Herbert S. Zim and Sonia Bleeker's *Life and Death.* Calmly, unsentimentally, but sensitively, the book covers chemical and biological components of death, causes of death, life expectancies, means of prolonging life medically, burial customs in this and other cultures. The facts are all included, but emotional reactions are discussed as well.

In the first paragraph the authors assert that "everything that lives must die." They end on this note:

> Since death always comes, people have learned to expect it and accept it. Day by day they try to add joy in living for themselves and for their relatives and friends. People who are loved and have useful, happy lives come to accept all of life including its end.

Books Discussed

Charlotte's Web, E. B. White, Harper and Row, New York 1952.

Grover, Vera and Bill Cleaver, J. B. Lippincott, New York 1970.

Where the Lilies Bloom, Vera and Bill Cleaver, J. B. Lippincott.

Home From Far, Jean Little, Little, Brown and Company, Boston 1965.

Lillan, Gunilla B. Norris, Scholastic Book Services, New York 1968.

Talking About Death, Earl A. Grollman, Beacon Press, Boston 1970.
Life and Death, Herbert S. Zim and Sonia Bleeker, William Morrow, New York 1970.

8 Morals, Morals Everywhere: Values in Children's Fiction*

BY William D. Eisenberg

"You're thinking about something, and that makes you forget to talk. I can't tell you just now what the moral of that is, but I shall remember it in a bit."

"Perhaps it hasn't one," Alice ventured to remark.

"Tut, tut, child!" said the Duchess. "Everything's got a moral, if only you can find it."—Lewis Carroll

The Duchess had a point. Didacticism in children's fiction has been with us since the time of the Puritans, though today it is often implicit and indirect. Let children enjoy first and learn second, but learn they must. How else will they be prepared for the unprecedented complexities of the world in which we live?

*From *The Elementary School Journal*, November, 1971, published by the University of Chicago Press.

It does not seem to matter whether the instructional material is moral and ethical, psychological, racial and ethnic, or objectively factual. As long as the instructional material is there, the only question seems to be what kind of instruction it offers. Does the fiction inculcate Judeo-Christian values? Is it educationally and psychologically sound? Is it free of racial and ethical misconceptions and prejudices?

But whether children are reading for enjoyment or for information, what gets them reading and keeps them reading?

Values? Hardly. Children perceive and understand values, but not in the abstract manner of adult philosophy. Stories must seem real. Plots, characters, and settings must seem like actions, people, and places. If they do not, no amount of clever loading of the text with "intrinsic" values will satisfy young readers, who may not even get to the values at all.

Children's fiction, then, must seem believably alive. Lewis Carroll is a name; Alice and the Duchess are real. A child who never heard of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson sings out in full voice, "Soup of the evening, beautiful soup." The Cheshire Cat's smile, the Queen of Hearts' temper, the White Rabbit's hurry, are all more real for children than the man who created them. And why not? Children can be any of these characters, or all of them, at the same time.

Still, for a story to be believably alive is not enough. Events must seem to have a right to happen and to follow each other, characters must be true to their own

natures, and places must be those where a child can imagine himself being. A young reader who has never seen a river can be Huck Finn on the moonlit Mississippi, "wider than a mile." Whether a young reader has a right to be Huck on a raft in the middle of a great river is a question he does not ask himself.

Huck steals chickens to support himself and Jim. But why? Because he has no respect for private property? Or because of a need to survive that can be met in no other way? What child would want to stay with a father like Huck's? What intelligent, sensitive, and compassionate man would choose the life of a slave?

Young readers identify and sympathize with Huck and Jim, for both characters are fugitives from brutal oppressors and neither has done anything to justify the severity of the punishment to which he is legally liable. For children the punishment must fit the crime, and the reward must fit the good deed. There can be no such thing as having Huck hand Jim over to the authorities, or putting Huck in reform school for larceny. That, in the eyes of children, would be immoral.

Life, for children, can be intensely and immensely exciting. Fiction should provide the kind of excitement that falls naturally within the realm of their experience or within the capacity of their imagination. Such fiction takes young readers on a trip unmatched by the trips offered by any drug, and much safer. Few adults are hopeless neurotics because they were once momentarily frightened by the Wicked Queen in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

Yet it is not just a question of whether there should be violence and terror in children's fiction, but also of why, how much, and how closely it all touches the child's own experience. To children Polyphemus, who imprisoned Odysseus and his companions, is a bully. Odysseus is the clever one who gives the bully his comeuppance. The gory details of the adult version can be omitted because they are irrelevant. Sadism, latent or otherwise, does not usually enter into the problem at all.

Children desire the inclusion of whatever enhances and advances the story, and the exclusion of whatever does not. My wife and I, observing the behavior of children at a movie theater during a showing of *The Three Lives of Thomasina*, found that children frequently act as their own censors. During mystical, frightening, romantic, or moralizing scenes the children looked away, jabbered among themselves, or went out to buy sodas and popcorn. One little boy sitting near us said to the older one in the seat beside him, "Tell me when the story's back so I can look again."

One can almost hear children today saying, "Tell us when the story's back so we can read again." The adult insistence that stories be clearly and explicitly moral collides head on with this youthful judgment. Morality, for children, needs to be inherent in the characters and their actions. Likewise, objectively factual information should be a bonus a child gets as he enjoys a good story.

Robert McCloskey's *Make Way for Ducklings* and

Robert Lawson's *Rabbit Hill* are both good stories and good lessons, but the lessons come across clearly because the stories are told well. Few young readers would willingly set out just to learn the life habits of ducks and rabbits, but McCloskey and Lawson write so interestingly that few of their readers can avoid learning about the ducks' need for a secure nest or the rabbits' fear of foxes. The policeman who stops traffic to make way for ducklings and Little Georgie's escape from the fox in *Rabbit Hill* illustrate McCloskey's and Lawson's sensitivity to a basic need of children—a good story.

"Quite so," say militant critics, "but stories are good only if they are addressed to a child as a member of a group. Only the member of a group, you know, understands what it means to be a member of a group. Only blacks can understand the black experience; only teens can understand the adolescent experience; only southerners can understand the southern way of life. Children of each group should read stories written for them by members of their group. That way they will have stories they can identify with, enjoy, and learn from."

By that reasoning *Hodie* is a dog story for farm children only, and *Heidi* is a pastoral for little Swiss girls. *Tim All Alone* would be for English school children, *Mei Li* for Nationalist Chinese, and *Sugar Hill* for middle-class blacks.

This kind of thinking could hopelessly fragment children's literary experience rather than giving them "the keys of Canterbury," as an old English folk song put it.

Such thinking could narrow rather than widen children's horizons, and children need narrow horizons as surely as the ugly duckling needed rejection.

But children's fiction today must face still another set of challenges from educational and child psychology. Vocabulary and subject matter are to be carefully controlled to avoid any tension, trouble, terror, or trauma. Age and ability levels must be carefully screened, interests must be considered but not pandered to, and stories containing "offensive" elements must be rewritten or dropped.

Little Red Riding Hood has been revised to meet these requirements. One of the oldest versions, which ends with the wolf eating Red Riding Hood, is regarded as so brutal, so horrific, and so cruel that the wolf no longer eats anybody. Red Riding Hood tricks him by running around the room to make him dizzy, and his death occurs offstage, as in a Greek tragedy. Red Riding Hood, Grandmother, and the Woodcutter celebrate the occasion by having a victory tea, for which Red Riding Hood has provided the jelly beans. It is a little hard to believe that most children are so disturbed by the fright figure of the wolf that they have fearful nightmares about being eaten, or that they acquire permanent neuroses from reading or hearing the story. In fact, there is usually general rejoicing when the wolf is killed, as there is in *Hansel and Gretel* when the witch is pushed into the oven, or when another wolf becomes wolf stew in *The Three Little Pigs.*

Again, we should not encourage sadism or brutality,

but can we, or should we, attempt to shield children from the knowledge of what is happening in our world? If a heavyweight champion of the world ignores the fighting techniques of his challenger, how long will he remain champ? Besides, modern communication, transportation, and urban living make a shielded childhood all but impossible for many young children today.

It is questionable, too, whether our society is any less brutal than the primitive peasant culture that produced *Little Red Riding Hood.* Is our society less brutal, or have the forms of brutality and cruelty changed? Atomic warfare is hardly less brutal than a medieval battle, and brainwashing cannot justifiably be called kind.

But which is worse—to underestimate a child's capacity or to overestimate it? I believe that to underestimate is worse. To start a child on fiction that has a controlled vocabulary does prevent some reading difficulties, but holding him to a pre-planned level if he shows the will and the ability to go beyond that level seems like telling the Apollo 13 astronauts not to try to come home.

As for racial and ethnic misconceptions and prejudices, objectivity is probably undesirable, since we are human beings, not machines. Fairness, however, is within our reach—and our grasp. "O Great Spirit," says an American Indian proverb, "let me not criticize my neighbor until I have walked a mile in his moccasins." Children are not only willing to be fair, they prefer to be—if and when adults will let them. Marguerite de

Angeli's *Yonie Wondernose* and Sidney Taylor's *All of a Kind Family* are fairly written stories, but children need more, more, and still more of them.

Perhaps we can update the conversation of Alice and the Duchess a little:

"You're reading something, and that makes you forget to enjoy. I can't tell you what the story is, but I shall remember it in a bit."

"Perhaps there isn't one."

"Tut, tut! Every book has a story, if only you can find it."